

Online Fan Fiction, Global Identities, and Imagination

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Based on longitudinal data from a three year ethnographic study, this article uses discourse analytic methods to explore the literacy and social practices of three adolescent English language learners writing in an online fan fiction community. Theoretical constructs within globalization and literacy studies are used to describe the influences of new media and technologies on modern configurations of imagination, identity, communication, and writing. Findings suggest that through their participation in online fan-related activities, these three youth are using language and other representational resources to enact cosmopolitan identities, make transnational social connections, and experiment with new genres and formats for composing.

Introduction

The current era of globalization—meaning the accelerated movement of people, ideas, information, media, commodities, and capital across national and regional borders—has given rise to many significant questions about the nature and impact of online communication and socialization across time and space. Scholarship in media studies, social sciences, education, and the humanities offers rich theoretical and empirical accounts of contemporary issues related to these trans-border flows of cultural, symbolic, and material objects. These accounts include explorations of the role of the information technology revolution in the emergence of new socio-political structures such as the “network society” (Castells, 2000) that challenge traditional economic and regional configurations of capitalism and the nation-state. New information and communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g. Internet, World Wide Web, mobile phones, Personal Digital Assistants), mass media, and modes of transportation facilitate accelerated patterns of migration and rapid disseminations of cultural material. These ongoing flows of information, people, and ideas in turn provide frameworks for permeable, networked, and transnational social structures.

Not surprisingly, such socio-political, territorial, and technological restructuring comes in tandem with reconceptualizations of existing notions of identity. Also, because adolescents are generally at the cutting edge of technology use and are of a generation that is likely to be greatly impacted by global restructuring, youth identity in particular has come to the forefront of much scholarly discussion of the

impacts of globalization. The potential effects on the identity of adolescents from majority culture groups who are indirectly exposed to diverse cultural perspectives via the media are raising new research questions (Jensen, 2003). Researchers are also concerned with how immigrant youth in local contexts formulate transcultural or polycultural identities that integrate elements of home and host cultures (Maira, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, 2004). Together, these scholars have begun to investigate the formulation of youth identities within deterritorialized online spaces that offer multiple points of social and cultural contact with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

A related area of inquiry deals with global flows of symbolic and material products alternately named as *mediascapes* (Appadurai, 1996), *transmedia* (Lemke, in press), *convergences* (Jenkins, 2006), or *media mixes* (Ito, 2007) and their increasing role in contemporary constructions of identity. These terms refer to the media, images, toys, games, technologies, and countless other symbols and products that collectively inundate and influence adolescents' lives. Yet, while new technologies enable greater media saturation and widespread dissemination of the symbolic materials contained therein, technological advances also facilitate the creation of contexts in which consumers play an active role in interpreting and recontextualizing media. Lemke (in press) and others (Appadurai, 1996; Jenkins, 1992; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) argue that official producers do not have ultimate control over the messages, products, and "identity consequences" (Lemke, in press, n.p.) of transmedia.

Similarly, the present study examines adolescents' use of print-based writing as well as new ICTs to engage in practices and forms of learning and identity building that are both sophisticated and highly literate. Through such activities, three youth constructed symbolic and material products that became part of trans-border flows of information that circulated among youth from many different countries. In particular, the study focuses on *fan fiction*, a unique form of writing in which fans base their stories on the characters and plotlines of existing media and popular culture. When creating fan fiction, fans extend storylines, create new narrative threads, develop romantic relationships between characters, and focus on the lives of undeveloped characters from various media. In recent decades, new ICTs have provided increased opportunity for fans from across the globe to meet, share, discuss, and develop their textual innovations in online archives and writing communities.

Specifically, I examine the literate practices of three adolescent English language learners (ELLs) writing in a popular online fan fiction archive. These young women drew from a range of resources, including new media and ICTs, to create narrative and social spaces that afforded them different opportunities for language socialization, development, and use. The study was designed to investigate three questions:

- What languages and literacies did these youth engage with as they participated in online fan fiction writing sites?
- What global and local resources did these youth draw on to support their fan-related activities?
- As English Language Learners (ELLs), what online identities and relationships did these youth construct through their participation in fan fiction sites?

Theoretical Framework

Current theories of globalization argue that mediascapes play an increasingly influential role in the possible identities and lives that individuals imagine for themselves. Appadurai (1996) names three significant shifts in the role of the imagination in global, post-electronic contexts. First, the imagination is no longer confined to the “special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual” (p. 5) but has instead become part of the fabric of ordinary, daily life for people in many different societies as they imagine new possibilities for job, home, life, and country. Second, Appadurai distinguishes between fantasy and the imagination—juxtaposing the individualistic and autotelic (having itself as its sole purpose) connotations of fantasy with the collective and agentic possibilities of contemporary imagination, in which the consumption of mass media often spurs imaginative processes fraught with “resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, *agency*” (1996, p. 7, italics in original) that can prompt social action. The third shift is from imagination as an individual to a collective enterprise, as mass media and electronic forms of communication facilitate “conditions of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure” (p. 8) across national borders. These imaginaries offer a meeting point for diverse perspectives where “local experiences of taste, pleasure, and politics can crisscross with one another” and provide fodder for social change and “the possibility of convergences in translocal social action that would otherwise be hard to imagine” (p. 8).

Appadurai’s conceptualization of the imagination as a collective practice that is both influenced by global flows of media and grounded in daily life within local contexts is an apt lens for viewing the creative, literate, and social activities of many youth within online fan fiction spaces. This perspective highlights the cross-border movement of cultural, symbolic, and ideological material that 1) influences the identities that youth construct and enact through their fan texts, 2) affects the languages and forms of literacy of youth, and 3) enables youth to shape and disseminate their own symbolic products.

Review of Related Research

At present, there are few studies in the realm of second language literacy research examining how ELL youth use new technologies to socialize, represent themselves,

and engage in online meaning-making activities. One notable exception is Lam's (2000, 2004, 2006) work exploring the role of media and ICTs in adolescents' communicative practices, language socialization, and construction of online identities. In one study (Lam, 2000), Almon, a high school student who had emigrated from China to the U.S., used Instant Messaging, email, and a personal webpage to develop an online *textual identity*. Key components of Almon's participation in online spaces were the formation of global social networks related to personal interests and popular cultural affinities. Moreover, as an ELL, he was able to draw from an array of expressive semiotic modes, such as emoticons (keyboard symbols used to convey emotional content in written text), web page design, images, and other languages (e.g., Chinese), to convey his expertise with technology and knowledge of popular culture. This in turn provided a comfortable context where Almon could regularly communicate with a transnational, multilingual group of peers who shared his interests. In time, his online activities helped him develop his English skills and move "from a sense of alienation from the English language in his adopted country to a newfound sense of expressivity and solidarity when communicating in English with his Internet peers" (p. 468).

In a second study (Lam, 2004), Yu Qing and Tsu Ying, two adolescent Chinese immigrants to the U.S., used a hybrid or mixed-code variety of English and Romanized Chinese to represent their identities as bilingual and bicultural individuals. These young women used chat to develop English fluency and form social affiliations with a Pan-Asian community of youth from across the globe. The hybrid variety of English/Cantonese became an integral part of a collective ethnic identity for members of this community—an identity that followed "neither the social categories of English-speaking Americans nor those of Cantonese-speaking Chinese" (p. 45). In a third study (Lam, 2006) Lee, a high school student who immigrated to the U.S. at age nine, used his online activities to fashion a global identity as a successful anime webmaster. Lee was able to draw from his developing English skills as well as his knowledge of Japanese and Chinese to create linguistically hybrid web pages within the genre of anime. At the same time, he further developed abilities in web design, composing, and producing multimedia files through interacting with and learning from a transnational group of anime fans. These activities enabled Lee to fashion an identity that was "part of a global economy of semiotic workers whose productive labor or engagement with 'texts' involves thinking creatively, setting goals and plans, gauging cultural trends, seeking out collaboration and teamwork, and pursuing self-initiated, just-in-time learning" (p. 25).

Lam's work highlights the opportunities that online cultures afford immigrant youth for displaying their existing knowledge and linguistic competencies, while at the same time receiving input from and/or interacting with youth from across the globe as they develop new linguistic and technical skills. In addition, these activities allow them to develop transnational or transcultural identities that push

the boundaries of categories such as Chinese, Chinese-American, and ELL, as they represent themselves and communicate through culturally and linguistically hybrid texts. Finally, these youth are taking active roles as designers and producers of globally-distributed information, ideas, and products.

Another related study is Yi's (2007, 2008) ethnography of the multiliterate practices of generation 1.5, Korean-American youth in an online community called *Welcome to Buckeye City* (WTBC). While most of the participants on this site lived in the same Midwestern suburban city, they, like many generation 1.5 youth, represented a diversity of social perspectives and a wide range of literate competencies both in their first and second languages. The site was designed as a "cyber-shelter for these teenagers" in which they could freely communicate and express themselves in a relaxed environment (2007, p. 28). In one study (2007), Yi focuses on Joan, a so-called "parachute kid," who lived with a relative or legal guardian in the United States and attended high school while her family remained in Korea. Joan used a wide range of creative composing or designing of texts as an integral part of her everyday life. She chatted in several online communities and often code-switched between Korean and English, depending on the context: she composed poetry in Korean and eventually translated her work into English; she engaged in collaborative storytelling with other members of the WTBC community; and she designed multimodal web pages for WTBC to match her conceptual understanding of the site. Through such activities, Joan displayed competencies across different genres, languages, and modes of communication. Also, much like the youth in Lam's studies, Joan's participation in WTBC provided a forum in which she used multiple linguistic and textual resources to represent herself as a "biliterate" youth and to develop a "writerly identity" (Yi, 2007, p. 23).

Another unique activity on WTBC was *relay writing*, in which members of the site composed a portion of an evolving story and then "relayed" the text to the next author for their contribution (Yi, 2008). Much like the Role Play writing of fan fiction authors (Thomas, 2005), this collaborative form of writing shifted the focus from individual authorship to participatory forms of writing that were facilitated by new technologies. Relay writing also created tensions for certain members of the community, as in the case of one site member who expressed concerns about making grammatical errors while composing in Korean and about expressing her ideas in such a public forum (Yi, 2008). This self-consciousness about writing ability and self-expression in public forums was also evident for the youth in the present study.

Similar to the youth in Lam's studies, the participants in WTBC formed diasporic networks in which they were able to construct transcultural identities by fusing aspects of home, host, as well as global cultures. The participants drew from knowledge gained through engagement in global communities surrounding Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and English popular culture. They discussed social

and political issues related to both home and host cultures. They also drew from genres and languages that were rooted in on- and offline home and host cultural activities. These studies present examples of youths' use of traditional print and other semiotic resources to index transcultural facets of their identities and develop meaningful cross-border relationships online. Through such activities, these youth gained confidence and competence in a wide range of literate activities and forms of representation. Moreover, their online activities afforded them a great deal of creative agency as they took up, reconstituted, and then redistributed cultural, linguistic, symbolic, and ideological material to a broad audience.

Methods

Setting

The primary context for the study, *Fanfiction.net* (FFN), is the largest online fan fiction archive, housing over a million fan fiction texts (as of 11/8/06). I chose FFN as a site for ethnographic study primarily because its size and international popularity attracts fan authors from across the globe. On the site, fans author and publicly post texts based on favorite media canons, and the audience has the option of reading and publicly posting reviews of the texts. FFN has a built-in mechanism for facilitating audience feedback whereby readers can submit feedback, known as reviews, at the end of each story. Also, the reviewer has the option of "signing" the review, which provides a link to contact information such as email, IM, or web address. Participation on the site centers on practices that extend beyond posting texts for entertainment. Other activities include peer-reviewing and collaborative writing, improving fans' writing skills, developing connections between fans who are interested in particular media canons, exploring certain genres of writing, and facilitating substantive discussion surrounding composition (Black, 2005; 2007).

The present study was in part an exploratory case study (Yin, 2003) of the website itself, with an underlying goal of understanding what aspects of FFN provided ELLs with access to and a means of affiliating with the literacy and social practices of the site. Ethnographic (Geertz, 1973; Hine, 2000) and discourse analytic (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Rogers, 2004) methods were used to gain a sense of the FFN community as a discursive space. During the course of the study, I spent three years as a participant observer on the site. This included approximately ten to twenty hours per week of writing and publicly posting my own stories, providing feedback for other writers' texts, and interacting with a diverse group of fans both on FFN and in the broader fan fiction community. These activities made it possible for me to develop a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the social, literate, and meaning-making practices that fans engaged in through fan communities.

Data Collection Methods

By examining the linguistic features of posted fan fiction texts and information presented on the authors' accompanying personal pages that included biographical information, I was able to identify six potential adolescent ELL participants. The study also involved a purposive nonprobability form of snowball sampling in that the links from one member's personal page acted as a referral to another member's personal page and texts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, conceptually-driven sequential sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was used to identify participants who engaged in notably different forms of participation—for example, some members were very active in writing on the site, while others were more active in reading, socializing, and posting reviews of others' texts. While this approach to sampling clearly restricts the generalizability of the findings, as a qualitative study, the goal was not to generalize but rather to provide in-depth insight into the distinct literacy and social practices of adolescent ELLs within the community.

Using qualitative methods, I collected data from multiple sources over a three-year period. The primary data sources were participants' fan fiction texts and reader reviews of these texts. FFN provides an "Alert" option that sends an email notification when specified members update their texts. Thus, I was able to download new and revised versions of participants' texts as they were posted to the site. I was also able to download readers' reviews of these newly-updated texts. I also visited participants' personal pages on a bi-weekly basis to note and/or download any changes to their biographical information.

Over the three year period, I conducted semi-structured interviews and engaged in numerous informal email and Instant Messenger exchanges with participants about their activities in the fan community, in school, and at home. The interviews were conducted via Instant Messenger and were approximately one hour long. The participants were formally interviewed twice during the study, with the first interview taking place three to six months after initial contact, and the second interview taking place approximately one year after the first interview. A primary aim of this project was to provide insight into ELLs' extracurricular literacy practices, language socialization, and self-representation in online fan fiction websites; thus, the interview protocols focused on participants' experiences with and impressions of fan fiction writing. This included questions about how they became interested in fan fiction, what types of fan fiction writing they engaged in, their reasons for writing fan fiction, and the role that participation in the fan community plays in their lives. Interviews also covered biographical topics, such as language background, experience with English, and home and family life, and included questions about how participants perceived the relationship between their fan fiction writing and school-based literacy activities.

Due to the geographic dispersal of study participants (Canada; The Philippines), I did not make face-to-face contact with participants. There are several

implications of this online form of ethnographic research. First, the lack of face-to-face contact meant that I was reliant primarily on web presence and self-report for identity confirmation. This was addressed through cross-checking participants' self-representation in multiple online contexts, as well as through obtaining signed human subject forms from research participants and their legal guardians. The lack of face-to-face contact also created an interview context with reduced social cues (e.g. facial expressions, gestures) that was wholly textual in nature. Online research does, however, allow for much less obtrusive forms of observation and data collection, thus reducing the observer effect. Data for this study were drawn primarily from case studies of three ELLs: Grace, Nanako and Cherry-Chan.

Participants

Grace

The participants whose texts are discussed in this article, Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan (all screen names and story titles have been changed), were in three completely different situations as learners of English. Grace was a popular fan fiction writer from the Philippines who had written many multi-chapter stories on FFN since 2001. It is through reading and reviewing Grace's texts and then following hyperlinks or links to other reviews that the other two participants met. Grace grew up speaking Kapampangan, which she considered her first language, and shortly thereafter started to learn Filipino (a standardized version of Tagalog), which she used for most academic activities in early grade school. Grace also began learning English at around age seven at school in the Philippines and primarily used English to participate in classes, to communicate with people online, and to compose fan fiction. Thus, much of her productive experience with English had been in written rather than spoken format. Nonetheless, English and Filipino are two official languages of the Philippines, and Philippine English is predominantly used in academic, media, business, and religious activities. Thus, English is considered a second language by most residents, and Grace had ample exposure to it in her daily life.

One of the so-called "by-products" of global capitalism is the transnational family, in which members of the family spend time, live, and/or work in different countries (Parreñas, 2005). Grace's family was an example of a transnational family structure, as her father was the vice president of a company in the Philippines and her mother lived and worked at a company in the U.S. For Grace, who at the time of this study was in her early twenties and living somewhat independently, the dispersion of her family was an accepted aspect of life. She explained that her parents kept in contact through electronic communication, primarily through online chatting when her father was at his office. The impact of such geographic distance on families, and in particular on children, is a topic that warrants a great deal of consideration, particularly as worsening economic conditions in an increas-

ing number of countries force such labor migrations. However, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this article and is a topic that Grace did not choose to elaborate on in her interview. Nonetheless, it is a factor that affected Grace's positioning as an ELL within a global context and thus is worthy of note.

Grace began composing paper-based fan fictions when she was ten years old; however, due to lack of computer access at her home in the Philippines, posting her fictions online took a bit of negotiation. In an interview, she explained,

At first I don't have an Internet access or a computer. I started writing by bringing a small notebook with me and wherever I go... I have this notebook. Then when an idea comes... I'll write it. After that... I will rent a computer with Internet access of course... for an hour and type everything and submit on the Internet. (Interview, 2005)

Grace's enthusiasm for writing and the various anime series provided enough impetus for her to constantly carry around a "plot bunny" notebook. *Plot bunny* is the fan fiction-specific term for story ideas, particularly those that multiply rapidly into other ideas. Her passion for writing within the online fan community also prompted her to engage in the difficult task of composing fictions in her third language of English in order to make them accessible to a broader audience, and then paying for computer access to upload them.

Nanako

Nanako was a native Mandarin Chinese speaker who lived in a large, predominantly English-speaking Canadian city. Nanako was a generation 1.5 immigrant who moved to North America from Shanghai with her parents and began learning English when she was eleven. Nanako and her family spoke Mandarin Chinese at home, and Nanako was fully literate in Chinese when she immigrated to North America. Nanako's parents were both environmental researchers, and a great deal of her academic effort focused on related areas such as science, math, and engineering. It was clear from her interviews and the personal information disclosed in her online writing that academic achievement was a primary concern in her life. When Nanako first moved to Canada, she was very concerned about her grades, as the language barrier caused her to "struggle through all of [her] courses except math" (Email, 2005). Moreover, as a self-described "rather quiet person," Nanako also had difficulty making friends with her English-speaking peers and felt isolated within the school community.

An avid anime fan since childhood, Nanako was quite excited when, about two years after moving to Canada and starting to learn English, she stumbled across the anime fan fiction community. When Nanako first joined FFN, she spent a great deal of time reading and posting feedback for different anime-based fan fictions. As a result, she was able to use these other texts as generic models when she finally felt confident enough to compose and post her own fictions online. The anime

fan fiction community presented an opportunity for Nanako to use and practice English, to develop a network of online friends, and to create stories about topics that she found highly interesting.

Cherry-Chan

Cherry-Chan was a second generation immigrant whose family, before she was born, moved from Taiwan to the same large Canadian city in which Nanako's family lived. Like Grace, Cherry-Chan also had a transnational family structure. She was born and grew up in Canada with her mother and brother, but her father lived and worked in Taiwan. According to Cherry-Chan, she had a distant relationship with her father "because when I was young he really did put a lot of pressure on me about my grades constantly . . . and my grades were never really up to standard" (Interview, 2006). Her mother, however, visited her father in Taiwan each year. Of the three participants, Cherry-Chan was the only one who grew up speaking languages that she was not fully literate in—specifically, she grew up speaking Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese at home, but she learned to write in English and never learned what she called "the true basics" of writing in Chinese (Interview, 2006). Also an anime fan from childhood, Cherry-Chan began writing on FFN about a year before Nanako in April of 2001.

I chose to focus on these three ELLs for several reasons. First, because Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan shared interests in the same anime series, their activities in the space were somewhat intertwined through reciprocal reading and reviewing. Specifically, Nanako met Grace through her participation in the online anime fan community, and Grace's texts served as inspiration for Nanako's own writing. During her early years on FFN, Nanako avidly followed and reviewed Grace's stories; however, their relationship consisted primarily of online author/reader exchanges about texts. Also, while Nanako and Cherry-Chan lived in different areas and attended different schools in the Canadian city, they met online and developed an on- and offline friendship through their shared interests. Specifically, they read and reviewed each other's fictions and occasionally met offline to go to the mall or watch anime together. Thus, the three participants became acquainted, insofar as they were all at least familiar with each other's screen names or stories, because they gravitated toward the same sort of texts and writers in the site. As a result, they had very similar textual role models and experiences when they first joined FFN. According to Nanako and Cherry-Chan, Grace's fictions served as generic models for constructing their own narrative texts, and Nanako's fictions also had a strong influence on Cherry-Chan's writing. Thus, the three provided interesting examples of the role of global Englishes and trans-border flows of information between geographically dispersed sites (Pennycook, 2003) in that Nanako and Cherry-Chan were modeling their English texts after an ELL writer who learned English as a third language in the Philippines.

Researcher's Role

Research participants interacted with me as a university-affiliated researcher as well as a fellow writer and anime fan. They read my anime-based fan fictions and accepted me as a legitimate member who was familiar with and well-versed in the norms and social registers of the fan community. I attempted to mitigate power differentials by positioning myself as “least adult” (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). This close relationship enabled me to develop a strong rapport with these youth, which in turn enabled me to discuss interpretations of data and ask research participants for clarification on specific aspects of their language use, writing, and participation on FFN. When possible, I also shared all publishable pieces with participants for feedback, suggestions, and to ensure that I was adequately representing their ideas about participation in fan spaces.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected for the study included participants' FFN personal pages, their fan fiction texts, reader reviews of these texts, public site interactions, fan fiction related petitions, and fan art. Analysis of the data was an iterative process requiring several different layers of coding and interpretation grounded in discourse analytic (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Rogers, 2004) techniques. The first stage involved repeated reading and inductive analysis of general texts posted in the anime-based subsections of the site. This included fan fictions, reviews, and publicly posted interactions. During this process, I coded for recurrent themes as well as structural and generic characteristics of each of these types and sections of multiple fan texts.

In the next stage of analysis, I broke specific sections, excerpts, and reader reviews down into *lines* which are simple sentences or clauses that, much like “idea units” (Gee, 1999), are counted as separate lines only when the unit introduces new information. The lines were then grouped into topical segments that are similar to what Gee (1999) refers to as *stanzas* or “sets of lines about a single minimal topic, organized rhythmically and syntactically so as to hang together in a particularly tight way” (p. 94). Because data were in written format, segments were often determined by the writer's own spacing. I then developed a more detailed typology of different kinds of meanings and social functions of these texts, particularly in relation to *genre*, *discourse*, and *style*. According to Fairclough (2003), *genre*, *discourse*, and *style* are three major types of meaning that can be used to understand “the relationship of the text to the event, to the wider physical and social world, and to the persons involved in the event” (pg. 27).

Genres are specific ways of acting and interacting in social events. Features of genre include the thematic structure of the text, cohesion devices used (parallel structure, repetition), specific wording, metaphors, politeness conventions, and interactional patterns (Fairclough, 2003; Rogers, 2004). Particular ways of introducing stories, interacting with readers, and providing feedback to authors, as well as

ways of acting such as informing, advising, warning, promising, apologizing were all coded under the domain of genre. *Discourses* refer to ways of representing self, others, and the world (Fairclough, 2003). Features of discourse include themes, voices and perspectives, ideologies, possible interpretations, and potential audiences for a text (Rogers, 2004). The socially-situated (Gee, 1999) ways that writers represented themselves as experts, novices, language learners, adolescents, and fans were all coded under the domain of discourse, as well as ideas and beliefs about writing such as “writing as recursive, writing as exchange” within the fan fiction context. *Style* refers to ways of being or using language as a means of self-identifying (Fairclough, 2003) and aligning oneself within particular discourses and/or genres through linguistic features such as modality, transitivity, active and passive voice, and word choice. Language choice, registers, and paralinguistic features of internet relay chat (IRC) were coded under the domain of style.

Findings

Examples of Participants’ Fan Fiction Texts

The following sections contain representative samples of the three participants’ fan fiction writing. It is important to note that each excerpt contains distinct elements that are commonly found at the start of texts on FFN. The first is what is known as a *header* in the fan fiction community. Headers are included at the start of a story to provide readers with information about the upcoming content. For example, a header typically contains information such as media canon, genre of story text, a rating much like movie ratings, romantic pairings, languages used in the fiction, and warnings about material that readers might find objectionable (e.g. spoilers that reveal plot elements from the original media, explicit sexual or violent content, death of characters). Another distinct element of each excerpt is the author’s notes to readers, commonly abbreviated as “A/N”. Author’s Notes are a common element of headers; however, I have coded them as separate segments because they also can appear within and at the conclusion of a story text. The next distinct element of each excerpt is the start of the narrative text. Due to space constraints, only the introductory paragraphs of each story are presented.

Grace’s Heart Song

The following excerpt is from *Heart Song*, one of Grace’s popular Card Captor Sakura (CCS) fan fictions that was first published in May of 2001. CCS is a manga and anime series that centers on the life and adventures of a young Japanese girl named Sakura Kinomoto or Cherry Blossom. In terms of structure, the first section of this excerpt, Segments 1-6, is a mixture of Author’s Notes and information typically contained in a fan fiction story header. Grace began in Segment 1 with a dedication of sorts by declaring her love for her boyfriend and expressing her happiness over meeting him. Segment 2 contains two disclaimers. The first is known

as a “copyright disclaimer.” In terms of genre, copyright disclaimers are a common generic element of fan fiction texts, as fans use them to both acknowledge the original media source/copyright holder and to deny any intention to infringe. At the level of discourse, such disclaimers reference the tensions between media fans and corporate culture in terms of ongoing debates over fair use and intellectual property rights (Tushnet, 1997). Within the same sentence, Grace also included a disclaimer related to her writing abilities as she positioned herself as an ELL. At the level of style, Grace’s use of caps for emphasis on the words “FIRST LANGUAGE” worked in concert with the disclaimer of her writing abilities to highlight her status as an ELL as a means of garnering understanding and support from the audience. Aside from the copyright disclaimer, Segments 2-5 are all notes to readers, including an explicit request for the audience to read and review (R+R) the story in Segment 5. Segment 6 contains typical header information such as title and chapter title, author, and an additional copyright disclaimer, and Segment 7 is the start of the narrative text.

SEGMENT 1: I LOVE YOU SO MUCH PHILIP

God HAS GIVEN YOU! and I REJOICE NOW FOR GOD HAS LEAD ME TO YOU :D

SEGMENT 2: Disclaimer: all CCS characters belongs to CLAMP and English is not my FIRST LANGUAGE

SEGMENT 3: Note: another S+S fanfic.. by Grace

Yeah.. the Fastest/quickest and yet Poor english Writer from the Philip-pines.. Sighs..

I hope i can handle uh.. 3 new fanfics at the same time...-.-

SEGMENT 4: Onegai!!! R+R please.. I hope you enjoy this fic as much as you enjoy the rest of my fanfics!

SEGMENT 5: I am still doing the Many worlds in 1 world story keke I want to make the chapter 4 funny but its hard Demoo.. I’ll post it tomorrow okay? in the meantime just check out my other fanfics

SEGMENT 6: Heart Song...

Chapter One: The famous Cherry

Ccs Fanfic by Grace

All rights reserved on CLAMP

SEGMENT 7: “PLEASE WELCOME.. OUR VERY OWN!!... CHERRY BLOSSOM!!!!”

The crowds went wild, when the lights went out and then they heard a voice...

“Aitai na Aenai na... Setsunai na... Kono kimochi...”

Then one by one light went on.. and they saw a shower of Cherry Blossoms.. the audience gasp.. then they heard a voice again...

“Ienai no.... Iitai no... Chansu.. nogashite bakari”

Then a little spotlight focus on a girl.. going down, up from the sky..
wearing a pink dress with wings on the back, and a cherry blossoms at
her hair.. she is sitting on a gold swing

“Datte....Datte... tsubasa hiroge futari de... Sora wo marason Yume wo
yunizon shitai”

“WE LOVE YOU CHERRY!!!!”

The singer smiles at them, then when her feet touches the stage, she
smiles and continues to sing the slow melody.. without music...“Hora
Catch You Catch You Catch Me Catch Me Matte...”

Grace continued to update *Heart Song* over a five year period. The final text was 30 chapters long and consisted of 15 initial chapters and a 15 chapter sequel that Grace composed in response to audience requests for the story to continue. The text chronicled a stormy relationship between the CCS anime characters Sakura and Syaoran; however, Grace significantly extended the plot and timeline of the original media by representing the anime characters as young adults with careers rather than as elementary school children. Over the five years that she was composing *Heart Song*, Grace received 1569 reader reviews of the text.

Nanako's Crazy Love Letters

The following excerpt, posted in January of 2003, is the fifth chapter from Nanako's story *Crazy Love Letters*. Structurally, the excerpt is much like Grace's in that the narrative is preceded by a header and several introductory notes to readers. In Segment 1, Nanako provided readers with information about the text and in Segment 2, explained that she would be unable to update her story for a while due to academic demands. She also thanked the readers who had been following and posting reviews of the text, and dedicated the story to several readers. In the third segment, Nanako expressed her desire to write as well as Grace and another fan fiction author. Segment 4 is a disclaimer in which Nanako self-identified as an ELL and asked readers to be lenient in some aspects of their feedback, and Segment 7 includes the initial paragraphs of the narrative text.

SEGMENT 1: *Crazy Love Letters*

By: Tanaka Nanako

Genre: Romance/Humour

Pairings: Sakura/Syaoran, Eriol/Tomoyo

Rating: PG-13

SEGMENT 2: A/N: hello everyone! This will be my last update, due to the coming exams. ><;;; Please forgive me everyone! I will try to update more chapters in Feb. But I'm still not very sure. *sighs* Gomen ne! Thank

you all who reviewed this story, this chapter is dedicated to shinningstar, Angel Winged princess of hope and engel hope. Thank you for adding me to your list! *hugs them* ^_____^

SEGMENT 3: My new year wish: I wish I can write as well as Grace and StarJade, demo, ME CAN'T! (V)^_____^(V) PEACE!!!(I learned that kawaii sign from my Cherry-Chan ^-^) Hehehe so proud! ^-^

SEGMENT 4: Important note: English is my second language, please excuse my grammar and spelling mistakes. Also, I might have some typos in the story, so hopefully, you guys can look over them.

SEGMENT 5: Chapter 5

Syaoran watched Sakura silently. He followed her home after the humiliation Mizuki had given her. As much as he hated to admit this, he felt sorry for Sakura. By watching her suffer, he felt his heart arched with pain. He did not know why he was feeling this way, but that doesn't seem to matter now. Right now, what matters the most was that he needed to take care of his enemy, who happened to be his roommate.

Entered Sakura's room, he walked towards her bed, placed the blanket on her shivering body. Then sighed heavily and questioned in his mind. Why do I have to take care of her? Because you are her roommate and if you don't take care of her, her condition will get worse. Besides, you are the only one here! His heart answered. Right. Just my luck. He complained and placed a hand on Sakura's burning forehead.

Nanako's text also departed significantly from the storyline of the original CCS series, in that the characters were college-age students attending Tokyo University. In addition, Nanako loosely based her narrative on the Western movie *You've Got Mail* by creating a plot in which the male and female protagonists fall in love online without realizing that they dislike each other in their offline lives. The entire fan fiction consisted of thirteen chapters and an epilogue that she wrote over a one year period. This was one of Nanako's most popular fictions, and it received over 1700 reader reviews during the year that she was writing it.

Cherry-Chan's Wind Storm

The following excerpt is from one of Cherry-Chan's texts that was written about two and a half years after she joined the site. The fiction was based on the manga and anime series *Yu-Gi-Oh!* about a teenager who shares his body with the ancient spirit of an Egyptian Pharaoh. It is worth noting that at the time this text was written, Cherry-Chan had been corresponding with Nanako on a regular basis and had gotten many ideas for structuring her own fictions from reading Nanako's and Grace's texts. Segment 1 is a disclaimer in which Cherry-Chan pointed out that this is her first *Yu-Gi-Oh!* fiction and asked readers to be lenient in their feedback, and

Segment 2 is a copyright disclaimer. Segment 3 is another disclaimer in which she acknowledged that some of the details of the text might be off because it was her first attempt at writing within the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* canon. In Segment 4, she dedicated the fiction to Nanako. Segments 5 and 6 provide information about the upcoming narrative, and Segment 7 initiates the story text.

SEGMENT 1: HiyahHiyah! Please Keep in mind this is my very *very* **FIRST** Fanfiction in the Yuugiou Section ^__^; Please Be Gentle?!

SEGMENT 2: **Disclaimer** - I do not own the Manga/Anime/Card Game Yuugiou

SEGMENT 3: **Warnings** - I Spelling/Grammar Errors | Timeline is off at times they may not be exact | Some things May not make sense but Bare | First Yuugiou Fanfiction |

SEGMENT 4: **Fanfiction Dedication** - My Yami—Tanaka Nanako (123456) [//Doushiite// She's my Yami and I met her by this ficcy ^^; or was it the other one..o.o; I forgot..]

SEGMENT 5: **Pairing(s)** - Yami x Anzu

SEGMENT 6: **Summary:** [AU] It was said that Yami and Anzu were destined to be together. Fate had told them they were meant for each other, and it was too good to be true when they were going to be forever officially in a couple of more years. Everyone was happy for them especially Yami's parents, but every good thing has a bad thing. Anzu was missing/losted for a couple of years, will Yami ever find Anzu?! Or will Anzu find Yami, This all depends on Fate, For this is a test with many strange obstacles if they are really meant to be, are they or are they not?!

SEGMENT 7: **Read and Review Onegaii**

SEGMENT 8: **Chapter 1: Gone Forever**

"You can't catch me Yami!!!!" an eleven years old girl stuck her tongue behind her while running around the palace. She had long dark hazel hair and the Nile's crystal eyes; she wore the royal clothing in Egypt. Running around not caring anything what the world has offer her, having her small feet on top of the coarse floor with each step she took made a faint sound with her elegant golden slippers.

"Want to bet Anzu?" the thirteen years old boy shot back with a smirk, as he continued to play his little game of tag with his so called, "Love one" . He had multi-colour hair mostly dark red, black and yellow, he had those soft crimson dark eyes. he wore the royal robes, but he didn't care if his clothes were messed up, he'd avoid an obstacles that were thrown to him, just to catch Anzu. His Anzu.

Cherry-Chan's *Wind Storm* was also a significant departure from the storyline of the original anime series, as *Yu-Gi-Oh!* centers on the battles of the male pro-

tagonist, while this text focused on establishing a romantic relationship between two more peripheral characters. This fiction was posted in May of 2003 and, like many of Cherry-Chan's texts, was never updated. In spite of its incomplete status, the fiction still received 30 reviews from interested readers.

As popular culture and media become ubiquitous in many contemporary contexts, the material products of media mixes take on salient roles in youths' daily activities and social interactions, while the symbolic or representational aspects of such mediascapes can play a significant role in shaping the social worlds and identities that youth envision for themselves and others. Jenkins' (1992) influential work on participatory fan culture draws from de Certeau's notion of "poaching" to describe how fans, rather than acting as passive consumers, actively raid mass media as a resource for their own personal and social exchanges. Jenkins depicts media fans as creative agents who are "[u]ndaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property" and who "raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions" (1992, p. 18). Along these lines, the previous examples of participants' texts illustrate some of the ways in which these three youth draw from contemporary mediascapes as a basis for self-representation and social exchange within a global fan community. The following section outlines similarities and differences among Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan's participation in the fan community as they 1) construct online identities, 2) engage in widespread poaching and recontextualization of media and other resources, and 3) play agentic parts in challenging traditional consumer roles and contributing to the collective imaginary of online fan communities.

Features of Participants' Fan Fiction Writing Activities

Online Identity

Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan all discursively constructed online, textual identities for themselves through their fan fiction texts. The forms of self-representation that they chose also shaped the relationships that they had with readers. In this space, discourse or text "constitute[d] the social, including 'objects' and social subjects" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 55). For example, these three writers shared textual patterns in their story headers that, at the levels of genre, discourse, and style, constituted certain types of authors, readers, and views of writing. To illustrate, in their respective excerpts Grace represented herself as an ELL and a "Poor english Writer" (Segments 2,3), Nanako self-identified as an ELL (Segment 4), and Cherry-Chan positioned herself as a novice within the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* canon (Segments 1,3). Over time, these types of disclaimers became a standard part of the generic structure of these three young women's fan fiction texts. By representing themselves as novices, the authors were implicitly positioning readers as experts who might notice errors in their texts and as responsive audience members who would provide feedback. Such lines were also implicit and explicit attempts to mitigate critique about

potential mistakes. This view of online fan fiction writing as an interactive, social endeavor was also reflected in the authors' styles as they emphasized their status as novices through the use of caps, bold font, and punctuation and elicited support from readers through the use of adjectives (*very, hopefully*), adverbs (*please*), and keyboard character facial expressions (^_^; [tearful smiley face]).

At the level of discourse, these lines can be seen as representing two potentially conflicting notions of writing. One view is that of writing being about form, conventions, and correctness; however, the other view is that of writing as being about function, communication, and message. The misalignment or inconsistency between the ways of interacting (genres), representing (discourses), and being (style) (Rogers, 2004) across these participants' texts suggests that while they implicitly referenced an assumed, academically-oriented discourse related to conventions and correctness in writing, through their genres and styles of writing, they actually were presenting a challenge to this notion by asking readers to judge their texts based primarily on meaning. This constituted an attempt to create writing spaces in which Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan, as novice English writers, could still take on identities as popular and successful authors who write stories that were valued for function (e.g. interesting storylines) rather than just form (e.g. grammaticality).

These youth also drew on different languages to index aspects of identity through their fan fiction writing. For example, all three young women incorporated *Romaji* or Romanized Japanese words—meaning that the Japanese words are transliterated using the English alphabet—into their headers: Grace asked readers to “Onegai!!! R+R” or to please read and review her story (Segment 4); Nanako apologized to readers for not being able to update her stories for a month using the Japanese phrase “gomen ne” (Segment 2); Cherry-Chan used Japanese to explain why (or *doushiite*) she dedicated her text to Nanako. Grace's narrative also incorporated *Romaji* lyrics from the CCS movie as an integral part of the text. In terms of style, the use of token Japanese phrases and lyrics was a way for these youth to index their insider status within the anime fan fiction community and to affiliate with the Asian origins of the media. Nanako's more extensive use of Japanese in her other fan fictions also indexed her offline academic activities. Specifically, during this time Nanako was taking Japanese classes and would integrate brief lines of Japanese text with English translations, such as “Watashi wa Kinomoto Sakura. (I'm Kinomoto Sakura)' Sakura replied,” (Nanako, 2003) into her stories and was quite excited to use her knowledge in ways that she viewed as enhancing the cultural tenor and characterization of her texts.

After writing on FFN for over a year, Nanako also began integrating her first language of Mandarin Chinese into her stories. In the following lines from Chapter 9 of *Crazy Love Letters*, Nanako used *Hanyu Pinyin* or Romanized Mandarin with an English translation for a conversation between two characters: “Meiling turned

to face Syaoran and grumbled in Chinese. ‘Dan shi, Xiaolang, wo xiang he ta shuo ji ju hua. (But, Xiaolang, I just wanna talk to her.)’” (Nanako, 2003). In addition to enhancing the cultural authenticity and emotional impact of conversations between characters, at the level of style, this mixture of English and Chinese within the story text was a means for Nanako to represent her own identity and abilities as a multilingual individual.

The use of multiple languages referenced a larger discourse—that of the cosmopolitan nature of online, anime-based fan communities (Jenkins, 2006). Within this community, cultural and linguistic difference were viewed as additive elements of writing, and many ELLs of Asian heritage were able to take on the roles of experts (Black, 2005, 2006; Lam, 2000, 2006). Through using multiple languages, Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan leveraged their own transcultural identities and multilingual skills to gain status within the community. These three young women were proud of their facility with other languages and viewed FFN as a global space that attracted a cosmopolitan audience of readers from around the world.

Textual Resources

Technological mediation and mass migration are emerging forces that drive the contemporary imagination and “create specific irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 4). Thus, “[n]either images or viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces” (p. 4). Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan all had familial and social ties that were not easily bound within physical space, and these ongoing ties connected them to various transnational networks of communication, information-sharing, and meaning-making. For their fan-related activities, these three youth engaged in widespread practices of “poaching” (Jenkins, 1992) from local and global resources, as well as from resources that exhibited the aforementioned “specific irregularities” of circulation. For example, Grace and Nanako watched Japanese-origin anime videos that had been dubbed or subtitled in English and then drew from these and other media, such as Western movies, songs, and novels, to create their fandom-based texts. These texts were what Jenkins (1992) refers to as bricolage or a pastiche of available cultural materials.

As bricoleurs, Grace and Nanako made transmedia connections by creating *crossovers*, or fan fiction texts that “cross over” or mix media genres. Grace’s *Heartsong* was a *songfiction*, or fan fiction based around the lyrics of a song. Her text included a mixture of narrative based on the CCS anime series and lyrics from songs ranging from the Romaji version of the CCS movie soundtrack, to ballads by Angela Bofill, a Latina rhythm-and-blues artist, and Barbra Streisand. While Nanako had created several songfictions, she also created crossovers that fuse the CCS anime series with popular Western movies. For example, Nanako’s text *Crazy Love Letters* used the characters from the CCS anime series to enact a plot that

was loosely based on the movie *You've Got Mail*. In another fan fiction, she used the characters from CCS and plot elements from the movie *Memoirs of a Geisha* to explore the thematic topic of the role of Asian women in society (Black, 2006).

Such multiple media resources provided scaffolding for Grace and Nanako as ELL writers in several ways. First, the original media series provided an initial plot framework and a ready-made cast of characters. Authors could then create new scenarios and original characters for their fan fictions. Next, rather than having to convey all aspects of the story through original written text/narrative, authors were able to leverage the message of song lyrics to augment the plot and emotional context of their own stories. By engaging with media across these various platforms, these authors were able to garner both inspiration as well as scaffolding for their print-based fan fiction writing.

The social connections that Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan made through the Internet also served as resources in the creation of their fan fiction texts. For instance, one of the benefits of posting fan fictions online was the opportunity it provided for receiving immediate feedback from a broad audience. Grace and Nanako, who responded to readers' input and updated their stories frequently, have received approximately 7600 and 9400 reviews respectively. Cherry-Chan, who infrequently updated her stories and left many of her fan texts unfinished, has received around 650 reviews. In addition, these reviews came from a global audience of readers. For example, Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan collectively received reviews from readers in at least 21 different countries. The wide geographic range of these reviews supports Appadurai's (1996) assertion that neither viewers nor products of the contemporary imagination are easily bound to physical space. Instead, electronic media, such as these participants' fan fiction texts, have an unprecedented potential to provide points of contact and cultural exchange for youth from across the globe.

As another illustration of such points of contact, after a few years of participation on FFN, Cherry-Chan began to draw from her online social connections as a new type of resource for her writing when she began to participate in Role Play (RP) writing. For this type of writing, fans collaboratively author fictions, with each writer taking on the persona of a different character. RP writing is different from traditional fan fiction writing in the sense that it is synchronous, as collaborators take turns composing their sections using Instant Messaging. Cherry-Chan has collaboratively authored RP fictions with Nanako, with a young woman in England, and with another female adolescent of Chinese descent whose primary language is English. In an interview, Cherry-Chan presented contrasting views on her RP writing. On the one hand, she claimed that collaborative writing made her less "lazy" because when writing alone, she tended to put off updating her stories and never finished many of her fan fiction series. However, in RP writing with a

partner “the story just goes on and gon [sic] . . . with each minute” (Email, 2006). On the other hand, she also claimed that RP writing made her “lazier” in terms of her writing style “as I’m not really watching what I’m writing grammaticall [sic] anymore because...their [sic] just logs and not real chapters in fanfictions” (Email, 2006). She went on to explain that before posting chapters on FFN, “I would read it like 10times to see if it would make okay sense to me . . . then if I had someone at that time I would ask them to read it over” (Email, 2006).

Thus, Cherry-Chan’s traditional fan fiction writing practices involved careful reading and reviewing by her and an available beta-reader to check for adherence to standard print-based conventions before the stories were publicly posted. Conversely, because the RP fictions were conducted through a synchronous medium that lends itself to a hybridization of face-to-face and written interaction, the features of IRC would often bleed into the texts, producing a non-standard, hybrid format. Nonetheless, it is important to note that RP writing partnerships still provided Cherry-Chan with an opportunity to engage in pointed composition-related interactions and to gain insight into the social nature of writing. Daiute (2000) argues that collaborating with a partner provides writers with a means of “experiencing the role of writer and reader as they respond to a partner’s suggestions of specific text sequences and listen to a partner’s reactions.” In this way, networked technologies provided an extracurricular context for Cherry-Chan’s writing, language development, and socialization, as well as a means for her to engage in “functional interactions” that bypassed both the boundaries and at times the textual conventions of traditional writing in offline spaces (Daiute, 2000).

Agency and Global Imagination

Individual and collective agency is a crucial aspect of contemporary “work of the imagination” which “is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai, 1996, p.4). This creative annexing of media is evident in the imaginative and agentic approaches that participants take in developing their texts. For example, Grace viewed fan fiction writing as a means of righting the injustices of plot twists that she viewed as mistakes in the original media. In an interview she explained that she wrote in certain canons, “because I love those series, and I know some of the readers wants to read some of um . . . let’s see *alternative* story?” (Interview, 2006). She went on to say, “Thank God for Fanfics. Even though Seiya and Usagi (Sailormoon) did not end together in series, there are some fanfics that put them together . . . and its making us their fans . . . satisfied” (Interview, 2006). Thus, one of Grace’s main purposes in her early writing was to make new and meaningful contributions to the broader narrative surrounding certain anime series and to contest the plot resolutions offered by corporate producers.

Another example of Grace's agency in annexing global media into her own "practices of the modern" is how over time Grace's fan fiction began to serve as a vehicle for sharing her Christian faith with readers. Specifically, upon finding renewed faith as a Born-Again Christian, Grace started infusing her anime fan fictions with themes related to salvation and Christianity. Through writing in this context, she also gained confidence in her abilities to "speak American" and to communicate her ideas and reach out to a broad audience. She also made many contacts with other fans who helped her develop her art, web design, and anime music video making skills. In time, these abilities and social networks all contributed to the development of an online youth ministry that Grace now runs. This ministry was a means for Grace to bring about what she viewed as important and necessary social change (e.g. conversion to Christianity) at the local and global level. Thus, her participation in the fan community, her creative reworkings of media texts, and her interactions in a globally networked online space all played a significant role in her self-representation as a Christian and her sense of agency in potentially bringing about social change at a level that extends beyond the borders of her local community.

Nanako also used her fan fictions to represent many themes and issues that were pertinent to her local context and daily life. For example, she used her fictions to explore topics such as love, friendship, and family relationships, academic pressures, popularity, arranged marriage, as well as historic and cultural aspects of China and Japan. Through creating these texts, Nanako was taking on these global topics and inflecting them with her own local perspectives. And, through distributing the texts in the fan fiction community, she made them part of trans-border networks of information related to these topics, that may in turn influence or at least come into conversation with other youths' perspectives, imaginations, and views of the world. For instance, her text *Crazy Love Letters* sparked a somewhat heated debate around the topic of arranged marriages between cousins, which prompted her to expand the story text and begin writing new stories that treat this topic in more depth in order to make the tradition more understandable to youth from diverse backgrounds.

As a slightly different example, Cherry-Chan's fan activities demonstrated agency in annexing the material as well as the ideological content of popular media. For example, Cherry-Chan belonged to a popular anime forum called *MiniTokyo*, in which participants from all over the globe met online to share anime videos and exchange information about different series, to post fan images, and through their ongoing interactions, to collectively create narratives related to the lives of various Asian popular cultural icons. As Lam (2006) points out, many youth view such file-sharing practices as "part of a grassroots movement to democratize the enjoyment of anime music and movies" (p. 25). As such, their activities can be viewed as a form of social action brought about through active and productive

engagement with mass media as fans challenge official producers' ownership, not only of the media narratives, but of the products themselves.

Discussion

Imagination and Identity

Appadurai suggests that the imagination has taken on "a peculiar new force" in contemporary social contexts (1996, p. 53), as mass media and migration provide individuals with rich fodder for envisioning alternate lives for themselves. Much like the youth in Lam's (2000, 2004, 2006) and Yi's (2007, 2008) studies, Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan's activities centered on mass media played a significant role, not only in the possible lives that they imagined for themselves, but also in the actual identities and social relationships that they fashioned online.

Of particular note is how ELL youth from this project as well as those from Lam and Yi's studies were able to leverage their knowledge of popular media to construct online identities as accomplished users of multiple social languages, including but not limited to print-based English. For example, Almon (in Lam, 2000) initially expressed worry that his struggles with English would constrain his future academic and work prospects. However, through his participation in online spaces, he was able to use English as well as his knowledge of Asian popular culture to develop a "textual identity" as a "knowledgeable, valued member of the global J-pop [Japanese pop music] community" (Lam, 2000, p. 471). As another example, Joan (in Yi, 2007) was able to construct an online identity as a poet by using Korean to compose on the WTBC site. According to Yi, Joan's "frustrations with writing in English could be counterbalanced by meaningful encounters with writing in Korean" outside of school (2007, p. 35).

In this study, Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan also used fan fiction writing as a means of developing their English language abilities, and there is a notably Western influence in their texts, either in terms of religious content, media sources, and/or story narratives that are set in North American contexts. However, the anime-based canon also opened up a space where these young women could leverage their knowledge of Asian languages, culture, and media to create texts that were well-received by the fan community. As immigrants to North America and as bricoleurs, Nanako and Cherry-Chan drew from the resources of their home and host cultures to create transcultural or polycultural (Maira, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, 2004) narratives. Thus, their practices of annexing the global were very much tied to their existing transnational and local connections. For example, participants' stories integrated the target language of English with Romanized versions of their heritage tongues and other Asian languages. Nanako and Cherry-Chan's narratives also addressed themes related to their lives as Asian females at home, their struggles as students in North American schools, and their personal experiences

as youth who inhabited multiple on- and offline cultural spaces. Their texts also included media stemming from their daily lives in Canada as well as from their participation in diasporic online communities (e.g. the *MiniTokyo* forum) that helped them remain connected to pan-Asian youth culture. The incorporation of multiple languages and cultural materials into their fan fiction texts afforded participants the opportunity to represent themselves as transcultural individuals and to use their varied linguistic resources to share the social reality of multilingualism in ways that the traditional, monolingual texts of a classroom would not. Thus, the common thread among these examples and those from Lam and Yi's studies is the way in which technology-mediated, out-of-school literacy practices provided a counterbalance for ELL youth's less successful attempts at using English in academic settings by allowing them to leverage a diversity of resources, including their Asian backgrounds, as they developed identities as powerful language users.

Collective and Connective Imagination

Technology and mass media provide people with unprecedented exposure to and options for participating in a "mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6). Such transnational social connections include the creation of "diasporic public spheres" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 21), such as the WTBC site that served as a meeting place for Korean immigrant youth in Yi's (2007) study, and the Hong Kong Chatroom that served as a meeting place for youth of Chinese descent in Lam's (2004) study. Similarly, participation on FFN facilitated Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan's connections with a pan-Asian group of youth; however, their fan-related activities also enabled them to construct relationships across broader cultural and linguistic borders. As Merchant (2001) and other researchers (Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Thomas, 2005) have pointed out, new media and ICTs can open up potential for strengthening ties with existing friendship groups as well as for establishing communication with a wider group of friends at the local, national, and international level. As evidenced by the number and diverse geographic range of participants' reader reviews, new ICTs can also provide youth with opportunities for connecting and exchanging perspectives with individuals whom they otherwise would be unlikely to ever meet due to geographic distance.

All three participants clearly demonstrate the networking potential offered by new media and ICTs in several ways. The fact that Nanako and Cherry-Chan, living in North America, were able to learn and benefit from Grace's English composition skills even though she was living on a different continent is one example. Also, Nanako made friends with youth from the fan community who were translating her stories into different languages, such as one author from Belgium who was translating one of her texts into French. Another example is Nanako and Cherry-Chan's relationship. Considering the political and social distance between China and Taiwan, it is significant that the combined forces of migration, popular

cultural affiliation, and technology provided a point of connection by which these two young women could form a long-standing on- and offline friendship.

The collective nature of Appadurai's (1996) imaginaries is also evident in the online youth spaces discussed in this article. The Relay Writing in Yi's (2008) study and the RP writing in fan fiction are illustrative of the ethos of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007) and participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992) that emphasizes collaboration, distributed knowledge, and multiple perspectives over the "'individuated,' . . . 'author-centric,'" and "'expert-dominated'" emphasis of more traditional literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 9). In such participatory or dialogic forms of writing, ELLs are able to draw from multiple resources to support their composition, ranging from popular media such as music and song lyrics used by youth in this and the Lam and Yi studies, all the way to human resources such as the native and non-native English speakers that provided audiences and collaborators for written texts. By writing with partners and in groups, these youth engaged in collective practices of imagination in which they composed with an awareness of the ideas, perspectives, and previous contributions of the other community members. Moreover, in terms of literacy, they were able to engage in purposeful, composition-related interactions, develop metacognitive strategies for monitoring their language use, and gain insight into the social nature of writing (Black, 2008). As Yi (2008) points out, exploring such collaborative forms of writing "moves beyond the common emphasis on research into individual composing in cyberspace" and "puts a new face on voluntary literacy practices—one that involves students co-constructing knowledge and understanding in a community setting" (p. 671).

Imagination and Agency

According to Appadurai, the modern day imagination "has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility" (1996, p. 31). For many youth, creative work of the imagination is an integral part of their lives that is facilitated and shared through networked technologies. This can be seen in Yi's studies (2007, 2008) with the youth who engaged in Relay or poetry writing on an almost daily basis, and in Lam's studies (2000, 2006) with the youth who created and maintained popular websites over an extended period of time. Grace and Nanako displayed a similar sort of commitment, as evidenced by their multi-chapter stories and ongoing interactions with readers that spanned months or even years, while Cherry-Chan displayed a stronger commitment to participating in a popular fan forum and maintaining a LiveJournal related to fandom over an extended period of time.

In terms of agency, participatory media fandom has a long history of negotiation between individual fan's perspectives and the aforementioned "globally defined fields of possibility" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31) of the mass media. Accord-

ing to Jenkins, “[o]nly by integrating media content back into their everyday lives, only by close engagement with its meanings and materials, can fans fully consume the fiction and make it an active resource” (1992, p. 62). For Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan, media content coupled with networked technologies served as an active resource for emergent forms of social action and agency that were closely tied to their local contexts and daily lives. This can be seen in the active roles that all three participants took in recontextualizing popular media. Grace did this through writing fan fictions that “correct” the original media plotlines, and through promoting Christianity via anime fandoms that were originally rooted in Eastern spiritual traditions. Nanako and Cherry-Chan also did this by creating fictions that critique and/or offer alternatives to traditional social structures, as in Nanako’s fictions with female heroines that challenged expectations for females in Asian society, or Cherry-Chan’s fictions that romantically paired male characters and challenged traditional notions of sexuality.

Through their fan fiction texts, participants also offered a challenge to conventional notions of “good” writing as individualistic, author-centric, monolingual, and rigidly adherent to standard genres and conventions. For example, much like the bilingual youth from Lam’s (2004) Hong Kong chatroom study, at the level of style, all three young women creatively employed language to create linguistically hybrid texts that indexed their transcultural identities and signaled their affiliation with a cosmopolitan audience. Their fan fiction texts also broke down the author/reader distinction through a mixture of formal narrative prose and informal, conversational style that invited audience feedback. In addition, by including disclaimers that asked readers to overlook grammatical and spelling errors, Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-Chan implicitly referenced and promoted a larger discourse that valued function over form in communicative practices. Moreover, these multilingual and interactive features have become entrenched as part of the genre of these three youth’s fan fiction texts. This continuity at the level of genre, discourse, and style coheres to support participants’ efforts to be recognized as legitimate authors and interlocutors in spite of their non-native English speaking status and to challenge conventional notions of what counts as good writing.

Conclusion

It is important to note that in spite of the possibilities for personal and social growth and global understanding that new media and ICTs might offer, there can also be problematic aspects of daily engagement with and relationships formed through media and technology. As Appadurai points out, the “prisms of the possible lives” (1996, p. 54) presented through mass media are unrealistic and/or unattainable for many individuals across the globe. Thus, media-based interactions may make the disparities between real and imagined worlds stand out in starker contrast. Additionally, uncritical engagement with popular cultural materials and media messages

can have deleterious effects ranging from adopting stereotypical representations based on gender and ethnicity all the way to engaging in materially consumptive practices that can have negative financial consequences for individuals and harmful environmental consequences for the world. Similarly, exposure to a plurality of literate and cultural perspectives does not automatically bring about understanding, empathy, and/or acceptance. Nonetheless, both the potentially productive and problematic aspects of our increasingly media-saturated and technology-rich social contexts have significant implications for our understandings of contemporary youths' literate and social development.

Analysis and discussion from this article suggest that new media and ICTs are providing ELLs and immigrant youth with new contexts for developing what Lam (2000) calls a "qualitatively different relationship" (p. 468) with English literacy that comes from being able to effectively express themselves online. Rather than using text solely to emulate preexisting genres and participate in concretized social patterns, the youth discussed in this article creatively employed language and other representational resources to enact cosmopolitan identities, make trans-border social connections, collaborate with other youth, experiment with new genres and formats for composing, and challenge traditional author/reader and producer/consumer distinctions. Attending to such extracurricular activities can provide a richer picture of youth's literate lives and also can offer insight into the ways that they do and also *do not* productively and critically engage with the linguistic, cultural, and ideological materials that they encounter in global online spaces. As youth increasingly turn toward such spaces as sites for communication, socialization, and self-representation, it is crucial that we, as researchers and educators, attend to the ways in which new media and ICTs may be influencing modern configurations of imagination, creativity, and communication in order to best support, extend, or constructively offer critique on both the positive and questionable aspects of such configurations.

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