A Multi-Case Study of Teens Who Write Outside of School for Their Own Purposes

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Dedication Page

This completed work is dedicated to my students, past, present and future, because they teach me so much. This is more than an academic work; it is evidence and affirmation that time should be spent listening to young people.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the culmination of a rich, rewarding, exhausting, and longer-than-expected academic adventure. First, it is important to say that I am a better teacher today, because of the investments made in me by so many teachers - both in person, and those I met only in print. I am especially grateful to my committee members for their personal votes of confidence in me and their patience. In every stage of this process, I have felt valued and supported by each of them. As a teacher myself, I can think of no higher praise than to have my students know that they are seen as individuals, they are heard as thinkers, they are supported as learners, and they are valued, apart from their performance, as people.

I owe Dr. Susan Groenke, my committee chair, a great debt on several fronts. First, she opened the door for me to begin this degree, because she saw in me the passion and the potential to productively join in the ongoing conversations in my field. Secondly, she held the door open for me at many junctures as my advocate, mentor and friend. Thirdly, she has modeled for me the heart of a teacher as a learner, as but one of many thinkers in a room. And finally, she has modeled for me the heart of a scholar. That word *scholar* has become less daunting, as I have seen its definition in her. I have come to define a scholar in my field as one who cares, questions, observes, studies and who feels compelled to respectfully join the larger conversation about how and why we educate, as counsel to those empowered to choose for so many, and as an advocate for those unable to speak loudly for themselves.

Whatever acknowledgment I may receive over the course of a lifetime for having completed this work or having achieved this degree, it is dwarfed by the acknowledgement due my family through their enduring support of my efforts and ambition. The sacrifices and support of my husband, Ron, are uncounted by him and unforgettable to me. I am grateful for the expectation that

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of the teen writer as defined as one who answers readily to the label of writer and who reports writing regularly outside of school for his or her own purposes. The research questions guiding this work are: (1) What do these young people write on their own time and for their own purposes? and (2) Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices? In this multi-case study, seven teenage participants were interviewed twice, invited into any of three focus groups to learn about their writing practices and beliefs, and shared writing samples. Following interaction with these teens and close iterative coding and analysis of interview transcripts and writing samples, I made several findings including: 1) the seven teens in this study write in a variety of genres for their own purposes, but predominantly write in fictional and narrative modes, and 2) the teens' motivations to write are intimately connected to their ongoing personal/individual and social identity work. These findings hold strong implications for teachers and education policymakers in the age of "Common Core," where less instructional emphasis is placed on writing in fictional/narrative modes. It also provokes consideration of education in its role of personal development and the role of the learner as a stakeholder in his or her own education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

"Most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen."
--Willa Cather

Traditional Views of Writing Achievement

Because of the lack of national emphasis on K-12 writing instruction in the past two decades, writing had been branded the "neglected R." More recently, however, writing has gained status as a "high-impact practice" that engages students across content areas (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). In fact, writing skills are considered one of the best available predictors of students' ability to succeed in introductory college classes across content areas (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). As such, both the ACT and SAT tests now require high school students demonstrate competence in writing skill. And, unlike previous high-stakes assessments under NCLB standards, the newest high-stakes test assessments tied to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2012) place a clear and heavy emphasis on writing competence, especially in argumentative modes.

Further, writing has also been reported by the business community as a factor tied to advancement in a significantly increasing number of salaried positions (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2004). The National Commission on Writing report (2004) defined writing as a "threshold skill" for hiring and promotion among salaried employees, and explained that "writing appears to be a marker attribute of high-skill, high-wage, [and] professional work..." (p. 19).

With the acknowledged importance and growing attention being given to writing, there is little good news to report concerning the proficiency of our nation's teens as writers. Broadly, teens

have been dubbed as “under-literate” (NCTE, 2006), in part because of their poor showing as writers. Despite the fact that writing is a foundational academic skill and plays a central role in many everyday informal and occupational settings, we know that many middle and high school students do not know how to compose well (Applebee, 2003; Applebee & Langer, 2013; Jetton & Dole, 2004). According to Applebee and Langer (2013), students in school most often write short answers, not constructed responses that reveal their thinking and understanding. And the quality of writing varies greatly, with many students demonstrating difficulty with composing longer papers and others struggling specifically with mechanics and spelling. The most recent NAEP Writing Report (2011) reveals that 52% of twelfth-graders scored below proficient at the basic level. Only 24% rated as proficient, and a surprising 3% were found to be advanced. Of those advancing from high school to college, nearly a third nationwide requires remediation (Achieve, 2005).

But we have to be careful about how we define "achievement." According to motivation theorists, students’ beliefs about their ability to perform well, and the value that students place on a given task or skill are two key components for understanding their achievement (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Elliot (1999) concluded that when students’ perception of competence is high, they are more inclined to adopt mastery goals for themselves. Conversely, students with low perceived competence tend to adopt performance-avoidance goals (Skaalvik, 1997). Students who adopt mastery goals are also more apt to engage in deep learning strategies (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Mastery goals also correlate with students’ persistence when encountering difficulties. Elliot (1999) related the pursuit of mastery goals to an appetite that “elicit(s) positive affective, cognitive, and behavioral processes that lead to a host of positive outcome(s)…, including both quantitative (e.g., persistence, effort expenditure) and phenomenonologically based (e.g., intrinsic motivation, self-determination variables)” (p. 177).

Findings about students' attitudes toward writing in the NAEP report would seem to support this. Twelfth grade students were asked to respond by agreeing, strongly agreeing, disagreeing or strongly disagreeing to the statement: “Writing is one of my favorite activities.” Students who strongly agreed with the statement scored higher on average than students who merely agreed, and scores for both groups were higher than the scores for students who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Unfortunately, many students express negative attitudes (i.e. anxiety, dread, lack of control, and avoidance) about writing (Cleary, 1991; Daly, 1985) and about themselves as writers (Elbow, 1998; Graham & Harris, 2005). Brandt’s (2001) study of literacy in the US exposes the admission that “school-based writing is widely associated with pain, belittlement, and perplexity” (p. 164).

Further, we may draw some insight about student writing achievement by considering the broad base of research on motivation to read and reading achievement. Much of this research reports that the voluntary participation and competence in reading declines as students enter middle school (Guthrie, 2001; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991), and these trends show no improvement through high school (Early, Fryer, Leckee, & Walton, 2004). In addition, as Williams (2004) points out, young readers' identities (e.g., likes, preferences, habits) are more typically reinforced in school than adolescents' reading identities. Beginning in middle school, students' perceptions about reading shift, and reading begins to be interpreted as “more connected to the work and the demonstration and assessment of knowledge” (Williams, 2004, p.687) than something to do for pleasure or for non-school-related goals. Typically, like in-school reading, in-school writings are for evaluative purposes solely (i.e. constructed response test questions and assigned writings to close a unit of study), rather than a means for “sharing knowledge, points of view, and feelings” (Bruning and Horn, 2000, p. 34), and this may work toward the negative feelings many students associate with writing.

An Alternative View of Writing Achievement

Well-informed about literacy trends broadly and writing performance in particular, Yancey (2011) takes up a very different lens through which one could consider the writing practices and achievement of teen writers. Yancey (2011) calls our attention to the process and the diversity of reading modes of mid-19th century England, when the classic novels of Charles Dickens were "all the craze." Dickens' novels were presented weekly in affordable serial publications, performed aloud before live audiences and read communally in reading circles. This emergence of literacy skills was socially dynamic--not academic, and it was occurring primarily outside of school amidst new social practices.

Similarly, a “writing public” is exploding in the social realm today. This proliferation and transformation of writing for diverse and new purposes is self-organized and technology-driven and is occurring outside of school and across the world via the Internet. Writers are not only communicating with an audience via the Internet; they are collaborating with other writers for their own purposes. This is a "reform" of how we view writing--and literacy more broadly--that is fueled by personal interest (on the part of both producers and consumers) rather than a vision for reform being driven by distant education policy makers. Yancey (2011) even notes that today’s writers are developing and demonstrating competence “largely without instruction” (p. 797). One imagines hearing Twain’s famous sentiment that "schooling should not interfere with education" echoed across time, and one indulges the consideration that perhaps schooling may in some cases stymie this growth and potential.

Given the recognized potential of writing to affect positive outcomes in preparing for work and college, the intuitive correlation that students who report enjoying writing are also more apt to perform competently as writers, and the cultural writing explosion underway, one can see merit in

close consideration of teens who write regularly outside of school for their own purposes. Certainly, teens hold an important vantage point from which to speak to our educational practice and learning culture in and around the schoolhouse doors.

Statement of the Problem

It remains to be seen if the resurgence of interest in writing in K-12 educational settings will yield the desired results. Some writing researchers' inclinations are that more time and more attention on students' writing will not be sufficient, especially if traditional writing instruction continues to look contrary to established best practices in the teaching of writing. Hillocks (2002) understates a shared concern, as he notes that emphasis on high stakes writing scores may not necessarily ensure that teaching and learning happen in an effective manner. Schultz and Fecho (2005) suggest that the importance given to standardized assessments results in a narrowing of best practice in the secondary English classroom. Specifically, they hold that pressure associated with high stakes testing has been responsible for silencing invaluable classroom dialogue and reducing instructional focus on building students' critical thinking abilities.

Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, the much derided constraints of a generation of NCLB-style high stakes tests are being replaced by Common Core State Standards (CCSS) priorities and dictates. CCSS publications and subsequent training are making explicit its priorities regarding writing with a prominent and unapologetic emphasis on argumentative writing and a secondary emphasis on academic expository writing (2012). Narrative writing is ranked last (and thus emphasized least in instruction) because, David Coleman, author of the Common Core State Standards, has generated these standards based on his own personal bias. Coleman asserted that students should be educated in a system of professionals who "realize people really don't give a shit about what you feel or what you think" (Goldstein, 2012).

Out of necessity, teachers look to the framework of pending student assessments to design their instruction. Teachers are being led to assume that forthcoming PARCC tests will adhere to NAEP Reading and Writing Frameworks. In fact, the purposes for writing as given in the state Common Core training manual are taken directly from the NAEP Framework (2011) and are listed as: “to persuade, to explain” and “to convey experiences” (real or imagined)." These purposes are prescriptively weighted, with writing to persuade allotted 40%, writing to explain an equal share of 40%, and writing to convey experiences at 20% in twelfth grade (tab 2, p. 5). Despite the inclusion of writing to convey experiences, the practical outcome is heavily shaped by assumptions that such writing is less valuable. Under existing time constraints and in a new academic culture with other priorities, classroom support for personal writing, arguably the most motivating and relevant type of writing, stands at risk of disappearing entirely.

The current season of transition moving from NCLB to CCSS and its emphasis that neglects personal and narrative writing, appears to be widening an already significant gap between a young person's school and personal literacies. Warschauer & Ware (2008) have wisely called on educators to mend the existing divide by “look[ing] for ways to acknowledge and even appropriate … the creative and complex literacy practices that youth bring into schools” (p. 234). They insist that the first step to building bridges with students is to “take seriously the literacy text and practices that enrich youth culture” (Warschauer & Ware, 2008, p. 234). Despite these demands, and the “dramatic shifts in the forms, uses, and technologies of writing [that] have taken place over the past twenty years” (Merchant, 2008, p. 755), few changes have occurred in curriculum and routines affecting classroom writing instruction in K-12.

The disconnect between literacies practiced in and valued by schools and those practiced outside of school have previously been explored with troubling implications. According to Street

(1991), teachers are apt to regard literacy practices for non-academic purposes, especially those practiced outside of school, as inferior. Further, students themselves tend to define their literacy practices based on school-sanctioned practices. A recent survey in Australia of 606 fourteen-year old students found that students' perceptions of themselves as readers were reported based on their notion of what counted as reading in school, which often precluded online material and magazines (Rennie & Patterson, 2010).

Guzetti and Gamboa (2004) recognize the importance of teachers becoming "aware of how students use literacies to form and represent their identities, to construct meaning, and to pursue their own interests" (p. 411). And there is a need to identify ways of connecting in and out-of-school literacies. Guzetti and Gamboa (2004) believe that "if teachers learn how adolescents develop, practice, and refine their literacies outside of school, educators will be better equipped to connect those out-of-school literacy practices to the work students do in school" (p. 411). Teacher and students benefit, if supports and experiences that have fostered independent writing and students' confidence in themselves as writers can be identified. This line of inquiry is lacking in the existing research, because researchers interested in writing have predominantly and historically focused on the writer's skills or the instructional practices of teachers of writing (Pajares & Valiante, 2006). Also, given that writing has been regarded more "central to the work of higher education" (Monroe, 2003), it is not surprising that much of the research on composition has been heavily focused on college-aged students.

Purpose of the study

This study revisits Dewey's (1899/1998) observation that "the great waste in the school comes from [the student's] inability to utilize the experience he gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand he is unable to apply in

daily life what he is learning at school" (p. 76-78). Dewey was reflecting on schooling broadly, while this study looks at writing in particular. It seems that writing ought to bridge the gap more easily than some other academic content or skills, because the opportunity and the demands for writing outside of school are naturally and regularly occurring. Bruning and Horn (2000) encourage researchers to pursue an understanding of the purposes for writing that relate to what students consider to be most meaningful and motivating. Further, they suggest that students' revealed motivations be compared with educators' assumptions. Influenced by the historical legacy of Dewey, more recent researchers like Bruning and Horn, and my own observations and experience as a middle school and high school English teacher, the purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of seven adolescents who choose to write regularly outside of school for their own purposes to advance an understanding of how and why teens choose to write when they don't "have" to.

Cook-Sather (2002) pushes for "authorizing students' perspectives in conversations about schooling and reform--to move toward trust, dialogue, and change in education" (p. 12). She further states: "Because of who they are, what they know, and how they are positioned, students must be recognized as having knowledge essential to the development of sound educational policies and practices" (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 12). Yet, students' perspectives are rarely sought. As Intrator and Kunzman (2009) explain, "Even when student voice is solicited, the rarest form of study involves exploration of a student's immediate experience" (p. 32). They explain that most student-centered research relies on surveys or interviews exploring students' attitudes about a past event. So, stories of success or struggle in education are typically narrated by teachers and validated by test scores and grades, lacking the insight available through student voices and perspectives.

Research Questions

In keeping with the prompting of Bruning and Horn (2000), who suggest that future research inquire directly of students to learn what purposes for writing they consider to be most meaningful and motivating, I pose two related questions:

1. What do young people write on their own time and for their own purposes?
2. Why do these young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices?

Propositions of the Study

Yin (1994) notes that case study research may or may not begin with propositions. Thus, I offer only tentative propositions alongside a set of guiding questions. Based only on my own limited observations of the youth included in this study, there are students who self-identify as writers who function across the range of academic ability as writers. That is, not all students who self-identify as writers are accomplished or even competent writers as judged by grades earned for compositions, and some are not successful students. So one expects to find students of varied academic ability among those who call themselves writers, supporting a proposition that a writer's identity is not strictly tied to academic success.

It is also anticipated that students who take up a writer's identity and who write regularly for their own purposes will be divergent in their format, purposes, routines, and perceptions about why one writes, supporting the proposition that *writer* is not consistently defined by all adolescent writers.

It is also anticipated that one will find that adolescents who self-identify as writers have both internal and external influences that impact their desire to write. External influences are likely to be some positive role models and/ or sponsoring and supporting individuals outside the school

environment. Internally, it is anticipated that these participants will reveal through story rather than hold as explicit knowledge, a sense of significance or voice through their writing. These ideas of internal and external factors support the proposition that writers are shaped by social influences which may drive internal factors.

Assumptions

Asking adolescents to talk about writing samples, experiences, habits, and opportunities seems a suitable approach to invite participants to share their understandings of culture, skills, beliefs, practices and themselves as writers. Therefore, three related basic assumptions shaped the design of this research as follows:

It is assumed that participants would have relevant information to relay about the circumstances, people and practices that motivate, support, or limit their identities and habits as writers. Also, all recruited participants would presumably be able to reflect and provide reliable, if not explicit, information concerning their development and interest in writing. The notion of reliability in this circumstance rests on the belief that "cultural processes surround all of us and often involve subtle, tacit, taken-for-granted events and ways of doing things" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 22). So, if questioned, participants could be expected to describe normal ways of doing life as it relates to their writing, thus revealing aspects of their tacit knowledge and cultural processes that may have influenced their choices to write and the resulting habits and beliefs.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to adolescent writers enrolled in two rural public high schools within the same school district. I used snowball sampling to recruit participants in the study (beginning with former students). As students are likely to only know the writing habits of their friends, this is a limited sampling frame. The target for recruiting was set between five and ten participants.

Participation and referrals were informally solicited by talking with other English teachers which resulted in some interest, but no commitments. Recruitment which continued months past the enrollment of the seventh student, was suspended when no further participants were available to commit to scheduled interviews.

Limitations of the Study

Dyson and Genishi (2005) note that "who we are outside our identities as … researchers influences the kinds of questions we ask and the kinds of collaborators and participants we select for our studies" (p.57-58). The selection of participants, though open to any interested teen writer, resulted in all of the participants being former students of mine. Some I had had in class in eighth grade, others as eleventh graders. No student was interviewed while he or she was also still a student in my class. Some (Sweeny, Elana, Atlanta, Katniss, and Angel) were interviewed at least one year after they had been in my class. Others (Rick and Dakota) were interviewed a semester after my class.

This limited sampling may be the subject of critique and be considered a limitation of this study. However, the familiarity that I have with my participants created a foundation of trust that allowed participants to share freely. Also, a climate was established through explicit prompting at the initial interview and recurred over time during the interviews to support students in saying and sharing in a manner very different from what would have been typical or acceptable for each of them in class.

This study relies on students' abilities to relay their experiences and perspectives, and is limited to those experiences and perspectives. While findings are offered to the reader with the voices of the participants as support and rendered in an objective manner, the researcher who chooses qualitative methodology acknowledges and values that she is a dynamic in the process.

Therefore, assumptions and a reflexivity statement are included that disclose my personal perspective in the research plan before recruitment, data collection or analysis began. To offset individual bias during analysis, the coding and themes were subject to advisor and peer review.

While generalizability is not the intended goal of this study, the issue of transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) is supported through thick, rich descriptions, generous detail in the form of participant voices, and information regarding context of this study.

Operational Definitions

Young adolescents are defined as students in ninth through eleventh grade who are 14 to 17 years old. Participants were recognized as "voluntary writers" for the purposes of this study based on their affirmative and confident response to the casual question, "Are you a writer?" without incentive or explanation and based on observable evidence or self-report that each exudes a confidence, interest and/or willingness to write frequently, at least in some context(s). These criteria are corroborated by researchers Piazza and Siebert (2008) working to create and validate a quantitative measure of writers' dispositions. They theorized that writers may have a variety of traits, but at least three "affective stances" were foundational to a writer's disposition: confidence, persistence and passion.

Reflexivity Statement

In an effort to evaluate bias in this research, I will begin by saying I was not an adolescent writer. I had an early and enduring love of words and a deep appreciation for those who managed them skillfully. I was a reader; I read widely and for my own purposes far more than any reading that was assigned or recommended by others. I did collect poetry as a child and continued to do so as an adolescent, but I did not engage regularly in writing nor did I take up the identity of a writer in any descriptions that I would have offered of myself.

My intense focus on writing has grown from my practical and theoretical concerns that emerged as I worked to teach young writers. After teaching five years as a middle school language arts teacher and then two following years as a high school English teacher under the pressure and scrutiny of the state's writing assessment, I have investigated and wrestled with myself considerably over writing pedagogy. In my reflections on teaching writing, I have speculated about the myriad influences that may have affected my student writers. I considered in turn the availability and regularity of peer or parent support or affirmation, established writing habits, authentic rapport and sense of affiliation with others considered writers, positive and negative writing experiences, opportunities to share their writing, love of literature and words, the implicit but understood connection between writing and meaning and the resulting satisfaction experienced when someone relates. These musings operate like an undercurrent in my own thinking in regard to developing young writers.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations

"An artist is someone who can hold two opposing viewpoints and still remain fully functional."
--F. Scott Fitzgerald

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that framing research around theoretical moorings provides structure and support that goes "beyond an aimless, unsystematic piling up of accounts" (p. 24). Therefore, several relevant and overlapping theories guide and enrich this research. The intersection of these ideas is the belief that writing is pointedly a multi-faceted process tied up in ongoing personal and social "identity work" (Gee, 2000). This chapter provides first a historical overview of the broad theoretical camps within the field of composition theory with digressions on the topic of gender and age in writers. This timeline highlights the back and forth struggle that has existed in composition studies' relatively short history. Following the historical review, a postmodern theory of composition studies is discussed as a tool for considering writers as interpreters. Then the significance of theories relating composition to identity and motivation is explored.

Historical Overview of Composition Instruction

The field of composition studies in the United States began in a climate of debate about 150 years ago, when Harvard offered the first composition classes to its students. The early emphasis, according to Hobbs and Berlin (2001), was "correctness" of form that led to the "objective, disinterested and mechanical rhetoric" of its era (p. 253). Early compositions were primarily a written form or draft of oratories, which were the ultimate goal (Scholes, 1998). Yale spokespersons debated the merit of composition classes for all, as they regarded literature as a high art showcasing the great potential of human nature and suggested that composition classes should

be reserved for the most gifted and focused on the creation of literature, not rhetoric (Hobbs and Berlin, 2001). The study of literature at that time, however, was not seen as an end in itself; literature was a pursuit "in the service of verbal decorum, morality and taste" (p. 1), and curriculum broadly was felt to be in the service of the church or government (Scholes, 1998). Despite the resistance and debate, the change was relatively rapid with most colleges offering no composition classes prior to 1860 and nearly all colleges offering composition courses by 1900 (Brereton, 1995).

By 1905 composition courses were characteristically focused almost exclusively on writing (Scholes, 1998). Ironically, English composition floundered and turned to literature for content, and English courses began to take a focused interest in literature from which they produced written critiques (Scholes, 1998). Scholes (1998) notes that in this turn toward literature, English courses repositioned their students out of their agentive role of producers working to emulate the works they studied and into a more receptive role of consumers of text. Literature came to be valued for its ability to input sympathy, tolerance and understanding resulting in better men (Scholes, 1998).

Following these early debates, political and social agendas moved for compulsory elementary school attendance. Hobbs and Berlin (2001) report that less than half of the nation's adolescents were enrolled in high school before the 1930s, but by 1940 two-thirds were attending. High schools preserved the preeminent place of great literature as inspiration for writing, but also experimented with writing stemming from students interests (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001).

Writing instruction continued to evolve--shaped then, as now, by social forces. The growth of industry into corporations and the small percentage of students entering college gave high school more of a work-focus. The writing curriculum was constrained to more of a utilitarian role "without regard for the personal or political life of the student," except where John Dewey's

influence interjected a concern for "self-development" presumably inherent in a democratic environment (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 258).

Between World Wars I and II the curriculum shifted and composition studies became centered on expressive writing activities about personal experiences with occasional creative writing (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001). In this era, according to Hobbs and Berlin (2001), "each and every individual was seen to possess creative potential, a potential the proper classroom environment could unlock and promote" (p. 260), and "genuine writing," was thought to "enable each individual to realize his or her true self in order to bring about a better society" (p. 261). This positioned the "private and personal" as "prior to the public and social" (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 261), and gave value to the writing process. Writing was linked to personal experience and intrinsic reward, but expressive writing was expected to stimulate improved mechanics and even "enhance students' enjoyment of literature" (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p.262). Following WWII the GI Bill sent a large number of veterans to college, and composition was swept back into the mode of conformity and functional expression more often than it encouraged expressive and creative writing. Literature and language again became centralized in English classes, and composition was again marginalized (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001).

Political pressure following the launch of the Russian spacecraft, Sputnik, in 1957 and the 1960 report, *The Process of Education*, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences led the nation to perceive an urgent crisis in public education. There was a strenuous rush to improve math and science curriculum, and Jerome Bruner's influence led to a spiral conception and arrangement of each curricular area (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 271). Yet, students were encouraged to write with an emphasis on process over products and discovery over emulation, allowing students to

arrive at "a unique, personal sense of the knowledge" being presented in diverse disciplines (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 271).

The late 60s and 70s saw an unprecedented enrollment of students of color in desegregated public schools and colleges. Language and racial identity brought new tension that some labeled as a crisis in English. *College, Composition and Communication* (1972), a publication of the National Council of Teachers of English, issued a position statement entitled, *Students' Right to Their Own Language*. Also, the linguistic focus led to the "rediscovery of the complexity of language" and regained attention for composition instruction (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 269). During the 70s, linguists were influential as reflected in the rise in attention and research on language structure as a means of supporting the development of writers. Specific attention came to be paid to sentence combining.

Janet Emig's (1971) landmark work and James Britton's research in the 70s captured national attention, and presented writing as a cognitive process with an emphasis on process (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001). This was significant because it represented an alternative in composition inquiry; it was a look at the writer rather than merely the written product.

Another camp of experts reasserted the "value of the expressive model of writing" which needed a "free and supportive environment" that allows students to "engage in an art of self-discovery" (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 274). The cognitive processing focus and the expressive model of writing converged with their shared process emphasis and acknowledgment of composing elements that were private and psychological. "The expressionist process was frequently taught in classes organized around resistance to dominant political forms," and the cognitive process was more apt to avoid political conflicts "adopt[ing] a stance of disinterested rationality" (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 274).

The emphasis on process evolved somewhat, displacing the pedagogy heavily focused on students' ability to recreate from model texts, and grammar and handbook driven error-correction, and formulaic approaches for organization. Writing came to be discussed for the benefit it provided the learner in any content contributing to retention and understanding. Emig (1977) stated that "writing represents a unique mode of learning… because writing as a process and product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies" (p. 122). The learning theories of Jerome Bruner (as cited in Olson, 1995) asserted that "to instruct someone in a discipline is not a matter of getting him to commit results to mind. Rather, it is to teach him to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge…" (p. 72). Bruner influenced teachers to consider the intersection of a student's cognitive level and the structure of the academic discipline being addressed.

While expressionists "remained a force," others continued their emphasis on the "private and personal nature of writing" (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 281), until the warmth and momentum of the supportive English classrooms met with the 1983 report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*. This report spoke of students as "commodities to be weighed and measured" (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p.275), and reported a decline in reading. Much later, Graff (2011) helped to clarify this 1983 report, revealing that "reading literary-fiction (novels, plays, and poems) – not reading per se or reading nonfiction – had declined" (p. 20). Graff (2011) specifically criticizes the NEA chair, Dana Groia saying she "venture[ed] beyond the study findings" in declaring a national crisis" (p. 20).

Then the NAEP test in 1984 highlighted the need for higher-level thinking in adolescent writing, and there was evidence that student interest in writing eroded as they progressed through school. Writing instruction for adolescents in particular suffered under the resulting 90s "Back to

Basics" political push. Nationally-normed achievement tests were introduced and quickly gained stature, and the “proliferation of these tests resulted in the decline of writing instruction” (Hobbs & Berlin, 2001, p. 275).

Two very different studies greatly influenced the conversations about composition in the 1980s, with far-reaching implications. Hillocks’ (1984) landmark meta-analysis of experimental research summarized findings from 1963 through 1983 and reported on effective and ineffective practices for teaching writing. Both curriculum and research were quick to take up or emphasize the practices Hillocks deemed profitable including sentence combining, freewriting, and inquiry (Smagorinsky, 2006). However, Hillocks’ findings determining that the common presentational format for teaching writing characterized by lectures, teacher-led discussions, and written feedback as well as the extensive and systematic teaching of grammar errors were ineffective went largely unheeded (Hillocks, 1984). Shirley Brice Heath (1983) also published her landmark longitudinal ethnographic study connecting home and school literacy practices. Her work challenged researchers and teachers to consider a range of literacy norms resulting from diverse community beliefs and practices (Smagorinsky, 2006). Subsequent new understandings of the reading and writing practices engaged in by "real" readers and writers led teachers to include practices like readers’ and writers’ workshop (Atwell, 1987). An emphasis came to be placed on oral language and on students’ participation and discovery in supportive classrooms. Classrooms aimed for more time to write, reflect upon, and share compositions. Teachers emphasized choice, writing and reading for real purposes and real audiences and working through multiple drafts (Atwell, 1987).

Another report from the early eighties revealed entrenched and ineffective classroom practices. Applebee (1984) revealed that writing instruction greatly diminishes beyond third grade, and that the most prevalent form of writing instruction came in the form of teachers grading student

papers and focusing on surface errors. Also, writing as a classroom practice had consisted of a paragraph or more only 3% of the time, and writing was less than one third of the time ever subjected to review or revision (Applebee, 1984). This was believed to be so because much of the writing required had functioned as a summative assessment of student knowledge (Applebee, 1984). Smagorinsky (2006) reflects on Applebee's (1984) research and critiques writing instruction of that time to be "superficial" and based on an assumption that a "very general knowledge of writing would suffice for most purposes" (p. 59).

By the mid-eighties new avenues for composition research began to emerge to consider writing as it was produced in the course of daily living outside the K-12 classroom. As writing had long been touted as preparation for the "real world," researchers began to critique classroom communication in comparison to professional writing in favor of "authentic communication, which was often difficult to produce in school given the typical teacher-as-examiner relationship of the classroom (Smagorinsky, 2006, p. 7). The more social nature of workplace writing fit with interests in intertextuality and the socially situated view of cognition (Smagorinsky, 2006), and over time writing research integrated a focus on social context into strategy instruction and cognitive processes (Graham, 2006).

Also during the eighties, composition researchers (e.g. Graves, 1981) took a closer look at the writing skills and processes of the very young, and acknowledged that children from very early ages are "constructors of meaning," rather than merely recipients of instructed readiness skills (Smagorinsky, 2006, p. 17). Fostering literacy from an early age was seen as a socially situated task rather than only an individual's cognitive development. In keeping with the interest in the social nature of fostering literacy in the very young, composition studies turned to view language and writing as social, reflecting the influences of Vygotsky (1978) and Baktin (1979) and came to

be expressed as sociocognitive, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical perspectives (Smagorinsky, 2006).

Still, the nation's 1992 NAEP Writing Report had its effect. The summative abstract for this report reveals that most of the 30,000 students sampled nationally in fourth, eighth and twelfth grades failed to demonstrate competence in writing in all genres, including informative, narrative and argumentative. But "the best students" who did perform adequately on narrative and informative pieces continue, however, to have difficulty with writing tasks that require them to muster arguments and evidence in persuasive writing. Both teachers and students had reported that persuasive writing – advancing evidence and arguments to influence readers to change their thinking – received less emphasis in their classes. With most students still below proficient in writing, the climate was tense and ripe for reform. In this climate the cognitive models for understanding and improving children's writing processes and outcomes (i.e. Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) that were begun in the eighties evolved and thrived in the nineties. The practices of young children and novices were compared to those of expert writers to label tendencies of each, and researchers began to talk of self-regulation strategies (Smagorinsky, 2006).

The comparison of scores from 1998 to 2002 reveals that both eighth and twelfth graders made some gains with eighth graders moving from 27% to 31% and twelfth graders moving from 22% to 24%. At the same time the percentage of twelfth graders scoring at basic or above dropped from 78% to 74%. The vast majority of students were not judged proficient by NAEP standards which Smagorinsky (2006) judged to be both vague and less than stringent. Specifically, it was reported that K-12 students had "serious difficulty in producing effective informative, persuasive or narrative writing" (p.3).

In addition to poor scores overall, NAEP (2002) again highlighted stark discrepancies between students of color as compared to White students, and students of low SES as compared to those from more comfortable means. These reported deficits in writing were acknowledged alongside the growing prevalence of writing with computers and the increased demand for greater competence in writing for more professional fields. Venezky, Kaestle, and Sum (1987) had previously translated concerns about low literacy into pointed warnings. The literacy gap associated with race and SES would have far-reaching social and economic consequences. Low literacy levels would continue to correlate closely to lower earnings and sustained and greater demands on public support. Also, our growing workforce with limited literacy skills would face unemployment because they were not prepared to undertake the jobs emerging in an information-driven economy. These same people would also be less prepared and so less inclined to stay informed as an electorate, less likely to vote and less likely to participate in community building.

Also, for the first time, students of advantage (While and affluent) were made visible in their academic weakness with writing, with less than 50% demonstrating expected competence in writing skills. Hillocks (2002) further dilutes these numbers with his review across several states which prompted him to critique the assessments themselves as accepting low-quality products. Through interviews, Hillocks (2002) concluded that the weaknesses of these state assessments not only bled over into classroom instruction, but were shaping writing instruction. And in the absence of advanced training in writing for most teachers, there was little resistance to the standards established by these assessments (Smagorinsky, 2006).

However, comparing Hillocks' (2002) findings to Applebee's (1984) earlier study, Smagorinsky (2006) notes evidence of improved teacher practice. Teachers in Hillock's (2002) study were reporting longer writing (multi-paragraphs as compared to earlier paragraph or less in

length) even in the elementary grades, more time spent in preparation for writing tasks including reading and brainstorming, greater attention given to audience, student exposure to models for writing, and opportunities for students to read each other's writing. Smagorinsky (2006) points out that amid these changes for the better, the overall sense that "the knowledge necessary for effective writing is general knowledge of a few principles that are applicable to all or most writing" was a lingering problem.

Alongside these lingering concerns, other discussions have arisen for cultural and divergent views of composition with social constructivists, feminists, critical theory and post-structuralists each bringing their influence (Smagorinsky, 2006). Also, literacy practices came to be viewed as multi-literacies (New London Group, 1996), or new literacies, with an important emphasis on the personal and social identity work implicated in the writing one chooses to do, and motivation to write.

Theoretical Perspectives on Identity

The term identity is disputed but useful, "because it is the everyday word for people's sense of who they are" (Ivanic, 1993). The belief that identity is more than relevant to literacy research is widely accepted (Smith and Wilhelm, 2004), even inextricably linked (Moje & Luke, 2009). But cultural and theoretical ideas about identity have changed over time. Perceptions of identity have moved away from a stable or staged concept and have come to be seen as "negotiated and performative" (Moje & Luke, 2009). The understanding of identity has diverged in its relationship to culture, power, gender, race, and affiliation. Identity is being theorized as multiple or "hybrid" and in a state of flux through "metadiscursive," highly-contextualized processes (Lewis & Del Valle, 2009). Stuart (1998) explains "there are possibilities for creating and importantly, re-creating ourselves within the context of social forces" (p. 144).

However, Collier (2010) states that "writers tend to be described in static ways by teachers, by themselves, and by researchers who investigate writer identities" (p. 161). But she warns that "narrow definitions of writers and writer identities preclude the consideration of writing as learning and writing as play, in which new ideas and possibilities are considered" (Collier, p. 161).

Acknowledging Goffman's (1959) social interactionalist identity theory, Stuart (1998) "argues that self-development is an ongoing process and that particular encounters challenge and affirm our self" (p. 142), and that "the language and writing as an integral part of language, influence the development of these selves" (p. 142). Goffman (1959) had explained that as a person moves into a new position or takes on a new role, he or she is "not likely to be told in full detail how to conduct himself," but that he or she will be "given a few clues, hints, and stage directions" (p. 63). These clues joined with the individual's pre-existing repertoire of ways of performing in the world equip and inform the individual how to inhabit the new role. In creating a text, writers, according to Stuart (1998) are enacting a presentation of self as much as those who meet and talk in the street. In fact, "self and presentation of self become one, our presentation is our/self and that self will alter over time" (p. 149). Both in these processes of becoming and presenting, Stuart (1998) states that "writing is a highly significant indicator of the construction of self" (p. 148). "These interactions in writing are not only encounters between the reader and the writer, but are enlivened by a wealth of other encounters that shape the presentation of self" (Stuart, 1998, p. 149). As a result, "we do not present ourselves as writers as isolated selves, but in interaction with others" (Stuart, 1998, p. 149).

Narrative identity theory suggests that identity is understood through stories, the ones we remember and tell about ourselves (McAdams, 1993). These stories integrate new experiences and even edit previous stories. Our stories of self begin very early. Eakin (2008) describes the

“extended self,” who emerges early in childhood as the self that we perform for others as well as “the self of memory and anticipation” (p. 3). This self is not static, but temporal. And this changing self finds expression in narrative, “for narrative is especially suited to registering the effects of time and change” (Eakin, 2008, p. 3). Also, the narrative of a previous self cannot be accessed later, as one cannot re-inhabit them. Neurologist Israel Rosenfield explains, “Recollection is a kind of perception, …and every context will alter the nature of what is recalled” (Eakin, 2008, p. 89).

Despite our illusions of autonomy and self-determination, the stories we tell about ourselves are not wholly autonomous constructions. “Instead, we draw on … the cultures we inhabit to shape them, resources that specify what it means to be a man, a woman, a worker, a person in the settings where we live” (Eakin, 2008, p. 22). Our culture also polices our stories of self. In fact, “for the most part, we are not left to our own devices when we talk about ourselves, for protocols exist for many of the kinds of self-narration we may use” (p. 28). Narrative theory embraces multiple dimensions of self depending on context. Eakin (2008) acknowledges that our narratives about self may not be offered to others or understood as complete, but are apt to be “fragmentary, spontaneous, [or] casual” stories (p. 17). Further, one can have incongruent and even contradictory selves (McAdams, 1993, 1996).

Gee’s (2002) idea of “discursive identities” suggests that identities can be imposed or co-constructed and vary depending on the context. In fact, Gee (1999) believes that “people try to make visible to others (and to themselves, as well) who they are and what they are doing” (p. 20) within specific contexts. This effort to be known is essential, because identities are dependent on the recognition of others. Gee (2000) also makes the point that literacy is never general or self-contained (e.g., a set of stand-alone mental abilities), but rather always tied to "identity work." He

explains that "people create from the grammatical resources of a language like English (and, sometimes, simultaneously from other languages as well), quite specific sublanguages," what he calls "social languages" (p. 412). Gee furthers that a person's social languages are used (in conjunction with a person's values, thoughts, beliefs, etc.) to "enact and negotiate different socially situated identities and to carry out different socially situated activities" (p. 412). However, despite the shifting, evolving and multiple identities associated with an individual at a given time and over time, Gee explains that individuals do possess a “core identity “ based on a “relatively fixed sense of self “which underlies one’s contextually shifting multiple identities (2002, p. 39). This core identity relates to the stories one believes about one’s self and others.

The neurological scientist Oliver Sacks (1985) explains, “We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a ‘narrative,’ and that this narrative *is* us, our identities.” From a neurologist’s point of view, “A man needs such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self.” Sacks (1985) speculates on the need for narrative and sees clues in the propensity and pleasure that young children demonstrate for story. He notes that story is not merely entertainment to the very young; it is the favored tool for presenting complex matters and general concepts. In fact, “it is this narrative or symbolic power which gives a sense of the world ….”

Cohler and Hammack (2007) believe that “the most normative feature” of human development “is its connection to discourses of identity through the formation of narratives that anchor the life course and provide meaning” (p. 47) especially during adolescence. Kenyon (1996) focused on what people find meaningful explaining that the meaningful for each person is made real, shared and remembered through stories. “Narrative and stories are the way the world is for us…“ (Kenyon, 1996, p. 25). It has been suggested that humans are their stories (Bruner, 2004).

As such, the stories of our lives are multiple, situated and always incomplete. We are not one story; rather we are "private or economic stories, inner stories, public stories, physical stories, family stories, emotional stories, and cultural stories" (Kenyon, 1996, p. 26).

Given the agency of others or more broadly of the culture in imposing identities, it is also acknowledged that individuals can act to manipulate, minimize or accentuate their discursive identities through resistance or repression of identifiable characteristics associated with specific undesirable identities. In enacting characteristics of valued identities individuals are said to possess "identity capital" (Cote & Levine, 2002), and such capital may invoke privileges within a community (Wortham, 2006). A sociologist reiterates that individuals are often in a legitimizing role or a resistant role depending on their inclination to accept or reject imposed categories of dominant cultural institutions (Castell, 1997). Enacting and resisting characteristics of models of identity are based on individuals' abilities to read and adapt to social signals and norms (Reed, Schallert, Beth & Woodruff, 2004) which themselves may change over time and likely change from one context to another.

For Spooner and Yancey (1996), "rhetoric is as much concerned with the formation of identities as the construction of texts," (p. 269) and literacy, specifically school-sponsored literacy, is wrapped up in "identity formation." In a discussion that considered the implications of email use, they assert that "rhetorical situations are not defined by the mechanical process through which they travel, so much as by the social purposes of the rhetors" (pp. 269–270). Subsequent discussion, research and debate has more closely considered ways in which electronic media can and does change what and how one might author, but the emphasis here is the shared belief that rhetoric is driven and shaped by the purposes of the writer. Spooner and Yancey (1996) note that school-sponsored genres set boundaries around the identities that students can construct. Yet, imposed

limitations cannot be separated inside the individual student writer from the many larger popular discourses relating to writing and social and cultural issues such as gender and race. “Students construct themselves through their writing within-and sometimes against — these discourses” (Yagelski,2000, p. 136). “How they construct themselves through their writing,” Yagelski furthers, "is always to some extent a negotiation among the roles available to them within the discourses in place in particular situations and the self-interest they bring to specific rhetorical tasks” p.(136).

Motivation Theories and Writing

Many educators and researchers (e.g., Guthrie, &Wigfield, 2000) agree that motivation plays a key role in reading and literacy development. Student choice is noted as a critical factor in encouraging student motivation to read (Allen, 2000; Allington, 2002), especially in establishing the habit of reading. And independent (or choice) reading is an important component in a balanced literacy program (Gallagher, 2009). Choice increases the likelihood that students will see literacy as personally relevant and having substance for their lives. When students see literacy as useful and fulfilling, they are more likely to choose to read and see themselves as readers (Alvermann, 2001; Gee, 1996; Wilhelm, 2001). So, it seems reasonable to believe that writing and writer-identities are similarly related to individual choice, and thus motivation.

Bruning and Horn (2000) weighed two decades of studies that explored the link between motivation and writing. Their overview of the research distilled four recurring conditions that were deemed critical to fostering young writers. These conditions were considered necessary to affect the perceptions and performance of young writers. These four conditions included nurturing the perceptions that writing in general has value and nurturing each young writer to believe that he or she could become a competent writer. Secondly, classrooms must be authentic in both their writing

goals and contexts. Authentic writing goals are those that position writing to function as real communication or personal expression. Thirdly, young writers need to encounter sufficient but not excessive challenge for their writing skills and confidence to grow. Lastly, the classroom must have a positive emotional climate.

Some researchers (Kunjufu, 1988; Noguera, 2003) have found that among adolescents, peer support is a significant factor in motivation to read and the likelihood of individuals viewing themselves as readers. One wonders if the same is true for writers. Teens who take up the identity as writers and who choose to write regularly under their own name, face, gender, age, race or other identifying characteristics may be more contemporary evidence of Smith's (1998) notion of "literacy clubs" or Lave and Wenger's (1991) "communities of practice." In both instances, an interest is stimulated and early efforts are sponsored by others who nurture skills and identities. Lave and Wenger (1991) would describe apprenticeship roles that intentionally scaffold early efforts into legitimate participation. Identity and affinity then become central to considerations of how and why young people choose to write.

Also, Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) ideas about flow reveal an understanding about motivation. The state of flow is marked by concentration, enjoyment, a desire to be doing the activity, self-esteem, and perceived importance of the activity to the future. Flow correlates highly with activities that present a reasonable challenge for an individual, which is typical of structured leisure activities and atypical of schoolwork. Schoolwork is more often reported as being high-challenge and high-stakes activities that are not a good fit for the skill levels of the individuals, thus resulting in anxiety rather than enjoyment. While work and play are not expected to be equally motivating, activities that came to be labeled simultaneously as worklike and playlike were found to be enjoyable and important (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

While the classroom has been a battleground for competing ideologies and pedagogies over time, the inner workings of the learner and would-be writer have been a deep consideration for those interested in developing writers. "The source of the complexity," according to Corbet (2009), "is not only within the head of the child, it is more powerfully and more consequentially manifested in the diversity of social experience" (p. 83). Still, the need to see oneself as a writer is understood as an individual expression shaped by cultural influence, and both the classroom and the culture exercise great influence on learning and identity (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984).

In review, the history of composition studies and research dispel any notion of "the good ole days when kids could write well." Writing is a complex task that is generally presented as a challenge to students and experts alike. A review of composition studies also highlights an ongoing struggle over purpose and focus which informs the reader of the forces that have shaped the debate and resulting practice. Political and educational assumptions as shaping forces in the debate have often taken different vantage points. The political concerns more often offer rhetoric and direction for student writing as an outcome. Educational concerns frequently focus deeply on the purpose and process of teaching writing. Both perspectives are necessary considerations, and both are subject to the cultural pressures and trends of any given era. But the discussion of how or why one should write or be taught to write is incomplete if we do not also consider the writer's perspective. Thus, the theories of identity and motivation are also engaged. These considerations do not represent all of the relevant topics in the field of composition research, but were selected specifically as tools to frame the observations and concerns as raised by the participants and myself in the current study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."
— Zora Neale Hurston

Case Study Methodology

Because the phenomenon of teen writers is a focus of inquiry in which it is difficult to separate the individual from the context, it is especially well-suited for case study (Yin, 2008). A case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). Such qualitative research takes an interest in "the meaning people make of their lives in very particular contexts" (Dyson & Genish, 2005, p. 9). Case study methodology is also desirable because it foregrounds participants' points of view and results in a dense and richly layered understanding. As such, a case study does not endeavor to offer a fixed explanation. Instead this research provides a context-limited slice of a broader phenomenon, then reports the recurring and significant and even outlying or contradictory findings.

This multi-case qualitative study was undertaken "to investigate a phenomenon" (Stake, 2005, p. 445) through "closely examining several cases linked together" (Stake, 2006, p. v). In this multi-case study each individual is a unit of analysis, because each participant is "a specific, a complex, functioning thing" (Stake, 1995, p 2) belonging to the phenomenon of teen writers. Participants are collected and reviewed together and categorically bounded "as members of a group or examples of a phenomenon" (Stake, 2006, p. 6) in their experiences as writers. Yet, individuals have come to their habits of writing for their own purposes from a unique set of circumstances and engage in varied habits. Individual perspectives offer unique insight into the factors that participants believe influence their writing performance or development as writers, and cross-comparison of individual cases offers evidence of shared traits or factors.

Selection of Participants

The seven participants in this study are adolescents who elected to participate in two interviews and at least one focus group, who self-identify as writers and who are involved in regular writing habits outside of school. Six of the participants tracked through standard level English classes, and two completed honors level English courses. One student was identified as intellectually gifted. Five of the participants were consistent honor roll students with four of those maintaining straight As in English. One participant struggled some, but usually earned Cs in English, and two of the participants had failed at least one high school English course.

The county schools enroll 14,000 students of which 91% are White, 6% are Hispanic, 1.4% are African American, 1.3% are Asian and less than half of one percent are Native American. System-wide 62% of students are classified as economically disadvantaged and 48% qualify for Title 1 funding. The two individual schools represented in this study roughly mirror the county's overall racial and socioeconomic demographics. The one school from which five participants came is twice the size of the second high school. The larger school has nearly 1,600 students enrolled, and the smaller of the two schools reports an enrollment of 700. Both schools report proficient writing scores in 2010- 2012 on par with the state's average of 4.2. The reported ACT composite average is on par with the state's average of a 19.5 and does not differ significantly between the two schools.

Sampling Frame

The criteria that requires that participants write outside of school regularly was central to the phenomenon under study and is interesting as an underexplored source of data that may lead researchers and teachers to understand teen writing as a phenomenon as our students understand it.

As I had taught eighth grade and then moved on to teach high school juniors and seniors, my starting place was students who had revealed to me in class that they enjoyed writing and pursued it outside of school. As I talked with one interested teen writer, he or she would mention another. All of the potential participants were identified through snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007), but all of the resulting participants turned out to be my former students. Given Kendall's (2008) several suggestions toward closing the distance between interviewee and researcher, it was considered advantageous that a rapport preexisted and facilitated recruitment in this study. Other young writers, friends of enrolled students, were sought out and invited to participate in this study, but were not successfully recruited. Some were forced to decline participation due to work schedules and transportation, and one failed to secure parental support for her involvement. All participants were students between 14 and 17. Both boys and girls participated, and the small group included students from varied social cliques and varied academic standing. The diversity among participants is interesting and useful while still being judged as typical in keeping with Patton's (2002) explanation that an individual or site is "specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual" (p. 236).

Procedures

Participants were identified and deemed fitting based only on my simple operational definition of voluntary writer. Consideration was given for each person's availability, transportation, and commitment to the length of the study as recommended by Gay et al. (2009). Following Gay's (2009) guidelines, parent consent and participant assent was secured and filed. Between July 2011 and July 2012, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, and three focus groups occurred endeavoring to include all participants in at least one meeting of a focus group.

Because qualitative interviews "allow for the exploration of meaning as meaning is constructed by the research participant" (Kendall, 2008 p. 133), two semi-structured qualitative interviews with some prepared questions were conducted one-on-one with each participant, but the ensuing discussion during the interview was allowed to take its own course. Stake (2006) supports the flexibility to design questions in common among all cases as well as questions particular to each case. This degree of flexibility and follow-up questions allowed the researcher to probe in a sincere "attempt to see issues from the perspective of the interviewee and to achieve a degree of empathy and understanding with the research participant" (Kendall, 2008, p. 134). Stake (2006) refers to a case study as characteristically being "progressively focused" with "organizing concepts changing either a little or a lot as the study moves along" (p. vi). Accordingly, the questions for the second interview were the result of questions that occurred to the researcher in reviewing the initial responses and transcript data.

Handwritten field notes were kept to augment audio recordings (Bogden & Biklen, 2007) of focus group meetings. Digital recordings from interviews and focus group meetings were transcribed with pseudonyms and destroyed. Per IRB regulations, consent forms are stored for three years following the study, but will then be destroyed.

Data Collection

Dyson and Genishi (2005) point out that the early steps of a case study indulge the researcher to look "through her own lens" and follow her "interests, predilections, and particular skills" (p. 38). My familiarity with these participants as former students, my day-to-day efforts to engage teens in writing or caring about writing and my review of the research about teaching young writers, conflated to comprise my own lens. However, the researcher must quickly adjust to a more objective lens, one that is "clear enough so the questions she begins to formulate are relevant to the

site; that is, they grow out of what she sees and experiences" (p. 39). Balancing the need for structure with the need to be open-ended, initial interview questions were written and submitted for review as a protocol (see Appendix A). *Development of interview protocol*

The focus of each interview was the writer. I worked to uncover how each understood his or her own practice as a writer. Initial individual interviews for each of the seven participants were "semi-structured" with a planned list of questions developed into an interview protocol (Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews "allow room for dialogue, follow-up questions and other changes" (Kendall (2008). This flexibility to probe and diverge "enables the researcher to attempt to see issues from the perspective of the interviewee" (Kendall, 2008). The first interview followed these first set of questions allowing the discussion to digress as needed.

In keeping with Yin's model (1994), open-ended questions were the format of focus group meetings and focused interviews with individuals, as participants' points of view are narrated or drawn out in conversation that may reveal intentions, interpretations and motivations not clearly represented in a group dialogue or activity. Dyson and Genishi (2005) describe interviews on a continuum from informal to formal ranging from quick after thoughts and follow-up questions that resemble quick conversations for clarification to preplanned and carefully composed questions. And Bogdan and Biklen (2007) advise researchers to "hang loose" in a manner that allows questions to change in response to the researcher's experiences or observations. My second round of interviews were again semi-structured and initiated around questions that arose during my first round of interviews and reflections.

Case studies are assimilated findings made from in-depth data collection from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007). My sources of data are (1) the audio recordings of focus group discussions augmented by field notes, (2) recorded and transcribed individual interviews with each

participant, and (3) recorded read-aloud or collected samples of participants' own writing. Qualitative researchers collect observations and artifacts and talk to people as a means to "construct interpretations of other people's interpretations of others 'real worlds' "(Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 18). These data sources collected over a twelve month period provide the desired "subjective interpretation of experiences as the center of the study" which "showcase their words, impressions, judgments, and reflections" (Intrator & Kunzman, 2009, p. 33).

Member-checking was accomplished through a one-on-one meeting with each participant. Each participant was presented with findings specific to him or her, as well as synthesized findings into which participant views and written work were integrated. The entire draft of this document was searched for every mention of each participant's pseudonym. Participants were made aware of the number, context and language of each entry. All of the member feedback affirmed the findings presented. This process validates the findings and seeks to empower participants to recognize their ability to represent their experiences and perspectives to the educational area and see them as valuable and relevant (Morrow and Smith, 1995).

Data Analysis

Gay et al (2009) remark that "an essential skill for case study researchers … is the ability to undertake data collection and data analysis activities together (p. 430)." So, analysis began as data collection began and was ongoing and recursive throughout. Dyson and Genishi (2005) recommend that recorded data be transcribed soon after the event and have accompanying notes for clarity and synthesis, and transcription was begun early and was reviewed with initial open coding between round one and two interviews. Analysis progressed through the discursive mode of coding and analysis. This process provides the researcher "the vocabulary needed to tell the story (or multiple stories) of what was happening in the case" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 84.) Line by line

the researcher interprets the "social meaning or importance" (p. 85) of the recorded data. Lines or chunks of data were labeled, and a running list of all labels used was ongoing (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Subsequent synthesis of preliminary findings were heavily layered with participant voices and shared with dissertation committee chair for review.

Development of idea unit coding system

The focus of this study is to understand what young people write on their own time, and to capture participants' perceptions about their writing, rather than a technical review of their writing itself. However, each of these individual interviews included an invitation for participants to share their writing in the form of read-alouds. Some, not all, recorded and transcribed interviews included excerpts of participant writing. Because two interviews were expected, the hope was that participants who did not come prepared or who did not feel ready to share samples of their writing would be more inclined to share by the second interview. Writing samples were accepted, reviewed and included in this study at participant prompting, and some work posted online was reviewed at the invitation of the participant. The read-alouds gave me access not only to their created text, but also to their intended tone and their chosen emphasis. Students selected the piece of writing to share and often read only an excerpt from that piece.

Dyson and Genishi (2005) acknowledge varied positions on transcribing all or selected parts of recorded data, and they support that transcription decisions should be based on the research question. Transcriptions were thorough and verbatim on related topics, but do exclude or gloss over some social and personal comments shared between interviewer and participant and among focus group participants. Dialogue was typed continuously with a new line beginning with each conversational turn noting turn-taking and the interplay between participant and researcher.

Transcripts also reflect occasional communicative acts (e.g., laughter, gestures, etc.), and notes that inform the reader of relevant contextual events.

First round interviews were transcribed before second round interviews were conducted. Transcript review and coding occurred throughout. Coding occurred in chunks of texts - phrases, a single sentence, or as a set of several sentences. These units of varying sizes were coded for their perceived focus. This initial coding of information fits with Chafe's (1980) idea units. Idea units are identified in sections taken from spontaneous discourse which occurs in spurts and is coded in corresponding chunks based on the person's focus. These spurts vary in length and are often marked by pauses and syntax.

Level one coding only considered the writing samples themselves in broad strokes, and closely focused on participant comments about their writing (see Appendix B for all codes). Examples of Level 1 coding are shared below:

Table 1 Sample Level 1 Coding: Rick

Interviewer	In general talk about the writing that you have been doing.	
Rick	It's been about how I feel. It's about how I'm feeling.	Emotion-driven
	If I am angry, it will be a war or more of a fighting stance piece of writing.	Real life enlarged in writing
	Most days lately haven't been too good. Because the reflection of my life goes into my writing.	Reflects REAL life
	The anger and depressed feelings that I get having to battle with school, two jobs, and my girlfriend, my family, and my girlfriend's family kind of sucks into me.	Anger/depression Stress
	I have to bury it deep down inside. So I have to put it somewhere. In my writing or one of my songs.	Hidden self revealed in writing Relief through writing
Interviewer	Your songs? Is that something else that you're writing?	
Rick	I write some country songs. I write mostly soft metal. I am a fan of the electric guitar. I play a lot of guitar.	Genres (songs) (nonfiction) Writing – connected to other creative outlets

	A lot of my songs have to do with politics because it is just a very good subject to write about because there's always new material	(distant) event-driven Enjoys starting new composing projects
Interviewer	Where do you get this new material?	
Rick	The news.	Nonfiction/ not personal
Interviewer	What is your source for the news?	
Rick	The local paper, the TV mostly… or magazines such as… there is a magazine for military with guns and stuff in it. Like if I read that a platoon of soldiers die, it kind of hits hard because that's where I'm planning to go and that could be me one day.	Exploration of anticipated role through writing/composing Threatening scene/ dark/ fear Emotion- driven writing

Another example follows. It is from Sweeny's initial interview. The interview began with me asking him how often he typically writes. Sweeny identified himself as someone who writes daily if one were to include his writing of lyrics.

Table 2 Sample Level 1 Coding: Sweeny		
Jill	Talk about the writing that you've been doing.	
Sweeny	Mostly thriller-like or real life. The one I'm doing right now is about this guy. I put a lot of me into my writing. It's about a misfit that don't really fit in. And his parents are hard on him. It's his journey through life with his friends.	Real life in writing Hidden self expressed as an alternate self through created characters
Jill	Tell me about the "a lot of me in my writing."	
Sweeny	I try to like… I'm real easy-going. I love music. I'm just a typical teenager and kind of a misfit and outcast. I try to …	Positive & negative characterization of self
Jill	Hang on… On the one hand you are saying tupical and the other you are saying misfit? So help me reconcile those two ideas.	
Sweeny	Well, typical – as in what you would think a teenager would do. Sit at home, listen to music, hang out with friends. You know. And outcast because … the music I like.. you know. I wear the heavy metal band t-shirts. That kinda makes me an outcast. But typical as in my daily activities.	Identity sorting Seeking acceptance

Jill	When you say you put a lot of me into my writing, what does that writing look like? Is it a story?	
Sweeny	Yeah. A story of teenagers. It's mostly teenagers and some about me. I do a lot of dark writing – like thrillers and stuff. The characters – like usually the main character is a lot like me. He listens to the same music. He dresses the same. I make out what I want my life to be in my writing.	Story centered on self/avatar Living vicariously through characters stronger/better self
Jill	Do you? So tell me more about that. You make out what you want your life to be in your writing?	
Sweeny	I've always wanted to be this cool kid, a guy everybody likes. And I'm not. So, I try to make my writing like that. I try to make him where he's still me, but he's the cool – everybody likes him [me]. You know, he has enemies, but everybody still likes him. Cause I used to be that kid. But since my parents' divorce and all that, it's just kind of went downhill.	Stronger/better self Seeking acceptance Grieving for loss
Jill	Why do you think that?	
Sweeny	I think that cause I'm not as happy no more. I'm very stressed a lot. And just… a lot of it is just… I've changed. Before, I did the stuff I do now, but I didn't let it show. I dressed like all the other kids; I tried to fit in. And this year, I'm being myself. I am happier that way. I try to… I wish myself was good enough for everybody else.	Sadness Resistance to expectations Seeking acceptance

Because the focus of this study is the individual writer as each understands his or her practice as a writer, level two coding involved separating the participants' perspectives from other observations and grouping initial codes into larger categories. Coding that prioritized participants' perspectives evolved over time into four larger categories, or themes, including 1) the writing itself; 2) the habits of writers; 3) motivation to write, and 4) personal and social identity work accomplished by the writing. A summary of the categorization that occurred in level two coding can be found in Appendix C. Following level two coding, individual portraits for each participant were drafted with a systematic review of individual data and transcripts. Each of the individual portraits follows in Chapter 4, after a brief introduction.

Ultimately, each case was analyzed individually for its “situational uniqueness” (Gertz, 1973 as cited in Stake, 2006, p. 3). Each is studied as “real cases operating in real situations” (Stakes, 2006, p. 3) to understand the most significant findings and assertions that were specific to each (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each case was written into individual portraits in “ordinary language and narrative” (Stakes, 2006, p. vii).

Case study methodology is rich in its individual focus and detail, but also is valued for its ability to account for and include differences, as analysis does not eliminate or discount what does not seem to fit (Sheilds, 2007). These participants, all writers, represent both interesting overlap and unique perspectives on their practice, and diligent attention was given to represent this complexity. Also, case study is revealing as it lends itself to cross-case comparisons. Comparisons were organized as an “unordered meta-matrix” in which each participant as a case is represented with descriptive data collected under shared relevant “organizing headings” (Gay, 2009, p. 431).

Dyson and Genishi (2005) caution that systematic review of the data by category must be done with context intact rather than plucked from context or oversimplified. Erickson (1986), too, directs researchers to consider and make explicit relational, social, cultural and contextual factors within and surrounding dialogue or events. For example, questioning behaviors may offer insights, but the language and events that prompt the questions are significant in their analysis. As such whole interactions may be chunked and coded in subcategories for comparison to other similar interactions during open coding.

Data were reviewed in search of patterns building both equivalent and rival explanations (Yin, 1994). Admonished by experts to “not merely organize data, but to try to identify and gain analytic insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied” from the participants' perspective rather than from imposed order for the sake of order, the emphasis was

placed on the inductive recursive process of coding data guided by evolving questions as I created themes (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 81).

Dyson and Genishi (2005) are kind and transparent in informing fledgling researchers that no analysis is truly exhaustive at any stage of scholarly work. As an iterative process, it could always endure another round of review and potentially yield further insights or relevant questions. They clarify that as researchers we "are not on the trail of singular truths, nor of overly neat stories. We are on the trail of thematic threads, meaningful events, and powerful factors that allow us entry into the multiple realities and dynamic processes that constitute the everyday drama of language use" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.111). So from chaos to order and from collections to insight, the journey of qualitative case study research is not rigidly prescribed, but carefully documented and transparent. The end goal is a "propositional generalization or assertion about how a studied phenomenon was enacted in a case" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p 114) that is judged to have "interpretive validity" (Erickson, 1986, p. 150).

Qualitative research may provide readers "a sense of being there, of having a vicarious experience in the studied site" from which "readers may generalize … in private, personal ways, modifying, extending, or adding to their generalized understandings of how the world works" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 115). Erickson (1986) concurs that readers make their own sense of data, a process that Stake's (1995) calls "naturalistic generalization." The knowledge that is shared by the researcher is passed along to the readers with "some of their personal meanings of events and relationships – and fail to pass along others. They [the case study researchers] know that the reader, too, will add and subtract, invent and shape – reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it ... more likely to be personally useful" (Stake, 2005, p. 455). The close analysis and the clear

presentation of the findings as “thick descriptions” of this study invite the reader into the perspectives of these seven participants and to their own naturalistic generalization.

Chapter 4: Findings

"I write to give myself strength. I write to be the characters that I am not. I write to explore all the things I'm afraid of. "
— Joss Whedon

Portraits of Young Writers

Stake (2006) states that "individual cases [within a qualitative multi-case study] should be studied to learn about their self-centering, complexity and situational uniqueness" (p. 6). Further, Stake (2006) asserts that it is "important to seek out and present multiple perspectives on activities and issues, discovering and portraying different views" (p.vi). Because each young writer who participated in this study presents a unique definition of a teen writer, this chapter begins with brief portraits of each of them.

Additionally, participants' voices are prominent throughout this chapter, because the highest priority has been given to understanding and relaying the meanings that the participants themselves bring to the phenomenon of independent and self-motivated teen writing (Creswell, 2007). All names of participants are pseudonyms given to the five females and two males who participated in this study. All are between the ages of 14 and 17, and all attended one of two rural public high schools in the southeastern United States. Five of the participants tracked through standard level English classes, and two completed honors level English courses. One student was identified as intellectually gifted. Five of the participants were consistent honor roll students with four of those maintaining straight As in English. One participant struggled some, but usually earned Cs in English, and two of the participants had failed at least one high school English course. The unifying trait of these participants is that each of them wrote regularly outside of school for their own purposes, and each of them readily referred to themselves as a writer when asked. Each participant is introduced and reflected upon as an individual case in light of this study's two broad

research questions: (1) What do these young people write on their own time and for their own purposes? and (2) Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices? These portraits of individual writers are followed by a listing of summary findings that take an overarching view.

Atlanta

Atlanta is a young woman thoughtfully living on the fringe of the mainstream. She is quiet and admittedly a bit shy around peers, but engaging with adults and friends. She is not afraid of being different. One small evidence of that point is that she recently colored her long dark curly hair a cheerful shade of purple. She is comfortable being different, but also conscious of becoming, rather than just being. She has the posture of someone who is tiptoeing or leaning to peak around the next corner, curious and anticipating something more.

Atlanta is the only child of academically-minded and doting parents. Her humor is subtle and often ironic. She will not only admit that her humor is nerdy at times; she celebrates that quality. When last I saw her, she had just come from school, and she was wearing a t-shirt with the periodic table on it.

Atlanta is identified as intellectually gifted, and her class work is consistently superior. Her academic history is littered with awards. She has maintained a 4.0 through her first year of high school tracking in all honors classes, and her ACT composite score is a 31 (with a perfect 36 in English) as a freshman.

Atlanta did experience some discontent in school, though. Her difficulties centered around her search for intellectual peers. Given her maturity and aptitude, some of her classmates were at times a painful trial and a disappointment to her (a scene that I watched play out daily in eighth

grade). Still Atlanta was not arrogant, just aware. She related well at a heart level and made friends. Still, she stood a bit aloof – awaiting something more.

Research Question 1: What do these young people write on their own time and for their own purposes?

The Writing Itself/The Writer's Habits

Atlanta is a fan of fantasy and epic adventure, and she frequently reads and occasionally writes fan fiction. Fan fiction is the broad term associated with the unsolicited continuations or alterations of existing fictional story lines or characters created by fans. Specifically, Atlanta mentioned enjoying constructing "epic adventures" that she compared to *Lord of the Rings*. She often creates stories about people being brave or heroic. She compares some of her recurring scenarios to Hogwarts, a fictional British school of magic made popular in the Harry Potter movies. At Hogwarts, a group of people live together and pursue a shared goal (i.e. a group of rebels banding together to resist a wicked government). Atlanta especially likes to have her stories follow a character who was first isolated and felt alone in his or her quest or perspective, and who then finds a group and joins it.

While Atlanta was easy to engage in conversation about her habits as a writer, she was more reluctant to share her actual writing. The following, however, is a recent writing sample from Atlanta set in London in the 1800s, an era (in her imagination) of a vampire plague:

> *He was taller than most and some say more handsome than any, though he hid his face with a mask. Loras Silvertongue, bounty hunter turned vampire slayer, made his way down the cobbled lane, eyes shining through the slits in his lizard shaped mask. The street was mostly vacant, as the hour was much past midnight, but Silvertongue preferred the darkness, as did his quarry.*

He made his way to the Thirsty Badger, a pub on the outskirts of town, that had soon been abandoned after clients refused to venture through the streets after dark. Slipping through the door that had been negligently unbolted after its owner's hasty and sorry flight, Silvertongue surveyed the room. Many vampires preferred to lurk in abandoned buildings such as this, picking off lone humans hurrying home after night had fallen. Just there, the tell-tale scratches of a vampire's claw-like fingernails marred the oak door leading to the cellar. Lighting a candle and readying his silver blade, Silvertongue flung open the cellar door and prepared to face whatever horrors lay below.

In addition to this kind of supernatural/vampire fictional writing, Atlanta also blogs. She tends to post daily, utilizing an app on her phone. She volunteered this information to me; but when I asked to read it, she politely declined. Her blog is maintained under a pseudonym, and only one follower of her blog knows who she really is. Atlanta and this one friend mutually follow each other's blogs. Atlanta gently scorned others' enthusiasm for the Facebook format which allows one "to find more people," preferring the virtual community and comfortable anonymity of her blog. She said, "I am deliberately not very personal with people [online]." While she enjoys the safe distance of anonymous virtual connections, she also values the connections that she is able to make with real people. She said, "I do appreciate the people who comment on the original posts that I make."

Atlanta did log into her blog from my computer and give me a brief guided tour. The format of her blog is more like a combination of Facebook and Pinterest. Artistic images are interspersed with narrative which is limited to small bites. But unlike most social media, the blog is primarily focused on commentary about fictional characters. She said, "I like that I can log on and say, 'Hey, I want to talk about this character.'" Atlanta has found a new way to use her old

character/friends to help her feel a sense of belonging and connection. She said, "I like that you can add commentary to the end [of another person's post], and have people agree with you. And you can tell I would be really good friends with them in real life because they identify with the same characters that I do."

She explained "headcanons" as a practice in this online community: "You write about a paragraph. It fits in with the story's timeline and doesn't change any events." As defined by UrbanDictionary, headcanons are ideas, beliefs, or aspects of a story that happen in a person's head, but not in the actual story itself. Atlanta had posted "a few of them," excited to share her creative imagination with others. Her headcanons posed her idea that "Draco's [from the *Harry Potter Series*] braggart would be a Dementor [non-being or Dark creature] or Voldemort, considering his family history." From the *Bartimaeus Series* by Jonathan Stroud, Atlanta suggested that "If Nathaniel hadn't been a magician, he totally would've lived off the money he got from art commissions, dyed his hair blue and been into Harry Potter. And he would've done spray paint propaganda in the streets for the Resistance, thus meeting Kitty Jones."

Atlanta described reading and writing like "a movie playing inside [her] head," and she relies heavily on the visualizations of stories. She sometimes writes down story ideas in a convenient notebook when she does not have time in the moment to develop the idea; however, she often does not record her stories on paper. Atlanta mentally archives her stories. Even without a written record of many of her stories, she still reports editing on both a micro and macro level. Atlanta edits just to "adjust a phrase," to ensure that characters sound as they should. She is attentive to the ways in which characters talk, and she is critical of the way fans attempt to write familiar characters online, especially the exchanges that occur between characters. She pays careful attention to dialect.

However, the fun of writing for Atlanta is in intentionally changing these characters and their outcomes. Atlanta thinks of these characters with which she has tinkered as "alternate universe versions of characters in familiar books." For example, her version of Harry Potter "might be more sarcastic than the one in the [original] book." It is not uncommon for characters or even real people from history to be brought back to life by Atlanta's imagination. Some have lived knowing when they are going to die, but they have been given some greater purpose.

Atlanta also explained that the epic scale of her imagined stories put her in a "world-changing" role far above life's daily bumps. She explicitly states that "it [her story construction] is a reaction to real life," and later she would look back and say, "Oh, this is why I'm making these stories."

Atlanta revealed her critical awareness of her own growth over time as a writer. She reflected on her earlier characters as unsatisfactory as compared to her later characters which are more diverse and more developed. She notes that they were all "cookie-cutter personalities," and now her characters are more diverse and more developed. She finds that she is more apt to weigh some possible action or decision for a character and rejecting it, "because they're too serious to do that. Or they're too goofy not to do that." Atlanta also experiments with subplots or side adventures and evaluates their fit to the characterization, existing plot, or tone of the story.

Atlanta said she always had an audience in mind even when she was constructing a story mentally, knowing she might not ever write it down and share it. She explained that she was often motivated to write, so she could make others feel the way she did about something. She explained, "I think it only carries the feeling I'm wanting it to carry to people who are similar to me." Then she explicitly stated, "So, I'm almost writing just for people who are similar to me, that want the same thing from a story. I think they can take away what I meant for them to take away." She

reflectively conceded that her stories might be enjoyed by others unlike herself, but she added, “It’s more about who you are writing for, even if you don’t know it.”

Research Question 2: Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices?

Motivation and Identity Work

At the time of this interview, Atlanta was a ninth grader in a high school where few of her former classmates were enrolled. She reported having few friends and relying more on the characters/friends from her stories to keep her company. These characters were like friends in that they happily occupied her mind as she read or imagined stories focused on them. She also drew comfort from characters in another way. She noted that some of her favorite characters “share a lot of the same flaws that I do,” but “other people still like these characters.” She reflected later and understood that she had unconsciously related the acceptance of these characters by the wide readership of the world to her own anticipated acceptance by others she would meet in the future.

As a ninth grader, Atlanta was aware that writing was therapeutic for her. She said that she participated in this study to “help illustrate the many different types of young writers” and to explain “the different ways” writing had been “therapeutic” to her. Atlanta invents story lines largely, if not entirely, for her own entertainment, and she acknowledges that her writing is a creative “coping mechanism” on which she has relied for many years. She feels she can “get away” – even if it’s just in her head. She said writing was what she did most often to make herself feel better. In her case, with no required writing supplies, she can engage in a mental drafting of stories anywhere.

Over time she has become aware that her stories help her to cope with her loneliness. She knows she is different from many of her friends, but she says, “I know I’m not the only weird

person. I know I'm not." She looks forward to making new friends, because she knows, "There are others weird in the same way that I am. It's just that at this point, there's no one that weird similarly enough to me that I feel like best friends with." She is not lonely because she has no friends. She has a group of friends, but she says, "We're all weird in different ways."

Atlanta also used writing to create companions for herself--companions that perhaps helped her overcome challenges she faced in her own life. For example, Atlanta said, "A lot of times if I do something that I consider risky that makes me nervous, I'll write about it and have my character do something risky that makes them feel similar." If not explicitly aware of her desire to have a fictional companion to walk with her through challenges, Atlanta was certainly reflectively aware. She said, "It's almost like I want somebody to be going through the same thing that I am." She explained that earlier that day her challenge had been volleyball. She said, "I'm not the worst one, but I am very terrible at it. And I just want to write something in [an ongoing story] about strong characters that still have to face these things that make them feel bad about themselves." Her prior relationship with characters and their strengths helped her maintain respect for them, even during the occasions when a character's performance on a specific task was poor. She said, "But then you as the writer know that that doesn't make them any less than they are."

On another occasion, Atlanta was nervous about an upcoming commitment to visit a classroom of young children to read to them in celebration of Dr. Seuss's birthday. To ameliorate her nerves about it, she gave a character in her story a speech to deliver. Her character was "really nervous, but he loved it after." It is interesting that the outcome for the character was not clear in Atlanta's mind until after she had faced her own stressful obligation and enjoyed a positive outcome. The students for whom she read had been wonderfully receptive and even hugged her after she read. Then she realized, "Oh, this is going to happen for him [her character], too." She

reiterated her need for a companion saying, “I wanted someone with me.” Atlanta put an additional twist on the idea of vicarious friendships, when she joked that she had found no one interesting enough to date at high school because none of her potential candidates measured up to her fictional characters.

Atlanta also expressed a motivation to write to sustain a particular feeling that she enjoyed. She said, “Even if the story is sad, you almost crave that something to make you FEEL.” Besides just feeling, Atlanta admits that her feelings about a book often relate to the connection that she has with specific characters. Atlanta reveals her connection with characters and explains her occasional postings about characters with the following: “You defend them so much, because you identify with them so much.” I asked why her characters needed to be defended. She explained, “Normally my favorite characters are not the heroes of the story. In Harry Potter, it’s not Harry; it’s Draco and Hermione.” Hermione gets respect and Draco gets sympathy from Atlanta. According to Atlanta, Hermione “has so much willingness to help other people,” and she “can accomplish so much work and not be stressed or angry.” Atlanta describes Hermione as “strategic with her problems,” because “she knows what’s worthy of pursuing.” Atlanta sees Draco as suffering from a great deal of “self-loathing.” She says, “[Draco] has such an ingrained need to please certain people and fit in with this society. And he just feels really trapped.”

Additionally, Atlanta explained that she felt more herself and better understood through her writing at times. She explained, “I think everybody has some degree of hiding their real true intimate self,” and her writing was one avenue for others to get to know her. She labels herself as “very shy around people” and “very quiet” around kids at school. Yet, “in writing,” she says, “you can bare your soul if you want to.”

Atlanta experienced a sense of competence through her writing. She felt more fluid and clear in her writing as compared to her speaking. She said, "I feel like I am more personal in the way I write than the way I actually talk." She explained that she is apt to fill her sentences with vocal pauses while she endeavors to collect her thoughts. "When I'm writing (even though I am just writing for myself), I'm not always writing to myself. I am writing to where I think other people would enjoy it besides myself. So, I sound more like myself when I'm writing for other people than when other people are hearing me."

Atlanta says writing "makes you feel better about yourself." Rather than a feeling of relief as expressed by other participants, Atlanta experiences companionship and feelings of competence. She recognizes that she can write well enough to expect favorable feedback from others. She says, "I can make that sound really nice -something fancy or special." In fact, Atlanta reported that writing was "the thing" that she did most "that made her feel better." Atlanta was actually quick to say that she was more confident as a writer than as a person, "because I know my writing sounds good. I know I sound good for my age, and I know that I'm going to get better." However, she described herself as "very self-conscious" as a person and as someone who would generally let others "make the first move" in a social context of her peers.

In summary, we hear Atlanta's own voice revealing her motivations to write and her strong sense of self in her writing. Atlanta writes to create an imaginary Other who is like her and can accompany her through life's loneliness and challenges. Like many avid readers, Atlanta grieves the end of the story and the emotional connection that she felt to the characters during the reading experience. She rushes to create more of the story--through writing--to sustain her enjoyment. She also writes because she enjoys the sense of relatedness that she builds around familiar characters. She also chooses to write to display her sense competence as a writer. Atlanta shares her self and

her writing sparingly, and while her writing allows her a safe social distance or even anonymity, she also uses writing to connect and not feel so alone.

Rick

The first day Rick appeared in my class he wore the expression of someone struggling to keep a secret. Before long, he burst with the admission, “I am an undercover redneck.” He seemed amused that the collared shirt and skinny tie that he had decided to wear that first day presented a different image of himself. While the image of the dressed-up version of Rick lingers, it is, of course, his intensity and humor that initially demanded and kept my attention. Rick’s writing is viewed through that lens now. His intensity is evident on the page, but it is his sense of humor and frequent smile that offset what would otherwise have been a dark and worrisome presentation.

Rick is a tall, lanky, country boy complete with the unhurried pace of walking and talking, but he also had the evolving air of a man rather than a boy. He engaged people and ideas straight on. He gave and received respect in an open rather than tentative manner, and his self-respect was evident in that he expected to be heard out if not agreed with. He applied his life experiences and his common sense to literary and real life challenges. He was also a bit theatrical in that he had a boldness about trying some things and a daring about trying them in front of others. He regularly, albeit not always appropriately, shared his perspective in class with the dual purpose of making school more entertaining, but also with the aim of keeping the discussion (and the people in it) "real."

Unlike Atlanta, Rick’s academic history and performance were problematic. He learned from the principal that he held the school’s record for tardies to class, and from the guidance counselor he learned that he held the record for most class credits earned through credit recovery. (Credit recovery is general term for a range of second-chance course offerings available to students

who have failed required high school classes.) Rick's failed classes included two English courses. Rick found a refuge and an advocate in the theatre teacher, however. She respected him and expected good things from him, and because of that he did perform for her. He took on responsibilities that centered on technical support, but she also got him on stage to perform his senior year. He was funny and confident and seemed to carry his peers at times through the stress of performing.

Rick's plan was to survive high school and join the Army. His commitment to the Army was instrumental in getting him through high school, as his recruiting sergeant provided the needed accountability and push for improved academic effort. However, when Rick was engaged, he offered relevant comments or questions and clear insight into discussion in the English classroom. While his engagement in English class was often sporadic, his writing at times best reflected his investment. While the surface errors were numerous, the intensity and detail earned him attention and praise.

Research Question 1: What do these young people write on their own time and for their own purposes?

The Writing Itself/The Writer's Habits

Rick starts out talking about his writing by saying, "It's been about how I feel. If I am angry, it will be war or more of a fighting stance piece of writing. If I am happy it becomes an adventure thing – kinda like a cartoon in my head that plays over and over and over again." Rick describes one project that was clearly all about venting. Rick had been writing daily on this narrative, but the main character was an avatar for himself--a character who gets to share what he really feels about the the pressure of his daily life at school. Rick reported that he wrote often

during Algebra class and later gets his girlfriend to do his Algebra classwork for him. Rick chose to share some of this story with me as:

> *Algebra, the shit stain of the world! My teacher, the pussy [who is called by various renditions of his real name] by the kids in his past classes, bad omens, evidence of a generation of great sorrow that has not passed. He hates his life, and he really hates this class. The people are the stupid ones, the druggies, the fucking retards, and in my book the worst one is a nigger named [real name]. He is a piece of shit. He talks shit 24/7. He should be hung. Then there's Devon, a tall pussy I tried to fight freshman year, but who ran away like a little bitch cause he is. He is liked because he plays every sport in this God-forsaken shit hole that they call school. It's stupid that all you have to do is play a sport, and you can do anything and no one will care! Given the chance, I would rip his throat out.*
>
> *[The teacher] walks in and tries to settle people down. Trust me, this class don't really get any better. He tries to talk over everyone. If he's feeling froggy, he'll send them out into the hallway until about two minutes and then tell them to come back in. I look up at the clock – LUNCH. Finally. Well, only twenty minutes left. Hear ole [the teacher] say, "Practice test!" SO, I yell at Dalton to be my partner. Dalton is an old hick like myself, but he is more into farming and I'm more into beer, Grizzly and guitar. He's a pretty cool guy. I start to draw circles, and he does our work, and I copy. I hate math and every other school-related bullshit.*
>
> *The bell rings, and I head to the theater where I'm alone. I sit there in the dressing room and I play my guitar and sing. Before I know it, the bell rings and I*

have to go back to [same teacher's class]. I drowsily walk in. "Fifteen more minutes, kids. And remember after school come and visit me for help" (or rape) I can't remember. I copy down everything I need to do.

The bell rings. I run to my fourth to finally get my last class of the day done. This dark cloud has been over my head for awhile now. It won't go away; it won't let up. I'm drowning in water. I'm dying inside. I fight the feelings every day. I try my best not to be consumed by the heartache. I'm fucking stupid. I am a dumb-ass. My life is burning, and all I can do is walk toward the edge as if that's the only thing a damned soul was meant to do. SO see you all in hell! I get ready for one of my last acts, my final performances to the world. Fuck this! I'm ready.

Rick offers that all of his writing is not driven by anger. He talks about a different scene (not yet a complete story) that he has written. He tells me this one is set in Vietnam. "This is a weird one," he explains, "it didn't have anger or depression or any of my usual emotions in it. This was actually one of those exciting like, 'Holy crap! That's amazing!' [moments]." This story began after Rick had fixed his motorcycle and was giving it a test drive down the road. He describes it as "kind of shaky and intense" in his imagination, so he hurried home to write it down. Rick drew details from a video game he had spent some time playing. Again, Rick reads his writing aloud to me as follows:

I looked up over the rock and all I saw was guns. They ran at us. Lead was flying right by our heads, but we were not afraid. We stood up and ran screaming. My M60 firing, the belt feeding my hungry beast as I caressed her trigger gently. The jungle had suddenly gone quiet. I heard a weak and bitter

voice calling from the water. As I fed another belt into my gun, I ran over to the creek and saw Sgt. Joe Swardon.

He was a massive man, 6'4" and 265 pounds of United States Army man. He always had his M4 with the mastery key under it. He loved that gun. He took protecting his home land to another level. I was glad to call him my brother and my sergeant.

> *I said, "What's wrong, brother?"*
> *"My legs," he said. "I can't feel my legs."*
> *"Don't worry. I will carry out to the rally point."*
> *"No." he said. "Go get the rest of my men safely to the rally point to win this fucking war.*
> *"I will," I replied. I saluted him for the last time.*

He pulled out his pistol and put it to his temple. I turned away. I heard a faint whisper followed by a bullet that sounded like a scream of a thousand damned souls. Once the jungle was quiet again, I walked the rest of the troops and relayed all of the Sgt's commands. They all nodded and yelled out for Sarge and followed everyone.

We moved quiet and swift taking out Chink by Chink mostly by knife or pistol with a silencer. We finally made it to the rally site. But to my surprise, it was not cleared yet. The VC were still everywhere I radioed my air support, but I thought to myself, "What would Sarge do?" All I could think about is what if my decision led every man here to their death. All the families I would destroy! Me, I had no one in my life. No one. My wife left me for another man and she took my son with her. No one would know if I died.

So, I turned to my men and said, "Boys, this is it! We can turn back and regroup with whatever teams and risk being lost, or we could let faith be in a higher power and rush them. It's all your choice."

They huddled for a moment and said, "Josh (aka Whiskey), Hell No! If we die, it's a heroes death – not because we were lost in the Chink's jungle."

So I said, "On your mark.

Rick's confession that his writing is "more [often] about a dark feeling" and connected to his need to find a "release," are clear enough after hearing him read this aloud.

I looked over Rick's written product, but he did not let me keep it. His handwriting is large, his surface errors are many, and his handwriting becomes more and then less controlled and legible. This piece was not characteristic of Rick's writing in terms of what he has chosen to share for this research and in class. This is all emotion in first person. Rick's other shared work has the same surface errors, but it is less raw, written in third person and at least a layer apart from his real life. He uses war as a setting possibly to control and justify the violence and anguish that is still evident in his work.

Rick describes a story that continues, at least in his head. And like a video it plays over and over while "this kid picked up this gun and put it to his head. Then it showed him waking up on Wednesday morning." Rick speaks as if the character is responsible rather than himself, when moments earlier he was the character. He explains, "The darkness clouded his head… He closed his eyes and thought of the events leading up to this very moment." He smiles and says he is not that kid, but he sympathizes with him. He offers warm reassurances insisting that he never considers suicide. He says, "I feel the frustrations, but it's [the story] a big exaggeration.

Rick reflects on his story and calculates, “One more story about some suicidal freak killing themselves isn’t going to be so bad in the world.” Rick clarifies, “This is actually anger. You know it sounds like it would be sad; it’s not. It’s extremely, extremely angry.” When asked, Rick decides that school is not so much making him angry, as he is angry at school. He says, “My anger follows me to school.” Rick is angry, but not powerless. He says, “I mean, I’m 6’5”. I’m kinda big, so nobody really messes with me [at school].” He continues, “So I don’t really get angry. If they do make me angry, I just stop and yell at them. I try not to inflict anger on other people.”

Rick writes most often for himself. He explains his sense of self as primary audience when he talks about incidental sharing of his writing. For example, when a friend happens to find a document open with writing in progress and reads it, Rick is open to his feedback, but it does not stand as the final word on his writing. “If they say it was good,” he explains, “then it was good. And I am happy about it.” However, “if they say it sucked, I still don’t get mad because it’s my writing. It’s my feelings. I don’t really care what other people think about my writing.” He jokes, “It’s my baby, and I am going to raise it the way I want.” Rick did explore his role as an audience for someone else’s ideas and perspectives through music. He talked about how satisfying it is to relate to another person and be reassured that they understand your struggles. He relates his experience with music to his writing saying, “You’re hoping that your writing also translates for other people – or at least one other person somewhere to make them feel less alone.”

Rick reported offering to share his writing with his dad, but his dad turned him down. Rick said, “He didn’t care, so he didn’t read it.” Rick did share his writing with his mother, however. He said his mother had commented disapprovingly about his “potty mouth.” But she added, “That’s an extraordinary story!” Rick describes his relationship with his mother as generally intuitive and supportive. He said, “She gets me.” He explained that he was “very emotional” in ways he did not

let show, but that his mother would pick up on subtle hints from his face or hands and know that something was wrong. However, when she asked who the main character of the story was based on, Rick withheld from her that the story had been about himself. More than one participant explained that his or her writing was specifically kept hidden from a parent for fear of disapproval.

However, Rick disclosed that he longed to find readership for one project in particular, a book he had begun. He said, "Someday, I hope, - pray to God – that somebody will read it." This sense of audience, however, does not seem to drive Rick to meet expectations of others as much as perceived needs. Rick explains that even if his book was never a truly finished product, and if instead, it was "just a bunch of crumpled up pieces of paper stapled together locked away in some filing cabinet in some broken down building," it might do some good. Because as his imagined scenario continues "some kid – out there somewhere" who has "the same troubles might happen to break into that old building, and happen to rip open that file cabinet, and pull out the old pieces of paper." He imagines that he might say, 'This is exactly how I feel. Maybe I should write down stuff. Maybe I should get rid of my anger and my depression, my sadness, my sickness, all.'

When asked about how writing fit into his future, Rick insisted that "I can't imagine myself not writing. I started writing since maybe fourth grade." Rick was a bit more tentative about publishing, hoping someday for a finished book. But he also explored the possibility of connecting his long-standing love of theatre becoming a playwright.

Research Questions 2: Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and underst and their own writing practices?

Motivation and Identity Work

Rick said, "Well, writing is important to me, because it's a major part of my life. It's the way that I cope with life." He also said, "Without my writings, I would probably snap."

Rick is almost apologetic later when says, “It’s more like relief of anger and the troubles that are locked inside my soul. I am just releasing them onto my keyboard. It’s kinda like getting rid of some demons, if you will.” He explains that life’s stresses (school, two jobs, a girlfriend and her family) have to be channeled. He says, “The anger and depressed feeling that I get …kind of sucks into me. I have to bury it deep down inside. So, I have to put it somewhere - in my writing or in one of my songs.” Rick reports he feels like lashing out or seeking revenge or destroying something, but he chooses to write instead. “But when I start writing,” he says, “it starts sinking down and I start to mellow out. After I get done, I’m not mad any more. I forget why I was angry. It’s all on paper.” He reports that his sadness or depression also finds consolation and relief through writing. He says, “If I feel depressed, I start writing it – just the most horrible day ever, and after this I’m gonna be dead. I go through, and I write. After I get done, I’m happy. I’m mellowed out and in a good mood for the rest of the day.”

Rick comments on his choice to write as one who resists what he thinks he is expected to do. He feels that he is expected to take his stress out by getting drunk, smoking pot and partying. He says, “I mean, I’m just a country hick, and that’s what everybody says we do.” He explains, “I don’t do any drugs to get rid of my pain; I deal with it. I write. It lets it all out, and that’s the way I cope with my pain.” He sees the potential for his writing to benefit others as well. He said, “And if my writing can somewhat help someone see that if they write they can feel the exact same way, then it’s just amazing.”

Rick also said that writing was something that his father did not understand or support. He said, “My dad thinks it’s stupid.” Then he defended his dad, saying, “But I guess that’s his job being a father. You know growing up in [a rural area of the US], you don’t think of your son growing up and typing away his feelings on a computer. I can understand his standpoint on that.”

He is denigrating his writing presumably, because it is so linked to a need to show his emotions and is therefore not considered manly.

Rick reported that no one in his social circles or day-to-day world writes. Yet when asked about writing in his future, Rick seemed sure that he would continue to write. He said, "Because these emotions that I'm feeling, I'm pretty sure are not going to stop at all." He added, "And in the future, what I've wanted to do is to try and write a play." He had already envisioned the genre, cast and setting of his future play. He hopes to write a comedy, but confesses, "I've yet to think of dialogue funny enough to put in it, cause I've not wrote a lot of comedy." Because his writing comes from his emotion, Rick reasons, "So, I'm waiting on that one perfect day that everything goes right. If it's just an amazing day from the time I get up to the time it ends, I know I'll be able to write a comedy."

In summary, Rick surprises others with his writer identity and devoted practice. In fact, Rick explained that when he told other people about his regular habit of writing they called, "Bullshit!" He named specific friends, one close guy friend and one girl friend, and both thought his writing habit was weird. Rick seemed to think it was understandable because nothing outward about him seemed to fit the writer type. Yet despite the lack of social support and the lack of academic success usually associated with writing, Rick not only writes regularly, but he greatly values his writing as a release for his range of emotions. He seeks out the time and space to write for its therapeutic benefits.

Katniss

At the time of our first interview, Katniss was adjusting to her freshman year of high school. She was comfortable and prepared for her interview. She greeted each question with a warm smile and a thoughtful response. She is petite with long curly hair and freckles. She is high energy, but

not high drama. In fact, her friends and family would describe her as really quiet, but, she is not afraid to express her opinion on a subject, especially with her friends.

I taught Katniss as an eighth grader. As an eighth grader, Katniss tracked with the highest performing students across academic areas, and she was an avid reader. In the classroom she was comfortable with the lead even among her high performing peers. Her work ethic and eagerness to learn made her easy to direct and always rendered an excellent product or outcome.

Katniss is still an avid reader, and it is hard to stop her talking on topics of interest including Harry Potter and *The Hunger Games.* She added, "My kind of ideal weather is a good thunderstorm, so I can sit and read a great book." She describes herself as a "hard worker in school," and she is diligent to keep her grades up. She has tracked in all honors classes, and she is in Senior Beta Club and on her school's Scholars' Bowl team. She also sees herself as a "creative and imaginative" person, but one who can apply logic in problem-solving. She says she is happiest when she is drawing, painting and writing, because she is able to express herself. She says, "Most of my friends say I'm going to be a great artist when I'm older, and others say I'll be an author."

Research Question 1: What do these young write on their own time and for their own purposes?

The Writing Itself/The Writer's Habits

Katniss often writes some fan fiction, but she also writes original stories, both from her imagination and her real life. Pirate adventures are a recurring and enduring interest, too. Most often, she writes about her real life in a manner that allows her to control outcomes. She said, "It's kind of like my own little fantasy just to mess with my own life."

However, she first told me about her story, "Dragon Wars," a surprisingly sophisticated tale with racial tension. She was enthusiastic and confident when talking about "Dragon Wars." She said, "So far it's pretty good." Her story centered on a blue dragon named Thunder who is in the

middle of a war against red and yellow dragon clans. Thunder is eager to avenge his mother who was killed by a yellow dragon. Thunder has an older brother named Smokey who resists authority and gets into trouble at the training camp. Smokey was also taken in for awhile by a deceptive nurse dragon at the camp, until he discovers that she was a spy for the red dragons. Also, at this early point in the story Thunder had only recently learned to fly, because his wing had been broken when he was small. He is only able now to attempt flying because a friend has built a "contraption for his wing" to help him overcome his handicap.

I thought the main characters sounded a bit like teenagers, but Katniss explained that she decided to begin her story with Smokey about thirteen and Thunder only ten with the intent of allowing the reader the opportunity to watch them grow into teenagers. The story had been underway for many months.

At the time of our interview, Katniss was working on multiple projects. She described one that she thought was atypical of her writing focus. She was writing a story entitled, "Who's Next?" that intersected her real life. The characters were based on her new classmates at school. Katniss explained that the idea for "Who's Next?" came from wanting to try a new genre. She said, "I wanted to see if I could write something on the paranormal and get some of my classmates interested in it. It's basically about a group of teenagers who just want to have some fun and stay the night in a rumored haunted house." Within the story Katniss has her own character who "tries to act reasonable and logical in the situations at hand, but everything seems to go out of her control."

The following excerpt from her story "Who's Next?" was copied from Katiness' online posting. The story relies heavily on dialogue. It has adult characters in the role of spouse and parent. The prologue introduces Adam as an "average business man" who "worked in a large

building owned by Computer Company." Adam is married and his wife, Karry, is a stay-at-home mom who cares for their three-year-old daughter, Carly. The character of the daughter is undeveloped. The wife is stable and consoling. Adam's life is "very happy, full of everything he ever really wanted – a nice home, a loving wife, a beautiful baby and enough money to live happily." Then "one night changes all." Adam overhears a conversation between his co-workers. A friend, Carl, had been killed the night before. The two discuss the rumor that claims that the killer was a demon. The following is an excerpt:

> *Adam turned around and stood up to face the two men. "Oh, shut up, " he spat.*
>
> *"You don't actually believe in all that do you? I mean we're grown men for crying out loud. Man up."*
>
> *"Suit yourself, Adam. But when the Demon finds you who'll be laughing then?" Jim sneered.*
>
> *Adam began gathering his things. "Whatever. I'm headed home."*
>
> *Danny laughed behind him. "Drive safely."*
>
> *Adam finally arrived home. It was dark and he could just barely see the ground in front of him. Opening the door to his house, he walked in with a temper.*
>
> *"Who do they think they are? Little boys? Who believes in ghost stories anymore?" he spat as he threw his things on his couch.*
>
> *"Dear, are you okay?" Karry walked in. Her red hair was wrapped in a bun and she was wearing her satin, pink night gown.*
>
> *"Yes, Just some trouble at work," Adam sighed.*
>
> *Karry walked over to him and hugged him. "Oh, it'll be all right. I have dinner in the fridge."*

Adam chuckled. "Okay. Is Carly in bed?"

Karry laughed too. "Yes, dear." She walked away to the bedroom reflected off the walls of the house in the background.

As the story continues, Adam watches the news and hears of a bloody death. Before the night is over he and his family also die mysterious and gruesome deaths. The story shifts to new teen characters 15 years later. In what Katniss shares, I see emphasis is given to eyes and hair, and romance. All of the teens die by the end of the story.

Katniss traces her roots as a writer all the way back to kindergarten, reporting that she was encouraged at home and at school from her earliest attempts to write. She said, "I would bring my stories to class, and the teacher would read them to everybody. It was something that I worked hard on." She also received affirmation at home for both her time spent writing and for her shared products. However, she said she really began to think of herself as a writer almost two years prior to our interview (in the summer between seventh and eighth grade) when she received her new laptop. Her habits as a writer were already established, but the laptop seemed to make the title *writer* stick, and it made writing easier. Because she already knew how to type and could type as quickly as she could write, the computer brought ease to writing and efficiency to her rewrites.

Katniss' habits as a writer reveal what is valuable to her about her writing. Her writing is frequent but more often spontaneous than planned. She reports having only finished one story of the many that she has been excited to start. She explains, "I only have one complete story right now, because I am constantly coming up with new ideas and plots for my other stories. She writes until the story line plays out in her mind, then she moves on. She may revisit the story and extend it, but she feels no compulsion to do so. She noted, "One of my stories, 'Eat My Heart Out,' has been deleted and rewritten twice." She even posts her unfinished stories online, and apparently in

her community of writers that is not strange. She reports, "There are many other users who just post simple drafts and unfinished works often just to see if readers are interested enough in the ideas they have to continue." When asked about how writing fit into her future, Katniss said she could not imagine herself not writing.

Research Question 2: Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices?

Motivation and Identity Work

Katniss writes to process and explore her emotions, because writing makes her "feel better." She feels "relaxed and calm" after writing. It seems to be a tool for reflection at times that helps her to put events in perspective. She explains, "It makes me feel like I was able to release whatever tension was in me. It makes me feel better that I can go back and look at it and see how it was that I felt." Katniss believes that writing is "like another door for [her] emotions." She said, "If I feel bad about something I could write about it, and it will make me feel better. And if I don't want to talk to anybody about it, I can kind of talk it through to myself. In a way it makes me feel better and helps solve a problem that I have."

When comparing her different types of writing, Katniss says she sees her fantasy stories that intersect her real life as more important, because "it does help me see something that maybe I didn't think about before. Like if I got mad at somebody at school and I was mad about it the rest of the day until I got home and I didn't think about any kind of solution for it and I just start typing about it and after I sit and think about for a minute, then I realize. This is how I fix it."

More than enjoying her connection with characters and working to extend it through writing, Katniss also was influenced by the characters that she created. Like Atlanta, Katniss' confidence to face real world challenges was bolstered through her characters. She positions her

characters to face situations that would challenge her, and she writes of their successes. While she is writing, she is choosing what she would like to be able to choose for herself. Remarkably, in re-reading her own work, she would take inspiration and encouragement from her imagined resolution for her characters. Seeing her characters overcome their troubles and challenges, Katniss was encouraged that she would also overcome her real world challenges.

Katniss revealed that she often processed real life events through her writing. She said, "If there was something big that happened on the news, like something really bad, a fire or something, I could think about it and write about it. I would notice that I could see that happen in all sorts of different ways. What triggered it? Who did it? What all happened? I've learned to think deeply…" When questioned she clarified saying, "I think that because I have done it [writing] for so long now, it [noticing and questioning] has become habit. She even stated that she believed that if her friends started to write regularly, they would likely experience the similar changes and benefits of this writer's habits of mind. While she looked favorably on the effect of writing including the likelihood of making someone more open, more social and more positive, it could also be negative if they fixated on things that were bad or that could not be changed.

Katniss' motivation for writing is also social. She explained that she wrote "Who's Next?," the mystery story, for fun and "to get more friends." She explained that all of the characters but three were based on people in her current classes; the other three were entirely fictional. She felt that by including classmates in her story, "it got them more curious to know what I was writing, and what was going on in the story, which led them to want to know more about me as a person, thus creating friendships." She also is now publishing her work online in a format that allows others to view, rate and follow her work. Followers receive emails every time a new post, chapter, story or rewrite is made available. The feedback is not specific, but the interest of others encourages her to

invest further. She says, “I wanted to try this option to see if I could get other people to read what I have and see what others think. One of my friends introduced me to this website. She loves to go there and read anything she finds."

Katniss writes to explore her place in the world. She has created several characters that are based on herself. She directs the characters actions in a given situation based on how she thinks she might herself feel and act in such circumstances. She gave an example saying, “I have a character based off myself in my Hunger Games fan fiction named Marina. When she's introduced, she's clearly a nervous wreck and doesn't know what to do, but she knows she has to try to get out alive. In "Who's Next?," her avatar character, Allisa, is “introduced in the beginning of the story as an intelligent girl who just wants to make the right choices and hopes to change her friends' minds about their plans for the night.” Allisa is the level-headed peace-maker who rallies her friends to save others, and bravely confronts those who’ve done wrong. In the end she sacrifices herself to save another. I asked Katniss if she often or ever played the role that leads her friends to avoid high risk behaviors. She said, “No.” But the character she created is just the type of person you would be wise to seek out for advice and assistance.

Katniss explains the exploration opportunity and the freedom that writing provides her. She says, “I feel free. I can do anything I want the character to do. I can say anything.” When I asked her how this freedom compares to other times not spent writing, she offers this contrast. She says, “Sometimes I feel like it’s best for me to keep my thoughts to myself. You know even if it’s something nice. You never know what the other person is going to think. So, I just keep a lot to myself, but when I get a hold of my laptop, I just write it all down.

The emotional experience of her writing ties Katniss to her characters and to her potential readers. When I asked her to tell me about a time when writing went really well, she immediately

said, “I think it would have to be when I first started coming up with the ideas for Dragon Wars. I started writing the ideas down. The beginning of it is kind of sad. As I was writing it I was feeling as sad as the characters were. And it made me think that it was just like perfect. 'Cause if I could feel it then anybody else that read it would probably feel it too. So, I think that made me feel like it was the best!”

She evaluates the quality of her writing based on her ability to position the reader so he or she would conjure up the intended emotion. It is notable that she did not point to a time in which the surface errors were few or the number of words exceeded her expectation, or other similarly unimportant features of writing. She went to the heart of the matter. She related to her experiences as a reader and intuitively wanted to take her readers on a similarly enjoyable ride.

Katniss shares her work with family, friends and online. She tells her friends about her writing even though she feels sure that they do not really understand. She appreciates that “they try to listen.” She defends this practice claiming “I have to tell someone.” Katniss relayed a recent experience with sharing her writing. She said, “It’s actually a few weeks ago. It was after wellness. I was talking to some of my friends. And I am not sure how we got on the subject. They were talking about dragons, and I just jumped in. I told them about my story, and they loved the idea. Even though they didn't exactly understand what I was talking about. But they just loved it.” She admits, “I actually pictured myself having my Dragon story published, and it makes me all the more excited to get it done.” Her imaginings are fairly specific in that she has pictured what it will be like. She said, “I can see a bunch of them at the library and a bunch of people sitting around reading it from different ages.” In terms of audience, Katniss originally imagined younger readers, but her perspective changed over time. She came to believe that others, in particular kids her age, would enjoy her writing.

Katniss wrote (and still writes) her classmates into her stories to gain their interest in her story and in her personally. Her stories helped her to build rapport and friendships with them. Having an established circle of friends, Katniss still writes friends into her stories. She reports that she recently wrote a story based on *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. Because the premise of the existing plot is that only one can survive, her friends began to advocate for themselves as survivors. This conversation even became good-spirited bantering among her friends via Facebook posts on Katniss' page. One peer, who was reluctant but willing to concede her death, suggested the manner in which she would die. She insisted that if she did not survive, that she must die by beheading. Katniss took on that challenge, and she calls that particular death scene her "second favorite death scene."

Katniss and her current boyfriend were also characters in *The Hunger Games* fan fiction story. One by one each of her friends were killed off, leaving just Katniss and her boyfriend. She reports that she was unable to come up with a satisfying ending; it was just too emotional for her. So, she asked a fellow teen writer to write the ending. The peer wrote an ending in which Katniss' character drank poison committing suicide to ensure that her boyfriend lived. Katniss said that she sobbed when she read the end of the story, because it was just so real to her.

I asked her if the deaths that she gave her friends ever caused any social tension. She said that she had received no negative feedback. Even the one friend who she killed off before the game officially started was accepting of his literary fate. He died when he was attacked by vicious bird-like mutations. In the course of the attack he blew up, because he had inadvertently stepped off the pressurized plate during the countdown to the start of the games. Katniss speculated that because the parameters were already established in the original work of fiction, peers seemed to understand that she, as a writer of fan fiction, had to play by those rules.

In summary, Katniss' writing has been her tool to seek out and draw together a social circle. She baited individuals that she hoped to draw into friendships with her writing, and she continues to feature her friends in her writing. She entertains herself with her stories, and she sees her writing as an opportunity to express her own creativity. She feels competent and appreciated as a writer. Katniss has also integrated her writing into her conscious efforts toward processing the real world and its challenging events. The story-world may be one layer removed from the immediate confusion or threat and a safer distance from which to consider the contributing factors or resulting implications of others choices and larger tragedies. Also, through her writing, Katniss explores the roles and the type of person that she hopes to become. The avatar characters for herself are courageous in the face of danger, trusted, stabilizing influences in a crisis, and an upbeat caring person in a romantic relationship.

Sweeny

Sweeny stood out in a crowd long before he seemed to worry about standing out. When I met him in the eighth grade, he was a big kid, broad-shouldered, tall and stout. He wore his dark curly hair long trailing toward his shoulders, and he was fond of wearing hats. He also usually wore a smile and broad-rimmed black glasses. The pictures of him wearing hats are my favorite, as hats seem to prompt him to strike a pose with more attitude. Overall, he was easy-going. Between classes he was more of a spectator, rather than seeking to be the center of attention. In class, however, he was confident and engaged, offering his input and producing quality work. He was placed among the highest performing students in the advanced English class. His test scores were strong, but his writing and creativity were a better representation of his ability. Sweeny had been writing outside of class for his own purposes as a hobby before I met him. During his eighth grade year, he would occasionally talk to me about the writing he was doing outside of class. He reported

loving writing and writing at least weekly. Most of his work then was entertainingly dark and detailed – not sad; he called it "thriller" writing.

Sweeny was an enthusiastic reader. And as a reader, he gravitated toward some of the darker themes and genres. Given his interest in horror as a genre, he is the one student to whom I recommended *Cirque de Freak* by Darren Shan in eighth grade.

As he entered high school his family life eroded. His parents divorced, and his relationship with his dad was a disappointment to him. He grieved for the loss of "his perfect little family," but outwardly chose a smile. His academic success was compromised by his flagging attendance, though he never acted out at school. A year later it is his relationship with his mother that brought disillusionment. This change left Sweeny living with and praising his dad. Despite the flip flop with his parents, Sweeny has maintained a more stable relationship with his little brothers. He is pushed at times by the responsibilities and annoyances that come with the job, but he softens when he speaks about them.

Research Question 2: What do these young write on their own time and for their own purposes?

The Writing Itself/The Writer's Habits

Sweeny admits: "I put a lot of me into my writing." His current story is "about a misfit that don't really fit in, and his parents are hard on him. It's his journey through life with his friends." In addition to just revealing himself in the main character, Sweeny directs the plot to be a re-write of his own life challenges. He explains plainly, "I make out what I want my life to be in my writing." He elaborates, saying, "I've always wanted to be this cool kid, a guy everybody likes, and I'm not. So I try to make my writing like that." His character is not flawless or heroic. Sweeny says, "I try to make him where he's still me, but he's cool. You know, he has enemies, but everybody still likes him. 'Cause I used to be that kid."

Sweeny points to his parents' divorce as a turning point for him in which life "just kinda went downhill." He describes his recent self as more stressed and less happy, but he acknowledges that his evolving self is more authentic in ways. He reveals that he used to work at fitting in. Now he says, "I wish myself was good enough for everybody else."

Other characters, too, are manipulated in the story in a manner that vindicates the teen writer. Sweeny's story features "a really good mom, but the dad is not such a good dad." These characters clearly represent his current perspective on his own parents. These powerful people in his life are thwarted in their aims often by an avatar character who was empowered to say, do, or resist in a way that the writer himself had not been.

Later, Sweeny talks about a particular story. "In this one right here, his dad is the sheriff." The teenage boy is "hanging out with his friends." Like Sweeny, the character "listens to heavy metal," but unlike Sweeny the character "has a cool car." The character and his friends "are riding down the road skipping school – having fun." The sheriff sees them and stops them. "And [he's] not like, 'What are you doing? Why are you not in school?'" Sweeny explains the mood as "more like yelling at him for being a failure." Sweeny says, "And basically that's how I see a lot of it. The father is mean. That's how a lot of my stories are; the father is real mean."

Cutting to the heart of his intent as a writer, Sweeny says, "The story is all about the kid's rebellion. He is trying to find out who he is, [and] what he wants to be." Sweeny's dream for himself is revealed in his desire for the character, "He and his friends are off to have a better life." It is also noteworthy that he sees this dream as one that will require determination. He says, "No matter how hard it is, what they have to go through, what they have to do, they will do whatever to get out of the pain that they are in now."

Sweeny picks up here and reads aloud:

So they hit the highway heading to their girlfriend's house. They are about ten minutes away, when they lit up a cig and started going faster. They turned up the music when they suddenly saw blue lights in their back window. Shadow pulled the car over and turned the music down. As the cop strolled up to their car, James stuck his head out the window and says, "Hey sheriff," as he came up to the window.

"Shadow, you were going a little fast, weren't you?"

"Dad, just leave me alone," Shadow said.

With a wink of his eye James turned up the music, and Shadow pushed the pedal down until it hit the floor.

Sweeny labeled the excerpt about Shadow as the sample of his writing "that inspired [him] most." He described his experience writing it, "It seemed like I had been writing for five minutes, and I look at the clock and three hours had passed. I got so caught up into it."

Sweeny described the support and encouragement that he received from his English teachers, even in one class in which he failed. He explained that he would be re-taking English I in credit recovery on computer while he was enrolled in English II. Sweeny had fallen behind due to poor attendance – not poor performance. About his teacher he said, "She has helped me a lot through it all. What I like about her is she understands that I'm not the best at grammar. But when it comes to reading or writing, I'm one of the best in the class." When others were getting back work they had done, many of Sweeny's peers were receiving failing or poor grades. Sweeny said, "She [the teacher] hands me mine; it's a perfect 100. She asks if she can keep it to show it to her other classes. It makes me feel good. She likes me 'cause she understands. She likes me for me, and that helps."

When the story comes up again later, Sweeny continues the narrative. Shadow had spent the night at a friend's house partying without bothering to check in with his dad and tell him where he was. The next morning Shadow returns home. Sweeny picks up reading here.

I walked into the kitchen and got a drink. Then I saw my dad put on his uniform.

He said, "Where were you last night?"

"Why would you care?" I muttered.

"What did you say?" his dad snapped.

Sweeny stopped reading. I asked, "What does he do when he snaps? Sweeny says, "He just gets blood red and is screaming at him." Sweeny hadn't written this part yet. When I asked him how was Sweeny going to handle this situation, he said, "He'll probably just run – retreat. You are not big enough for this battle. You don't have enough ammo to finish this battle."

Sweeny described his room as both a place of self-expression and a place of inspiration, because he has posters of his favorite bands and tattoo designs. He said, "And that's who I am. That's my life… tattoos, music and art. So when I look at my room and see those things, it gives me ideas for something – an adventure to put my characters through." Sweeny also talked about where he felt he could not write. He said, "Probably with my dad with me, because I can't write while I'm getting judged. My writing is who I am."

Sweeny said, "And once I start writing, it's almost like I can't stop. I just kind of zone out. The world- I'm oblivious to everything. I'm focused on just my writing. I have to get all my ideas down." He estimated that these sessions occur almost daily and last an hour or two. Sweeny, who prefers to write in his own room, reported finding flow in the midst of his school day. He said, "[Today] I got a lot on the piece I'm writing right now. And it just… I couldn't stop. It was just

idea, after idea, after idea. It kept happening. It felt good to not have to think about it. It just came natural."

Sweeny collected story ideas in key words and phrases at the bottom of his class notes. Sweeny showed an objective project evaluation when he mentioned having abandoned a writing project about a zombie attack because "[his] story line wasn't solid."

When asked about how writing fit into his future, Sweeny said, "I wouldn't see a job that I would probably love more than that. I write constantly."

"What if writing is not part of a future job," I asked.

Unwavering, Sweeny said, "Yeah. Probably I would do it in my spare time. I would have a job, and I would still work to get whatever I am writing at that time published and out there."

In the context of the English classroom, Sweeny reported his teacher engaged and encouraged him and got the very best out of him – even though he failed the class. He reported that much of the writing was personal and important to him. He also made it clear that the surface errors were not his priority.

Research Question 2: Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices?

Motivation and Identity Work

Sweeny gave me credit as his eighth grade teacher for naming him a writer. He explained, "When I got my writing back [in class], I was making really really substantial grades on those." The positive feedback impacted his thinking about his skills and his future as a writer. He said he realized that, "This thing I love, could actually turn out to be a job one day. It could turn out to be more. I'm actually a decent writer."

About his writing, Sweeny said, “It’s my get-away. It’s what helps me calm down.” Sweeny explained, “It [writing] really helped me. I’ve always written. But last year was really hard for me. I was depressed a lot. Once I realized that when I write, I feel better, I started to write more. It made me feel better and better every time I wrote.”

Sweeny described his time spent writing as, “Very happy!” When asked to consider and compare his feeling before versus after a writing session, he said, “Before, it’s pretty stressed. I’m… you know…three little brothers, a single mom, and a single dad – it’s pretty hard. I’m stressed out- really strung out. I mean I am stretched far between everything.” And after I write, it’s just… I’m relaxed. I feel like me again.”

When I asked him why his writing came out as a story rather than a journal, he said, “Because of who I am. I’ve always been told to keep your feelings inside. Don’t really let them out. I just don’t want everybody to know what I’ve been through – what’s happened the last three years. It’s embarrassing; it’s hard. For me to write – it’s somebody else.” He added, “My writing basically just gets my feelings out, my story out to the world without them knowing about it.”

Returning to his story, I ask Sweeny, “Do you feel good when Shadow has the nerve to drive away?” “Yeah,” he says, “he has a sense of control.” Sweeny sees Shadow as someone being allowed “to be his own person.” Sweeny had already considered how to give the dad more authority than a typical dad by making him the sheriff. He said, “What’s the biggest way you can rebel if your dad is the Sheriff? You break the rules. He’s sticking it back at his dad. Like, ‘You didn’t get your way this time. Did you?’”

Sweeny explained, “I’m writing what makes people happy through a hard life. So, when I need to get away from my hard life, I’ll go re-read what I’ve wrote, and I’ll find an answer.” When I asked Sweeny what it would take to make life better, he answered, “Basically to be in control.”

To clarify I asked, "So you feel stuck, but your character isn't?" He said, "Yeah. It started out, he was stuck. Now he's starting to realize I'm getting old enough. I can do what makes me happy. That's my never-ending goal in life. To find what makes me happiest. To get away from what makes me sad. To live my life to the fullest and find what my potential could be."

Sweeny had offered his writing for his dad to read. He said, "I just wanted him to be a normal dad and say, 'I like it. You are doing a really good job. But that didn't happen.'" Sweeny held onto his ideas for himself and resisted his dad's efforts to change the content – especially his urging to clean up the writing removing profanity and references to drug use. He said his dad had expressed his concern about how others might make negative assumptions about Sweeny if they read his writing. Sweeny passionately defended the authenticity of his work. Sweeny said, "Yeah, he [his father] is so afraid of me getting judged…, but I know that ain't true. People aren't judged by what they write; they are judged by who they are. They define themselves. Like the author of *Speak*. Do you think that people judge her because she wrote about rape and cutting?" Sweeny made the intrinsic importance of writing to him very clear when he said, "After I write, I get my life back. "

In summary, Sweeny writes seeking consolation, control and autonomy. First, he leeches his anger and disappointment out through his writing. Then he empowers his avatar characters to say, do, resist and ignore in ways that he cannot yet do in his real life. Sweeny hides in the form of invented characters and imagined scenarios from the embarrassment that he anticipates would follow a full and honest disclosure of his pain and personal life. He also uses his writing to re-connect with the sense of competence and happiness that he experienced when he was younger. Through his writing, Sweeny seeks authenticity and explores the ugliness and the beauty of life. He respects realistic portrayals of the pains and challenges in life.

Angel

Angel is a twin. Her sister was born with significant physical and cognitive challenges. As a more able sibling, her place was assigned the day she was born. Angel became a big sister and a model for comparison. Of necessity, she got less attention, and she labored under much higher expectations and accountability as is common with siblings of individuals with disabilities. Her role is not unlike the masses who are older siblings, except that she wasn't older; and she did not have the opportunity to grow into or out of that role. Her twin was never going to compete with her to achieve or find her place in the family and the world, and she was never not going to need her help. As a result, Angel was assigned the responsible role. She extended this role and responsibility as two younger siblings came along years later. So, as a pre-teen she had regular in-home babysitting responsibilities.

Angel is sweet and warm. She is quick to smile and see the silver lining of a tough situation. She looks for the opportunity to engage her peers rather than avoiding it. She is reticent, but not shy. She enjoys making others smile and laugh. She probably does not think of herself as popular, but she has had a lasting, tight-knit, small group of friends who shared her upbeat attitude and cooperative disposition.

As an eighth grade student, Angel was pleasant and easily engaged. She was attentive and responsible to start her work. Her good intentions did not always result in completed assignments, however. Make-up work was an ongoing conversation with her, and her grades faltered and fluctuated with her lack of follow-through. Angel did find her opportunity to shine through her writing. In assigned writing she was clever and creative. She invested details and elaborated in her response to given prompts. Her surface errors, especially spelling, were always problematic and

required teacher or peer support to ensure that her ideas got heard. She accepted corrective feedback and support graciously.

Research Question 1: What do these young people write on their own time and for their own purposes?

The Writing Itself/The Writer's Habits

Angel writes imaginative original stories that grow out of her own interest as a reader. Angel shared an excerpt from a story about death, significance and romance. Angel had to be cajoled into reading her work aloud. She would have preferred to pass the paper to me to be read silently.

> *Everything is dark! I hear someone crying. Hey, it's coming closer. I was lying on the ground. My eyes floated open. I stood up and saw a crowd of people. I walked over and realized that I recognized some of them. My mother is weeping and everyone else is crying, too. My mother walked over to the grave and placed a white rose on it. I walked up behind her to look at the grave. My eyes widened in shock as I read the name. Here lies Kara Cross, a beloved daughter and a very wonderful girl. My legs buckled and gave in. I fell to the ground. Tears streaming down my pale white cheeks. And…and…I …uh- I was cut off. I looked to my right and sitting there on the gravestone was a boy. He looked about 18. He had sandy-colored hair and light-colored eyes. He was wearing a cloak with what looked like blue velvet inside. He also had something strapped to the back that I was unable to see clearly.*
>
> *"Who are you?" I asked with a sniff.*

He jumped off the stone and landed in front of me. Show off, I thought.

"Why should I tell you? It's not like we are going to know each other long," he said in a bored tone.

I took a step back. "What do you mean?"

He sighed. "I have to take you to the other side. In other words, I am a grim reaper."

Angel also talked about a story she had planned, but she had not yet written based on *Romeo and Juliet*. The story starts on a school bus with a girl who sits reading. Angel explains, "She loves to read and everything." Although Juliet is her middle name, it is the name by which she is best known. Angel describes the guy who gets on the bus as a "narcissist," and his name is Romeo. As Angel imagines him, Romeo hates the original tale for which he is named, because the guy dies for the girl. She says, "He's like, 'I would never die for a girl or something like that!'" The conversation between the boy and the girl begins when Romeo says, "Who reads- like before school?" Angel explains that "he's thinking she's like a nerd and all that." And not surprisingly, Juliet is not initially interested in Romeo, because "he's a jerk," according to Angel.

They arrive at school and learn that they have the same English class. Angel imagines that "the teacher forces them to sit together because their names are Romeo and Juliet," and later they are cast together in the school play *Romeo and Juliet*. Another boy who is interested in Juliet auditions for the play and "ends up being Paris." Another character, Rosie, becomes Roselyn and Nell becomes Juliet's nurse. The intervening plot is not developed as of yet. Angel just says, "Stuff happens, and they start liking each other." The story's climax is already clear in Angel's mind. Following a fight between

Romeo and Juliet, “she storms off into the street and a car comes. She freezes. He pushes her out of the way. And he’s the one who ends up getting hit.” Angel says, “It’s so ironic, because he said he’d never do that.” The ending is still not as tragic as one might expect. Romeo doesn’t die, but he is hospitalized. Juliet is distraught, and “she starts crying and all this stuff.” True to her romantic heart, Angel sees the story ending with Romeo and Juliet falling in love.

In a more recent example, the story centers on a teenage guy who is in a band. Angel says, “He’s real famous and everything, but he drinks a lot.” The girl is “really different from him; she’s poor and works a job.” Because the girl’s parents had died when she was younger, “she has to work to pay for her living.” These two meet and the guy takes an interest in the girl, “and something happens.” The newspaper reports that he has fallen in love with her. Some scandal arises in the press, and “she gets stuck in the middle of it.” The band’s manager sees this scandal as “good for publicity,” so “he wants her to continue acting like they are going out.” She is drawn in thinking “they are just acting, but they start wishing it was more than an act.”

A pattern begins to emerge. Teenagers, acted upon by others or by circumstances, are thrown together. The relationship was not a gushing love-at-first-sight romance. The girl was undervalued at first, and the boy has an air of danger. The two end up in love and are a good match for one another. Angel admits, however, that the process of connecting is still unclear for her. She said, “I get the beginning, and I get the ending. I just don’t know the middle, the details that goes in between.”

Also characteristic are Angel’s characters; they are often working to minimize parental support or were entirely on their own. Enjoying their independence from adult control, her

characters were making more adult choices. Specifically, she mentioned that her characters cuss, drink and date.

It is also evident in her work that female characters are empowered by being clever and determined, rather than being rewarded for being beautiful and needy. Her most recent story takes Little Red Riding Hood as its narrator. The voice in her work projects the power and authority that she enjoys giving to female characters, and it is engaging. She writes:

Those Grim Tales you've heard about, well, they arn't really tales. They're facts. The Grim Brothers weren't of your world. They were really from Erizan, which is also know as the world of fantasy. You know me, or at least [you have] read about me even if it isn't the complet truth. I'm Little Red Riding Hood! Now lets get something straight! My grandmother didn't get eaten by the wolf. Also there was never any wood cutter who killed the wolf. What really happend was I was on my way to my Grandma's and the "big bad wolf" stopped me on the way. Now I don't see anything scary about a wolf pup. I mean he wasn't even in his wolf form which is as fritening as a kitten. Well any way all he did was follow me to her house teasing me and being a meanie. So I told my grandma who was cutting wood and she told him to go home before she called his father who thought bullying a girl was unbecoming of a prince. So he left tail between his legs. See no death. A lot of the Brothers Grim tales are exagerated. Now back on track. As I was saying, all those tales are true but not very accurate.

Angel reports that she's a long time daydreamer, and she remembers stories that she created in seventh grade, but that she first began to think of herself as writer during her eighth grade year. As a writer, Angel starts many more projects that she finishes. Angel describes feeling "blocked" frequently. Her habit is to either engage the input of a friend or to set aside the current story in favor of a new idea waiting in the wings of her imagination. Sometimes, she returns to stymied

stories hoping for fresh ideas that will move one of them forward. She does not push herself to complete stories; she is content to write in the direction of her ideas.

Her characters are people, but they may be in fantasy settings or engage fantasy characters. The current literary frenzy over vampires, zombies and half-human characters are interesting to read, but not something she usually enjoys writing about. She sees writing as a life-long interest, because she has "too many daydreams for it to go away." What will she write in the future? Angel reports that she wishes she "could work on [her] comedy a little bit more," because she thinks she is "not that funny."

When asked about how writing fit into her future, Angel sees writing as a lifelong hobby tied to her very natural habit of daydreaming.

Research Questions 2: Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices?

Motivation and Identity Work

Angel writes for her own enjoyment. About her characters she commented, "I just smirk thinking about them." But for Angel, writing is also largely a social activity. She made the connection between her own enjoyment of her daydreamed stories and her social desire to write when she said, "So I won't forget about them [her invented characters and their imagined adventures,] and I can tell other people about them; I want to write."

In eighth grade, Angel wrote collaboratively with two other female friends. These girls would write during school and pass a story in progress off to one another between classes. Angel said, "It's fun to have three people writing one story, because they each get to add their own ideas." This type of writing was entertaining to the writers in its surprises and social engagement. Her friends clearly enjoyed reading her input into their cooperative stories. It was important to her that

they enjoyed her work and laughed while reading. Because of the positive feedback and enjoyment that she received in these types of writing activities, Angel began naming herself a writer in eighth grade. Although her writing successes were not tied to classroom experiences, she was also rewarded and encouraged in class when her creativity showed through her writing.

Angel also described social times with friends that would become about writing. On these occasions the girls would be hanging out and their attention would shift to talk about their writing or to read aloud portions of their writing. One of Angel's friends would offer suggestions about a writing project that Angel had started on her own, or she might even take up the pen and paper and write the next part to get the other going again. The exchange was reciprocal. Neither girl erases or detracts from what the previous girl had written expect for addressing Angel's spelling errors. Angel explains, "Whenever she gets blocked, I write some for her and we might switch out."

Angel's current writing was motivated by peer enjoyment. Angel had recently and repeatedly shared her writing with positive effect. She reported that her friends said her writing was "great" and would even get angry when they had invested in the story only to realize that it was unfinished. In speaking of one friend in particular, Angel said, "It's sort of like it's funny. But I want to finish it more for her, so she can read more."

In addition to the process of writing being social, the content of Angel's writing is also social. She is typically focused on teen romantic relationships. These fictional relationships that Angel creates are her vicarious exploration of this anticipated role. Angel said, "They [her characters] get to act how they want to act. I don't really act how I want to act, 'cause I don't want my mom getting mad." Angel creates characters that are based on her own interests, desires and ambitions. She admits that some of what she would not say aloud comes out in her writing. She confesses that while she "may not act it," she has "always wanted to have a boyfriend." Her

characters give this hidden self a voice. Angel said, "If I say it out loud, I'm afraid they'll laugh at it." She writes dialogue and back stories for the girls that are interesting and independent. She admits that these characters are, at least in part, a type of fantasy about her own future.

Angel also writes to enter a fantasy world in a manner that others watch TV. Writing is entertaining, "especially if you are one of those visual people and you just see a movie when you are reading." Angel's story-writing process does not always begin with pencil and paper. She says, "It's little stories that I make up in my head." Later, she writes them down motivated to save them to "tell other people about them."

Angel said, "Like if you're having a bad day or something, you just write it down on paper and turn it into a story. It [the story] turns out better than how your day turns out." Unlike Atlanta, Katniss, or Sweeny, Angel insisted that control was not a motivator and that her work did not regularly work to solve specific problems from her real life. Angel reassures me, "Nah, I'm usually fine with my life, so there's no fixing to it." She jokes, however, that she might try to write to fix other people's lives. In fact, most of her stories do not closely follow any of her real life challenges. Angel sees writing as a stress relief and "more fun than watching TV;" and unlike TV, her stories always matched her interests.

Angel also cited the need to hold onto dreams and daydreams as a strong motivation at times for her writing. Her creative mind apparently does not always sleep when she does. So, she occasionally wakes with details of her dream lingering, and she rushes to write them down. Sometimes she builds from these details to build longer narratives.

In summary, Angel crafts writing like a magic carpet ride. This ride takes her at her whim to tailored adventures that always suit her interests and even allows her to re-enter and extend her dreams and daydreams. So, she does write to entertain herself. But on a deeper level, she writes to

explore vicariously the roles that she looks forward to inhabiting. Through her imagination and clever avatar characters, Angel can be the girlfriend she looks forward to being. She can also escape parental control and enjoy greater autonomy. On a more immediate level, Angel connects socially with her writing. She writes collaboratively with others, and she writes to engage and entertain others.

Elana

I became acquainted with Elana when she was in the fifth grade. She was then and remains an ambitious and conscientious student and a writer. She believes in herself, and speaks confidently about achieving her dreams. She is petite, but determined to earn her place in the world and be heard. She has chosen singing and writing as ways of being heard. She says that both music and writing are her emotional outlets.

She comes from a stable and loving family. Her "I Am From" poem reveals that dinner around the table with family was a common occurrence, as was Grandmother's chocolate pie, the men-folk out hunting and kisses at bedtime. Her poem also relays her Christian family roots that led her to believe "that being faithful and grateful will lead you to heaven."

She was reluctant to describe herself for this study, admitting that few people truly know her and "most of the time I am unsure of who I even am." But she offered the following clues about how she sees herself: "effervescent and adored by many," "crazy and insane," "easily sidetracked" at times, and "a human who makes mistakes and stresses over the small things way too often." She sees herself in a dichotomous way, both light and dark. She is a self-proclaimed romantic who loves life, but also as someone who falls in love too easily. She says, "But I also possess an extremely childish side, too. I love being loved and hugs and kisses and being playful. I love attention and cute things. She alludes to a darker side that is lured to focus on strange thoughts and

ideas, but her description is vague. She admits liking some creepy, gross or even gory things at times.

Academically, English has consistently been her strong suit. While she admits that she has not made straight As, her ACT scores (posted on Facebook) were strong across the board. In English her scores climbed from 21, to 22, to 25 over her three attempts and her composite moved from 21 to 24.

She is a sensitive young woman who admits to crying easily and often about both the big and the little things. She dances secretly when no one is around and loves to lose herself in a moment. Socially, she expresses a concern that some people may find her weird when they first meet her, but "it's their loss" if they chose not to be her friend.

Elana loves books, most of all teen romance as well as horror and mystery. She said her reason for participating in this study was "because I love writing above anything else." She said writing "keeps me level-headed, allows me to work through my problems and stresses thoroughly, and gives my imagination a chance to come to life." Touting the effects of a writing life, Elana says, "Without writing I wouldn't be the person that I am today, and I believe that I wouldn't be nearly as successful as I am now."

Research Question 1: What do these young people write on their own time and for their own purposes?

The Writing Itself/The Writer's Habits

Elana reports, "Yeah, I try to put writing into my everyday life. Elana writes poetry and realistic teen stories, but at the time of our first interview she reported that she actively avoids writing about stressful real-life experiences, like learning to drive. Since that time she has used her writing more often, or more openly, as a tool to process her real life in different ways. She is

writing reflections on her real life experiences. After visiting a Holocaust museum, she wrote in first person in a conversational tone. She compared her own blessed life and its potential to the lives so tragically lost. She thoughtfully asked, "Does it make me selfish to live and love and be free?" She focused sympathetically on the children lost in that darkness as follows:

> *I think what got me the most was the children… The ones whose lives were taken before they were born, or ripped from their mothers arms or beaten, broken, and ashamed. They didn't deserve that!! They didn't deserve to have their humanity or dreams torn away by monsters that were under order. I would rather die than treat other people that way or to kill or torture. It's beyond selfish! It's shameful, blasphemy even to treat your own kind that way!! They had everything taken away from them by you just for your own damn life!!*

Before she closes on this topic, she backs down her intensity acknowledging "But I wasn't there… I didn't go through what they went through so I can't accuse and point fingers. I can only observe and imagine and remember and cry for the ones who were lost or put through that shame… I cannot say that I understand; I never will…" But she ends with the poignant confession, "At times like these I wonder where my God was."

Elana labeled another piece as "stream of consciousness" in which she rambled around her topics of concern including making something of herself in what remains of high school, which college to choose, and discerning whether the boy – too old for her –really was right for her now or ever. She explored these same concerns and emotions in a poem entitled "Unacceptable" which follows:

24 - 17= Unacceptable (6-26-13) Unacceptable

Why must age be such an importance? When you love someone it shouldn't matter
When you love someone it should be accepted

Do I love him?
Probably not like that yet
But what if I did?
What if I wanted to be with him?

24-17= 6, almost 7 years apart
Cool, no big deal
The deal is that I'm 17, not 18 and it would be against all logic and moral if we were together

To think it is blasphemy
To do it is illegal
To dream it is unacceptable
So where do I turn?

I really like him and his smile, eyes, messy hair, glasses, personality, humor, odd sense of fashion, laugh, craziness, knowledge, openminded thoughts, ability to accept anything and anyone and the fact that he's different

He likes books, and hiking, and dissecting, and discovering, and all the weird things that people rarely accept without disgust

He accepts me, for me!
He let's me speak my mind and give my advice or statement
He smiles at me like I'm the only girl in the world, like I'm important
And it may not mean anything to him but it means something to me

HE means something to me
He invades my thoughts, my dreams, my future
And all I want is clarity, proof that he likes me too
I don't know what to believe anymore…

So where do I turn?
Maybe I'll figure it out in my dreams

Three of her writing samples were direct addresses in first person – like one side of a conversation. One was addressed to the young man who has captured her heart, praising his "brilliant blue eyes" and his ability to sweep her off her feet and "break down the walls that no one

else can even think of climbing." She imagines that "If I had you, I could shine and march on! I could be brave and unashamed of trying things I'm afraid of doing. I could fly!"

The second was addressed to her dad and less complimentary. She is shouting with written words that say, "I'm too lazy. I don't do anything. I don't care enough. I don't try hard enough. It's apparent that you think that of me by how you speak to me sometimes." She softens to say, "I love you dad," but continues saying, "but I wish that for once in your life you would stop dictating every move I make and let me be a teenager." She makes her need and her complaint clear when she writes, "I want attention and love and someone that I can talk to about things like college and guys and teenage problems without it being stupid to you or something that I shouldn't be thinking about. I can't just not think about something. I can't be sugary sweet every minute of every freaking day, and I can't just be carefree."

The third was a letter to her future self. She describes her present state as "confused, single, and struggling in math," while "stressing" and "being a bit of a rebel." She discloses that she has the habit of flirting and liking guys who are "either totally wrong" for her and still liking the guy who has repeatedly broken her heart. She also admits that she is making choices that strain her relationship with her father. She admonishes herself to improve as follows:

> *I need to get myself together. My future self better be WAY better than the me now. She better be more confident, less stressed about the small things, less boy crazy (or at least crazy over only 1 boy), focused on her future, more true to herself, closer to her family (especially her dad), less stupid, not on any drugs or anything else bad (not that I am now, but still), smart in all of her decisions, not a procrastinator, fulfilling the dreams that I have wanted for myself, one step closer to becoming successful, still in touch with people who are closest to me now, not*

hitched with a baby on my side and struggling as an only parent for my child, more serious, nice to people even if they aren't nice to me, closer to God, not taking life for granted, and most definitely not wasting my life on stupid things.

Elana also writes stories that intersect her real life. Most recently she has been writing teen romances. When last we spoke, she had two different romance stories in progress at the same time. Elana admits that she is the female character in her stories. The romance writing that Elana shared follows.

It was a cold winters evening. The sun was falling and the moon was shining bright. And I, had just fallen into a lake. A cold freezing, lake. Now don't start assuming that I am stupid for falling into it. I mean, what was she thinking?! That idiot! Yeah, I can hear you now. The truth is that I'm clumsy. EXTREMELY clumsy And getting me near anything that can be fallen into or tripped on, for the majority of the time, will be fallen into or tripped on. It's just a sad, unfortunate fact for me.

Here's what happened –

"Better watch out. There's a lake down there." Hunter's voice carried from atop the hill.

"Okay, I'll watch o-" and step and plunge!!

"Amy?! Footsteps coming closer… She sounds from outside the immersion were distorted.

I flailed and attempted to swim but it was just so cold. Sinking… Sinking… Suddenly I was pulled forcefully from the water and enveloped into warm, comforting arms. "Baby…It's okay."

My body was on the surface but my mind was still sinking… It's just so cold…"Amy? Hey.."

After a much-needed, deep breath, I sputtered "Th-th-that's… not a lake… That's a d-damn o-cean!

"Ha ha. You're okay then."

Sure I'm okay if you can call body freezing, teeth chattering, joints burning and stiff okay.

"Ugh…" I tightened my grip around his shoulder and cuddled up to him.

"Come on. Let's get you into the house and warmed up." Hunter easily lifted and carried me; up the hill, to the house, through the door, and to the couch where he swaddled me up into a blanket and sat me on the couch.

"Hold me. I'm cold.

The look of indecision in his eyes was heartbreaking but he came over and took me into his arms anyways.

"Amy –"

"-Don't Just … hold m-me." My emotions betrayed me and hot tears coated my cheeks. "I don't want to know."

I cried into Hunter's chest and gripped his shirt tightly.

"Don't you feel strongly about me?"

"I hate you…" My tone was sharper than I intended it to be but he stayed calm and asked, 'why?'

I gazed up into his beautiful eyes and stayed silent. I had already said too much.

"Amy, why do you hate me?"

More silence.

Purposefully, Hunter shifted his weight and guided my head softly to the pillow beneath me then loomed over me and gazed into my teary eyes. "I want to know." His knees, on each side of my legs, entrapped me, and his hands did the same to my shoulders. There I lay under him in plain sight. I was defenseless.

I had no choice but to speak my heart's words.

"Because I love you."

I could see the sudden surprise and reluctance in his expression but I continued. "You can't imagine how hard I've tried to just turn it off, to stoop liking you, to keep it from growing, but nothing is working! Not even seeing the

worst sides of you. I don't want this damnit. I don't want you because all you do is make me remember that I can't have you! Then I'm shattered all over again!"

"Amy…"

"Hunter, do you know how hard it is dealing with this?" Hoping there's a chance but knowing that there's not? Trying to act normal around you when all I'm doing is screaming inside? Trying not to say too much of what I'm really thinking because it's not allowed or because I could get into trouble? Yeah, I live with it every time I think of you, all the time actually. Because I'm always thinking about you and it won't go away! You're a blessed curse Hunter! I hate you!" All over again the tears flowed down my damp cheeks and I began to sob. I couldn't handle this.

"It's okay, Amy. Deep breaths. Deep breaths."

"Don't Amy me! That's not fair…"

Hunter filled the gap between my body and the couch and supported himself on one elbow. He gazed intently into my eyes as he put his palm to my cheeks, and one at a time and with one finger, wiped away my tears. "Why do you think you don't have a chance?"

"It's obvious isn't it?" I honestly could not believe he didn't know already. "Maybe. But I want you to say it.

Looking him directly in the iris I accused him of doing something that I knew he could never be heartless enough to do.

"Are you deliberately trying to mock me?"

I've never heard Hunter be more serious. "No. But I think you're mistaken if you think that you don't have a chance, especially considering the way I've treated you. Help me understand your point of view."

I was skeptical but he deserved the truth. "Hunter, I'm your student and you're almost 7 years older than me. The odds of you liking me back are almost impossible. I'm just being realistic."

A big smile lit up his face and out of nowhere he began singing Phil Collins classic hit "Against All Odds", but changed the lyrics up a bit.

How can I just let you walk away, let you leave without a trace

When I stand here taking every breath with you, ooh

You're one of the only ones who really knows me at all

So take a look at me now, there's been an empty space

And there was nothing to remind me, just the memory of your face

Now us being together is against all odds but that's what I'm goon change!!

During the process of singing, Hunter had taken me into his arms, cuddling me to his chest and his body pressed into my hip.

So comforting… I moved closer and cuases a light chuckle to escape Hunters lips.

"You're warm."

"Uh huh, surreee." A goofy grin was plastered on his face but within just a moment his expression softened. "I want to kiss you…"

I stared up at him, yearning for his lips to touch mine.

*Wait! Stop! What?! He wants to kiss me??! What if I mess up? What if Im not a good kisser? Is my breath okay? Do I have something stuck in my teeth?! *freaking out**

"Okay." I said with a smile… - You idiot! Are you insane! You're going to let him kiss you?! Gahh! – inner self banging her head against a wall –

Well, no turning back now.

Hunter positioned himself above me and while putting one hand holding my neck and the other against my waist, he brought his lips, softly, gently, to mine.

Suddenly, there was a burst of energy and I was lost in the moment… I wouldn't rather be anywhere else…

The kiss became heated and I felt pleasure shoot through my body like lightning.

"Ah, Hunter…"

I knew he was feeling it too since I could feel a bulge growing and pushing against my leg and his kiss became hungry. Sensually, his tongue asked for entrance and I obliged. My worry had vanished and was replaced by heat and need.

Our tongues danced, his hand tightened around my waist, and the fingers of his other hand tangled themselves into my hair.

"Amy, should I stop now/"

My hand found its way into his shirt, gliding upward to his chest. "No."

"Virgin?" He paused and looked down into my eyes.

Glaring, I answered "You know that, now shut up and do me." I pulled his head back down to mine with arms snared around his neck.

Elana went on to describe her character's first sexual experience. Hunter was passionate, responsible and caring. Their dialogue during sex was instructive, playful and passionate. The climax was followed by an exchange of "I love you's." Elana's character falls asleep, and Hunter briefly becomes the narrator. He is attentive and complimentary.

On the same day, Elana re-wrote the romantic fantasy with an alternate leading male and an alternate series of events. In her second version of being rescued from the freezing water, Joey carries her into the house, strips her naked and puts her into the hot shower. Then at her pleading, he joins her. Joey is surprised announcing, "You're not timid." Their sexual encounter was rushed, forced and mutually climatic. Elana shared a third story with yet another leading man. This adventure is a hiking and rock-climbing trip. In the story, the dialogue and actions were focused in the direction of having sex, but the story was unfinished.

Elana has been a writer since I met her in fifth grade. Even now she reports writing as a daily habit. She says, "Every day after my day ends, I try to write about my day." She

writes poetry, letters and narratives. Her time spent writing is often sustained, fitting the description of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Elana said, "I don't think I would [have] noticed a fire; I'm pretty much engrossed." Elana said that her writing came from her soul, the place "deep inside [by which] you know what to do."

Elana described the difference between how she felt before and after writing as a "clarifying" experience or as a surprise when her writing took "a different direction than what [she] had wanted it to be." She also notes that while she does not "go in wanting to learn something" [from her writing], she does learn occasionally about the topic of her writing, but more often about herself as a writer.

However, even when Elana is not enjoying writing, it is evident that she values it. She reports pushing through reluctance to write by choosing to write about new subjects. She returns recursively to stymied stories and sometimes picks up where she left off.

Research Question 2: Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices?

Motivation and Identity Work

Elana talked about her writing early in this research calling it a "solace." She compares writing explaining that it does for her what singing and helping others does; it comforts her. Later when her writing has undertaken the topic of romance, she openly labels it a "fantasy." She uses her writing as an outlet for exploring her anticipated roles of lover and beloved in a mature romantic relationship.

Elana describes a risk-free thinking that exists in her personal writing time, "Yeah, [it's] not something that I would feel like a failure over, because it's not for a grade." Elana stated that she ends a writing session feeling "accomplished," having begun feeling either "focused" on a specific

idea or "cloudy" and just wanting to write. She also suggests that writing is a low-risk venture, because it allows her to try new things. Elana described the difference between how she felt before and after writing as a "clarifying" experience or as a surprise when her writing took "a different direction than what [she] had wanted it to be." She also notes that while she does not "go in wanting to learn something" [from her writing], she does learn occasionally about the topic of her writing, but more often about herself as a writer.

However, many of Elana's comments reveal that her writing is often motivated by her desire for a release. Elana shared, "Well, if I am sad, I find that writing actually takes away that sadness." Elana explained, "Whenever you are frantic, … overpowered [by] so many emotions and just the busyness of the day, you just kind of want to get it out there."

Elana traces her beginnings as a writer to the traumatic event of losing her grandmother when she was in fifth grade. She explains, "The first time I wrote [like she does now], it became important to me. Because I was trying to find a way out. I was sad about something and writing relieved me. By writing it was like I was talking to an imaginary person that fully understood me."

Elana enjoys feelings of competence through her writing. She describes herself as a writer. She said, "In writing I'm confident; I know I can get it out there. And I know I can put my ideas down on paper and still be happy with it."

In summary, Elana writes for diverse purposes. Her earlier writing came in spurts and in the form of poetry as an emotional release, a place to unpack her sadness and relieve her tensions. Her personal writing of diverse genres is a safe space, one in which it is impossible to fail. Elana employs her writing and its accompanying sense of competence to embolden her. Her posted but unshared writing to her father are acts of resistance, quietly seeking autonomy. Her more recent sexual and romantic fantasies played out in longer narratives are explorations of the anticipated

roles of girlfriend and lover. Her avatar characters are eager and bold. They do not contend with the parental restraints that currently hem her in.

Dakota

Dakota describes herself in retrospect as “a headstrong student” who “has overcome many obstacles.” As a recent high school graduate, she now says, “I am determined to succeed in everything I do. I am excited to be starting [college] in August.” She has a confident view of herself and says that she believes “that teachers see me as responsible and mature. They put a lot of trust in me, and they know that I put effort into everything I do.” Similarly, in social situations outside of school she expects acceptance and success. She says, “Someone may see me as shy for a little while, but then they learn that I'm friendly and easy to get along with.”

Dakota’s route to this optimistic and determined outlook, however, was less straight forward. She had been a successful student in elementary school, but I met her as a junior, and her freshman and sophomore years had been troubled. She was in the state’s custody living in the local church-supported home for children. Her biological father had gotten sick and passed away. I learned only the tenor of her relationship with her mom through her classroom writing. Their relationship was important to her, but I had the sense (without the details) that it was not stable or healthy. Dakota reflects on that time saying,”As a freshman and sophomore, I was a very confused and lost teen. I was stubborn and was losing my best friend who was also my dad. I DID NOT CARE ABOUT SCHOOL. My dad was all I was concerned about. That was a very dark time in my life.” She explains, “My junior year is when I gained my support system and then in my senior year I got adopted.” Her last year in high school Dakota was legally adopted, began a romantic relationship with a shy, sweet classmate, and began to write and talk openly about her growing

faith. She says, “My support system is my adopted family, my boyfriend, his family, and GOD! Without them, I wouldn't have had a chance.”

Dakota is petite, and she wore her dark blonde hair straight and long. She arrived daily dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. In compliance with the school’s dress code, which required her to hide her tattoos, I don’t recall seeing her tattoos, but she mentioned them often. The large one on her back was of a rebel flag. Because of her appearance, Dakota had said people who did know her would probably not connect her to her writing, because, “a lot of people say I look like a druggie with tattoos.” According to Dakota, first impressions would probably get her wrong unless your first impressions saw her “as this redneck that has a lot of Southern Pride.” She recalled that one of her teachers revealed that her first impressions of Dakota had been less than favorable based on her appearance. These first impressions were overcome by Dakota’s exceptional performance in her class, labeling her as “one of the best kids she has had in class.”

Dakota sees herself as a “very country girl,” but notes that others may call her a “redneck.” She says that she takes the label *redneck* as a compliment. Rather than being eager to share her writing so that others might know her better, Dakota says she prefers to “keep people guessing” anticipating that she will upset their quick judgments of her by “proving people wrong.” She gloats over such victories saying, “Hey, I guess you will think twice next time!”

In a standard level English class, Dakota met with success early and sustained it over time. Dakota not only revealed her propensity for writing, she demonstrated a remarkable degree of focus and determination. She consistently performed to the best of her abilities on every assignment, and she not only earned straight As, but she also won the English award for her class for that semester.

Research Question 1: What do these young people write on their own time and for their own purposes?

The Writing Itself/The Writer's Habits

Dakota is the only participant who reports that journal-writing characterizes her writing. She is also the only participant who was writing nonfiction persuasive essays and letter writing. Dakota also wrote some in narrative. She relayed her experiences of storytelling humorous stories with teen housemates at the dinner table. She and her housemates would laugh to the point of tears. Afterwards, they would have difficulty reconstructing why the stories were so funny. So, Dakota began making an effort to write them down and add them to her collection.

Yet, her writing in all its forms seemed to share the common goal of influencing those who had control in her life or an effort to process and take control of her own life. Dakota explains, "My writing is how I think in my head."

Dakota believes that her habit of writing often and over time has made her think more thoroughly. She also says, "Being a writer, I think about things before I say them most of the time. I think I process situations different."

Dakota was taken into state's custody more than once, but during the first placement she did not have contact with her mother for a month. During that time, she journaled extensively about home. She said, "It just made me feel like I was at home again, because I could write and read about being home and put myself in that situation." Dakota also chose to write a two-page letter to her boyfriend as a best effort of be heard and understood. She explained that "it was the only way" that she could get heard. She felt more effective in writing about an emotional topic rather than talking. She even began the letter by saying, "I am writing this because I know you won't listen." The boy wrote a letter in response, and the relationship prospered. Dakota said even

texting is sometimes more clear than calling or talking. Also when she was in a children's home, Dakota wrote a letter to her treatment team and to the juvenile judge to advocate for herself after she had made some poor choices. She said, "I wrote that letter and because of that letter, I was looked at differently. I had a lot of people respect me because of that, instead of, 'You messed up honey.'" Dakota tentatively clarified saying, "This is going to sound really bad, and I don't mean for it to come out that way. I can use words to manipulate the situation. I fell like that is important to be able to do."

Dakota discussed resisting the journal-writing suggestion from her caseworker only to be surprised by enjoying it. From her first attempt she said, "It just put me in a place where I was zoned out of everything else. And I was proud of it." Dakota even said that her enjoyment of writing had become a motivator she could use to leverage herself to finish other less desirable things sooner. At age 15, she looked at the volume of writing she had done and realized how deeply ingrained the habit of writing had become in her life. She said, "You can call me a lot of things, but a writer is one of them." It was as if the physical evidence of "an overwhelming amount of writing" had weighed in with a verdict.

Also, because of Dakota's interest in rescuing pit bulls, she was actively collecting and recording the positive encounters that people had had with pit bulls. Dakota seemed to unwittingly reveal a secondary objective for her writing when she compared the pit bulls to a juvenile who gets into trouble with the authorities. She says, "Some may have been in jail, but that doesn't mean they can't change," meaning both pit bulls and teens. Dakota explained that she was thinking of her own sister as an example of a teen who had been in jail and who is now stuck with a bad reputation. From Dakota's perspective those who should have been supportive, like DCS, had instead labeled and given up on her sister.

Dakota was simultaneously working on a second project that dealt more with talk back to her own experiences with labeling. She called the project "Southern Pride," and it was intended specifically for her house parents with whom she had a friendly tension and ongoing debate. She described the project as both serious and humorous. She wrote to take issue with people who looked less than favorably on her several prominent tattoos and the way she dressed.

As a senior, Dakota reports occasionally choosing to write in the midst of class after completing the day's assignment (or ignoring it). But her beginnings as a self-acknowledged writer were more tentative. Dakota said, "From her first attempt [at journal writing] she said, "It just put me in a place where I was zoned out of everything else. And I was proud of it." Dakota's journals were considered private, but she would still occasionally get excited about something she had written and "grab a house parent" and launch into a read aloud. Dakota does not like for others to read her writing to themselves. She feels that it still needs her emphasis and tone of voice to be fully appreciated for its subtleties – especially her sarcasm and humor.

Dakota reports internal drafting and editing before writing, but she describes her overall process as being "all jumbled up." She says, "The process is a lot more complicated than the written product." Dakota also demonstrated an inclination to adjust the language of her writing to fit its audience. She said, "I can sound as unintelligent as I want or as intelligent as I want."

Dakota shared that writing had been a clarifying experience for her more than once. She described feeling dumb or confused before writing and coming to the conclusion that writing had clarified her thinking and pushed her to articulate what she possibly already knew.

When asked about how writing fit into her future, Dakota confidently said, "I am going to publish a book." Dakota also noted that while some of her future writing may reach a wide

audience, some of her writing would remain personal. She said, "I think I am always going to use writing as a coping skill."

Research Question 2: Why do young writers choose to write and how do they value and understand their own writing practices?

Motivation and Identity Work

Dakota recalled that her father, now deceased, had called her a strong writer when she had typed out (on a typewriter) stories like those she had encountered in children's books, but she did not label herself as a writer until much later.

When asked to complete the sentence, "Writing is like…, Dakota quickly and simply said, "It's a coping skill." Moments later she added that writing was also "an escape from reality." Dakota often writes to distract herself from life's heaviness. She writes in short light-hearted bursts and enjoys sharing her humor. Dakota also reports using her writing to sustain and enjoy a feeling. She says, "it [writing] is a tool to keep that feeling going. Just however long I write, is however long I'll keep the feeling in mind."

Dakota compared writing to other distractions, "I had a poem, and I wanted to see if I could put the music with it. I started playing the guitar really well. But then it didn't last for long. I can play really well. But it is not something that can take my mind from somewhere else. I always end up going back to writing." In addition to playing guitar, Dakota also reports "drawing for awhile too," but "after awhile my brain just doesn't give me anything to draw." So, she returned to writing, which she states now as if it should have been the obvious choice. She says, "And of course, I went back to writing, and I had fun with that."

Dakota stated that she has resorted to writing in the form of posting on Facebook as a means of ignoring someone standing in front of her who is arguing or unpleasant. She also created longer

posts recently to honor her deceased birth-dad on his recent birthday. She explained that it was not only important, but that it also helped to take her mind off of some of the negative things being said by others that made it seem like she did not care about her birth family. Less often Dakota uses her writing skills as coping skills to address rather than deflect sad feeling. She said, "If I am really sad, and I write about something it gives me an understanding of what it is I am sad about. I get over it."

According to Dakota many of her other peers were strongly opposed to writing in all its forms. She thought of them as lazy, and she believed that they did not like writing because they viewed it as a chore. She said, "If you look at something like a chore, you'll not want to do it as well as other people." When I asked her if writing required effort, she said, "Yeah, it's effort for a lot of people. I mean it's still effort for me."

With writing as a well-established habit, Dakota explains the difference in the way she typically feels before as compared to after writing, "Before I write, I have a lot on my head and thoughts coming from different directions in my brain. And afterwards, I feel almost accomplished – like proud of myself. But then I feel really relieved because I have everything I was thinking about on paper and in front of me."

Dakota even claims that her strength as a writer empowers her in her interpersonal conflicts. She says, "I feel like if I got into an argument, that I can have power over them. I can use intelligence to my benefit. I don't try to make people feel bad. But if you are going to make me push hard to think about something [to make her point], then I'm going to make sure you are walking away insecure." Our further conversations revealed that even on a topic for which she is uninformed, Dakota feels as if her skill with words would allow her to fake a decent if not intimidating presentation. She shared one brief exchange with her boyfriend in which she silenced

him. She concluded saying, "So, I got to make him look like an idiot. He ended up sitting down where I wanted him to." Dakota sees her perceived skill with words as a powerful tool to get things done. She said, "I just feel like you can look at things totally different depending on how you write about something. You can make something spicy look sweet." In justifying manipulating others with words, Dakota said, "Teachers do it all the time. Teachers can manipulate a situation so quick."

Dakota said school was not a significant factor in her writing. Because she was considering homeschooling and early graduation, I asked her how her writing might change in those circumstances. She said, "I don't think that being in a classroom changes my writing any, because my writing is who I am. When I am in the classroom or whether it is summer break, or whether I am on top of Mars, it is probably going to be the same."

Dakota's writing had been revealed to be more of a therapeutic distraction from heavier issues in her life or as an avenue for control over a specific issue (i.e. Southern Pride or pit bulls). But when her life dramatically changed, so did her motivation for writing. The tone and focus and even the mode of her writing changed too. Her writing became less hidden and less defensive. Dakota included a photo of herself and her real full name on her blog.

Also, in her new home environment she had an adult as a writing role model, her soon-to-be adoptive father. Dakota holds high expectations for herself as a writer. She said, "I am not a normal kid," when she explained how she pushed herself to improve as a writer. "But I like to challenge myself, so it's more like a good kind of effort instead of a bad effort. And it's an effort that almost comes natural, it just requires thought."

Dakota was the only participant who reported having a writing adult role model. Dakota's house parent/dad had been keeping up a faith-based blog for over three years. She said, "He [house

dad] takes your breath every time you read something that he writes. He knows exactly what to do and what to say to play to your emotions." Dakota relayed the exciting news that her house parents were in the process of legally adopting her. She said of her house-parent/ soon to be adoptive dad's writing that, "If he were writing about food, he would make you want it. If he wrote about our upcoming family, you would tear up because of the emotional impact that he has in his writing." His writing really encouraged Dakota in her own efforts. She said, "So, I think I can do that too." She felt that a previous incident was further evidence that she could move people emotionally with her writing. Dakota relayed a response that she had received from a six-page letter that she had written thanking her case worker. She thanked the woman for her part in a "life-altering decision" leading to Dakota's adoptions. The woman texted Dakota saying, "I have no words for how that made me feel."

Through her housedad, Dakota was exposed to blogs. Dakota had only recently downloaded and begun exploring the new free blogging program on both her phone and her laptop. She was excited about the potentially interactive nature of a blog. She envisioned her blog serving many purposes, but its primary focus would be as a tool for processing her life changes and growth. She anticipated that she would include her previous passion of defending pit bulls, but she also saw the blog as a tool for talking about personal issues including her adoption and her faith. A review of her blog revealed that while Dakota had intended to take up her favorite issues again in the blog format, her entries were limited to personal reflections. The following is an excerpt from her new blog.

> *I have realized that as I progress through life, situations I'm dealt get tougher and tougher. But instead of sitting around and crying about it, I have learned to use every situation to an advantage. I'm going through a time in my life where patience is*

the main ingredient to staying sane (if there's any such thing). What I'm trying to get at is that patience is a life lesson so take advantage of life lessons. Sometimes the lessons are sugar coated though so read between the lines. For instance, "if at first you don't suceed, try and try again." They don't mention that everytime you are trying again, you have previously FAILED. But that is my point, life lets you look at every situation one of two ways. Optimistic and pessimistic. Optimistic is the positive side of looking at things (glass half full). And pessimistic is the negative way of looking at things (glass half empty). Another lesson learned is that there are times in your life where optimism comes in handy. But there will be times where you may need to be a little pessimistic or maybe even both. It just goes to show you that there is light at the end of every dark tunnel.

I know my thoughts seem a little scattered tonight but that's ok. There is a little short advice in what was on my mind. If you take nothing from this but one thing please remember.....

You only have one life. Learn from it and enjoy it. YOU are the ONLY one who can choose your outlook on life so use this advice to help you make the decision....sincerly,

Dakota made clear that she intended to continue her pen and paper journal writing. She said, “I want to be able to have that forever.” The iPod however, did not fare as well. Dakota said, “I have not been good to Mr. iPod. Right now it is not being used. I took a lot of stuff off of it and put it on here. Now it’s between the phone and the laptop.”

In summary, Dakota used her writing as a diversion to escape the pressing issues in her real life and gradually as a tool for empowerment. Dakota was reluctant to begin journaling, but found that her recorded ideas had many benefits. Her early journal entries were an attempt to reach out and connect with her mother while she apart from her in state’s custody. As writing became more

of a habit, Dakota recorded all types of ideas, wonderings and humorous snippets. She found that others encouraged her writing and were entertained by it. Over time, she found that words well-placed had influence and power. She used her writing to be heard within the legal system. She also used written words to negotiate dating and friend relationships. Her attention to writing found a payoff in the classroom as well. With her improved attendance and attention to course requirements which resulted from the increased stability offered by state's custody, Dakota found that her efforts and her writing elevated her to the top of her classes. Her academic success continued, and her confidence as a writer grew. More recently, Dakota's writing and her vision for the purposes of writing have been influenced by an adult write- role model. Her step-father's blogging has awakened her to the power of the internet as a tool for sharing a personal self, including sharing her burgeoning Christian faith.

Conclusion

These participants are very different individuals. And in their independent interviews, each very definitely revealed that their writing was important to him or her both now and in the future. The value that each participant placed on writing – even the writing that occurred in private and related to their personal lives and unique experiences - connected them. In particular, there is a sense of a shared need to write. This need seems to supersede even the desire to perform as a writer in a manner that others would judge favorably. The recurring themes and their overlapping motivations at times sound like a chorus of voices harmonizing distinctive tones into the same song. This is a song of emerging independence, creative play, and serious exploration of their future roles and selves.

Summary of Findings

1. Students' motivations for writing were diverse but also overlapping at times, and they changed not only from occasion to occasion to suit a particular purpose or mood, but they also changed over time to reflect the emotional season and needs of the writer.
2. Participants valued the emotional affect of their writing and often enjoyed their time spent writing, and their experiences as writers were generally more greatly esteemed even than their resulting products.
3. Students' revealed motivations for writing included the following: being a release, an escape or distraction, an effort to exert some control over their own lives, a performance of an inner identity vicariously exploring the real or an imagined world, a social and collaborative activity, an effort to sustain a connection with a piece of literature, or a performance of a cultivated and very open identity as a writer. (The most popular and the most recurring of these identified purposes for writing was as a release – something therapeutic.)
4. Where participants' confidence in writing did not always match their school-assessed abilities as a writer, participants discounted the surface errors and expectations and defined their strengths as skill with ideas and words (rather than with compositions).
5. Independent writing for these participants was often episodic either idea or emotion driven and typically resulted in a character sketch or scene, but only occasionally fully developed into completed stories. These scenes and characters were, however, frequently revisited and related scenes and companion characters emerged.
6. Participants demonstrated some metacognitive awareness and strategic inclinations toward their writing, but did not hold themselves accountable for either process or product in a manner typical of a classroom-trained, self-regulated writer.
7. Participants reported strong visualization as an important and consistent component in their writing process.
8. Students described frequently experiencing a sustained and focused writing session that matches Csikszentmihalyi 's (1991) description of flow.
9. If viewed as a rough draft, participants' work was very often praiseworthy demonstrating a variety of skills that are targeted for development in academic writing including voice, indirect character development (i.e. through dialogue, private thoughts, actions, and reactions of other characters), inclusion of details for mood, authentic and entertaining dialogue, deep analysis and extension of experiences with literature, sensory detail, and varied sentence structure.
10. Participants' only occasionally worked with a conscious sense of audience outside of a sense that they were writing for someone very like themselves.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

Despite the fact that the seven participants included in this study were diverse, recurring data pointed to behaviors and preferences that linked them. While "multi-case study is not a design for comparing cases" (Stake, 2006, p. 83), some simplistic comparative descriptions are inherent but limited to "relatively few specified attributes" (Stake, 2006, p. 82). So, the focus here is limited. Specifically, this chapter I take a look across individual cases at the recurring and prominent evidence of confidence among these writers and at their overlapping and diverse motivations for writing. As motivation and identity cannot be separated in this discussion, identity issues are included. In Chapter Five, I also consider the reading-writing connections and implications of these findings in light of current policies, pedagogy, theories and research.

Feelings of Confidence as Writers

Participants repeatedly and explicitly stated that they feel confident as writers. Except for feeling "blocked" or apologizing for surface errors (i.e. spelling, fragments and run-ons), participants had no fear or hesitation about writing to meet their own expectations. Dakota talked about the power that writing gave her over situations and others. She also affirmed the quality of her own work when she said, "I think any time I write something and I go back and read it, I am pleased." The fact that Dakota saw her writing as a suitable gift for her house parents revealed her confidence in her abilities to say something worthwhile. Atlanta's feelings of competence and her sense of accomplishment come through, as she talked about her experiences with writing. She explained that while she occasionally wows herself with one of her drawings, she says she cannot always draw when she feel like she would enjoy it. Writing, however, is much more reliable outlet for her. Atlanta said, "When I need to write, if I feel like writing, I can always write. It's very rare for me to have bad writing days." Atlanta compared her experiences with visual art to her

experiences with writing saying, “I feel routinely more creative with writing.” Atlanta’s writing competence was a consolation to her when she felt less competent in other areas. She encouraged herself saying, “It’s ok; it doesn’t really matter that much. I’m good at this [writing].”

Elana had described the end of a writing session as an experience that left her feeling “accomplished.” She used the word *confident* and shared that she was most often pleased with her ability to get her ideas down on paper. When Katniss was asked to compare her confidence as a writer to her confidence as a person, she replied, “…they are different. Mostly, my confidence level when I’m writing is a lot higher.” Angel talked about her ideas not only eventually ending up in a book, but she said, “I think it would be a good book.”

Rick and Sweeny expressed their confidence differently. Rick had insisted that he did not write for the approval of others. He was comfortable being judged for what he put in writing. At one point he said, “It’s my baby. I’ll raise it the way I want to.” Sweeny had defended the content of his writing when it was criticized. He was not willing to water down the authenticity of his writing when challenged.

Motivations for Writing

Dyson and Genishi (2005) remark that different kinds of literacy events are “energized by different purposes, are characterized by particular relationships among participants, and are marked by expected moods by possible and anticipated interactions, and expected topics and structures” (p. 6). Writing as the practice of these teens was revealed to serve diverse purposes, including 1) being a release; 2) an escape or distraction; 3) an effort to exert some control over their own lives; 4) a performance of an inner identity vicariously exploring the real or an imagined world; 5) a social and collaborative activity; 6) an effort to sustain a connection with a piece of literature, the experience of reading; or 7) a performance of a cultivated and very open identity. The most popular of these

identified purposes for writing was as a release – something therapeutic. This list, however, is evidence that that there were as many purposes for writing as there were writers included in this study. Stake (2006) emphasizes that "seldom will it be necessary to resolve contradictory testimony or competing values" among participants. That, in fact, "contradictions may help us [researchers] understand the quintain [holistic view of the phenomenon]" (p. vi), and "highly atypical cases can sometimes give the best insights into the quintain" (p. vii).

Although participants did write for diverse purposes, it is also true that they wrote for more than one purpose. And one participant changed significantly in habitual purpose over time. At least one participant noted that different motivations were likely. Atlanta said, "I don't think everybody wants the same thing from their writing that I do."

Writing as a Release

Popular author Claudia Harrington says, "[S]ome authors use writing as a way to leech out the darkest parts of their psyche or to deal with particularly rough issues" (Henry, 2010). Harrington first started writing *Macabre: Quirky Poems for the Morbid Soul* when she was sixteen, and she saw it in print just before her nineteenth birthday. Harrington shares, "To me, writing about such dark thoughts was like getting a burden off my chest for good…"(Henry, 2010). Harrington reports that writing has always helped her to unburden herself. She was reluctant, however, to share her darker self with the broad public. But she became more accepting of the darker side of herself that she was displaying. She said, "the more I thought about it, the more I realized that, 'Hey, this is me'" (Henry, 2010). Balancing her darker self, she says, "But I refuse to always be so glum, so maybe getting it all out will be a positive thing. And I will be able to breathe again in complete freedom when it's done, because I will know that it is all in the past now…" (Henry, 2010).

Several of these teen writers shared this sentiment. Elana said, "Well, if I am sad, I find that writing actually takes away that sadness." When asked to compare writing to something else, Elana said, "Writing is like salvation." She elaborated to say, "Well, relief. Like bringing religion into it. Sometimes once you pray or once you get up on stage and sing about it or dance around during church, you somewhat feel relieved about it. And that's the salvation." Sweeny said, "[writing] is where I get my anger out. I am a pretty strong guy, and I don't need to get mad one day and something happen. I like that I don't have to worry about that."

Rick explained release when he said, "If I am sad, it will be something like this piece right here. If I am happy it becomes an adventure thing … It's more [often] about a dark feeling … and want[ing] it to release." Seeing writing as a key to the "troubles locked" inside his "soul," Rick sought opportunities to write as a "relief of anger."

Writing as an Escape or Distraction

People enjoy escaping their real life demands and its resulting stress. Dakota labels her writing as both a coping skill and an escape. Dakota reports that she chose to participate in this study "so more people can understand some reasons that writing can be helpful." And she still openly reflects on its purpose as, "an escape for people like me who has had to overcome so much to get where I am today. Participants write to enter a fantasy world in a manner that others watch TV. Sweeny said, "It's my get-away. It's what helps me calm down." Angel said writing was a stress relief and "more fun than watching TV;" and unlike TV, her stories always matched her interests. Atlanta openly labeled writing as a coping skill. She chooses to take her mind off "petty stuff that [she] know[s] in a month or a week [she] won't care about it," by launching through her imagination into something that is "not so me-centric -something with concerns outside yourself."

Writing to Sustain the Feeling/Experience of Reading or Connection to a Story

A contemporary American novelist and screenwriter with two books converted to award-winning movies, Thomas R. Perrotta (n.d.), confessed in an online video-taped presentation that his book, *Election* (1998), was born out of a desire to sustain his focus and interest that grew as he followed the 1992 US Presidential election. He said, "When it [the election] was over, I was sort of grieving." He confessed, "I wrote this novel in a way to assuage my own feelings that I want this election to continue." So, he wrote his own version of it set in a high school. Atlanta definitely shared this mindset and motivation. She latches onto a good feeling attained through connection with literature and writes about it. "Just however long I write, is however long I'll keep the feeling in mind." Katniss also wrote to extend the connection that she felt with characters, especially those from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series. She held onto the excitement and shared it with her friends by writing them into her fan fiction based on the series.

Writing for Control

The two male participants were more apt to write from a need to control or anticipate real world events or relationships. Their stories are built around main characters who are avatars for each of these male teen writer. Sweeny was forthright in stating, "Like usually the main character is a lot like me. He listens to the same music. He dresses the same." Rick wrote about his classroom powerlessness. He used his writing to denigrate his teacher. Rick enjoyed making his teacher appear powerless and flaunting his own power to control the challenge that school presented academically and socially at times.

The struggle for control not only happened inside the stories participants were writing, Sweeny described a struggle for control over his writing content. Sweeny talked about his father's

reactions to some of his writing. According to Sweeny, his father seemed to encourage the act of writing, but not the writer.

Writing as Performed Identities to Explore Vicariously

Two contemporary authors chime in to validate vicarious exploration of imagined roles as a motivation for writing. YAL author, Jennifer Lynn Barnes, began writing seriously as a teen, completing her first "practice novel" during her senior year of high school. Barnes explains that teens are constantly in the throes of figuring out the broad strokes of what it means to be a person. Writing about this journey is a great way to experience many versions of self-hood without the risks of living it (Henry, 2010). Nicci Sefton, another author of YAL who started writing in tenth grade, confesses that her book *Luxuria* "was originally based on a daydream I was having about me being a vampire. The main character Annabell is actually based on a cooler version of me (Henry, 2010)."

An element of rebellion or a striving for independence (often from parents) emerged as a recurring theme across participants with their characters getting kicked out of class, cussing, cutting class, fighting, smoking cigarettes and marijuana, drinking and even bullying. Angel's characters were often working to minimize parental support or entirely on their own. Angel explained why it was important to write and live vicariously (and a little rebelliously) through her typical teenage characters; "I am not a teenager. I do not do teenager things. They go out and get in trouble… I don't do that. I'm a gold child." She was revealing that the person she felt constrained to be by her parents expectations was different than the person she dreamed about being. She told me that her collaborating peer guessed that she was allowing her characters to do what she wished she could do herself. She reports that her collaborating peer admitted to having done the same thing.

Similarly, several of the participant teen writers created characters in order to explore vicariously through them. Angel vicariously plays the role of girlfriend and even mother in her

writing, because she fantasizes about taking on those roles. She made this clear when she said, "They [her characters] get to act how they want to act. I don't really act how I want to act, cause I don't want my mom getting mad. Rick, who anticipated a military career, created soldier-characters who faced harsh combat realities. His writing served multiple purposes, but an imagined rehearsal was certainly one of them. Sweeny's teen character, Shadow, was an avatar character, Shadow was actively defying his sheriff-father by smoking, speeding and cutting school in a way that Sweeny could not, but longed to do to his own father.

Another facet of this exploration is empowerment. Katniss explained that while she lacks confidence to pick herself up and make herself feel better in her day-to-day life, she gave her characters the resilience that she felt she lacked. In re-reading her own work, she would become encouraged. The happy resolution to her characters' troubles and challenges would lead her to believe that she, too, would prevail over her challenging circumstances. When she talked about her characters, it was also evident that Katniss admired some of them. I confirmed this observation with her later, but noted that she was uncritical of her admiration. So, we discussed that it is easier to do the right or admirable thing in fiction as compared to real life. Fiction can stop, think, and even choose to decide later, or it can be edited after time and reflection- unlike real life.

The Reading – Writing Connection

Ernest Hemingway wrote to Bernard Berenson in 1953 reporting that he usually read three or four books at once, and that over the course of a year he probably averaged about a book and a half a day (Brasch & Sigman, 1981). Hemingway is illustrative of the widely held presumption that writers are themselves avid readers. Similarly, Richard Peck wrote an essay entitled, "Nobody But a Reader Ever Became a writer" (p. 80 as cited in Gallo, 1992), and Stephen King insists that a person who does not have time to read, "can't be a writer" (King, 2003).

Perrotta, a successful modern American writer, shares the view that writers must also be readers. Pernotta (n.d.) describes himself as a reader during his high school experience, and he insists that an enthusiastic reader has the best chance of becoming a successful writers. He said, "If they read really passionately, that to me is the one mark that they will be alright" (Perrota, n.d.). However, he ran into aspiring writers who were not avid readers, because he also says, "I am always mystified when I meet writers … who have an urge to express themselves, but they don't want to read. That just doesn't make sense to me" (Perrota, n.d.).

While no one tries to separate or downgrade the important interaction between reading and writing, some counter the absolute necessity that reading must flourish to jumpstart and inform writing. Harste et el (1988) believe that "writing encourages even children in academic trouble in reading to develop and find their own voice, as well as to take (or retake) ownership of the process of literacy itself" (p. 52).

Although not all participants were avid or even regular readers, only Angel characterized herself as not liking to read novels. Angel does enjoy reading Japanese manga. Angel said, "You don't have to read a lot. You just have to get a good imagination."

Atlanta who had early, positive and regular encouragement as a reader, also connected reading and writing differently. She said her writing was fashioned in depth and tone and scope after the books she regularly read. She said, "I don't read stuff that most high school girls do about going to the prom or having boyfriends. Cause I don't read about that, I tend not to write about little stuff like that. Atlanta prefers fantasy and epic adventure stories, and she felt there was a strong connection between the genre regularly read and the one in which one might write.

Both Atlanta and Katniss were avid readers (reading daily and at least two books a month) and had a very strong identity as a reader (based on Facebook posts). Elana, Katniss and Atlanta

had attended monthly book clubs with other teens. Rick was the only one who read mostly nonfiction, but he insisted that he shocked his friend with this information.

All participants mentioned mentor texts in reference to their own writing. Some utilized the story or book they read as an inspiration. Others wrote fan fiction that extended the story or offered alternate scenes. And Angel took inspiration from her assigned reading of *Romeo and Juliet.* From this mentor text, she created contemporary characters who were seated together in the same English class, who are familiar with the play and who happen to also be named Romeo and Juliet.

Sweeny said he was a recent fan of Stephen King and of *The Chronicles of Vladimir Todd* series by Heather Brewer. He noted that King "portrayed the beauty in a lot of stuff," because "he describes it." Sweeny also appreciated what he called "the real factor" in both King's and Brewer's writing. He explained, "There are bad people out there. There are bad things. It's all around us. I don't like books that sugar-coat it. I like books that put it out there."

Fan fiction. Two of the participants, Katniss and Atlanta, were engaged in reading and writing fan fiction through online resources. Katniss, like many fan authors, inserted herself as a character into her fan fiction. Her character could easily be classified as "a mixture of idealized and authentic personality traits" (Black, 2005, p. 123). The fact that Katniss' character admitted based on herself played encouraging or self-sacrificing parts in her stories make a case for seeing them as *Mary Sue* characters. *Mary Sue* characters are characters who "may be loosely based on the author," "often perfect" and have "a tendency to save the day" (Black, 2005, p. 123).

Atlanta was drawn to the stories of epic adventures. She saw them as tales of lives worth living, as they were operating from world-saving and life-changing perspectives rather than being overly focused on petty, mundane entrapments of a short-sighted focus. However, unlike many more typical members of fanfiction online communities, neither Katniss nor Atlanta published their

own stories for other fans to read and review. Atlanta often did not share her stories. But she did start a blog late in her freshman year, and she does post headcanons for characters there. Katniss shared primarily among friends at school, and later she posted on an online writing community, Wattpad. She used this format to invite friends to access her work there.

A strong reading-writing connection is presumed in the arena of adult readers and appears a great advantage for writers of any age. The two honors students who consistently maintained their status on the honor roll were the two avid readers of the group, Katniss and Atlanta. Sweeny and Elana reported reading enthusiastically at times, but had not maintained a consistent reading habit into high school. But several of these teen participants, Rick, Angel and Dakota, did not report reading regularly at any stage of their lives. Two of these teens who did not read regularly or extensively were also weaker writers and had less academic success in English classes and in writing tasks across the curriculum based on anecdotal reports and observations from my own classroom. However, with or without the strong connection and habits of reading, each of these participants identified as a writer and chose to write regularly. This small sample does not allow us to generalize, but it can be said that the identity of the reader is not always strongly tied to that of writer. It is certainly true that story-telling, risk-taking and performances before an audience are nurtured in ways outside of reading.

Conclusion

Stake (2006) states “the cases have their stories to tell… , but the official interest is in the collection of these cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases” (p. vi). The phenomenon of voluntary teen writer is unmistakably marked in these cases by shared preferred genres of writing, motivations to write, and writing as "identity work." This is an interesting contrast to also commonly expressed feelings of isolation and insecurities. Both Atlanta and Angel came to mind

when I read George Orwell's essay "Why I Write" in which he explains that loneliness was a significant factor in his early investments in writing. He said, "I think from the very start my literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated and undervalued." This need to be understood and to connect to others appears among the several motivations revealed by participants and shared among them. But Orwell also admitted that he knew that he had "a facility with words" and through them "a power of facing unpleasant facts," which made me think of Dakota's outward battles with words and her retreat into words as a tool to face unpleasant realities. Orwell continued that his skill with words and his feelings of isolation "created a sort of private world in which [he] could get [his] own back for [his] failure in everyday life." This need to get one's own back and to make up for struggles or failures in everyday life relates strongly to Sweeney's writing and emotions.

Orwell reports his early experiences looking back on them many years later after earning acclaim as an important political writer, but I am left to wonder what an interview with a teenage Orwell would reveal. Gallo (1992) edited a collection of over 80 author's reflections on their lives as writers. Through this he learned that there was a "pronounced difference" in the ways that the adult writers, looking back, discussed early experiences with reading as compared to writing, and they "seemed to value them differently" (p. 149) too. Early experiences with reading were described as pleasurable and often involved supporting adults, while early writing experiences lacked adult involvement and "frequently involved feelings of loneliness, secrecy and resistance" (p. 153). Buying, prominently displaying, and gifting books were seen as evidence that reading was valued, and reading was described as a common activity "knitted into holiday celebrations as well as ordinary routines of daily life" (p. 153). Writing, Gallo (1992) reports, was more often recalled in the context of humiliation and anxiety. Typically, "the feelings surrounding early self-initiated

writing were described as lonely" with both the "occasions and impulses to write emerg[ing] from children's immediate circumstances and feelings" (p. 154). In contrast to the pleasure and happiness associated with reading, these same people "tended to remember writing for the pain and isolation it was meant to assuage" (p. 155).

One of the writers who was also a parent explained that writing was not something she actively encouraged her own children to do. She said, "I think the idea that you must be creative is sort of wrenching it out of the natural. It always seemed to me that it was a natural thing, if it was going to come" (p. 157). Adding to a vague sense that writing is supposed to be a natural pursuit of just some people, Gallo (1992) remarks that it is not surprising that developing an identity as a writer can be "rather difficult" (p. 158). In fact, Gallo (1992) reports a "reticence" on the part of successful authors to name themselves as writers when they were younger. This he attributed, in part, to the fact that they did not see writing "as an end in itself" (p. 159), and they seemed to perceive writing by adults as being "more strictly in the purview of adults" (p. 160), because it was associated with earning money, paying bills, and maintaining communication with distant family relations.

These young writers were forthcoming and often passionate in talking about their experiences with writing and about naming themselves writers. They shared a clear emphasis in explaining the importance that writing played in each of their lives. Their revealed motivations for writing are more than interesting. They represent these participants not only writers in an out-of-school routine who may offer insight into ways of motivating classroom writers. They represent themselves as students, "as actors and agents, not simply as the objects of the educational process" (Bourne, 2002, p. 241). And as students and actors and agents they should be recognized as voices contributing to the 'heteroglossia' (Bakhtin, 1981) presumed to be present in the classroom as

elsewhere in society (Bourne, 2002). With blended and diverse input from students, the classroom is not a place in which students are "merely given or denied access to valued, official forms of discourse" (Bourne, 2002, p. 241). Instead, "the classroom is presented as a place in which a variety of discourses and discursive practices are constructed, maintained and reproduced, and within which alternative positions are made available to children" resisting the "imposition from the more powerful (the teacher) on the less powerful (the pupils)" (Bourne, 2002, p. 241).

The point to which these students are bringing me through this analysis of their perspectives is not new, but one that has become out of focus. In it the broad goals or purposes held by students, are implicated more than the narrow and task-specific goals relative to an immediate outcome (Eccles et al., 1983). Fletcher (1992) gets at writers' purposes, as he writes to explicate *What a Writer Needs* (the title of his book). He said, "You do not learn to write by going through a series of preset writing exercises. You learn to write by grappling with a real subject that truly matters to you" (p. 4). The focus is on the human need to make meaning, to record his or her emotions, ideas, questions, or thoughts in some format. Writing is an excellent tool for demonstrating what one knows, but the desire to write and even to read is deeper than academics; it is akin to the desire to communicate.

Gee (1999) explores this deeper drive in his discussion of efforts one might invest toward gaining a Discourse. Gee (1999) says, "If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools and places together in such a way that others recognize you as a particular who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what(activity) here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse" (p. 18.) Gee (1999) complicates and enriches our sense of interactions (inclusive of literacy acts), as he calls us to see a given Discourse as the contextualized integration of language skills and personal values and beliefs akin to a "dance" (p. 19). Then he insists that whatever

Discourse is developed or displayed, it is not to be understood as a "unit" with clear boundaries (p. 19), and it must still be validated by the perceptions of others.

Academic writing is the focus and the priority of CCSS that will shape many classrooms. While academic writing represents more than one Discourse, the participants of this study have clarified for me that all academic writing is underwritten by diverse social Discourses, cultural understandings, and diverse sets of values and beliefs that our students bring with them and grow among themselves outside of or alongside our instructional influence. Academic writing cannot be fully separated or understood apart from out-of-school literacies, because these private or social literacy acts are foundational and even more revealing of the individual's set of values, beliefs, culture, self-concept as a writer or participant within a given (or multiple) Discourse(s).

This essence of these ideas was most succinctly stated by another qualitative researcher who made deep inquiry in teen practices, Ma'ayn (2012), who says, "Literacy is social and therefore is relational and transactional by nature. Students do not achieve literacy as if it is a checklist of benchmarks that one has attained; they use literacies to make meaning in their lives" (p. 16). This rich conclusion serves to highlight several important facets of this discussion of literacy and writing. Cognitive skills alone cannot empower students to write, because literacy is relational and redefined by our relationships with each other. Use of literacies may turn introspective, but it is first modeled and offered in supported social exchange. In a grand context, one might consider our students' relationships with those closest to them and with the big world. Through reading one can come to know our world and others in it as it is (or as it is/was perceived to be), but only through choosing our own words, to carry our own thoughts, and to make our own choices, can someone be said to be thinking for him or herself. And in thinking for himself or herself, one learns to make, refine and share meaning with others.

Melinee Lesley's (2012) research into a Third Space builds on Scribner and Cole's insight above and add hope. Lesley created a Third Space with a group of young women of color who also fell into the classifications of low income and academically at risk. Lesley's (2012) summation of the work accomplished by the group and the transformations experienced as a result, at least in part, of this unique and supportive group follow and are challenging and inspiring.

> Virtually all of the girls evolved in their writing to present more agentive personas about themselves as writers within the group. When I asked Kecia what she had learned through participation in the writing group, she stated matter-of-factly that she never thought she could write before. Other spaces or contexts for literacy did not present the same evidence. Thus, a Third Space setting where identities and literacies could be "made and re-made over time" was vital (Wissman, 2011, p. 410 [as cited in Lesley (2012)]. In the Third Space Tara could stop being a bully, Felicia could process her relationship with her mother, Isabel could trust an audience with her writing. Kecia could examine sexual harassment, Kiara could confide a secret, Veronica could confront racism, and Amber could change her mind about the futility of her life. In the Third Space at-risk adolescent girls could rename their lived experiences and construct a new literacy identity. (p. 136)

The context of this study was not a Third Space, and the range of view of this study did not allow one to consider transformations over time. But through the voices of these seven participants, the reader is prompted to consider the importance that each young writer placed on his or her role as a writer and the meaningful experiences each had enjoyed with personal writing. Participants of this study were asked to complete the sentence, "Writing is like…" Sweeny said writing was like a dream. He explained, "You live out everything you've ever wanted. So, my writing is like a dream I wake up smiling from."

Chapter 6: Implications and Significance of Study

Current Political Context

Chapter six sets forth some implications and significance of this study, considering the purposes of literacy as set forth in the current political and pedagogical pressures that direct schooling in this country. Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are poised to make significant changes in the classroom writing practice of teachers and the resulting classroom experience of students. Additionally, CCSS may already be influencing the way teachers and students value personal writing. Because the personal writing that the participants of this study are doing is relevant to literacy development, personal development and academic potential, it is important to consider the culture of academe as it touches upon, includes or influences personal writing. And it is essential that writing, in our conceptualization, in our educational policies and in our classroom practice, is not reduced to a mere demonstration of skills and the evidence of schooling.

In the new reign of CCSS, narrative and personal writing are being relegated to the far corners of the classroom. CCSS advocates point to teachers' over-reliance on personal and narrative writing in the past, but an over-correction that fails to value narrative and personal writing will also have negative effects. Current CCSS training materials for teachers explains that except for college application essays, students will seldom be required to write personal narratives in college or the workplace (Rothman, 2012).

Researchers and policy makers are reminding educators to increase rigor through a focus on cognitive strengths of their students. Noted researchers (e.g., Graham & Perin, 2007) advocate a shared focus on specific goals for writing and strategy instruction to improve writing quality and efficacy. Struggling writers are best supported through procedural prompting (Graham, 1997) and feedback that orients students to see or assess their own progress toward specific writing strategies.

Such support and praise builds students' confidence in the prescribed strategies and builds confidence in an ongoing cycle of improved writing skills (Borkowski, Weyhing, & Carr, 1988; Graham & Harris, 2000). These factors are particularly critical in improving self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation because developing writers realize that they are capable of improving their skills (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). The greater the students' sense that strategies are useful and that the prescribed goals are attainable, the more likely they will be to make use of them. Strategy use, in turn, will promote skill acquisition (Bandura, 1977; Graham 2000).

But, relevance is also an important key to rigor. Students progress more successfully through materials for which they believe there is reason to know and use (Alverman, 2002; Wilhelm and Smith, 2002). Even cognitive theorists (Ashman, 2002) distill best practices to include only strategies that are both functional and meaningful to students, ones in which students themselves have confidence. A succinct summary of effective cognitive instruction also includes an emphasis on lucid, considerate and enjoyable instructional materials and efforts exerted toward matching the instructional strategy and the learner's perceptions (Ashman, 2002).

If we stand quietly by while personal and narrative writing are marginalized in school, we will lose something worthy. I fear that while writing as a skill is becoming highly valued under the new CCSS, writing as an art has suddenly and already lost status. Personal writing is personal expression not unlike painting or dance or musical composition. Storytelling and personal writing are also tools that empower teens to take an active role in constructing and reflecting on their own identity. Sweeny pointed this out to me when he talked about how his writing helped him synthesize life and academic input to gain insight. He said, "I love learning how the world really is and putting that in my perspective." If we as educators aspire to the highest realization of what the CCSS are pushing us to help students achieve, it would look very much like what Sweeny just said

in his own words. If we neglect this rich avenue of helping students express and process all the input of life including academic input, we most certainly will affect what they are able to achieve. Argumentative and informative writing cannot be expected to accomplish these same ends.

Writer as an Ideal Versus Student Writer

Yagelski (2000) engages what he understands to be the difference between a Writer, a romanticized cultural ideal of individual literacy achievement, and the student writer, "a flawed individual," or one who is "a collection of particular and often discreet writing skills or lack thereof" (p. 35). Positioning students as Yagelski's "student-writer" drives literacy instruction to be a teacher-assisted pursuit of a set of skills to be learned. These skills, then, are taught "in ways that ignore or even deny context," and "the successful student writer, then, is one who has mastered these skills" (p. 35). "The student writer is thus understood as a kind of faceless individual who possesses (or does not possess) these required skills that are universally applicable rather than as a member of a language-using community, or perhaps more accurately as a language user moving across the boundaries of various discourse communities" (Yagelski, 2000, p. 35). Yagelski (2000) points out that this occurs despite the fact that our professional discourse about writing largely takes for granted that writing is "context-bound, and is inherently cultural and social" a situation which he refers to as an "infuriating paradox" (p. 35).

Formal literacy instruction is built around assumptions that literacy is a collection of "cognitive abilities which are promoted and assessed through schooling" (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 14). The concern is not that stronger readers or writers can be developed through focused attention or even direct instruction on inherent cognitive skills necessary for literacy, but that schooling (and writing in particular) cannot default to a primary focus on decontextualized skills irrelevant to the student writer's perceived needs and diverse purposes for writing or improving writing.

All of the participants in this study are engaging in narrative writing. The writing that they do (narrative and otherwise) outside of school for their own purposes is important to them, and presumably good for them in terms of advancing their skill development as writers. For example, Angel's modern Romeo and Juliet story reveals deep literary analysis. She took a modern Western cultural re-imagining of the classic tragedy by not allowing it to end in tragedy. She modernized the theme by considering characters who might face a similar love- or – life decision in a different context. She developed multiple characters that paralleled Shakespeare's original cast and revealed them in their dialogue and actions. She changed the point of view of the story by making Juliet the narrator. Further, she personalized it by shaping the characters through their likes and dislikes and description of their voices and appearance. In another story, she creates characters of even greater depth. She uses dramatic irony in that she reveals aspects of the character to the reader before they are evident to the narrating character herself. In an excerpt from a third story, she starts briefly with an unreliable narrator who comes to realize his predicament. The surprising and skillful tone is both sad and flirty and is developed with an interplay of prose and dialogue. She also includes imagery and purposeful and effective sentence fragments. That's impressive!

Such self-motivated and engaging practice is also potentially lost if fiction writing has no academic standing. Inside a classroom, her writing would position her to benefit from a teacher's input to help her label and acknowledge these choices that she made. Such discussion and labeling could help her more critically read future texts and be more intentional about these traits in her own future writing. A teacher could also connect her to published authors whose modern adaptations of Shakespeare's work are meeting with great success.

Further, Yagelski (2000) concludes that in school "literacy is defined as a set of decoding and encoding skills and a means of demonstrating specified — and sanctioned — knowledge…" (p.

36). This lays claim not only to the process and purposes, but also to the content itself. Relevance and rigor are frequently touted in the current climate of CCSS reform. But relevance is somehow skewed or constrained to mean the reach that a teacher makes to connect topics of interest or familiarity to students to the planned focus and instruction. Such reaching on the part of the teacher and such relevance are valuable, but how can relevance be exclusionary of the students' interests and agendas, even those that intersect the target skill set?

Oppressive Literacy Practices

Yagelski (2000) refers to local acts of literacy as something apart from one's abilities to participate in mainstream discourses. In teaching a group of inmates, he contrasts the inmates need to "write themselves into the mainstream" of society alongside "their lack of the kind of literacy skills valued in that mainstream" (p. 45). Yagelski (2000) recognized that "writing was a way [for these inmates] to tell their powerful and often disturbing stories, to claim a voice for themselves, to validate themselves, to gain status as students; it was a way for them to voice their concerns and ideas about the problems that had directly shaped their lives: drugs, injustice, racism, poverty" (p. 45). Despite their need, these men remained marginalized and unheard. Yagelski (2000) acknowledged the writing that these inmates did in his writing course as well as their writing of letters or their written participation in the many steps of the legal system as "unseen local acts… [that] draw on, resist, intersect with and deviate from official literacies, yet they are no less vital to the lives of these men" (p. 48). He asserted that to ignore these local but vital literacy acts and "to ignore the fact that official literacies can marginalize as well as empower" does not help these men gain official literacies, but instead is guilty of perpetuating "oppressive literacy practices" (p. 48).

Further as he reviewed his practice as a teacher in traditional settings as well as in prison, he concluded that he, along with other teachers, "need(s) ways of thinking about literacy — and

about [any student] as a literate being — that enable himself [and other teachers] to understand her writing not only in terms of mainstream literacy but also in terms of her struggle to maintain control over her life" (p. 54).

Marginalized Literacy Practices

Similarly, Lesley (2012) reflected on the marginalized literacy practices of the young low income women from ethnic minorities that she studied. Because their local literacy acts were frequently outside of school and commonly erased or hidden from adult review within school, there was no opportunity to acknowledge or nurture the potential that they represented. It is significant that these and other at risk students are neither viewed nor supported as "literate being(s)" seeking to express themselves. In fact, Leslie reports that they "remove themselves as much as possible from the equation of writing in school" (Lesley, 2012, p. 134). To call attention to their unmet human and academic needs, Lesley's book about them names them *Invisible Girls*. It is sad and frustrating when students do nothing to build their academic skills including writing, but it is tragic when what they do does not count.

Learners as Stakeholders in Education

Yagelski (2000) reflects on former students for whom schooling did not help them achieve. He reduces the complexity of all the factors that structure schooling to the question, "Does literacy matter?" Yagelski poses this question to our students rather than to us as teachers or researchers or theorists. Does literacy matter in light of an adolescent's "ongoing effort to understand herself and make sense of her life in the context of family troubles, adolescent struggles, social dysfunction, institutional pressures and a desire to belong?" (p. 161). Does literacy matter "in terms of [the student's] efforts to negotiate the day-to-day challenges of life in contemporary capitalist America?" (p. 161). And does literacy matter "in terms of [the student's] attempts to address social

and political injustices that she sees as limiting that life?" (p. 161). Yagelski (2000) calls literacy to answer Paulo Freire's standard of "fully human," which he elaborates to define as "someone who exercises some measure of control over her social and economic existence in the face of obvious institutional and financial obstacles and less obvious social and cultural limitations; one who claims some measure of autonomy within a tangled network of social and cultural forces; one who struggles to accept herself even as she demands acceptance from others" (p. 161).

Also Daniel Pink (2009) has rocked the corporate world and captured the attention of many through his research and best-selling book. In it he challenges our assumptions about motivation and success by pointing out that the most important predictors of high-quality work are autonomy, mastery, and purpose. So, if our goal is for our students to read and write with greater autonomy and purpose progressing toward mastery and to grow as individuals who are empowered and encouraged to construct a self that is fully human, what would school look like?

Ted Sizer (1997) gave an insightful answer to this question at his keynote speech stating that "schools are to provoke young people to grow up intellectually, to think hard and resourcefully and imaginatively about important things." Research then is needed to break down this big idea and to test strategies and school philosophies that facilitate this vision. Additionally, time, attention and money spent in Third Spaces which solicit and support academic potential without the traditional school accountability may prove to be time and money well-spent. The participants in this study found outlets and encouragement and some very occasional productive feedback from peers and/or adults, but their willingness and even eagerness to be interviewed, to be acknowledged and heard as writers is strong evidence that such a space might be welcome.

As these schools of thought converge, there is at least an acknowledgement of the individual as a thinker. Individuals are considered as stakeholders and as partakers of some existing discourse.

Individuals are seen as both unique and identified by gender, race, ethnicity, religion, affiliation or socioeconomic status. All of these distinctions play into what the individual is invited to write, say, read, watch, join, and do in the context of school. Schools have sanctioned literacy practices and either offer or fail to offer support of school personnel, time and resources that empower students and promote their literacies. Also, there is the acknowledgement that teachers enact their philosophy of literacy (and education broadly) whether they have had the occasion and prompting to make that philosophy explicit to themselves and others and whether or not they have had the opportunity to consider the potentially restrictive or empowering role that literacy might take in the lives of their students.

Yagelski (2000) borrows Margaret Himley's (1991) term of "shared territory" to describe the student-created text itself, because in writing it, "persons compose and express their individuation within, through, and against culture" (p. 5). Yagelski (2000) asserts then that the student text is about who the student is and can be, as much as it is about what he or she wants to say.

Yagelski (2000) expects teachers to push beyond merely accounting for the student writer's self-interest in terms of trying to become familiar with and understanding toward students' life situations "in order to work more effectively with students"(p. 106). He believes that students in their efforts to meet course requirements and complete academic writing assignments (including but not exclusively personal narratives) are not "merely negotiating the complexities of academic discourses," but they are "also engaging in acts of self-construction through writing" (p. 106).

Purposes of Education

In the second edition of *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in their own Self-Interest* (2009), Finn addresses the competing tensions around the purposes of education in a democratic society. Finn views this tension as "…the clash between citizenship rights, particularly social rights, on the one hand, and free-market economy and social class on the other" (p. 258). While Finn's views cause readers to consider the purposes of an education in terms of a divide and the common practices of education as perpetuating a divide with an emphasis that is overtly societal and political, he is also pointing to an engagement and a responsibility that is inextricably personal. Finn (2000/2009) believes that a social democracy can only maintain a way of life that is beneficial to its people, if the people themselves become guardians of their society and mindful of the forces that forge their society. Such a social democracy empowers individual citizens to pursue domestic tranquility and to act to restrict governments and institutions from oppression of any of its citizens, otherwise we would be left with "[l]aws, rules, and regulations interpreted and enforced by a professional class of politicians [who] have proven inadequate in securing and protecting social rights of ordinary citizens" (p. 175).

CCSS, as the face of education to come, seems to overlook consideration of education as the pursuit of an individual driven by his or her own interests or concerns, except where money and education correlate. More money and opportunities for advancement are most often in the best interest of any individual. However, one could draw on Graff's (1987) long view from history which considers the intended versus the realized impact of literacy. Graff (1987) challenges what he termed "the literacy myth." This "myth" is deeply rooted in the belief that literacy will lead to individual and social advancement. It is important to note that the entire focus is on economic gains rather than personal gains that result from education. This is even more clear when one considers

the diminished standing or omission of personal and narrative writing in the entire scope of schooling.

Elbow (1995) tells a truth about the way writing functions in the classroom. He explains that students are positioned to have to write *up*, because their audience is the teacher who already knows more about the subject under study, and worse, already knows what he or she expects to hear in the paper the student has produced. This context can be intimidating and as such reduces the writer's subtext to, "Is this okay?" Further, it reduces writing to testing. The present context and coming priorities, educators should be prompted to consider what the process of writing and the dispositions of the student writer have the possibility of becoming.

In addition to writing in a manner that values and engages the personal experiences of students, Yagelski (2000) explained that "when it came to reading literary text, personal experiences seemed irrelevant; so, too were the social and cultural contexts within which those experiences occurred" (p. 168). What is taught implicitly in a high school English classroom with the "work as literary art" approach is "text as … [a] container of predetermined meaning" (p.168). What's lost then is the opportunity to guide students toward deeper, more critical understanding associated with texts. So, instead of understanding how Mark Twain's text "functioned as a work of literary art," students could use the same text to understand "how experience mediates the construction of meaning (how, for example, the students' own attitudes about and recent experiences with racial tension might shape their reading)" (p. 168). Students have the opportunity to see meaning "as a function of the constructive activities of reading and writing within specific social, cultural, political, and historical contexts" (p. 168), instead of being relegated to a "passive, alienated stance toward extended text" (Bloome, 1993, p. 146). Viewing reading

from such a stance is as limiting as an orientation which understands writing as the straightforward transfer of ideas or information through text (Yagelski, 2000).

In his college composition course, Peter Elbow (1995), a teacher and a composition theorist, pushes to empower writers to write, to be "self-absorbed," to "see themselves at the center of the discourse" (p. 79). This position is a sharp contrast to the traditional tone of academic writing which positions the writer to be "personally modest and intellectually scrupulous" and to "see themselves at the periphery" of the content about which they write, even "skeptical and distrustful" (p.79). Elbow (1995) invites his students to "take their own ideas too seriously, to think that they are the first person to think of their idea and be all wrapped up and possessive about it," and to "write as though they are a central speaker at the center of the universe" (p. 80). Elbow (1995) labels these acts as sins acknowledging that they are more than controversial; they are most often condemned. While Elbow does not see these nurtured writer-centered stances as a finished product for college educated professional, he staunchly defends their place in the process of growing writers and thinkers.

Suggestions for Future Research

As I look daily across my own classroom, I see students engaged, students struggling and some students opting out. Ken Robinson (2010), noted thinker in the field of education said, "…so many people are opting out of education," because education is not conceptualized, offered or received in a manner that "resonates" with them or "feeds their souls." I do not think that research will find answers that will ensure that all my students will engage and grow in the content and skills that I so value and try to share. But I do think we should consider if we are looking for the right indicators. Seeking to resonate with students' needs and aspirations as people seems like the right thing to do.

Peter Elbow seems to concur with Robinson's idea of resonating with students. Elbow (1995) puts forth his ideas about what a writing course might accomplish. He proposes, "That it's a reasonable goal for my students to end up saying, 'I feel like I am a writer: I get deep satisfaction from discovering meaning by writing – figuring out what I think and feel through putting down words; I naturally turn to writing when I am perplexed – even when I am just sad or happy; I love to explore and communicate with others through writing; writing is an important part of my life" (p. 72). But Elbow expresses tension when this goal of feeling like a writer is viewed alongside the goal of becoming an academic. Elbow (1995) expressed this idea of becoming an academic as a student saying, "I feel like an academic: reading knowledgeable books, wrestling my way through important issues with fellows, figuring out hard questions – these activities give me deep satisfaction and they are central to my sense of who I am" (p. 76). What is interesting to me is that despite the tension expressed, both the writer and the academic embrace identities and gain satisfaction from their pursuits. In either case there is ownership, desire and development.

As writing becomes more prevalent (and possibly more constrained) in the high school student's school day, as it is expected to under the directives of CCSS beginning this academic year 2013-2014, several questions suitable for future research arise for me as follows:

1. How will students' personal writing be acknowledged, valued, and affected by these classroom cultural changes?
2. How do adolescent students delineated by various tracks (i.e. standard, college-prep, AP, etc.) talk about the literate demands being made of them? How do these same students talk about themselves in the context of literate acts?

3. What will the student receive for his or her effort? Not merely what grade or even reinforcement will students receive, but what sense of self or shaping influences will be enacted or offered in this context?
4. Will the writing be received as merely a technical product for which a checklist will be sufficient in grading? If so, what does this do to the persons being composed and expressed in their writing?
5. How will content-area teachers fare in this role, and how will they change the classroom writing experience and contribute to the overall conversation about developing student writers?
6. Will the students' personal experience be valued and validated as a relevant filter for reading or writing?

Technology and the Future of Writing Instruction

Also while technologies have not been a focus of this study, technology use was an emerging factor for several of the participants. Also, it is impossible to consider the future of writing apart from considering the ways in which new and emerging technologies are impacting literacy practices of teens and adults. Buflin and North (2007) state that "young people's language practices and their engagement with various forms of digital culture do not belong to separate domains," but should be seen as "intimately connected and perhaps even one and the same" (p. 247). Besides merely becoming prominent, the evolution of technology for the writer reiterates the idea that education can and should resonate with learners. Alvermann (2010) references the "shifting terrain" of composition practices as a result of evolving technologies. In this new terrain, educators are learning to share control with students and leverage students' knowledge about

modern media and popular culture. Alvermann (2010) sees "the challenge to educators" will be to become "pedagogically nimble" not just to keep up with new technologies, but also to reposition themselves to "support the literacy learning of adolescents" not just in classrooms, but "across spaces of home, community and school" (p. 6). The immediately relevant underlying assumption then is that teachers should value the processes they do not always direct and support the development of products they may not always evaluate.

Similarly, Michael Wesch (2007/ 2009), a professor and a cultural anthropologist, shares a perspective that not only fits the evolving technological interface that learners have with information and with others through the internet, but it also fits with the idea of supporting our students to value and pursue their own interests. Wesch makes a strong case for why educators should work to foster foundational dispositions of learning – specifically curiosity and imagination. Wesch explains that digital information is not pushed toward our students in manner consistent with our classrooms; "instead," he says, "the new media landscape is a pull environment" (Waters, 2011). So, creativity and imagination fuel our students' need to know and willingness to produce. What's more, according to Wesch, is that if schooling should "shift away from the idea that we need to stuff students' head with information," and instead, concentrate on "making them truly knowledge-able," then, "learning becomes joyous" (Waters, 2011). So, whether our students are writing in traditional or digital literacies, the exploration and research may need to be focused on the stance of educators and the extent to which it facilitates the growth of individuals through their personal interests as well as the prescribed priorities of their curriculum.

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Appendices

Appendix A -Interview Protocols

First Interview Protocol

Students were asked to generate a pseudonym, give their age, grade, gender, race and school. The date of the interview was recorded and the following questions were offered generally in the order listed, but not strictly.

1. You are participating in this research because you described yourself as a writer. How often do you typically write? _____ per (week, month)
2. Talk about the writing you have been doing.
3. Describe where you like to write.
4. Tell me about your time spent writing. What is that like?
5. Talk about how you feel before you writing. What about after?
6. In what ways do you talk about or share what you've written (if any)?
   Did you imagine sharing your writing with this/these person(s)?
   Does your idea of audience change from one piece of writing to the next?
7. Do you seek input/feedback for your writing-in-progress? How? Why?
8. Why is writing important to you?
9. Talk about how or when you first began to think of yourself as a writer.
10. Finish this thought and elaborate: Writing is like_____
11. Talk about writing and your future.
    What about writing in your past?
12. Describe a type of or a specific setting for writing that you do not enjoy.
13. Talk about what others have said about your writing recently or in the past.
14. How is your writing like or unlike that of others you know?
15. Tell me about your friends or other young people that you know who do not like to write.
16. If you have it, read aloud part of something you have written and talk about it.
    Why did you write this?
    Why did you choose this piece of writing to share?
17. This is (fiction) (non-fiction) (poetry) (journal) (other). Is this form comfortable?
    Is it typical of your writing?
18. How did you decide to write?
19. Did you share this piece of writing or ideas from this writing with others?

Second Interview Protocol

Having reviewed the transcript from the first interview, specific questions unique to each participant were added to the following planned questions:

1. Talk about your experiences with writing in which the writing took top billing among your priorities of the day.
2. Do you find yourself engrossed in the task of writing in a manner that blocks out other concerns?
3. Talk about occasions (if any) in which you have surprised yourself as a writer.
4. Think aloud and compare the importance of the writing process as compared to the written product.
5. What have been the strongest or most recurring themes in your writing this year? Overall?
6. Compare your thinking before and after a typical writing session. What roles does writing play in thinking?
7. Do you see any connection between writing and creativity?
8. For you, is writing more like descending into a deep personal space or emerging from somewhere into a well-lit easily view-able place? Explain.
9. Talk about the importance of words in your writing and in your life?
10. For you, are your experiences in writing in any way revealing TO YOU?
    Do you find clarifying or Aha moments occur?
11. Do you feel that people know you better through your writing?
12. Do you see any connection between writing and taking risks?
13. In what way(s) have you been shaped or influenced by others who write?
14. Describe your level of confidence as a writer? As a person? Are they related?
15. Does your writing come from the mind of heart or elsewhere?
16. What question(s) should I have asked about your experiences as a writer that I have not already asked?
17. What have you learned (about yourself or about writing) from your participation in this research?
18. What early learning experiences did you have as a writer?
19. What are your reading habits?

Appendix B Initial Coding Terms – Level 1

Table 3. Unordered collection of initial codes			
Collecting writing	Emotion- driven writing	Happy/satisfying	Writing as coping
Grief/sadness expressed	Goal-driven writing	BLOCKED/hindered	Others' enjoyment
Unveiling an expected or future self	Focus/ FLOW/ loss of awareness of time	Art/drawing/music/dance related creative work	Read-write connection
Writing as a chore	Tacit belief	New projects	Social
disconnect with peers b/c writing	Affirmations for writing	Writing to /savor sustain feelings/ dreams	Teacher influence/feedback
Writing is not stigmatized/weird	Risk-free/seeking safety	Genre (romance, poetry, history, horror, nonfiction,)	Vicarious lives/ enlarged or better self
Hidden writing/ private	Success/ failure	Effect of writing	Resistance/ rebellion
Fan-fiction	Audience	Identity	Control
Layers of self or hidden self or false self	Developmental perspective	Partnered writing	Change outcomes of real life
Writing as urgent/important	Frequency, time	Unplotted/unplanned spontaneous	Relief/ release/ stress relief
Idea-driven writing	Imagined script/ reported inner dialogue	Writing as entertainment/ escape	Confidence/ feelings of competence
Cause-driving writing	Writing for connection	Shared writing	Self-assessment
Traits of created characters	Writing not fully under the control of the writer	Pre-formed ideas prior to writing	Perceptions of writing as challenge
Seeking acceptance	Humor	High risk behaviors	Self-critique
Seeking input/ critique/feedback	Ownership of process/ product	Conditions conducive to writing	Assignment writing/ school expectations
Character/ more empowered than self	Intentionality /strategic metacognition	Related to real life experiences	Reading/writing disconnect
Role models	Feedback	Clarity resulting from writing	My future and writing
Surface issues in writing	Naming me a writer	Motivations to write	Known through my writing
Peer support	writing has an effect on my real life	Avatar character (traits)	Story structure (dialogue, sub-plot,)
Social motivation	Gender roles	Reading like a writer	Routines

Appendix C – Level 1 Coding - Converging Ideas on the writing itself

Table 4. Defining Writing and Examples of Relevant Coding		
Category	Definition	Examples of Level 1 Codes
The writing itself	products reviewed or descriptions of products created by participants and offered by them as examples of their writing including samples read aloud, handwritten work left with me or writing posted online and accessed by invitation.	recurring themes, gender roles diverse genres: romance, poetry, history, nonfiction – but primarily narrative fan fiction related to real life experiences surface issues in writing traits of created characters (i.e. high risk behaviors, related to self, brave, heroic, peace-weaver, etc.) affirmations for writing

Table 5. Coded Example of Participant Writing		
Examples from transcripts (portions of student text are summarized)	Coding	
"Why hadn't they thought of breaking open the widow in the first place?" Jonny murmured. "They've probably been too scared to think logically. It's a miracle that Dylan was able to figure that out when he did, otherwise we would have never found them." Allisa replied. Jonny simply shrugged and nodded. The trapped teens were set free by their friends. Each emerged and fell to the ground. The guys laughed with relief. Lizzy "remained on the ground curled in a tight ball." Allisa attempted to comfort her, but "her mouth remained mutely agape." Then Lizzy became the third (or fourth) victim. Elizabeth let out an earsplitting shriek. Allisa jumped up and stumbled back. Everyone watched as her jaw seemed to fall right off as she screamed, blood spurting everywhere. William ran off behind the van and vomited while Dylan looked away and began to cry, as if he was visualizing Jane's death. Joseph started right at her, his gaze completely blank with horror. Allisa grabbed Pib's sleeve and began to shake. Pib stared at her as well, totally speechless. Allisa suggests calling 9-1-1, but no one does. The teens begin to realize that they are trapped whether they are inside the house or not. Dylan's attempt to run to the van for escape is thwarted because the van is mysteriously locked. They again consider the police, but fear that they might be blamed for what has happened because no one would believe what really happened. Another friend dies and one is still missing. Allisa talks her remaining friends into launching a search for the lost friend and quells conflicts as they arise between them.	Narrative writing Genre/ horror dialogue Character traits – avatar is level-headed/ leader Vicarious lives/ enlarged or better self Avatar is compassionate Avatar character in the center of the action, affected but not overcome Avatar – foil for less able peers/characters Avatar character is level-headed/leader Avatar character – comforter Avatar – brave	IDENTITY WORK

Then the plot thickens as one teen unexpectedly attacks another in a sudden rage outside the view of the others. The resulting death is blamed on the Demon. The crew becomes suspicious. Allisa bravely helps attend to the wound and confronts the suspected attacker. In a panic the teen villain attacks and chokes Allisa. A friend steps in with a crowbar, and Allisa is saved. To comfort the now tearful Allisa, Joseph puts his arm around her. She cries into his shoulder. Then, "he puts his hand under her chin and lift[s] her face, looking into her saddened blue eyes." They sit "staring into each other's eyes, with fear and desperation," and then "Joseph slowly leaned in and kissed her, offering promises that "it's going to be okay."	Sub-plot Avatar - romantic partner Character traits - Joseph – tender, faithful	

Appendix D – Level 1 Coding - Converging Ideas on the writers' habits

Table 6. Definition of Writers' Habits and Sample Codes		
Category	Definition	Examples of Level 1 Codes
Habits of writers	Behaviors reported during writing or routines, structures, supports, spaces, timing, duration, actions, or trends related to writing reported by participants including reading, planning, editing, collecting, sharing,	Routines, space, frequency of writing, habit of starting new projects seeking feedback for their writing conditions conducive to writing; experiences writer's block/hindrances collectors of their own writing self-critique, editing and attention to surface errors experience of "flow" -sustained; loss of time; episodic – spontaneous, emotion-driven, idea-driven, urgent, and incomplete pre-formed ideas prior to writing; goal-driven writing writing not fully under the control of the writer partnered writing indications of metacognition, self-regulation or intentionality of participants as writers, participants' notions of audience, the reading-writing connection writing as connected to other creative outlets

Table 7. Coded Example of Transcript for Writers' Habits	
Examples from the text	Coding
Jill – What's the difference between a time when writing went well and when writing was tough? You said you get writer's block. Angel – I don't like that, because then I don't want to work on it more. I don't know how to continue it from there. Cause I get the beginning, and I get the ending; I just don't know the middle, the details and everything that goes in between. Jill – How often does that occur – what you call writer's block? Angel – a lot. Yeah. I get to certain points and I just can't - know how to continue it on. And then I usually either go to a past story or make a new one. Jill – In what ways do you talk about or share your writing? Angel – My friends. I say I've wrote a story. And they say like – Can we read it? Then they'll read it but of course, they make fun of my spelling. They definitely do. They'll end up fixing it for me sometimes. Jill – So they tease you about your spelling?	"Writer's Block" Planning (advanced details; seeing the end) "Writer's Block" = New project SHARE (peers) surface errors peer support Feedback (positive/ peer) Other's enjoyment

Angel - They go like Oh, this great. But then they get mad whenever I stop – like in mid-sentence or something. They're like, continue. Write more. Especially my friend who read this recently. She got mad. She was like, Finish it! Jill – How does that make you feel? Angel – It's sort of funny. But I want to finish it more for her, so she can read more.	Social Motivation

Appendix E – Level 1 Coding - Converging Ideas on the Writers' Motivation to Write

Table 8. Definition and Sample Codes for Writers' Motivations		
Category	Definition	Examples of Level 1 Codes
Motivation to write	Clues both in the writing and in their discussion of writing that explicitly express or point to tacit motivation to write or to share the writing	Writing Confidence (feelings of competence); ownership of the process and product in writing (autonomy/ self-determination) perceptions of writing as low risk or risk-free (task economy/cost) humor, grief, sadness, stress, happiness, satisfaction, success, failure, etc. seeking acceptance through writing or as a character of my writing Motivations Social – draw others in; enjoyment for others; partners; connection Relief/Release of emotion; as a coping mechanism Distraction from stress Control – resistance/ rebellion; change outcomes; (relatedness) (autonomy) Vicarious Adventures (avatars) (self-actualization) Writing to savor or sustain feelings/dreams and connections to literary worlds or characters (meaningfulness/interest)

Table 9. Coded Example of Transcript for a Writer's Motivation	
Examples from transcript	Coding
Jill – How was that [Stephen King's Chronicles of Vladimir Todd]?]	Reading-writing connection
Sweeny –I loved them!! It showed the beauty of the world on how he drove to be human. He wanted to be human. He wanted… He loved the sights. He loved nature. But, on the other hand, there were bad people. There was bad stuff. We all end up gonna somehow get tied into, or somebody close to us is gonna get tied up into. It, at least, they didn't sugar-coat anything it. Even though it was a teenager book, it still was… They just put it out there. If you didn't like it, you didn't like it. It was the real world, and that what I like. I just can't get into books that sugar-coat it. If they don't have something kind of real world, problems or real world characters.	Values Authentic Characters – flawed Writing belongs to the writer Audience – not a driving force
Jill – There are a lot of books out there now… that have a truer voice. They sound a little more like real life. OK, so you go from stressed to relaxed, and writing makes that difference? When did you discover that writing made that difference?	Reading – writing

Sweeny – Probably, once my parents started… I started to see a change. It really helped me. I've always wrote. But once I started seeing a change, it was sad. Last year was really hard for me. I was depressed a lot. Once I realized that when I write, I feel better, I started to write more and more. It made me feel better and better every time I wrote. It just…	connection Relief [It helped me.] Sadness/ Depressed Relief [when I write, I feel better] Relief = more writing
Jill – Why do you think the story came out fictional instead of this is me telling my feelings more like a journal?	Narrative
Sweeny – Because of who I am. I've always … I know it's not right, but I've always been told to keep your feelings inside. Don't really let them out. I just don't want everybody to know that I've been through. What's happened the last three years. It's embarrassing; it's hard. For me to write – it is somebody else.	Hidden self Embarrassment Writing = Low-risk

Appendix F – Level 1 Coding - Converging Ideas on the Writers' Identity

Table 10. Definition and Sample Codes for Identity		
Category	Definition	Examples of Level 1 Codes
Identity Work	Drawing on multiple and diverse theories about identity – clues that reveal participants using writing to see themselves through others' eyes, to play "what if" with their present circumstances or imagined futures, to present self to others or to express a hidden self	Layers of self; hidden self; unveiling of an expected or future self; validating a stronger/ better self; living vicariously lives/ enjoying a vicarious self exploring roles; Am I better known through my writing? – my truer self Character is more able/ more empowered self-esteem

Table 11. Coded Example of transcript for Writer's Identity	
Examples from transcript	Coding
Jill – Describe your confidence as a writer and as a person. Tell me if those two are related. Katniss – I would say they are different. Mostly, my confidence level when I'm writing is a lot higher. As a person, it is not as high. Until I get to the point that I just can't take it anymore. Jill – What do you mean, "You can't take it anymore?" Katniss – Umm… if I get nervous about something that I have to do.. um.. Most of the time, I don't have enough confidence to pick myself up and make myself feel better. Jill – So, what happens? Katniss - I kind of just think long and hard about it. But when I am writing, I show that I have confidence about what I feel. I've noticed that when I go back and re-read something that I wrote… Jill – Because your characters have more confidence? You said earlier that when you re-read [your own writing], you see your characters prevail, then you feel you can survive? Katniss – Yeah.	Identity Work: Confidence as a writer Lacks confidence as a person/ self-esteem writing has an effect on my real life Re-read –habit Character is more able/ more empowered

Vita

Jill Henderson is a native of rural east Tennessee. She is currently teaching at the high school from which she graduated. Jill entered The University of Tennessee at the age of 17 with a declared major of nursing, but like many freshman, she grew through her coursework and life experiences to find her way into her major. She found her passion and the focus of her bachelor's and master's degrees in special education. Jill worked as a special education teacher for 13 years serving students across the range of ability. She taught in self-contained classes, resources classes and in the early implementation of full-inclusion in the regular education classes in Tennessee, Michigan and Mississippi. She supported students with diverse challenges including those with emotional and behavioral disabilities, learning impairments, hearing impairments, cognitive delays, and physical and health-related challenges. She also taught students identified as intellectually gifted in pull-out settings who ranged in age from second through eighth grade. The push for "highly qualified status" for teachers sent Jill back to college to add regular education endorsement to her existing license.

As the opportunity presented itself, Jill moved across the hall in the middle school transitioning from a special education to a regular education class. She expressed her motivation for the change stating that she wanted to "be the door she was tired of knocking on." She wanted to challenge herself to be an effective model for inclusion serving the needs of both regular and special education students. She began teaching English to eighth grade students. As English was a separate course form Literature, the central focus of Jill's class instruction was composition. Facing this new challenge, Jill wanted to be as confident in making curricular decisions in regular education, as she felt she had been in special education. This desire drove Jill back for additional

coursework. Pressured initially by her responsibility to prepare eighth grade students for the state's timed writing assessment, she was drawn into coursework in the Department of English Education. There she sought answers to her questions in what became an ongoing investigation of composition studies. The coursework engaged and inspired her and eventually led her into a commitment to a doctoral program in English education. It was a natural outgrowth of her journey that she chose to focus on writing in her dissertation research. This research, however, gave her the opportunity to consider writing from the perspective of the students rather than from the dictates of the state, the data of the district or even the focus of the classroom teacher.