Asking Teens about Their Writing Lives: The Writing Identity Work of Youth

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Abstract:

Framed by theories of youth, culture, identity studies, and literacy identity formation, this article examines how youth articulate themselves as writers. Using interview transcripts, analysis explored writing identity from the perspective of teens in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Findings from this qualitative study suggest that youth used various cultural artifacts, both conceptual and material, to feel and/or seem like a writer within multiple contexts. Specifically examined are the ways in which teens negotiated various identities as writers, including whether and how they drew on specific artifacts to embrace, resist and negotiate the following: (a) standardization, (b) meaning and relevance, (d) support, and (d) identities. In particular, findings illustrated the significance of spaces that provided opportunities for students to both feel and seem like a writer, and highlighted the nuanced ways in which seeming and feeling like a writer are shaped by social and cultural factors. Implications point to providing teens more opportunities to engage in the identity work of writers within multiple spaces, where support, choice, and time to talk about how society conceptualizes writing and what writing means to them are present.

Keyword: writing | literacy identities | adolescent literacy

Article:

To understand more about teen writers, we (five English educators) interviewed teens (grades 6–12) about their writing lives inside and outside of school. Many teens were sophisticated, creative writers like Sadie, who stated, “Why do I write? I like telling my own stories. I can’t find what I want to read, so instead, I write it. Who else is going to do it?”

Sadie explained that she writes in order to tell the stories she wants to read. Her reasoning is empowering and assertive. Most English language arts (ELA) educators hope that, like Sadie, all students believe that their stories are important to tell and that they see themselves as writers. How did Sadie begin to see herself as a writer? How have school or other contexts offered her ways to be a writer? What resources did Sadie have access to as she became a writer?

Teens are active writers of fanfiction (Lammers, Citation2016), successful journalists on NPR's Youth Radio (e.g., Machetta, Citation2020), and published novelists (e.g., Hannah Moskowitz, author of Break). According to Pew Research data, adolescents use writing frequently on social media, in e-mails, and in text messages (Lenhart et al., Citation2008). Teens, like Emma Gonzalez, Greta Thunberg, and Winter BreeAnne, use social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, TikTok) to write powerful messages about social justice. Each of these teens decided that an issue was important to them and used the tools at hand to convey these messages – gun control, climate activism, and showcasing Black artists and activists – to wider audiences. These young people, and millions of others, are engaging in the kinds of New Literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, Citation2011) work that weaves together text and technology, context and identity, into the sociopolitical discourses of the 21st century globalized world (Gee, Citation2006). These are examples of how youth writers impact the world.

In school, teens are often portrayed as struggling writers, even if they are successful outside of school (Yancy, Citation2009). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Assessment for Educational Progress (Citation2011)), only 24% of U.S. eighth and twelfth graders demonstrated "proficiency" in writing, with a mere 3% demonstrating superior performance. A survey of faculty in two-year colleges revealed that only 4% believed that their students were well-prepared for college, while 12% of faculty in four-year institutions did (Schaffhauser, Citation2015). Others worry that technology degrades teens' writing due to different conventions in textese (Maltais, Citation2012). Some employers agree, collectively spending more than $3.1 billion on writing-related training (National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools and Colleges, Citation2004, Citation2005). Situating teens as non-writers stems from a narrow view of what counts as writing in school, linked to high-stakes expectations from standardized exams (Applebee & Langer, Citation2006).

The complexity of writing, teaching writing, and being a writer – nested within the institution of school and in the social worlds one inhabits – is challenging for teachers and students. Teaching writing is a complex process shaped by the teacher's own writing history (Zoch et al., Citation2016), their experiences with teaching-of-writing professional development (Myers et al., Citation2016), and the institutional constraints of school, such as high-stakes testing (Au, Citation2007). Learning to write is an identity-construction process in which students, incrementally, take on the authentic practices, behaviors, and discourses of writers (Ivanič, Citation1998). The fluidity of adolescence, intersecting with the rigidity of school and the rules of academic English (Ball et al., Citation2010), create a complicated space that young writers must navigate. In particular, constructions of a "good writer" are racialized and oftentimes marginalize BIPOC students, especially in school (Haddix, Citation2009; Kinloch, Citation2010). Asking questions and listening to teens talk about their writing lives can be an important way for educators to learn about writing instruction and literacy learning (Intrator & Kunzman, Citation2009; Jones & Beck, Citation2020).

The focus of this article, then, is to analyze how youth articulate themselves as writers. Much scholarship has focused on young people and their writing, using identity markers (e.g., race, class, or gender) to contextualize the writing processes and the texts they create. We took a different approach by gathering interviews from teens across a variety of ages and contexts, inviting them to talk widely about their writing identities. This study focused on how teens described their writing lives in their own words, using the identity descriptors they took up. Thus, by examining the writing identity work of youth, we hope to learn more about how they learn to write in various contexts. One reason we sought to gather such a wide range of youth voices – five

states and eight sites – was to represent a diverse range of youth voices as they spoke about their writing lives. We address the following research questions:

1. How do teens describe their writing identity work?
2. What cultural artifacts do students draw on for that description of writing identity?

Theoretical framework

This research is framed by theories of youth, culture, literacy, and identity studies (YCLI) (Moje, Citation2015) and literacy identity formation (Bartlett, Citation2007). To counter calcified, deficit notions of students' languages and literacies (e.g., Valencia, Citation2012), educators must view students as capable and knowledgeable, building on the resources that young people bring into the classroom (Bomer, Citation2011; Fowler-Amato & Warrington, Citation2017; Kinloch, Citation2010; Paris & Ball, Citation2009). Some studies on writing have privileged the voices of teen writers, found meaningful insights into how adolescents engaged in the writing process, and illuminated contradictions related to what schools might consider writing deficits (Early et al., Citation2010; Tatum & Gue, Citation2012). Less research, however, has utilized direct accounts of teens' writing lives to examine how they understand themselves as writers and the writing they do. Our interviews with teens collected direct accounts of their writing, writing lives, and writing identities, within the context of school and school-adjacent settings.

Youth culture, literacy, and identity studies

The goal of YCLI is to provide alternative narratives to common beliefs about adolescents, such as viewing teens as hormonal, deviant, and/or unable to embrace literacy practices (Lesko, Citation2012; Moje, Citation2015). Current attempts to engage with adolescents' literacies are too often premised on struggles within test-constrained school curriculum, instead of "beginning with what young people know, do, read, and write and want to know, do, read, and write" (emphasis original, Moje, Citation2015, p. 207). Research limited to school contexts using scores on standardized assessments also fails to develop "broad and deep profiles of adolescent literacy practice and proficiency in a host of contexts" (Moje, Citation2015, p. 207). Thus, developing an understanding of how young people "construct and represent themselves in hybrid ways across different spaces and contexts" (Moje, Citation2002, p. 216) will open possibilities for more meaningful assessments of learning. Moreover, solidifying this understanding allows for making school-valued literacy practices relevant and meaningful for youth (Moje, Citation2015). While much research on youth literacy practices has delved deeply into literacy practices of individuals or small groups (e.g., Black, Citation2006; Elf, Citation2016; Muhammad & Womack, Citation2015), this article seeks to better develop a broad impression of teens' visions of themselves as writers by interviewing 76 youth in urban, suburban, and rural contexts across grades 6–12.

YCLI also takes up the intersection of literacy practices and identity formation of youth. Moje (Citation2002) states that youth "read, write, and speak themselves" into texts that they engage with. Through this interaction, "they construct new texts of experience for themselves," and "construct new selves that are hybrids of all of these experiences" (Moje, Citation2002, p. 222). These new selves are identities that are both fluid and derived from "histories of participation" (Moje, Citation2015, p. 212), including participation in schools. Thus, literacy

practices that surround texts can "play an important role in developing youth cultures and in providing fodder for identity enactments, whether by serving as a marker of identities that will be recognized in particular ways, or by providing the information necessary for youth to enact certain identities" (2015, p. 213). One core enactment of identity through text is the writing of texts that others recognize, and the ability to talk about the creation of that text. In this way, youth take on the work of writing to bring an identity, as a writer, into being. The ability to use metatalk about writing (Myhill & Newman, Citation2016), within a community of writers (Vasudevan et al., Citation2010), is a way to further enact the identity as writer (Vetter & Meacham, Citation2018).

To further develop a framing of identity work, we draw from definitions of identity described as multiple, fluid, and dynamic, and that situate discursively constructed self-understandings embedded within social, cultural, and historical contexts (Holland et al., Citation1998; Mishler, Citation1999). Through writing, talking about writing, and taking up, resisting, or reshaping notions of what it means to be a writer, people engage in identity work around writing (Ivanič, Citation1998). Ivanič argues that writing identities "are all socially constructed and socially constructing in that they are shaped by and shape the more abstract 'possibilities for self-hood' which exist in the writer's socio-cultural context" (Ivanič, Citation1998, p. 24). The social and institutional contexts of the youth we interviewed are school and school-adjacent settings, which afford the young people some possibilities as writers, while constraining others. According to Bartlett (Citation2007), identity work includes drawing on cultural artifacts at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, which we describe below.

Seeming and feeling

Bartlett outlines a framework for the work one does along both the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels to both "seem" and "feel" (Bartlett, Citation2007, p. 54) like a writer. These actions are about the ways "in which one works to convince others and oneself that one is the kind of person who knows how" to write (Bartlett, Citation2007, p. 55). Interpersonal refers to what an individual does to be recognized by others, "necessitat[ing] crucial social work to seem like a legitimate person practicing literacy in a legitimate context for a legitimate audience [involving] extensive interpersonal political manoeuvering and impression management" (Bartlett, Citation2007, p. 54). The work of a writer also includes the intrapersonal work of feeling like a writer, which includes an individual's perceptions of their own writing abilities and "their sense of the perceptions held by parents and teachers" (Bartlett, Citation2007, p. 54). For example, some students may successfully write essays and earn passing grades but not believe they are good enough to feel like writers. Others may fail state-mandated writing exams but feel like writers because they have a huge following online. Writing identity work occurs at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels.

Another interrelated aspect of identity work includes the cultural artifacts that young people use both to seem and to feel like writers. Cultural artifacts are "objects or symbols inscribed by a collective attribution of meaning" (Bartlett, Citation2007, p. 55). Artifacts may be material, such as a notebook, or conceptual, such as writing for therapy or writing to pass a test. Holland et al. (Citation1998) suggest that people use cultural artifacts to develop identities and/or to challenge society's traditionally accepted identities. For example, many young people use school as a cultural artifact to support their academic writing, while others resist school as a cultural artifact due to its exclusion of writing genres meaningful to them, such as fanfiction or anime. Cultural artifacts, then, are tools that individuals use to feel and seem like a writer.

Learning to write is an identity-building process in which individuals take up specific cultural artifacts and behaviors that are associated with writing in order to convince themselves and others that they are writers (Burgess & Ivanič, Citation2010; Cremin & Locke, Citation2016; Ivanič, Citation1998). Writers, in this view, are not reduced to proficient or non-proficient producers of institutionally-required written products, but are intentional creators who use the tools of language available to them through their varied social spheres to craft purposeful written communication (Eyres, Citation2016). When young people take up, or reject, the identity of a writer, they negotiate an active and dynamic stance toward the writing they choose to undertake and their approaches to various writing tasks. We found this framework useful because it helped us make sense of how teens explained or alluded to their use of cultural artifacts to engage in the interpersonal and intrapersonal work necessary for constructing and enacting writing identities within various contexts. In other words, Bartlett's framework of seeming/feeling helped us unpack what that identity work looks like from a teen's perspective.

Teens, their writing, and identities

Although research has been done on writing identities with teachers (e.g., Cremin & Locke, Citation2016), adults (e.g., Burgess & Ivanič, Citation2010), and young children (e.g., Hong, Citation2015), we focus most of this literature review on studies conducted with adolescents and young adults, since that is our focus. Research has illustrated how writing identities shift across time and contexts (e.g., Black, Citation2006). Elf (Citation2016), engaged in ethnographic research of one individual's development across four years of schooling. Findings showed that, over time, she shifted from identifying as one kind of writer toward other identifications relevant in contexts beyond school and the discipline of science. This shift in identity intersected with and was facilitated by her out-of-school writing experiences. Similarly, in a case study with adolescent English Language Learners (ELLs), Black (Citation2006) examined how one teen, who wrote fanfiction online, developed an online identity as a popular, multiliterate writer. This was in contrast to how she was situated as an unsuccessful or non-writer in school. Taken together, these studies illustrate how teens engaged in writing identity work within and across contexts.

Scholarship has also portrayed how teens' diverse identities shape how and what they write. Muhammad and Womack (Citation2015) investigated Black adolescent girls' use of multimodal literacy to make sense of and challenge public conceptions and representations of Black girlhood. They closely examined the girls' writing with additional analysis of interviews and field notes to determine how the girls composed multimodal texts that pushed against traditional notions of beauty, sexualization, and education. Vetter (Citation2010) found that one high school student, who typically identified as a non-writer, wrote an in-depth multi-genre research project in her ELA class because she was allowed to write about LGBTQ issues. This student identified as a member of the LGBTQ community and explained that she chose not to engage in other assignments because they did not reflect her own experiences. For this student, her LGBTQ identities shaped her engagement in writing.

Researchers have consistently found that students of color thrive as writers outside of school, but are often situated as struggling writers in school (Haddix, Citation2009). The work of Skerrett et al. (Citation2013) is noteworthy for its use of "students working as ethnographic partners" (p. 152) in collecting out-of-school data about their writing lives. This study takes up the way young people used their data collection as a way to perform particular literacy identities, to both feel and seem like the kinds of writers that the researchers were interested in studying. In a

study that interviewed 30 teens and 60 adults about the act and meaning of writing, Brandt (Citation2014) found that teens were oftentimes viewed by others as being less literate than older participants. This ageist stereotype is often related to the belief that creative writing, something the teenagers often engaged in, was uncritical and easy. Overall, this body of research pushes educators to broaden notions of how teens engage in writing in order to provide spaces for students to make sense of their identities and to engage in writing identity work.

Other studies have highlighted students' identity work related to the use of multimodal writing (Vasudevan et al., Citation2010; Weinstein, Citation2007). Vasudevan et al. (Citation2010) engaged in an ethnographic study of a multimodal storytelling project in a fifth-grade urban classroom. They found that, by learning new composing practices, some fifth-grade students took on new literate identities in their classroom community. A typically disengaged student situated himself as a writer when he was able to use pictures and other artifacts from home to compose a multimodal text about his life outside of school. Weinstein (Citation2007) interviewed three students who wrote and performed rap music outside of school. Weinstein learned that the students engaged in this literacy practice because it provided pleasurable opportunities for them to express their identities, to develop membership into hip hop communities, and to play with language. These studies demonstrate the power that multimodal writing has for engaging young writers in writing, both in and out of school.

Scholarship has also focused on how teens express their social identities – conceptual cultural artifacts – through literacy practices (e.g., Finders, Citation1997; Moje, Citation2000). In a study about the literacy habits of adolescent girls, Finders (Citation1997) found that a particular book or folded note could signify membership into various social circles. Oftentimes participants would not read the books they carried but instead used the covers to position themselves in ways that made social life in school easier. In a study of adolescent gang members, Moje (Citation2000) discovered that they used graffiti and tagging to gain power and status in their community. She found that because these students were often marginalized in their classrooms by being associated with deviance and violence, they used these alternative forms of literacy to make their voices heard and claim spaces for themselves.

Research has pointed out that students often do not have opportunities to discuss their writing lives (Vetter & Myers et al., Citation2017; David, Consalvo & Vetter, Citation2019) or intersectionality of identities in school (Negin et al., Citation2020). Dialogic classrooms (Nystrand, Citation2006) with robust opportunities for metatalk support students' identity development (Phillips Galloway & McClain, Citation2020). When teachers do not engage in robust conversations around writing identities and discourses, students' opportunities to learn the metalanguage of writing and intersectionality are limited (Dix, Citation2012).

Overall, research illustrates the value of learning about adolescents' writing experiences, knowledge, and identities. The above research relied on interviews, observations, and artifacts of writing to illustrate relationships between writing and identities. Although many of these studies engaged in interviews with teens, most were focused on specific writing experiences, such as online fanfiction writing or writing a multimodal genre project in school. Less research, however, has asked teens to directly discuss how they define a writer, their daily writing practices, and/or who/what influenced their writing in order to get a big picture of their writing lives. This relates to the need for more research about how talk about writing shapes the construction and enactment of writing identities (Vetter & Meacham, Citation2018 and Vetter et al., Citation2017). In addition, less research has explicitly investigated the role that material and cultural artifacts play in the interpersonal and intrapersonal work of learning to write within and across multiple contexts. This

article does just that by analyzing how 76 teens throughout the U.S. speak the stories of their writing identities. Such research can provide insight into the social identity work involved in learning to write.

Method

Data collected comprises interviews with 76 youth in grades 6–12, using a single semi-structured interview protocol developed collaboratively by the researchers. We analyzed those interviews to explore the following questions in this study: How do teens describe their writing identity work? What cultural artifacts do they draw on for that description of that identity work?

Research and context participants

Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, Citation2016) through educational settings in Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas, Nevada, and Oregon. All participants completed informed consent/assent documents and all names are pseudonyms. Researchers involved with this study serve as teacher education faculty specializing in literacy at universities across these states and share a background as ELA teachers; we strive to position young people as capable writers with valuable stories to tell. As part of our ongoing clinical and research work, we have established connections with the schools and organizations in our communities through which we solicited participants.

Selection criteria included teens who were currently in grades 6–12 in urban, suburban, and rural locations in order to capture a broad snapshot of teens' writing lives around the country and in various types of communities. No additional demographic or performance data was assessed prior to the study to either include or disqualify participants. Teens did not need to identify as or be recognized as a writer. Instead, we wanted to talk with teens who had both positive and negative relationships with writing, defined broadly, in order to collect data from a more realistic representation of teens in the U.S.

The teens that we interviewed were part of various writing programs or school settings in which each of us were involved. All of the authors developed some trust with the participants prior to interviewing them and were known to community partners prior to this study. By design, we conducted one interview per participant as we aimed for a snapshot in time of teens' explanations of their writing lives and identities, across multiple sites. With the exception of the writing camp, which was sponsored by a university for youth in the community, other sites were not affiliated directly with the universities and participants may or may not have had connections to these universities (Table 1). We provide self-disclosed demographic information related to race, gender, and sexual orientation for the teens that we highlighted in the findings section. Most teens did not identify their sexual orientation. Out of the 76 participants, 39 identified as writers, 12 sometimes identified writers, seven did not identify writers, and nine did not share how they identified writers. Not all participants stated which specific grade level (6–12) they were in, but they did disclose if they were in middle or high school. Although technically some of our sixth and seventh graders would be considered pre-teen (11 or 12 years old), as opposed to teens (13 to 19 years old), we continued to use the term teen for all of our participants because we focused more on grade level and less on age.

Table 1. Setting, participants, and demographics.

Setting	Description	Demographics
All settings Rural, urban, and suburban.	Interviews took place in classrooms and in after-school learning spaces in the following states: Kentucky, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas. Each of us had established some trust within our contexts and used the same interview protocol with each teen.	31 middle school 45 high school 41 White 19 Black 12 Latinx 4 Biracial 56 female 20 male
Young Writers' Camp Urban, suburban, and rural	This camp includes young writers in grades K-12 and takes place at a university in a Southeastern city over two weeks in July. Not all campers who attend the camp love writing or identify as a writer. Oftentimes parents send their kids so that they can improve their writing skills. Approximately 20% of campers qualified for need-based scholarships. Researchers did mini-interviews during the half-day, two-week camp, starting on day two of the camp. Those interviews occurred outside or in the hallway. Recruitment occurred during parent orientation.	1 middle school 16 high school 10 white 6 Black 1 Latinx, 11 female 6 male
Middle School After-School Programs Suburban Urban	Participants were engaged in after-school activities in two Title I middle schools, in a local school district, in 2017 in the Southwest. One site was a suburban, magnet, recently renovated school. The other site was an urban, decades-old school with no recent renovations. Both the school district and the investigator's university are located in a small southern city in a largely rural region. More than 90% students qualify for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS). The researcher spent several weeks attending these after-school programs for a larger study. Recruitment was based on interest and willingness to be interviewed. Each interview consisted of one meeting of about 30 minutes and occured in a lightly trafficked hallway.	13 middle school 11 Black 2 Latinx 10 female 3 male
Traditional High School Suburban	This suburban school was situated within a large urban school district in the Western part of U.S. Both participants were AP track students, junior year, making plans for college applications. Approximately 12% students qualifying for FARMS. Recruitment was based on interest and willingness to be interviewed. Each interview consisted of one meeting of about 30 minutes and occured in a lightly trafficked hallway.	2 high school 2 White 2 female
"Alternative" High School Suburban	Alternative public high school that is a "magnet" school in the Western part of U.S. Students must apply to and be accepted into after struggling in some way within their zoned high school. Approximately 12% students qualifying for FARMS. Recruitment was based on interest and willingness to be interviewed. Each interview consisted of one meeting of about 30 minutes and occured in a lightly trafficked hallway.	7 high school 3 Biracial 2 Black 2 White 4 male 3 female
Traditional Junior High School Suburban	Interviews with 17 students, in grades 6 and 7, took place during the school day in the hallway with students stepping away from their English language arts class in a mid-sized school urban part of a Southwestern state. Recruitment happened a week prior to interviews. The researcher visited approximately 15 ELA course sections in grades 6 and 7, including inclusion classes, on-level classes, pre-Advanced Placement, and Gifted and Talented sections. The researcher explained the research and distributed consent forms to all interested students. More than 90% students qualify for FARMS.	17 middle school 9 Latinx 7 White 1 Biracial 17 female
Traditional high schools Rural	Interviews took place in two rural high schools in the Southeastern U.S. Approximately 60% of students qualify for FARMS at both schools. This research was part of a larger research project. Recruitment was based on interest and willingness to be interviewed. Each interview consisted of one meeting of about 30 minutes and occurred outside of the classroom.	20 high school 20 White 13 female 7 male

Eight of the nine researchers (five of whom are authors of this paper) who conducted the interviews are White, female, and grew up in working-class and middle-class families. One researcher is a Black female who grew up in a working-class family. We are all former ELA teachers, eight are current literacy educators, and one is a doctoral student in literacy education. All of us share the beliefs that: (a) writing differs with purpose, audience, and other elements of the situation; (b) writing is often a form of public participation in a democratic society; and (c) writing is an important part of personal growth, expression, and reflection (National Council of Teachers of English, Citation2016). Four of the researchers are National Writing Project (NWP) teacher-consultants and the rest are involved in local writing communities that share NWP goals and objectives.

We recognize that our interpretations are constrained by the lenses of race, language, and positions of privilege. For example, even though we asked questions about how race, gender, class, and sexual orientation shaped how and what teens wrote, very few of the participants chose to give in-depth answers that explored these identity elements. We are aware that our identities might have been a barrier for students who did not feel comfortable sharing these experiences with someone they did not know sufficiently. With that said, we entered this project with a commitment to open spaces for the voices of youth, and invited participants to narrate their own writing experiences, foregrounding identity markers they chose to discuss. Most of these interviews happened in 2018 and we acknowledge that the same questions asked today may have invited far more stories anchored in race particularly.

Data collection

The researchers collaboratively developed a common protocol (see Appendix A) to guide semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, Citation2016), conducted by the researcher with one or two participants. All interviews were audio or video recorded and transcribed. Interviews with 59 of the participants were conducted in single sessions lasting between 10–30 minutes. Seventeen participants who were enrolled in a two-week university writing camp participated in multiple mini-interviews throughout the camp session. These mini-interviews started on day two of the camp. Each day, the teens were asked different questions from the interview protocol. This slightly different format was adopted for the camp in order to minimize schedule disruption. This format might have provided more trust between the researcher and participant, particularly during the final interviews, and generated more interview data (approximately 15 minutes more interview time per person).

Data analysis

Analysis occurred in four phases (Merriam & Tisdell, Citation2016). In the first phase, researchers reviewed all transcripts to identify excerpts in the interviews about writing identity work. For example, after being asked about her writing practices in school, Cecilia told a story about being poet laureate in her school. Identifying these excerpts helped us learn more about the cultural artifacts that teens used to seem and/or feel like a writer, as described below. Researchers created an Excel spreadsheet in which each excerpt appeared as a separate entry.

We examined our first research question in our second phase of analysis by coding the interview excerpts for moments when the teens seemed – the interpersonal work an individual does to be recognized as a writer – or felt – intrapersonal perceptions of their own writing ability – like

a writer. These excerpts contained incidences of only seeming, only feeling, or both seeming and feeling like a writer. During this coding process, the following themes emerged: (a) not feeling or seeming like a writer, (b) seeming but not feeling like a writer, (c) feeling but not seeming like a writer, (d) feeling like a writer but not wanting to seem like one, and (e) feeling and seeming like a writer. We organized these codes in an Excel spreadsheet with the code and excerpt from the teens. We then quantified how many times, for example, teens described feeling and seeming like a writer to help us determine how saturated the themes were (Table 2).

Table 2. Codes for interpersonal and intrapersonal writing identity work.

Code	Quantity	Example
I don't feel and don't seem	22	Interviewer: ACT, prep for high-stakes tests … how have they impacted your views on writing? Student – How … because, like, I am a special-needs person, I'm going to do all these different things with the test. So, they write for me. But this year I'm pretty sure they're going to make me write it, so, like, here's my question: How do you do this? How do you write a five paragraph summary about this question? How? You get one paragraph out of it. How do you get five? I can't think that well (Eve).
I seem but don't feel	37	And then we write in English class, which is kind of required. Like, I don't like writing stuff about stuff that has an outline to it. Like, I don't like writing something that somebody tells me I have to do. I want to write on my own terms (Nadia).
I feel, but don't seem	24	I wrote this one story and one of my teachers really didn't like it and they gave me a bad grade on it and that was a really bad experience for me because I was younger and I felt really bad about it … She just said that she didn't really enjoy reading it. It was about like an Egyptian story I wrote in the fifth grade and she just said she didn't like it (Pat).
I feel but conceal	7	And … but I don't really like to share it [my writing] with my family. Um, I don't really know why. I think it's just like I don't … I don't know. Cause my family they're all like, like this is gonna sound mean but they are kind of like just like … like my parents are both like super smart so it's sometimes hard cause I don't know. I feel like they sometimes won't understand what I'm trying to do. It's not their fault but it's just like, I don't know. I feel like they sometimes like aren't … not good enough at like understanding things but just like can't like depict things I feel like the way I can sometimes (Korey).
I feel and seem	159	Either like I listen to music, and I'll be like, "Oh, that kind of reminds me of a scene I want to happen in this story," and then I'll be like, "Okay, well, to do that thing I need to get to that scene, which means I need to write more and get there." Or I'll be reading a book, and I'll be like, "Huh, I really want to tell a story" or, "I really want to read another book like this." Then I'll start writing that kind of story.

In the third phase of analysis, we examined our second research question by identifying cultural artifacts, those material or conceptual "objects or symbols inscribed by a collective attribution of meaning" (Bartlett, Citation2007, p. 55) that teens referenced in their interviews. Material cultural artifacts included tangible people and things through which writers inscribed, shared, revised, or published text, as well as related objects through which writers signaled their identification as a writer to others (Table 3). Thus, we engaged in inductive coding for the kinds of material cultural artifacts that teens described using in multiple contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, Citation2016). For example, many teens described using a journal, a material cultural artifact, to

Table 3. Material cultural artifacts.

Material cultural artifact The number in parenthesis indicates the amount of codes for each category.	Description
Dress and accessories (46)	Tangible objects through which one signals being a writer such as scarves, messenger bags, glasses, and coffee.
Texts (33)	Written materials that influence writing such as books, magazines, letters, and websites.
People (38)	People who influence writing such as friends, family, teachers, published authors, and readers of online fan fiction.
Tools (52)	Tangible objects through which one inscribes, revises or publishes writing and/or signals being a writer such as notebooks, journals, pens, computers, and phones.
Conceptual cultural artifact	Description
Passion (15)	Loves to write; feels compelled to write
Self-expression (33)	Writing to represent one's beliefs, personality, feelings, or opinions
Writing as a profession (19)	Earning money by writing; writing as a career; producing a body of complete work that is published or shared; being a member of an established writing community; being known by others as a professional writer.
Writing for fun (11)	Writing for enjoyment, recreation, a hobby or a pastime
Writing for therapy (10)	Writing to process emotions/challenges; writing to heal; writing to cope with adversity
Writing for school (22)	Writing to address an assignment or school task
Writing for creativity (44)	Writing to produce artistic, original, or imaginative products
Writing for reflection (10)	Writing to understand one's own experiences and the world
Writing to understand multiple perspectives (7)	Writing to consider the perspectives of people unlike oneself
Writing for documentation or memory (5)	Writing to recall events at a later time, to capture information over time, or to remind/activate one's memory
Writing for craft (24)	Writing in an intentional way to create an effect on the reader.

Table 4. Quantity of codes for each theme.

Theme	Quantity of codes	Example
Standardization	113	It's not terrible but it's not good. Because, when you're doing standardized testing and you look around to see how other people are progressing and you see it's all in one jumble it's not broken up- your ideas are not broken up, they don't connect. But if you know how to write [then] you're perfect, you're good to go. If you don't know how to write you're going to be struggling, so I think the people that are actual writers- and I had to write a paper, are going to do good and standardized testing more than a person who doesn't but I don't think it helps me as a writer (Avery).
Meaning and relevance	135	Okay, so, my grandma passed away during the summer and I wrote a poem about it because she was a really big influence on me and I really miss her. Her birthday was yesterday actually. And it was a poem, as I said. The tone of it was kind of sad and like, I don't know what word to use for this. Missing? That doesn't make sense. You know what I mean. And it was just about how much I do miss her and how much of an influence she had on me (Delma).
Support	89	My friends, my teacher … Mainly them. Sometimes I'll let my mom read it but sometimes not because I feel like I'll get embarrassed (Delma).
Negotiated identity markers	8	I do think it affects my writing because some people may think that just because I am African- American or Black or whatever you want to call it, that I don't know big words and I don't know how to spell and I don't know things that Caucasians or whatever you want to call them; I am not being racist. Like things that they know, but I know just as much as everyone else in my class. I am just as smart as all of the white kids. There is not difference besides skin tone and height and that's pretty much it. I am not different at all (Dorothy).

write down thoughts, ideas, and drafts of writing. Conceptual cultural artifacts are the ideas, images, purposes, and notions through which participants explained, described, or represented writing and being a writer. We then engaged in inductive coding for the kinds of conceptual cultural artifacts that teens described using in multiple contexts. For example, many teens described writing as a time to heal and make sense of traumatic events in their lives (Table 3).

For our fourth phase, we collapsed the material and conceptual artifacts into four central themes concerning the teens' interpersonal and intrapersonal writing work (Table 4). In this phase, we found that themes overlapped as " … some category piles overlap each other in Venn diagram-like fashion because they share similar traits while retaining unique features" (Saldana, Citation2013, p. 205). First, we noted that several material artifacts, such as teachers or parents, and conceptual artifacts, such as writing for creativity, were associated with how teens resisted and/or embraced support from others. Second, we found that several conceptual artifacts, such as writing for self-expression, and material artifacts, such as a journal, were associated with the desire to write in meaningful and relevant ways. Third, we noted that material artifacts, such as high-stakes exams, and conceptual artifacts, such as writing for school, differed from those associated with writing for personal reasons and were aligned with how teens resisted standardized or formulaic writing in schools. Finally, we categorized conceptual artifacts, such as the belief that writers write to heal, and material artifacts, such as story characters, that were associated with how teens' identity markers (e.g., gender, race and more) shaped how and what they wrote. We discuss these four central themes below.

Findings

Because we understand identity work to be interpersonal and intrapersonal, we explore how teens discussed seeming and feeling like a writer within a variety of contexts through their interviews. Below, we organized our findings based on the ways in which teens' descriptions of writing identity work included drawing on specific artifacts to embrace, resist, and negotiate: (a) standardization, (b) meaning and relevance, (c) support, and (d) identities.

Standardization

Overwhelmingly, teens resisted cultural artifacts related to standardization that they experienced in school. Teens raised the issue that both standardized testing and teaching to the test narrowly defines what counts as writing, causing them to neither feel nor seem like writers. Levi (White, male, high school), who identified as a writer, said that in one of his high school classes he thought:

> an essay had to be a five-paragraph clunky essay. Now, I've had three essays published, and I know that an essay can take on a lot of forms. It can be an instruction manual, a final exam. Standardized testing told me that an essay was one thing. It seems my teacher has a very specific idea of what an essay should be. Two essays that I did in that class both got Fs.

Levi drew on the material artifact of five-paragraph essays, a structured text that must include an introduction, three body paragraphs with support and development, and a conclusion. Five-paragraph essays are often used to scaffold students into academic writing, but this material artifact did not support Levi in feeling or seeming like a writer. Thus, school, which taught him to draw

from the conceptual artifact of writing for school, was not a space for him to engage in the identity work of a writer as there was only one way to be successful. Levi continued to write and publish essays, finding contexts outside of school to both seem and feel like a writer.

Jacey (White, female, middle school), who identified as a writer, explained that learning to write for the high-stakes test helped "for like schoolwork and for preparing for the [standardized] exam and for, like, class essays probably. But my own writing, I don't think it would really affect it too much." Here, Jacey discussed how the material artifact of the standardized exam and the conceptual artifact of writing for school helped her get through this kind of writing. When doing standardized writing, then, she seemed like a writer within the definition of what counted as a writer in school, but she did not feel like a writer. Jacey did, however, situate herself as a writer in the ELA classroom when she was given the chance to plan out her writing process for a choice piece. She also wrote "not-poems" or notes "formed into a poem" that she and her friends exchanged during school. For Jacey, then, standardized writing caused her to seem, but not feel like a writer. She engaged in both the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of writing, though, through the material artifacts of not-poems and the writing process.

Willow (White, female, high school), who identified as a writer, discussed how she seemed but did not feel like a writer in school by explaining how she separated test writing from personal writing.

> I try and keep them separate because I know like standardized tests - you don't have to do it for the rest of your life. When we get a rubric from whatever we write in school, I'll usually focus on what the three [the highest score] says and then I usually try and do that. But just me writing by myself I kind of get my thoughts out and then I go back and I revise everything.

Willow has learned how to seem like a writer in school by figuring out how to score high on the writing rubrics, a material artifact. Outside of school, however, she took on a more authentic approach to writing by engaging in her own drafting and revising process. She typically did this at home or in her personal notebook at school when she was bored. As a result, Willow did not usually feel like a writer at school even though she seemed like one according to her assessment results. At home, she drew on the conceptual artifact of writing to express, which was in opposition to writing for school in the classroom. As a result, she experienced a disconnection between the writing identity work she did in and out of school.

Across interviews, teens commented that high-stakes exams and instruction focused on writing for those exams took up the majority of instructional time, narrowing the kinds of writing that mattered and leaving little space for other kinds of writing. Teens took the stance that a broader view of what counts as writing in school offers more opportunities to engage in the identity work of a writer.

Meaning and relevance

Teens embraced cultural artifacts related to writing that were meaningful and relevant to both the author and reader. They also resisted cultural artifacts that did not allow them the space to write in meaningful and relevant ways. Teens' experiences of school, a material artifact, supporting their writing identities varied widely. Below we discuss teens' varied experiences of writing as meaningful and relevant, or not, within and beyond school.

Cecilia (White, female, high school), who identified as a writer, described being poet laureate in her school and winning a poetry contest.

> I was poet laureate last school year. I ended up getting published and I was honorable mention in the Hollands Poetry Contest. I was so excited because there were four winners and 64 honorable mentions. So, I was like, "My writing is good!" But doing poetry honestly for me is one of the most fulfilling ways to write, just because that's how I cope. Performing poetry is sharing my story in a way that doesn't give the people who hurt me power. But still acknowledges that they existed and did what they did.

Cecilia used material artifacts, poet laureate and poetry contest, and a conceptual artifact, writing as reflection and expression, to support her identity work as a writer both in and outside of school. To feel like a writer, Cecilia wrote in a genre of her choice, poetry, about topics relevant to her life, coping and empowerment. She seemed like a writer because she was celebrated for it by others and was published. Thus, this combination of both interpersonal and intrapersonal work in after-school programs helped Cecilia take on a writer identity across contexts.

Korey's (Black, male, high school) writing identity was not linked to school at all. He identified as a writer and wrote fantasy stories outside of school to make meaningful connections with others.

> I want people who are having a hard time to find something I have written and have it help them get through it. And then maybe one day they'll start writing something and maybe I'll get to read that, you know?

The stories he wrote were material artifacts, alongside the belief that writers write for creativity and reflection, a conceptual artifact; all of which supported him in seeming and feeling like a writer. Korey turned to fantasy books and stories during his parents' divorce to help him make sense of himself and his experiences. He used fantasy texts as models when he began writing his own stories – stories that he believed needed to be written. For Korey, then, seeming and feeling like a writer meant writing stories that others might find meaningful and relevant as they make sense of themselves and the world around them.

Social media, another material artifact not connected to school, provided spaces for teens to both seem and feel like a writer. Specifically, having their work published for others to read added meaning and relevance to the experience. For example, after being asked about a good writing experience, Iris (White, female, high school), who identified as a writer, stated:

> I would say when I first published my teacup contemplations. I published it on a website- Wattpad and it's gotten five reads last I checked and it was one of my foremost works and I was so proud of it.

Iris was able to share writing, which she understood to be deep and sentimental, with others, as well as see that others are reading her work. Thus, she drew from the conceptual artifact that writing is professional, which included publishing work, and the material artifact of Wattpad to engage in the identity work of a writer. For many of the teens, social media was a way to publish

and share their work with others. When they did this, they reported both seeming and feeling like a writer.

Overall, teens drew from the cultural artifact related to the idea that writers write in meaningful and relevant ways. In those examples, they were able to write in ways that helped them make sense of themselves and the world around them, sometimes in school and sometimes not. In some instances, they were able to make connections with others through published pieces. When those opportunities were not available, they experienced conflict, often seeming but not feeling like writers, and either resisted school writing or did the minimum to pass.

Support

Teens described how they embraced and resisted cultural artifacts related to support when engaging in the identity work of writing. In particular, feeling and not seeming like a writer was shaped by people and the kind of support they offered. This section details the complicated ways support does, or does not, foster seeming and feeling like a writer.

Paige (White, female, middle school), who identified as a writer, stated that she both felt and seemed like a writer when she shared her writing with a friend in English class. However, Paige hesitated to share her writing with her parents for fear that they would not understand the writing and criticize it. She explained:

> I don't really like to share it with my family … like my parents are both like super smart so it's sometimes hard … I feel like they sometimes won't understand what I'm trying to do. I feel like they sometimes … can't like depict things I feel, like, the way I can sometimes. And so I don't necessarily like want to get shot down just 'cause I feel like they won't understand it.

Here, the material artifact of her family's comments inhibited Paige's ability to both seem and feel like a writer, so she avoided sharing her writing with them. For Paige, then, to engage in the identity work of a writer, she needed to be in a context with individuals with whom she felt comfortable expressing herself, a conceptual artifact. For Paige, that was her friend (a material artifact) in English class. Although Paige's parents were providing support to her through constructive feedback, Paige needed support in the form of validating experiences that only her peers could give her. Thus, Paige's interpersonal and intrapersonal work related to her writing identities required specific kinds of support.

Pat (White, female, high school), who identified as a writer, articulated how a teacher's feedback on her writing, a material artifact, discouraged her from writing by giving her a bad grade with vague feedback on a story.

> I wrote this one story and one of my teachers really didn't like it and they gave me a bad grade on it and that was a really bad experience for me because I was younger [fifth grade] and I felt really bad about it. She just said that she didn't really enjoy reading it.

For Pat, one teacher's negative and vague feedback of a story impacted her writing identity work, because, while she felt like a writer, the teacher's response made Pat not seem like one. Like Paige's parents, Pat's teacher was giving feedback on Pat's development as a writer, but the tenor

of the comments did not support her in seeming like a writer. Although Pat discussed spaces in which she both felt and seemed like a writer in other segments of her interview, it is worth mentioning that she still remembers this experience from elementary school. Inevitably, then, Pat thinks back to this moment and makes decisions about whether she wants to take the emotional risk of drawing on the conceptual artifact of writing for creativity to seem like a writer to others.

Adrian (White, female, high school), who identified as a writer, talked about how teacher support via feedback helped her to seem and feel like a writer in school.

> And Miss C tells me exactly what's good and she doesn't go around just saying, 'This is bad, this is bad, this is bad.' She tells me what's good and I feel like that's really helped me a lot because I don't focus on the bad. I focus on the good that's in my writing and then I go back and make what she didn't say was good even better.

Adrian used the material artifact of her teacher's support and the conceptual artifact of writers know their craft to recognize the "good" in her writing. With those artifacts, Adrian was able to then revise her writing and make needed improvements. In a way, Miss C and her support served as a literacy sponsor for Adrian's writing identity work in the classroom (Brandt, Citation1998). As a result, Adrian both felt and seemed like a writer in school.

Esme (Latinx, female, middle school), who identified as a writer, talked about the power of support from a teacher. Specifically, she discussed how material artifacts, such as her journal, promoted negative feedback from peers. Esme said, "Even when I'm reading to my friends in the halls, people will like knock my journal out of my hands." She elaborated that in class, after being encouraged by her teacher to read aloud, that students

> Would like jokingly say mean stuff about it, and like, I didn't really like that. It like really hurt. And then she [my teacher] was like, don't bother, don't mind them. Just go and write. I actually wrote a poem about that.

Esme used the material artifact of her teacher's and friends' support to explain how she resisted negativity from some peers and capitalized on the support of her teacher and writer friends. With that encouragement and support, she used the conceptual artifact of writers write to reflect to create a poem that helped her make sense of the experience. Thus, Esme felt like a writer, but sometimes believed she had to conceal that writing identity depending on the context she was in, as did some other participants. Overall, teens tended to either resist or embrace the support that was offered to them, depending on how they perceived it.

Negotiated identity markers

Teens also talked about how their identity markers intersected with one another and overlapped in ways that shaped their identity work as a writer. Although this theme was not as saturated as the others, most likely due to the limited amount of time we had with the teens, we share these excerpts because of their significance.

Barbara (Black, female, middle school) did not identify as a writer. In her interview, she stated that she oftentimes felt like teachers were making assumptions about her abilities based on

her race. She did not seem like a writer because of those assumptions. She extended that experience further saying:

> I feel like, if I want to become a writer, I feel, maybe, like a white, any person, would just be like you are just not good enough. Or that since I am Black, I am hood or I am ghetto, and I can't write a good piece of work. But I feel like, as a Black person, it's just that there a lot of things that you are limited to, 'cause you can, you go outside, and people are already judging.

Barbara felt that racial identities shaped her identity work as a writer, specifically related to the conceptual artifact of writers know their craft. Thus, she expressed that even if she felt like a writer, she might not seem like a writer because of White peoples' perceptions of her capabilities to craft like a writer because she is Black. Barbara understood she will have to resist those deficit positionings from teachers and future readers if she wanted to prosper as a writer in the future. The idea that she won't ever seem "good enough" to others, which extends beyond school, shaped how she felt as a writer, in her description. In other words, Barbara recognized that a society dominated in whiteness will not recognize her as a writer, regardless of her craft or capabilities. In this way, Barbara recognized that she does not have access to the same kinds of artifacts to seem and feel like a writer. Thus, Barbara illuminated the social construction of what counts as craft that is tied to systemic inequities and the preservation of whiteness in schools.

Tina (White, female, high school), who identified as a writer and as a member of the LGBTQ community, discussed her belief that in order to write a book with LGBTQ characters, the author needed to have some background and experience with that community in order to write in a meaningful way. She explained:

> Because a lot of the time straight authors like to write about LGBT characters, but then they just completely like [screw it up]. And I'm reading and I'm like, "This isn't … " The first thing that popped into my head was J.K. Rowling. She just likes to throw it in [that Dumbledore is gay].

In this interview, Tina drew from material artifacts, books, to express her belief that in order to seem like a writer, writers must write from experiences and backgrounds that they understand. Her story illustrated how identities, such as sexual orientation, shape not only what and how someone writes, but also how someone might be perceived as a writer. Interestingly, J.K. Rowling was well-received as a writer, however, she has recently come under criticism for how she wrote about LGBTQ characters in her Harry Potter series. Critics have stated that it is not enough for Rowling and other writers to say that their characters are LGBTQ; instead, they need to show it to readers (Pugh & Wallace, Citation2006).

Dylan (White, male, high school), who self-identified as a writer, expressed a similar belief about what it means to seem and feel like a writer in his interview.

> It's really hard to write from [the] perspective of someone who's not male and white in my opinion. Because when I write, most of my protagonists, they reflect me. I just don't really have that much experience. I was raised in a very sheltered environment. I don't feel like I have enough knowledge to write from another perspective that's not a white male.

Dylan drew from the conceptual artifact that writers write for self-expression to express his belief that, in order to seem and feel like a writer, he needed to write from his own experiences and background. Thus, Dylan recognized that his identities as a white male narrowed what he could and should write about, even though he valued reading about the diverse experiences of others. Overall, these teens recognized that they needed to negotiate identities to do the interpersonal and intrapersonal identity work of a writer.

Discussion

During these interviews teens talked about their writing lives which helped us to better understand the complex ways in which they used material and conceptual artifacts to engage in the social aspects of writing identity work. Specifically, Bartlett's framework of seeming/feeling helped us unpack how they described their writing identity work and our data showed how context, people, and composition tools made a difference in that identity work. For example, one-size-fits-all teaching and assessments of writing negatively impacted teens' ability to find meaning and satisfaction from writing. Additionally, their ability to invest in writing was largely predicated on whether the teens experienced belonging as a writer. Teens sense of writing identity was impacted as well by the perceptions of having the right types of support for their writing. Finally, the teens narrated the ways that interested peers and invested teachers, along with meaningful writing tasks, created the interpersonal and intrapersonal spaces to seem and feel like a writer. This research can remind literacy educators that asking for and taking seriously the perspectives and narratives of teens can afford us powerful insights (Early et al., Citation2010; Ivanič, Citation1998; Tatum & Gue, Citation2012).

Specifically, standardization impacted teens' willingness or interest in adopting a writing identity. For many, writing for high stakes exams was an action that was not meaningful to them, but they were expected to do it well for success in school. Like Willow, teens did not feel like writers, even if they seemed to be writers by succeeding on standardized writing tasks. Other teens were able, in spite of their resistance to standardization, to situate themselves as writers in other spaces based on composing practices related to their interests and forms of expression, as Vasudevan et al. (Citation2010) found in her study with young writers. As we recall, Levi, like Weinstein's (Citation2007) participants, found success and pleasure in literacy practices outside of school. In Levi's case, he published a piece of writing in an out-of-school context that, when done in school, was evaluated as failing. Similarly, Jacey wrote "not-poems" to her friends during class and handed them out during passing periods, specifically positioning her writing as not what was expected for school. Thus, standardized writing in school oftentimes hindered the writing identity work of teens and pushed them to either resist taking on writing identities altogether or to seek out other spaces for writing.

Support for a writing identity, or lack of support, was related to seeming and not seeming like a writer. The interpersonal recognition of being a writer mattered to teens, and they resisted sharing their writing identity with others if they were not assured of receiving support. Although teens found meaning in writing, they hesitated to share their writing identity with others for fear of being rejected. Like Pat, whose teacher rejected her story in fifth grade, students often weighed the emotional risk of convincing others of this identity. This assessment of risk is similar to Skerrett et al.'s (Citation2013) research, in which her student could narrate rich literacy practices aligned with what he learned in class, but never showed researchers material artifacts of those practices.

Feeling and not seeming was connected to identity markers and the ways in which teens discussed how they may not be perceived as a writer because of their race, like Barbara. For example, Tatum and Gue (Citation2012) illustrated how specific structures can situate adolescent Black boys as writers by providing support by other writers and by organizing learning around African American writing. The authors' Summer Literacy Collaborative and Young Writers' Camp also did the work of integrating the interpersonal and intrapersonal by, for example, providing choice in topics and genres, inviting various kinds of writers to talk with students about writing, and by asking students to talk about themselves as writers.

Both feeling and seeming like a writer occurred when teens were able to write in ways that were meaningful and relevant to them, alongside guidance and support from experts. Meaningful writing often provides opportunities to make sense of how identity markers like race and sexual orientation intersect with being a writer, such as in Tina's discussion of her LGBTQ identity and who can legitimately write about her community. Similarly, Adrian felt and seemed like a writer by anchoring her writing identity to constructive teacher feedback. The dual layers of seeming and feeling like writers adds texture to existing scholarship about how teens express their social identities through literacy practices (e.g., Finders, Citation1997; Moje, Citation2000), make sense of their identity markers through writing (e.g., Muhammad & Womack, Citation2015), and benefit from support and sponsorship (Brandt, Citation1998; Early et al., Citation2010). Specifically for our teens, seeming and feeling was dependent on various social and cultural factors that shifted over time.

Overall, teens most often seemed and felt like writers when they received support from adults, were given choice in writing topics, and were able to explore their multiple identities, which confirms what other researchers have found about writing identity work through the voices of teens (Bomer, Citation2011; Haddix, Citation2009). This study offers news insights into this area of research by offering a deeper understanding of how both interpersonal and intrapersonal elements of writing identity work can function in teens' experiences of being a writer. Specifically, having opportunities to take on a writing identity for students in multiple spaces is significant for students' writing development, success, and joy. As educators, then, we need to ask how we can support our students to both seem and feel like writers both in and out of school, and to be aware of the social and cultural factors that shape those elements. Thus, for educators, it is important to evaluate how students are situating themselves as writers in the classroom and why they have taken up those positions. We also need to be aware of why and how those identifications shape and shift over time. In addition, it is important to ask how we, as educators, are situating students as writers through the opportunities that we open up both in and outside our classrooms (e.g., support, choice, topic, etc.). As educators, we also need to help students navigate and resist the ways in which standardized essays narrowly define what counts as writing and hinder writing identity work within classrooms. Finally, it is important that we open spaces for students to talk about their writing identities as these teens did during these interviews. Through such introspective conversations with adults and peers, students can develop a more nuanced understanding of writing and themselves as writers, including what motivates them, what challenges them, and what supports they need, as we discuss below.

Implications

A lesser-studied way of fostering young people's identity work in writing is by creating spaces for teens to reflect on and talk about their writing identities, as we did with these teens. This kind of

space to talk about writing identities is a throughline in these teens' stories. Teachers could adapt this finding for their classrooms. For example, a teacher could adapt Nancie Atwell's practice of interviewing students on a quarterly basis (Atwell, Citation1982; Atwell, Citation1985) and ask youth how they see their own growth as writers, as well as asking them to define a writer and how/why they see themselves as writers. Such reflective opportunities, grounded in talk, can help students to unpack why they situate themselves the way they do within a writing space. As a result, they come to understand that a writing identity is not fixed (e.g., individuals are not born writers). Instead, writing is an action that can be supported or hindered by people, interests, places, etc. (Vetter et al., Citation2017; Costa & Kallick, Citation2000). Providing time and space for these discussions demonstrates to students that their identity work is valuable. Teachers can shape instructional practices to better fit the needs and interests of students with professional development focused on fostering writing identity work in the classroom (Myers et al., Citation2016). Integrating practices that value students' writing identity work could also support teachers as they navigate the demands of standardized writing instruction (Au, Citation2007) by opening opportunities for students to write more and see themselves as writers.

Additionally, more research that provides spaces for teens to share their lived experiences could help unpack how teens can become co-constructors of knowledge in literacy instruction. The teens we interviewed were highly reflective and aware of their own lived experiences as writers. That high level of reflection was cultivated, as referenced above, in the spaces co-created by teens and adults. Spaces that center writing as product or standardized tests scores are unlikely to encourage students to grow into a writerly identity. Given the opportunity, though, teens' are more than willing to share their perspectives, often in the hopes of making the classroom a more welcoming place. Classroom teachers and literacy educators have much to learn from situating adolescent experience and voices as a vital piece of classroom research and investigations (Moje, Citation2002). Further research that focuses on the intersectional and overlapping aspects of identity and its impact on literacy practices also is needed, including how race, class, language, gender, sexuality, experience, ability and other identity markers can inform students' writing and lived experiences as writers. Although all participants were asked how these identity markers shaped their work, they took up this line of discussion less often. Admittedly, the interviews for this piece were done before the summer of 2020 and the resulting cultural shift in conversations, around race in particular. Regardless, this may suggest that teens would benefit from further study of how other writers are informed by sociocultural factors in order to foster those identity connections.

Listening to teens' literacy experiences provides opportunities to better understand the rich literate lives of teens and shifting classroom practice accordingly. Building upon this type of experience and professional development provides an asset-based foundation for approaching writing instruction in schools. Then, the classroom could provide moments in which students could, as Sadie mentioned at the beginning of the paper, write the stories they always wanted to read.

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Appendix A Interview Questions

Describe what you think a writer is. What do they look like? Do you identify as a writer? Why or why not? What would a person have to do for you to call them a writer? Do you get to be a writer in school? Why or why not? Do you talk to writers in school? Do you talk about writers in school?
What kinds of things do you like to write? Can you tell me what you've written in the past? What are you planning to write for camp? What kinds of things do you write in school? What kind of writing do you do in and out of school? What is the difference between the two? What are the similarities? What advice would you give teachers about writing? What kind of writing do you do in other content areas other than English/language arts class?
Do you think that your gender, race, class, or sexual orientation shapes what you write? For example, if you are a girl, are you more likely to write about romance?
Take me through an entire day (including at night) with you and describe when and how you write. How does that daily experience relate to how you would describe yourself as a writer. With that information, do you identify as a writer? Why or why not? When do you write (morning, afternoon, summer)? Why at that time? Do you typically write in school? If so, when do you typically do it?
Where do you write? Do you write with other people? If so, who? Do you use digital or social media to write? If so, how? When did you start writing? What kinds of things do you typically write? Did anyone influence you as a writer? Tell me about a good experience writing. Tell me about a negative experience writing. Are there any authors who inspire you? Who? Why?
Why do you write? Do you write for specific audiences? If so, who? Do you ever publish online? Explain. Do you hope to make a career of writing? If so, explain. Do you think that your gender, race, class, or sexual orientation will play a part in making a career out of writing?
How do you write? What is your process? What are your strengths and challenges? For example, some people say that it's easier to get started, but then they get stuck. That leaves them with a lot of unfinished work. Who do you share your writing with? Why? Do you ever write collaboratively? If so, describe that experience.
What made you want to become a writer? Were there specific people that influenced you? In what ways does school shape your goals of becoming a writer? Name a thing that is hard for you as a writer. Name something that comes easy to you.
Tell us about a picture that you brought in that you think describes a writer or writing. Why did you choose this picture? In what ways does that picture portray a writer or what writing means to you?
If you have advice for teachers about teaching writing, what would it be? How has standardized testing impacted your views on writing? Your writing itself?