The Role of Social Media in the Facilitation of Complex Discourses Between Young Adult Author and Reader

By

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of social media by Young Adult (YA) authors Scott Westerfeld and John Green and young adults to determine whether social media facilitates discourses of complex themes in YA literature. Related literature demonstrates the potential benefits of social media to help students develop critical thinking skills by introducing direct student/author interaction; however, there is a lack of empirical studies that observe these direct student/author relationships. Content analysis was used to observe and analyse 455 tweets, 555 blog posts, and 81 YouTube videos by Westerfeld and Green produced during the period of September 2012 to March 2013. Qualitative analysis was employed to analyse 14 interviews with participants between the ages of 11 and 17. The results indicated that while these three social media tools did facilitate direct author/reader engagement, this engagement can only take place if young adults are social media users. Interviews revealed that while social media usage was not prevalent with these participants due to internet safety issues, they would consider using social media to engage with authors in a controlled setting.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Bethany Marie MacCallum. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "How Discourses of Moral Ambiguity Found in Young Adult Literature are Facilitated by Social Media", Pro00032532, September 21st, 2012.

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First and foremost, thank you to the 14 young adults who volunteered their time for this study. The excitement each participant showed when talking to me about their favourite books reminded me why I wanted to do this study, and why I went to library school in the first place.

Secondly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor (and sometimes all around life-coach), Dr. Margaret Mackey. Without her invaluable guidance and constant encouragement throughout this process, I'm not sure where this work would be. There were times when, during an extended period of illness, I did not think I would be able to finish this project. Dr. Mackey's belief in my abilities kept me going through that time, and I don't think I will ever be able to thank her enough for it.

I would also like to thank Dr. Shannon Murray and Dr. Jane Magrath, both of whom showed tremendous amounts of faith in me when I could not see it myself. To Shannon and Jane: Thank you.

Thank you to my partner, Jeff, and my friends, who have had to listen to me talk about Scott Westerfeld and John Green non-stop for the last four years. You read their books, watched their videos, and listened to me rave about them in all my Nerdfighter glory without a second thought. Thank you for never judging, and just letting me be me.

And lastly, thank you to my mom, Maida MacCallum. Before she passed away, she made me promise to never stop chasing my dream no matter where it led me. Well momma, so far it has led me 5000 km from home, and I can't wait to see where the next 5000 km take me.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On January 15th 2013, 7:00PM, I was getting ready to settle in and watch "An Evening of Awesome." I made my popcorn, set my laptop up on the table, and had YouTube open as I waited for the "Evening" to start. Taking place at Carnegie Hall and streaming live on YouTube, "An Evening of Awesome" was an unprecedented event presented by Penguin Young Readers Group. The event was a celebration of the one-year anniversary of John Green's newest Young Adult (YA) novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and his amazing fan community of Nerdfighters[1] (Penguin Teen Australia, 2013). The night, which was executed much like a variety show, lasted for two and a half hours and was hosted by Green and his brother Hank. It featured noted YouTube stars such as: Hanna Hart (creator of *My Drunk Kitchen*), who interviewed Hank Green on stage; Ashley Clements and Daniel Gordh (*The Lizzie Bennett Diaries*), who acted out excerpts from *The Fault in Our Stars*; and Grace Helbig (*It's Grace*). Green's favourite band *The Mountain Goats* performed, and Neil Gaiman joined the Green brothers on stage as a surprise guest (Brissey, 2015; Higgins, 2013; Triska, 2013). Tickets for the evening cost between $25-$40 and sold out within 10 days, and on the night itself, "Carnegie Hall" was the No. 1 Worldwide trending topic on Twitter (Brissey, 2015; Minzesheimer, 2013). There was screaming, singing, dancing, tweeting, Tumblring[2], and storytelling. Overall, the night was simply awesome.

"An Evening of Awesome" was the first time I had ever taken part in a live stream event, and it was the first time I had ever interacted over social media with other fans who were also taking part in a live stream event. The night was named after the Project for Awesome, a charity founded by Green and his brother Hank, and made possible by the help and support from Green's millions of online fans (Higgins, 2013). During "An Evening of Awesome," we (Green's online fans) tweeted back and forth with each other, often just exclamations of excitement or "that was so funny!!" I even tried commenting on the YouTube live stream itself, but so many people were participating at once that the comments just flew by.

It was on this night that I truly felt like a Nerdfighter, sharing my thoughts and excitement about author John Green with others who were just as eager to share their thoughts

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[1] Discussed further in Chapter Four.
[2] Defined later in this chapter in the definition section.

and excitement. We were fans and readers from all over the world, in different time zones, of different ages, and from different backgrounds, but we all came together through social media to celebrate and share in the celebration of this beloved author. I had no idea what I was getting myself into that night. As the thousands of screaming fans filling Carnegie Hall became downright hysterical when Green walked onto the stage, I could almost feel the excitement reverberate through my computer screen. The fervor on Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube was palpable and contagious, and I found myself easily becoming swept up in it. I was now a Nerdfighter, and there was no turning back.

Study Overview

But a fan perspective like mine is not sufficient to provide understanding of this kind of phenomenon (though it does provide one needed point of view). What does the scholarship surrounding social media contribute?

There is much scholarly research, both Canadian and American, that suggests young adults are flocking to the internet and social media in droves. According to a multi-phase report published by Media Smarts (2015), titled *Young Canadians in a Wired World: Trends and Recommendations*, as of 2013, 99% of Canadian students from grades 4-11 access the internet inside and outside of school. Further to that, three-quarters of the students surveyed have a social media profile or blog, with YouTube being the most popular and Twitter being the fourth most popular social media sites among this demographic (Loney, 2014; Media Smarts, 2014; Media Smarts, 2015). The survey conducted by Media Smarts in 2013 also revealed that older young adults are particularly active users of social media, with 50% of grade 11 students posting to their own social media accounts, 73% reading or posting on other people's accounts, and 44% tweeting on a daily to weekly basis (Media Smarts, 2014). A report published by Statistics Canada (2014) titled *General Social Survey: Social Identity, 2013*, echoes the numbers published by Media Smarts, stating that 95% of respondents between the ages of 15-24 report using various forms of social media.

In the United States (U.S.), young adults are accessing the internet and social media in similar numbers. According to multiple Pew Research Center studies, 95% of young adults between the ages of 12-17 use the internet, with 92% of these young adults reporting they go online daily, and eight in ten of these young adults using social media (Lenhart, 2012; Lenhart,

2015; Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith, & Beaton, 2013a; Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). This number has increased from the 73% of online young adults who use social media reported by the Pew Research Center in 2010 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). In fact, 24% of young adults report going online "almost constantly." Conversely, only 12% of young adults report once-a-day usage of the internet, while 6% report weekly use, and a small 2% of young adults report going online less than once-a-week (Lenhart, 2015). As with Canadian young adults, YouTube is the most popular social media website among U.S. young adults, while Twitter is the fifth most popular social media website (Thompson, 2014). According to the Pew Research Center report *Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015*, 71% of young adults use Facebook, while 33% of young adults use Twitter, and 14% of young adults use Tumblr (Lenhart, 2015).

Green's online fan base is a typical example of an online community created and facilitated through these various types of social media. Online communities are "self-organizing systems that evolve over time around a specific issue [or interest], have their own set of rules and regulations (informal or formal) and are managed by the members" (Singh, Twidale, & Rathi, 2006, p. 3). They are made up of users who share similar interests and who find a sense of connection through these shared interests (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev, 2011; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). While the studies cited above indicate that a large number of young adults are using the internet and social media, there are also studies that tout the educational benefits of using social media to help young adults move past traditional pedagogy (Comer, 2001; Tosenberger, 2008). Social media tools can allow for learner-centered environments, such as interest-based online communities like John Green's loyal Nerdfighters, and direct student interaction with literature and the authors of the literature (Baker & Moore, 2011; Johnson, 2010; Rowsell & Burke, 2009; Silius, Kailanto & Tervakari, 2011; Tosenberger, 2008). Missing from the reports on scholarly inquiry, however, are empirical studies that observe these direct young adult reader/author relationships and the kind of discourses that are taking place within them. How are young adults using social media? Are they using it to be part of online communities, like John Green's legion of Nerdfighters, to connect directly with Green and other authors? Or are they using it mostly to interact with their peers? In response to this gap, this study sought to explore whether direct author/reader relationships through social media are occurring between young adults and their favourite authors.

It was my hope that this study would provide a better sense of how young adults use social media to connect to authors, if at all, and whether these author/reader connections result in discourses about the complex themes that can be found in these authors' work. For the purposes of this study, I define complex themes as themes or situations that are difficult to define, can be interpreted in more than one way, or require critical thought or exploration. However, it is also important to note that the complexity of these discourses also lies in the fact that they can happen across multiple platforms (for example, they can move from Twitter, to blogs, to YouTube), and that some platforms facilitate these discourses better than others (for example, blogs versus Twitter). These complexities are touched on throughout this thesis.

Research Design and Questions

This study comprises a mixed methods approach, involving content analysis of YA authors Scott Westerfeld's and John Green's social media use, and analysis of interviews with 14 young adults between the ages of 11-17, to determine if discourses of complex themes surrounding the works of these authors are being facilitated through social media. The specific research questions were:

Research Question

How, if at all, do social media tools facilitate discourses between young adults and Young Adult authors about complex themes found in their works?

Sub Questions

1. How often do Westerfeld and Green use social media tools?
2. What do Westerfeld and Green use these social media tools for? (i.e. publicity, promoting their books, discussing their works with their readers, direct address to readers, etc.).
3. How are readers engaging with authors through these social media tools?
4. What are the negative outcomes of using these social media tools, if any?
5. Do readers' perception about the author's work change as they engage with the author through social media?
   a. Does online interaction affect readers' interpretations of the morally ambiguous themes within the author's work?

6. What are the educational benefits/outcomes of using these social media tools, if any?

       The study presented here comprises the data gathered to address these questions, and is organized around three themes: the scale of the online resources coming from the authors and their community members, my own experience of participating in such communities, and the emotional considerations/barriers that keep young adult readers from taking part in these communities. In Chapter Two of this work, I provide a review of the literature related to social media and how it can be used to form connections with other users, as well as discuss theoretical concepts related to social media use such as Online Communities, Affinity Spaces, and Legitimate Peripheral Participation, or "Listeners". Chapter Three provides a description of the methodology employed to develop this study. In Chapter Four, I introduce the two authors chosen for this study, discuss why I chose to observe them, and describe my own experiences using social media to interact with them. In this chapter, I introduce two of the three themes just mentioned: the scale of social media presence and output coming from the authors and their community members, and my own personal experience of participating in such communities. Chapter Five presents the data and findings collected from the authors' social media use, and Chapter Six presents the data and findings collected from the interviews I conducted. In Chapter Seven, I discuss my author and interview findings and provide an analysis of the findings as they relate to social media use and the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter Two. In this chapter, I introduce the third overarching theme of this study, the emotional considerations/barriers for young adults to participating online, through the introduction of Moral Panic Theory. Sub Questions One and Two are addressed in the Author Social Media section of Chapter Seven, and Sub Questions Three, Four, Five, and Six are addressed in the Interview Data section of Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight serves as the conclusion to this study and discusses the "pluses and minuses" of using social media, again touching on my own experience of using these platforms.

Definitions

Blogs (Weblogs): "Websites containing an archived series of reverse chronological items posted
        by the author" (Baker & Moore, 2011, p. 379; Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013).

Social Media: web-based services "used for social networking," where existing relationships
        can be maintained, while helping "strangers connect based on shared interests,

political views, or activities" (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 210).

Tumblr: "a [micro]blogging platform that aims to give users the easiest and fastest way to
blog, whether they want to publish text, audio or video material" (Marquart, 2010, p. 71).

Twitter: a social media platform for microblogging, "where messages (called tweets) are
posted instantly and are usually no longer than 140 characters," and are shared with a
"network of followers," or users who subscribe to receive that person's content (Aharony,
2010, n.p; Bonini & Sellas, 2014, p. 127; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010, p.
21).

Young Adults (in context of YA Literature): "Adolescent readers" who are (loosely defined) as
being between the ages of 11-19 (Bean, Dunkerly-Bean, & Harper, 2014; Bucher &
Hinton, 2014; Cart, 2010; Harkin, Turner, & Dawn, 2012; Nodelman, 2008).

Young Adult Literature/Literature for Young Adults: For the purposes of this study, defined
as literature that has a focus on "youth culture"; occupies the developmental space
between childhood and adulthood during which adolescents experience self-awareness,
"inner turmoil, awkwardness, and vulnerability;" and is marketed to the young adult age-
range (Badavi, 2014; Bean, Dunkerly-Bean, & Harper, 2014; Bucher & Hinton, 2014;
Cart, 2010, p. 4).

YouTube: "a video-sharing Website founded in 2005" where "[a]ny Internet user can access
YouTube and search for videos . . . post comments . . . obtain a personal space . . . and
upload videos" (Mullen & Wedwick, 2008, p. 67).

Conclusion

In this thesis, I offer an initial exploration of how, if at all, young adults use social media
to form connections with YA authors, and if they use these social media tools to facilitate
discourses surrounding the complex themes that can be found in YA literature. The path to
answering this question, however, was dramatically impacted by two phenomena that I did not
expect to encounter during this study.

The first unpredictable element was John Green's rapid rise to fame. At the onset of this
study, Westerfeld and Green were comparable in terms of their social media and real-life
popularity. Since the release of Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* in 2012, however, his
popularity has continued to rise, as evidenced by the magnitude and rock-star like nature of "An

Evening of Awesome." Initially, I sought to study YA authors with comparable social media use and popularity to see how they interact with their readers, but with Green's rapid rise to YA author superstardom, I found myself in the middle of a 20th century hurricane that shows no signs of stopping. As a result, Green has become the extreme in terms of social media popularity and output, while Westerfeld acts as a control; he provides an example of what a "normal" author's social media use looks like. In Chapter Four, I further discuss this phenomenon and what implications this fame may have in terms of how Green is able to connect with young adults through social media by sharing my own experiences as an observer from the ground floor.

Another factor that changed the course of this thesis is the fact that the participants interviewed had very little interaction with social media, despite what is strongly suggested by the Media Smarts, Statistics Canada, and Pew Research Center studies cited above. Of the 14 participants I interviewed, only eight reported using any type of social media. Though young adults have access to the internet and social media more now than ever, my results suggest that there is still a portion of the young adult demographic who choose not take part in forms of social media. Events like "An Evening of Awesome" demonstrate that many young adults are full-blooded participants in online communities, yet it is clear from my results that "listeners" and "legitimate peripheral participants" need to be accounted for as well. This unexpected result reinforces the urgency of the need for more empirical work with young people.

> **The Doobly Doo**
> *Welcome to the Doobly Doo! In popular YouTuber terminology, the Doobly Doo is the description box that can be found below each video on the YouTube platform itself. John and Hank Green use the Doobly Doo to provide extra links, information, and other supplementary material about the topics they are discussing in their videos (J. Green, 2009). Throughout this study, I use The Doobly Doo to provide supplementary material relating to the topics I am discussing.*

Both phenomena of Green's rapid rise to fame and the low social media usage by my interview participants drastically changed my expectations for this thesis, which is not necessarily a bad thing. While I initially sought to study two comparable authors and their social media usage, the growing gap between Green and Westerfeld's online and real-life popularity introduces an unforeseen factor in Green's ability to connect with his fans. Similarly, the revelation that my interview participants are not using social media as much as the literature

suggests introduces an unforeseen factor in young adults' ability to connect with their favourite authors.

As a result of these unanticipated changes in the project, this study not only explores whether social media tools facilitate discourses between young adults and YA authors about complex themes found in their works, but also what barriers may prevent these discourses from taking place at all.

CHAPTER 2
Literature Review

Why Social Media?

Research into the educational benefits provided by the use of social media in schools and school libraries suggests that these digital tools offer avenues through which teacher librarians can explore ways to develop literacy skills (Comer, 2011; Tosenberger, 2008). For example, Melissa Comer (2011) states that the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) endorses "digital media…[to] support the use of technology to reinforce critical thinking, promote problem solving, and enhance decision-making" (p. 242). Social media such as blogs, Twitter, and YouTube allow for students to move beyond the "imperative towards pedagogy" and begin developing, and more importantly expressing, independent thoughts and opinions of the literature that they are reading (Tosenberger, 2008, p. 188).

The advent of the internet has opened the lines of communication to a global extent, reaching online communities in all parts of the world. As researchers state, the internet has allowed communication to expand thousands of miles, connecting individuals who would never have been connected otherwise (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Kotowski & dos Santos, 2010; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). This type of communication is becoming more common through the use of social media like blogs, Twitter, and YouTube, where individuals can form and become part of online communities by following other users or bloggers. These online communities are made of users who share similar interests, who find a sense of connection with other users through these interests, and who interact with other users because of these interests (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). As Zhao and Rosson (2009) suggest, people use social media such as Twitter to "achieve a level of cyberspace presence, being 'out there' and to feel another layer of connection with friends and the world" (n.p.). According to Gee (2005), these online communities of users, or "affinity groups" who interact through shared interests, occupy what he terms cyber "affinity spaces"; non-hierarchical, interest-based spaces which require the use of "portals"[3] to allow access to the content (p. 225). Social media tools, which can act as these portals to the content of shared-interest communities and affinity spaces, appeal to young adults because of their ability to "allow [them] to participate

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[3] According to Gee (2005), a portal is "anything that gives access to the signs (content) of the [affinity space] and to ways of interacting with those signs, by oneself or with other people" (p.222).

in educational online communities by creating, manipulating and sharing content online, communicating and exchanging opinions… and creating communities for different needs" (Silius et al., 2011, p. 21). Social media websites like Twitter, blogs, and YouTube allow users to establish an online presence and connect to very real online communities, sharing common interests and communicating with each other about these interests.

Author blogs. Social media tools such as blogs, Twitter, and YouTube can also allow young adults the opportunity for direct engagement with literature, and the authors of that literature (Clifton, 2010; Dann, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Tosenberger, 2008). Author blogs, or "online diaries" (Baker, Psych, & Moore, 2011), for example, have become a popular medium for two-way conversations to take place between YA authors and their young adult readers. As Johnson (2010) notes, connecting with authors used to be a very different process:

> If you wanted to write to the author, you sent the letter to the publisher, and six months later, the author might receive your letter… However, with the advent of Web 2.0, or the read/write Web, many authors took things into their own hands and started blogging. (p.172)

Johnson (2010) goes on to say that, "Children's and young adult authors are very aware of the emotional connections they create with their young readers through their books. Rather than remaining at a distance, many of these authors desire to create a stronger connection with their readers, which blogging allows them to do" (p. 172). Author blogs allow for YA authors to connect with their readers through this form of direct address, as well as allow for readers, or in the case of this study, young adult readers, to connect with YA authors in return through an "open dialogue using commenting...features" (Baker & Moore, 2011; Rowsell & Burke, 2009, p. 107). They open a gateway for readers to not only interact with the literature, but with the authors of this literature as well through direct address blog posts and blog comments.

Twitter. Much like author blogging, the use of Twitter by authors offers another avenue through which they can connect to their readers outside of the literature. Twitter, a micro-blogging site that allows users to post messages of 140 characters long or less, began with the intended purpose of answering the question: "What are you doing?" However, it became evident that a growing number of people are using Twitter more to interact with other users. To facilitate this

function, Twitter has incorporated the use of the "@" protocol to allow users to address tweets to other specific users (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009). There are also a number of other types of tweets being produced on the social media site, such as: "Pass Along," which includes information sharing or providing "News," which includes commentary on current affairs, etc. (Dann, 2010; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007; Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010; Pear Analytics, 2009). Though the environment and interface of Twitter is not as conducive to conversational use as it is for the other uses previously listed, "short, dyadic exchanges occur relatively often, along with some longer conversations with multiple participants that are surprisingly coherent" (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009, p. 2). This conversational feature can, like author blogs, allow YA authors to connect to their readers through direct address tweets, forming a connection and sense of community not possible simply through the literature.

YouTube. The video-sharing website YouTube, like blogs and Twitter, can also act as a medium through which YA authors and young adult readers can communicate. YouTube was founded in 2005, and is currently owned by the company *Google* (Backinger, Pilsner, Augustson, Frydl, Phillips, & Rowden, 2011). It was originally created as a source for entertainment through user-generated content, but has since taken on many other roles, including acting as a medium for users to share their stories, beliefs, and opinions with the rest of the world (Backinger et al., 2010; Briones, Nan, Madden, & Waks, 2012; Kim, Paek, & Lynn, 2010). According to Kim, Paek, and Lynn (2010), the most prominent social media aspect of YouTube is its ability to create online communities, especially among adolescents between the ages of 12-17. This age group currently makes up the most significant user demographic of the website, being 1.5 times more likely to visit the video-sharing website than the average user (Briones et al., 2012; Freeman & Chapman, 2007). This particular draw of young adults to the website allows it to act as a perfect medium for YA authors to directly address their readers, and as with blogs, young adult readers can interact with both the author and other members of their online community through the comment function.

Theoretical Concepts: CoPs, Affinity Spaces, and Listeners

I relied on the work of several theorists to guide and inform the findings and data analysis for this study, including: Wenger (1998); Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002); Gee (2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2013); Curwood, Lammers, and Magnifico (2012, 2013); and Lammers (2011). While a number of other researchers and theorists have also explored these frameworks, and will be discussed throughout this following section, the seven listed above provided the essential theoretical frameworks that I used to inform my own research. Below, I will explore Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder's *Communities of Practice* (CoP) (2002); Gee's (2004) *Affinity Spaces*; and Curwood, Lammers, and Magnifico's (2013) *Contemporary Affinity Spaces*.

Communities of practice: A brief introduction. According to Wenger (1998), humans are social beings. This fact, he suggests, is the central aspect of learning. It is what "matters about learning," and it is the nature of knowledge and knowing (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). He goes on further to say, "Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of [valued enterprises], that is, of active engagement in the world" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). From these assertions comes Wenger's concept of communities of practice; a theory which focuses on learning as social participation. He defines this participation as: "a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities" (Wenger, 1998, p.4, emphasis in original). It is this social participation, Wenger argues, that forms our identities and influences how we interpret our own actions.

This leads us to CoPs. At their most basic level, CoPs consist of individuals who share something in common, and who interact with each other as a way to further their knowledge about this common endeavor (Dubé, Bourhis, & Jacob, 2005; Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Wenger et al. (2002) further break this down, saying:

> Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis. . . . These people don't necessarily work together everyday, but they meet because they find value in their interactions. (p. 4)

They are part of the informal structures of organizations, and they form spontaneously as people search for help, solve problems, or develop new ideas. Interacting together allows these groups

to share information and offer each other insight and advice at a community level so that all can benefit (Dubé et al., 2005). In essence, the members of these groups act as "sound boards" (Wegner et al., 2002). They work with each other, helping one another reach a common goal.

What is surprising about CoPs, however, is that they are not new. In fact, they are much more common than one would think. Communities of practice date back to when we "lived in caves," discussing how best to capture prey (Wegner et al., 2002, p. 5). They represent the first knowledge-based social structures, and they can be found in the history of every organization and industry, though they do not necessarily have to be formally recognized. Wenger et al. (2002) give the example of the U.S. automaker industry as one with an informally established community of practice, given that the surviving automaker companies have made Detroit their home base. Individually as well, we all belong to communities of practice, and we can belong to several communities of practice at a time. They can be found in our homes, schools, or even in our hobbies, and they change with us as we grow and learn. They can be named or unnamed. They can be highly prominent fixtures in our society, or remain largely invisible; but, we are surrounded by them, and we most likely belong to multiple CoPs, even if we do not realize it (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002;). As Wenger (1998) suggests, "communities of practice sprout everywhere – in the classroom as well as on the playground, officially or in the cracks" (p. 6).

The idea that CoPs, with our explicit or tacit membership, can develop around a common interest or endeavor is what makes this framework pertinent to this study. Wenger (1998) argues that it is the learning within these CoPs that is the most personally transformative. We know that CoPs can be useful in classroom settings, and participating, whether it be full or partial participation until the individual feels comfortable enough to participate fully, in these communities can lead students within them to reach a common goal. This goal can be finishing a book together as a class during story time, or performing a concert together as the school band, but working together towards a common goal is an integral part of the learning process.

CoPs, however, involve not just a shared goal, but also a shared physical space (Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012). According to Wenger et al. (2002), CoPs can exist in online forms, which they call "distributed" communities (n.p.). These distributed communities of practice, however, face a number of problems that according to Wenger et al. make it hard for the communities to succeed. These problems include: relying on technologies that are "not real substitutes for face-

to-face interactions," making the community as a whole feel remote; a lack of "presence" and visibility for members; an excessively large membership which can make it hard to know members on a personal level; and communities that cross too many divisions and organizational boundaries of a company or organization, making management difficult.

What, then, comes of individuals who may share the same space, and who may share similar interests or practices, but who have different goals regarding these interests? What about individuals who do share the same interests and goals, but do not take up the same physical space, as is common with today's increasingly online society? Are these individuals still "members" of the CoPs? Theorist James Paul Gee (2004) also noted these problems associated with CoPs, indicating that the idea of "community" can suggest a notion of "belonging" and "personal ties." It implies "membership" when,

> 'membership' means such different things across different sorts of communities of practice and there are so many different ways and degrees of being a member in some communities of practice that it is not clear that membership is truly a helpful notion. (Gee, 2004, p. 78)

Gee (2004) goes on to say that,

> If we start with the notion of a 'community' we can't go any further until we have defined who is in and who is not, since otherwise we can't identify the community. Yet it is often issues of participation, membership, and boundaries that are problematic. (p. 78)

Gee proposes that the problem lies with the label, because it implies labeling a group of people which must be identified by its "members." Instead, Gee suggests a shift towards "spaces" instead of "communities." A focus on space suggests that even if the people interacting within the space are not a community in a physical sense (i.e. they are online rather than face-to-face), they are still able to gain from their interactions with others and develop an affinity with one another. Space allows for more affordance, more fluid endeavours, and fewer constraints than are often associated with membership in a "community" (Gee, 2004, 2013; Hayes & Duncan, 2012). People can identify as members of a community within a space, be it an online or physical space, but they can also choose not to identify as members of the community. It is from these problems associated with the notion of physical "community" and "membership" that Gee developed his framework of affinity spaces.

Affinity spaces. The conception of affinity spaces was Gee's response to the inadequacies inherent in Wenger's concept of communities of practice. Both theories, however, do maintain that interaction is a key component of the learning process. According to Gee (2013), affinity spaces act as key examples of synchronized intelligence. People from diverse backgrounds and skill sets can use a variety of tools to network in ways that benefit all who are a part of that space. It is a common interest and a feeling of connection between people (in either physical or virtual locations), however, that still stands as the primary defining feature of an affinity space (Arnone, Small, Chauncey, & McKenna, 2011; Curwood, 2013; Gee, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2013; Hayes & Duncan, 2012; Lammers, 2011; Lindgren, 2012; Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012; Nardi, 2005). This common endeavor "provides unity in an affinity space, not a need for shared geography, age, or other social factors" (Lammers, 2011, p. 58).

Affinity spaces are also characterized by their lack of rigidity. They are experimental and innovative, and have "provisional rather than institutional structures," as well as being "adaptable to short-term and temporary interests, ad hoc and localized, easy to enter and exit on demand and very generative" (Arnone et al., 2011, p. 184). People are able to enter such spaces, which are often internet websites, and contribute in a variety of ways (whether they be big or small). They are able to interact with different people for different reasons, even if the end goal itself is different from the rest of the people within the space. People are able to share resources, values, and move through or from groups flexibly and without constraint. The space can be a physical space, an online space, or a combination of the two, as affinity spaces transcend constraints of time and physical proximity (Gee, 2013). People enter affinity spaces not because they are looking for jobs or trying to be practical; "they are in them because there they can count and contribute, grow and not be judged by their wealth or status" and "share different things in different spaces" with different people (Gee, 2013, p. 178). It is this particular flexibility that makes affinity spaces such an appealing theory when discussing the constantly evolving online world.

Social interaction also plays a major role in affinity spaces. The common endeavor may be the most salient motivation for entering an affinity space, but not all participation in these spaces revolves around it. Other such forms of participation can include playing games, engaging in online discussions, or even taking part in activities that can help build a community within the space (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012). Masters and "newbies" all share the same

space, and creating, exchanging, and distributing knowledge can be taken up by both the old and new (Lindgren, 2012). Affinity spaces and the synchronized intelligences that lie within offer a new form of living and socially interacting as a way to "move forward" and "make a better world" (Gee, 2013, p. 179).

While a common endeavor, lack of rigidity, and social interaction are all components of an affinity space, there are also three more specific components that are a part of these spaces: content, generators, and portals (Gee, 2004, 2007; Lammers et al., 2012; Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012). According to Machin-Mastromatteo (2012), content is what the space is about. Gee (2004) also describes content as what signs the space has and how they are organized. Generators are the entities that give content to the space (Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012). A space can have one or more generators (Gee, 2004). Portals are what people use to enter the space. They can be physical or digital places, and portals can also be generators as long as they allow for people to access or modify its content. Conversely, a generator can act as a portal as long as people interacting in the space can see it (Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012). As Gee (2007) explains, a portal "gives access to the content and to ways of interacting with that content, by oneself or with other people" (p. 94). These three components are integral aspects of an affinity space that must be present, in one way or another.

What is unsettling about both Gee's and Wenger's perceptions of CoPs is that both theorists suggest that the idea of communities simply does not work for an online space. I see this as an oversimplification of the concept of "communities." While a community is traditionally defined as "a group of people who live in the same area (such as a city, town, or neighbourhood)," communities are also "a group of people who have the same interests, religion, race, etc.," and "a unified body of individuals" (Community, 2014, n.p.). If a group of individuals share similar interests and choose to meet online rather than face-to-face, why, according to Gee, can this not be considered an online community? Whether it is called a "space" or a "community," individuals are still able to meet online, gain from their interactions with one another, and develop an "affinity" for each other. A perfect example of this is the online community of Nerdfighters, who are the self-professed "nerd" following of author John Green. These Nerdfighters meet mostly online, though face-to-face Nerdfighter gatherings do happen, even here in Edmonton with the Edmonton Nerdfighter Group. These followers are fans of Green's writing, but they are also fans of his online social media presence. They identify

strongly as a community (see Figure 1), having their own online space where they can go to meet, share stories, information, or even just their love of John Green with each other, and in a sense, develop an affinity for one another (http://dftba.com/s/4/About-Us.html). This is a group of people who share an affinity for something, and also identify strongly with each other as a community.

Figure 1. The DFTBA website, where Nerdfighters can go to shop and purchase John Green and Nerdfighter related paraphernalia. The website also acts as a portal into the Nerdfighter forum, which is accessed through the "Community" drop down tab, and which allows Nerdfighters to meet with each other in an online space and share their love of all things Nerdfighteria and John Green.

Not all researchers agree that the term "community" cannot transfer to online spaces, however. Despite Wenger et al.'s (2002) suggestion that "distributed" CoPs do not work for reasons such as remoteness, lack of "presence," a large membership, and organizational boundary crossing, researchers have also touted the benefits of these distributed CoPs, called Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP). According to Dubé, Bourhis, and Jacob (2005), the fast-paced and distributed nature of society today makes face-to-face meetings slow, costly, and time-consuming. VCoPs allow individuals to transcend time and space, using sophisticated media such as email, video-conferencing, databases, websites, and intranets (Dubé et al., 2005).

The contention between Gee, Wenger, McDermott, and Syder, and Dubé , Bourhis, and Jacob's opinions on CoPs and whether they can exist as VCoPs or instead be termed as affinity spaces suggests that the issue is more complicated than simply defining all types of online interaction with one term. The idea that there are strict and rigid rules and regulations as to what

constitutes a VCoP or an affinity space simply does not work, and the definition of what constitutes a VCoP or an affinity space needs to be reconsidered. While there is not enough room in this paper to attempt to rework both definitions, for the purposes of my research, I will discuss how I feel affinity spaces should be defined and how this definition makes affinity spaces an important theoretical framework for my research.

Gee's idea of affinity spaces seems to occupy a different realm of online interaction than Wenger's CoPs. Instead of the notion that affinity spaces are what they are because they allow members of a community to meet online (unlike, according to both Gee and Wenger himself, CoPs), I suggest that it is actually the fluidity of affinity spaces that matters. While a community suggests a "unified body of individuals," I propose that affinity spaces be defined less by their ability to exist online, and more by their ability to allow individuals to move in and out of them freely and without consequences or restrictions. This is a topic touched on by Gee (2013) himself, describing the fluidity of these spaces by suggesting that affinity spaces are where people can "flexibly form and reform in different groups" (p. 174). This flexibility is what I feel best defines an affinity space, not whether the community of individuals within it can meet online or not. It is this this flexibility that makes the notion of affinity spaces work so well with the dynamic and multimodal nature of social media, which is why I chose to focus on affinity spaces as a theoretical framework for my own research.

Contemporary affinity spaces: Affinity spaces and social media. Since moving into the Web 2.0 era, social media and other forms of social networking sites have continued to become more pervasive and a part of everyday life. From computers to smartphones to tablets, we are becoming increasingly connected at a worldwide level. As Hayes and Duncan (2012) note, "In the years since Gee's initial conception of the affinity space. . . . 'social media' have moved from a marginal activity on the internet to prominence in recreational, journalistic, and political life" (p. 10). Because of this, Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers (2013) argue that Gee's initial organization of affinity spaces needs to be updated. They propose the following updated features:

1. A common endeavor is primary.
2. Participation is self-directed, multifaceted, and dynamic.
3. Portals are often multimodal.
4. Affinity spaces provide a passionate, public audience for content.

5. Socializing plays an important role in affinity space participation.

6. Leadership roles vary within and among portals.

7. Knowledge is distributed across the entire affinity space.

8. Many portals place high value on cataloguing content and documenting practices.

9. Affinity spaces encompass a variety of mediaspecific and social networking portals. (Curwood et al., 2013, pp. 678-679)

This updated organization of affinity spaces plays a particularly important role in my research for this study, as it focuses on such "mediaspecific," "multimodal," "social networking portals."

As stated by Lammers et al. (2012), affinity spaces have come to encompass various media-specific social networks. These social networks act as portals to the affinity spaces, but they also allow users to act as generators and contribute content to the affinity space through the portal/social media site itself (Lammers et al., 2012; Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012). While affinity spaces were initially defined as having one portal (i.e. a discussion board), contemporary affinity spaces can involve a multitude of social networking sites. These de facto social network portals include creative sites like DeviantArt (an artwork-sharing website) and FanFiction.net (a written story-sharing website), as well as Facebook (a more general social networking platform), YouTube (a video-sharing website), Flickr (a photo-sharing website), Tumblr (a microblogging website), and Twitter (also a microblogging website). The ability to work across multiple mediums in contemporary affinity spaces allows for the building of a substantial community audience to help support and motivate creative production (Lammers et al., 2012). As Lammers et al. point out, "the interconnected relationship among media-specific, fan-created and social networking portals is such that they need each other as each contributes to the growth and dynamic participation of the spaces" (p. 50). The interconnected nature of these social networking/portal websites fits in well with the fluid and dynamic nature of affinity spaces.

Just as the social networking sites themselves can act as affinity space portals, they can also act as generators. Sites such as Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs allow for the addition and modification of their content. While the content organization and design is initially determined by the designer of the actual website, it is the users who post content within the website that shape it (Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012). If someone produces a tweet on Twitter, uploads a video on YouTube, or creates a Tumblr or blog post, they generate the content for that website.

In the previous paragraphs, I have detailed Wenger's theory of communities of practice and how Gee developed his notion of affinity spaces from problems inherent in Wenger's theory. I also gave a brief overview of the nature, organization, and dynamics of online, physical, and blended affinity spaces, before discussing why I do not agree with Wenger and Gee's assertions that CoPs do not work well online, and why affinity spaces are better defined by their fluid nature. I then detailed Lammer et al.'s updated contemporary affinity space organization and how social media fits into this revamped organization. All three theories, Wenger's CoPs (or VCoPs), Gee's affinity spaces, and Lammer et al.'s contemporary affinity spaces, however, share one assertion that they feel is integral to online spaces: participation. Again I ask, what of those who choose to become part of a community or affinity space, but do not participate in the traditional sense? Can there be other forms of participation that do not meet the traditional definition? Does the idea of participation act as a barrier to affinity spaces for those who choose not to participate? In the following section, I will address these questions.

Lurkers, listeners, and legitimate peripheral participation. In the online world of affinity spaces (or VCoPs), those who find themselves in these spaces but choose not to participate have been given a variety of labels, most of which are negative. The term *Lurker* is the most prominent one, and has been defined as those who are present in an online space but do not speak out or are non-posters (Crawford, 2009; Edelmann 2013; Lee, Chen, & Jiang, 2006; Walker, Remond, & Lengyl, 2010). Lurkers are often described as "passive" (Walker et al., 2010), "invisible" (Edelmann, 2013), and without a "voice" (Crawford, 2009). They are defined by what they do not do, despite the fact that they can make up to 90% of an online group (Edelmann, 2013). They are described as "free-loaders" (Edelmann, 2013; Lee et al., 2006), and are often thought to be learning at a lesser extent than those who choose to post and therefore "participate" (Walker et al., 2010). These definitions do not adequately describe lurking, nor do they take in account what good *can* come from lurking (Edelmann, 2013). Though the concept of lurking has been well-studied, constantly defining the act of lurking by what it is not casts a "disempowering" light over the act (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

Some researchers have attempted to replace the term "lurking" with more positive labels. These include Lave and Wenger's (1991) *Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, and Crawford's (2009) *Listening*. Legitimate peripheral participation refers to learning as a situated activity, in

which members of a community move from the periphery of the community to the centre of it through eventual participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lee et al., 2006; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). According to O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007), "On entry to a given community, learners are legitimate peripheral participants and with experience (may) become full participants with the attendant identity shifts" (p. 315). Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that:

> there may well be no such thing a 'central participation' in a community of practice.
> Peripherality suggests that there are multiple, varied, more- or less- engaged and –
> inclusive ways of being located in fields of participation defined by a community.
> Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world. (p. 36)

However, according to Lave and Wenger's model, "discourse within a community is key to learning and therefore participation" (O'Donnel & Tobbell, 2007, p. 322). Thus, participation is still key.

Crawford's (2009) theory of listening, however, does not have a focus on participation, and instead takes into account what can be gained from the simple act of "listening" and observing others who do participate. According to Crawford, "Listening has not been given sufficient consideration as a significant practice of intimacy, connection, obligation and participation online," and like lurking, is often considered as "contributing little value to online communities" (p. 527). Crawford argues that instead, listening "invokes the more dynamic process of online attention" (p. 528). She suggests a rethinking of lurking as listening, which allows the behaviors of lurking, once believed to be "vacant and empty," to be considered as "receptive and reciprocal practices" (p. 528). Further to this, "listening more usefully captures the experience that many Internet users have. It reflects the fact that everyone moves between the states of listening and disclosing online; both are necessary and both are forms of participation" (p. 528). Unlike the terms lurking and legitimate peripheral participation, listening is not defined by a lack of participation; instead, listening is defined as a type of participation. Because of this more inclusive, and what I feel is a more well-rounded, definition, listening and "listeners" will be my preferred terms of use in the context of this study.

In the previous paragraphs, I have detailed the issues regarding participation in online spaces and communities. Often, the idea of "having a voice" takes up precedence in these online spaces, and this "voice" is seen as the only true way of "participating." Because of this, the very normal action of lurking has been plagued by negative definitions and connotations. Even as

researchers have tried to bring the concept of lurking into a more positive light, using terms such as legitimate peripheral participation, the idea of being on the periphery and moving towards a centre still revolves around the idea of participation as being the only way to reach that centre. It was not until I discovered Crawford's concept of "listening" did I feel that the positive benefits of lurking were truly being valued and highlighted. Given all of the research on both the pros and cons of lurking, what is still not being discussed however are those who are non-participants in the fullest sense: the ones who may intrinsically belong to an affinity space or VCoP but do not post, do not lurk, or do not even realize that these affinity spaces and VCoPs exist at all. More research needs to be done on these outliers; the ones who share an affinity for something, but do not gather in online spaces for various reasons. Whether it be because of internet safety, online bullying, or even lack of access, these outliers need to be studied more in-depth to find out why they are not joining affinity spaces, and whether they would join them under more controlled circumstances (such as being introduced to them by a teacher, friend, or even a parent).

Affinity spaces in education. As our society becomes increasingly connected on a digital level, we hear more and more about how we can connect our classrooms on a digital level as well. Due to the affordability and accessibility of "internet connected devices," young adults are frequenting online spaces as a way to collaborate and communicate, read and write more than ever before (Curwood et al., 2013; Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012; Magnifico, 2012). Research shows that young adult participation in these online spaces promotes development of 21st century literacy skills (Arnone, Small, Chauncey, & McKenna, 2011; Curwood, 2013; Gee, 2009; Hayes & Duncan, 2012; Lindgren, 2012). These skills include critical thinking, ability to deal with complex themes and issues, collaborative work and collective intelligence, media literacy, creativity and innovation, and the ability to produce digital media (Gee, 2009, 2013). But how, exactly, do affinity spaces help develop these skills?

According to Antoine van den Beemt, Sanne Akkerman, and Robert-Jan Simons (2011), young adults search for a sense of ontological security, connecting "more reflexively to others and to content" (p. 62). This reflexive attitude helps young adults prevent their social and cultural spaces from becoming chaotic. By grouping themselves together in these affinity spaces, young adults are able to form their reflexivity. They allow young adults to develop opinions and experiment with these opinions in easy to enter and exit spaces according to their own chosen

level of participation and engagement (Arnone, et al., 2011; Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012; van den Beemt, et al., 2011). This form of self-directed engagement allows young adults to choose their own focus, and subsequently, hone their critical thinking skills by making (producing) and taking (consuming) meaning (Gee, 2013). By sharing their opinions with others in the affinity space, they are working with a collective intelligence, while also developing online media literacy skills, to distribute expertise and relatedness (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Affinity spaces within popular sites like YouTube, Twitter, and Tumblr allow for problem-solving and peer-to-peer learning processes that are experimental and innovative, particularly because of the content creation often involved with these sites (Lindgren, 2012; Magnifico, 2012). These young adults can interact with an authentic audience to engage in thoughtful discussions and share their own creative pieces (whether it be writing, artwork, video, etc.) about real-world interests.

But what do young adults themselves have to say about these issues? In the next five chapters, I will address ways of incorporating their voices in a larger study of two YA authors and their online communities.

CHAPTER 3
Methodology

The studies and articles discussed in the literature review cite the potential benefits of social media, such as blogs and fan fiction forums, to help students develop critical thinking skills within the classroom by moving past traditional pedagogy (Comer, 2011; Tosenberger, 2008). Social media tools can allow for learner-centered environments, such as interest-based online communities (affinity spaces) and direct student interaction with literature and the authors of the literature (Baker & Moore, 2011; Johnson, 2010; Rowsell & Burke, 2009; Silius et al., 2011; Tosenberger, 2008). What is missing from this literature, however, are empirical studies that observe these direct student/author relationships and the potential educational benefits resulting from these relationships. In response to this dearth in the literature, this study was used to determine the ways in which young adults do and do not participate in discourses of complex themes through social media.

Research Design

This study used a mixed-method approach to answer the following research questions:

Research Question

How, if at all, do social media tools facilitate discourses between young adults and Young Adult authors about complex themes found in their works?

Sub Questions

1. How often do Westerfeld and Green use social media tools?
2. What do Westerfeld and Green use these social media tools for? (i.e. publicity, promoting their books, discussing their works with their readers, direct address to readers, etc.).
3. How are readers engaging with authors through these social media tools?
4. What are the negative outcomes of using these social media tools, if any?
5. Do readers' perception about the author's work change as they engage with the author through social media?
   a. Does online interaction affect readers' interpretations of the morally ambiguous themes within the author's work?
6. What are the educational benefits/outcomes of using these social media tools, if any?

The objective of this Mixed Methods study was to collect and analyse data from authors Scott Westerfeld and John Green, as well from young adults who read their work, to determine if discourses of complex themes surrounding the works of these authors are being facilitated through social media. This study is categorized as a Mixed Methods study because it combines elements of qualitative research, "characteristics, or qualities, that cannot be easily reduced to numerical values," and quantitative research, "amounts, or quantities, of one or more variables of interest" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 94; Lund, 2012). As such, this study triangulates data from three sources: a content analysis of Westerfeld and Green's social media use (quantitative), interviews with young adult readers (qualitative), and an auto-ethnographic account of my own experiences within the online worlds of Westerfeld and Green.

According to White and Marsh (2006), a key factor in content analysis is that the texts being analysed communicate and convey a message from the author. As such, to study how authors Westerfeld and Green communicate to young adults about complex themes through social media, I conducted a quantitative content analysis of the blog posts, tweets, and YouTube videos made by these authors.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) suggest the use of interviews in a qualitative research design as a way to gather information about people's beliefs, feelings, motives, and "conscious reasons for actions or feelings (e.g., why people think that engaging in a particular behavior is desirable or undesirable" (p. 148). Because I wanted to determine how and why young adult readers interact with authors, if at all, through social media, qualitative research interviews were appropriate for this study.

Using this Mixed Methods approach allowed me to investigate the claims made by the literature reviewed that suggests teens and young adults are avid users of social media (Baker & Moore, 2011; Rowsell & Burke, 2009). A Pew Research Center study published in 2013 indicates that eight out ten "online teens" use some form of social media (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith, & Beaton, 2013a). With this statistic in mind, I hoped that this study could be used to explore whether these young adults use social media as a way to interact with YA authors, and if so, how they do so.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study used two methods in data collection. These methods included:

1. Qualitative and quantitative textual exploration and content analysis of various social media channels established by Westerfeld and Green to connect with their readers.

2. Qualitative in-person interviews with young adults between the ages of 11-17 about their experiences with YA literature and connecting to authors through social media.

Social Media Content Analysis

Collection methods. The research and data collection method used for the content analysis of Westerfeld and Green's blog posts, tweets, and video blogs consisted of downloading the data of each social media tool into word files over a specified time period. For Twitter data, the content of each tweet was downloaded, and the date and time of each tweet was noted in the word file. For blog and Tumblr data, the content of each blog and Tumblr post was downloaded, and again the date and time the post was created was noted in the word file. For YouTube videos, the title, description, date, and time of each video was downloaded into the word file. These word files were then uploaded to the content analysis tool *Dedoose* for organization and analysis. The data for each of these social media tools was collected once a week (every Friday), and the word documents were stored on my computer. I also printed off the word documents to store hard copies of the data in two separate binders: one binder for blog posts, tweets, and video transcriptions for Green, and one binder for blog posts and tweets for Westerfeld.

A Pilot Study was conducted from September 10th to October 31st, 2012 to test the initial data collection and analysis techniques. During the Pilot Study, a research assistant was used in the data collection and analysis to help test the reliability and transferability of the results. Both the Pilot Study and the Main Study used the methods noted above to collect and store data from each of the social media sites produced by each author. For the Pilot Study, there were over 680 tweets for Green and 350 tweets for Westerfeld recorded so I chose to code every tenth tweet produced by each author, resulting in a tweet sample size of 68 tweets for Green, and 35 tweets for Westerfeld. These tweets were then coded in in *Dedoose*. Blog data for each author was collected in the Pilot Study and formatted into two respective PDF documents (one for each author) to be analysed and coded in *Dedoose*. For Green, 139 blog posts were collected and coded, and for Westerfeld, six blog posts were collected and coded. During the Pilot Study,

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YouTube data was collected by watching each YouTube video posted by Green, as he was the only author to maintain a video blog, and noting the title, date, and author-assigned description. There were a total of 27 videos documented, and this data was also then uploaded to *Dedoose* for coding.

During the main portion of this study, which took place from November 1st 2012 to March 16th 2013, I collected and analysed all tweet, blog, and YouTube data myself. During this period, Green tweeted over 2,500 times, while Westerfeld tweeted over 960 times. I again coded every 10th tweet in *Dedoose*, resulting in a tweet sample size of 256 tweets for Green and 96

> ### *The Doobly Doo*
> *During this period, Green conducted two live Q&As about his books using Twitter. Both Q&As were facilitated by organizations: The first one was facilitated by Green's publisher, Penguin, in November using the hashtag #readpenguin; and* The Atlantic's *Twitter book club facilitated the second one in February, using the hashtag #1book140. During the first Q&A, Green answered 93 Twitter questions; during the second Q&A, he answered 108. While Green's Twitter output is normally high in general, these two Q&A sessions definitely impacted Green's Twitter output during the Main Study.*

tweets for Westerfeld. For Green, 402 Tumblr posts were collected and coded in *Dedoose*, and for Westerfeld, 8 blog posts were collected and coded in *Dedoose*. There was a total of 54 YouTube videos collected and coded in *Dedoose* for Green using the same collection methods as used in the Pilot Study.

Coding with Dedoose. In May of 2014, during the coding period of the Main Study, *Dedoose* suffered a substantial data loss, affecting the coding process for this study. The program, which operates through the use of an internet server, stores all of the data uploaded into the program in the Microsoft Azure cloud computing platform. Below is an explanation of data loss sent from *Dedoose* to all users of the program:

We had a pretty devastating system 'collision' last night. A system critical MS Azure service went down in the midst of a full database backup and encryption process. This process, in turn, was corrupted and pulled down the entire Dedoose system. Here's where we are:

1. The database that is currently live as of this morning is current as of the first week of March

2. Initially we hesitated to bring the system back online at the March state because, by the end of today, we will be able to bring the master database current to mid-April

3. Any data added to the system from this point forward will not be disrupted as we bring past back-ups on-board

4. While we are digging into every corner of the Azure system, we do need to be honest and say that we are not hopeful for recovering data that were added to the system in the past 2 ½-3 weeks

5. Finally, we are ready and willing to get our hands dirty by digging in to assist any project where our staff, and myself, can be helpful to bring things up-to-date.

All that we are asking, is that users consider waiting until the end of today to further assess the state of any project data.

This is an unprecedented and unanticipated event and we have already implemented protections moving forward. As you can imagine, this is a painful and challenging moment for us and we are doing all we can to help restore and re-build user data and, certainly, confidence.

The second update that came after this "system collision" informed users that data added on or before April would not be restored as originally hoped (though all data added/coded up until March was restored).

In *Dedoose* before this system collision, once users were finished coding their data, they could take "pictures" of it and store these images on their computer, but the actual data itself could not be downloaded from the program. At the time of the system crash, I had made pictures of all of my data (the Pilot Study data from September 2012 to November 2012, and the Main Study data from December 2012 to March 2013) except for the Main Study Twitter data, which I had just finished coding in April. This Twitter data was part of the time period of data that was lost by the company and not retrievable. This put my data coding process behind slightly (by approximately 20 hours) because I had to recode this Twitter data, but it did not affect my actual data sets because I had all original data collection stored on my computer. It is important to note, however, that after this incident, *Dedoose* implemented a feature that would allow users to export

entire projects from the program to their computers. This incident provided a valuable learning experience for both *Dedoose* and its users about the dangers that can occur when working with cloud computing technology: The Cloud is not infallible.

Data sources. I used multiple data sources to collect data on both Green and Westerfeld. Using these multiple data sources provided me with a broad picture of how Green and Westerfeld connect with their readers. Westerfeld uses two main channels of communication with his readers: Twitter (@ScottWesterfeld), and his blog (Westerblog, www.scottwesterfeld.com). I documented and coded both of these social media accounts for Westerfeld because they are the only ones he uses to connect with his readers. Green, however, uses a number of different channels to connect with his readers. These include two Twitter accounts (@realjohngreen and @sportwithjohn), six Tumblr blogs (www.fishingboatproceeds.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedwgwg.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedtfios.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedalaska.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedpapertowns.com), and four YouTube channels (*vlogbrothers, hankgames*, *MentalFloss*, *CrashCourse*). For the purpose of this study, only specific social media channels used by Green were documented and analysed. These were his Twitter (@realjohngreen), his Tumblr blogs (www.fishingboatproceeds.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedwgwg.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedtfios.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedalaska.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedpapertowns.com), and two of the four YouTube channels that he appears on (*vlogbrothers* and *hankgames*).

I chose to study Green's @realjohngreen Twitter account and not his @sportwithjohn Twitter account because Green uses the latter to strictly discuss the various sports teams he follows. He does not use his @sportswithjohn account to discuss his books or professional life as a writer with his readers. I chose to study all of Green's Tumblr blogs because he uses each one to either exclusively interact with readers about his books (www.onlyifyoufinishedwgwg.com for *Will Grayson Will Grayson*, www.onlyifyoufinishedtfios.com for *The Fault in Our Stars*, www.onlyifyoufinishedalaska.com for *Looking for Alaska*, www.onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.com for *An Abundance of Katherines*, www.onlyifyoufinishedpapertowns.com for *Paper Towns*), or to discuss his books and various

other topics with his readers (www.fishingboatproceeds.com) (see Figure 2). The Tumblr blogs that have a URL beginning with "onlyifyoufinished" are specifically for Green to answer reader questions about the book corresponding with that blog. I chose to study only the *vlogbrothers* and *hankgames* YouTube channels because these are the only two channels in which Green specifically address his readers (whether it be about his books or various other topics). His other two channels, *MentalFloss* and *CrashCourse*, are educational channels written, produced, and hosted by Green that are used to teach viewers about topics such as World History, Literature, and American History. They are not used by Green to address his readers directly about his books and other various topics; rather, they are written and scripted by Green and a team of writers to follow a specific educational curriculum, and thus were not used as data sources in this study. Green does have a website (www.johngreenbooks.com) and a Facebook profile (www.facebook.com/JohnGreenfans), but I chose not to study these sources because they are designed to only post content that he already shares on other sites (i.e. Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube).
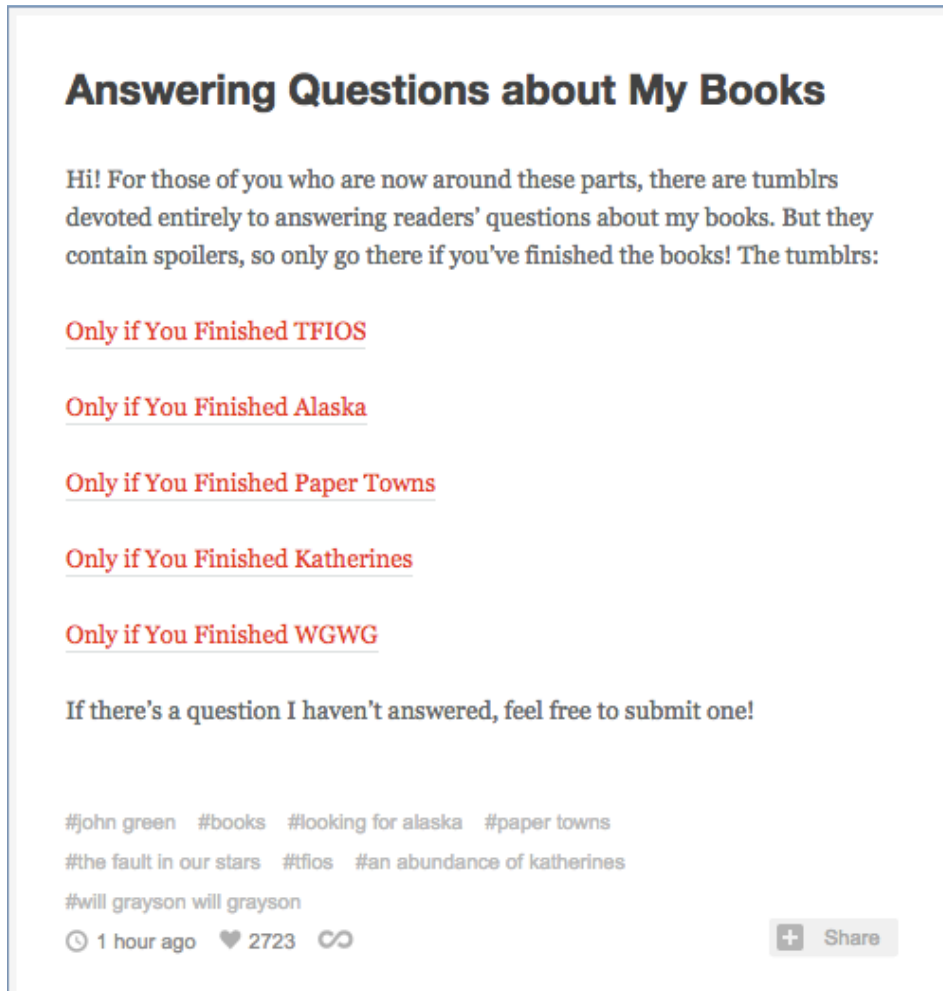
Figure 2. Screen shot of a Tumblr post by Green in which he lists his other book-specific Tumblr blogs.

Data analysis. To conduct a content analysis of the data collected from Twitter, blogs, and YouTube for each author, four categories of tweet content as identified by Stephen Dann (2010) in his article "Twitter Content Classification" were used: *Broadcast*, *Information*, *Conversation*, and *Other*. These categories were then adapted into nine mutually exclusive categories which arose from the tweet, blog, and YouTube content, developing into a coding scheme based on both the previous literature and the data content itself. The reliability and transferability of these categories were again tested through a Pilot Study and with the help of a research assistant. These adapted categories can be found in Table 1:

Table 1: Coding scheme with description and social media examples

Code	Description	Tweet or Blog Example
Self Promotion (i.e. Broadcast)	Tweets or blog posts in which author A or Author B either made direct reference to their own works or re-tweeted/re-blogged a reference made by another user regarding their works.	Author retweet: "@_____ Friend asks me *hey have you heard of uglies by @ScottWesterfeld ?* yes I have its the book I lent you 7 days ago! I want my book back."
YA Topics (i.e. Information)	Tweets or blog posts in which author A or Author B posted links to articles, workshops, etc. that pertained specifically to the genre of YA fiction. The tweet or blog posts specifically used the term "young adult," or the article, workshop, etc. specifically used the term "young adult."	Author Retweet: "@_____ For those of you new to Teen Read Week, here's the entire history of YA in 5 short paragraphs: http://davidlubar.com/yahist.htm #TRW12"
Personal (i.e. Other)	Tweets or blog posts in which author A or Author B shared personal information or anecdotes about themselves, posted pictures that they had taken, or shared opinions on topics or issues. These tweets or blog posts were specifically identified by the author's use of personal pronouns (e.g. I, me, my, myself, etc.).	Author blog post: "Pictures from my visit to the abandoned theme park in Berlin, as seen in this video."
Videos/Blogs (i.e. Other)	Tweets or blog posts in which author A or Author B referenced a video that the author created and uploaded to the video-sharing website YouTube, or a blog post made by the author and shared on his blog.	Author tweet: "@_____ New video! Existential Airport Anxiety and Reading Bradbury. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIGAeJ6SIWQ …"
Miscellaneous (i.e. Other)	Tweets or blog posts in which author A or Author B shared information that did not fit into any of the other nine categories.	Author tweet: "@_____ If the newspaper industry collapses, what happens to its hidden subsidy of stemware packing materials? #riedelnomics"

Code	Description	Tweet or Blog Example
Direct Address (i.e. Conversational tweets or blog posts made in reply to questions/comments from readers)	Tweets in which author A or Author B directly addressed and interacted with another user through the use of the "@" protocol on Twitter; or blog and Tumblr postings made in response to a user's question or comment. This code was further broken down into four different categories.	These tweets or blogs posts break down further in four categories.
Direct Address Complex-Book (i.e. Conversational tweets or blog posts made in reply to questions/comments from readers)	Posts that discussed complex subject matter found within each author's works (e.g. such as the role of religion in one of the author's books).	Author blog post: "If you think of symbols as "enchanted objects," Augustus associates the unlit cigarette with taking control over his health, which often feels (and is!) out of his control. So he puts the killing thing in his mouth but denies it the power to kill him."
Direct Address Complex-General (i.e. Conversational tweets or blog posts made in reply to questions/comments from readers)	Posts that discussed general complex issues that were unrelated to the author's works (e.g. discussions on the legalization of marijuana).	Author tweet: "@_____: @_____ there are some alternative calculations that (attempt to) account for underemployment, but yeah, I agree. http://www.bls.gov/cps/lfcharacteristics.htm#altmeasures …"
Direct Address Superficial-Book (i.e. Conversational tweets or blog posts made in reply to questions/comments from readers)	Posts that discussed trivial subject matter related to content from each author's books (e.g. the colour of a character's eyes).	Author tweet: "@_____: @_____ Yes, It's Alek from the Leviathan series."
Direct Address Superficial-General (i.e. Conversational tweets or blog posts made in reply to questions/comments from readers)	Posts that discussed trivial subject matter not related to content from each author's books (e.g. how the author's day was going, fan art sent in by readers, etc.).	Author blog post: "Swoodilypooper supporters: I have a pressing question. When I upgrade to FIFA 13, should I continue to play as Swindon Town or pick a new club?"

I applied a variation of the coding scheme discussed here to Green's YouTube content. All of Green's YouTube videos were made to directly address his readers by answering reader questions, discussing themes chosen by the readers, or keeping the readers updated on Green's personal and professional life. The videos also often covered a number of topics throughout the course of each one. Because of these factors I chose to assign only the four categories of *Direct Address* to the videos. To conduct a content analysis of the data collected from YouTube, each YouTube video was separated into categories based on the tags assigned and description attached (e.g. title of YouTube channel, title of video, etc.) to that video. These videos were then assigned one of the four mutually exclusive *Direct Address* subcategories (*Complex Book*, *Complex General*, *Superficial Book*, *Superficial General*) based on which of these four topics was predominantly discussed within each video.

Inter-coder reliability for pilot study. All Twitter, blog, and YouTube data for the Pilot Study was analysed and coded by myself and my research assistant independently in the content analysis program *Dedoose*. The degree of compatibility between us was determined through calculating the number of coding discrepancies between the two data sets (see Table 2). A mutual consensus was then reached to determine what code should be applied when a discrepancy occurred.

Table 2
Inter-coder reliability statistics

	Westerfeld	Green
Twitter Reliability	92%	93%
Blog Reliability	83%	96%
YouTube Reliability	N/A	82%

The inter-coder reliability for Green's blog was 96%; whereas, the inter-coder reliability for Westerfeld's blog was 83%, which was due to the fact that there were only six blog posts for Westerfeld with one discrepancy, in comparison to 146 blog posts for Green with six discrepancies. Furthermore, we found a greater number of discrepancies for Green's YouTube videos as they ranged in duration from three to 13 minutes, during which time the author covered a number of different issues. This allowed for a greater amount of subjectivity and therefore a lower rate of reliability. The interviews were entirely conducted, transcribed, and coded by myself in both the Pilot Study and the Main Study; therefore an inter-coder reliability percentage

is not included.

Interviews

Collection and sampling methods. For the interview portion of this qualitative study, three female participants between the ages of 11-13 were interviewed during the Pilot Study. Another 11 participants (9 females, two males) between the ages of 11-17 were interviewed for the main portion of this study. Ethics approval was obtained for this study, and consent forms were signed by both the parents or guardians of each participant, as well as the participants themselves. The candidates for the study were young adults who have read books by Westerfeld and Green, or who read YA literature in general, and who may or may not contact or "follow" Westerfeld and Green through the use of social media.

Creswell (2007) suggests that an optimal sample size for a phenomenological study is between "five to twenty-five individuals, all whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied" (p. 61). As such, this study involved interviews conducted with 14 young adults to ensure transferability of results; 11 young adults were interviewed during the Main Study, allowing for three preliminary interviews during the Pilot Study that served to test questions and make alterations if necessary. These participants were interviewed in-person at various branches of the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) or the University of Alberta Libraries, by myself, using a semi-structured interview guide. I recorded the interviews using both a hand held recorder and a recording program on my computer to ensure I had a backup audio copy of each interview. I transcribed all of the interviews by hand using my computer.

This research involved participants who were young and unfamiliar with such interactions; therefore, a semi-structured interview method in which I established a relaxed and conversational-like atmosphere, allowing the participants to feel "safe enough to talk freely about his or her experiences and feelings," was the best approach (Kvale, 1996, p. 125). A semi-structured interview, approximately a half-hour long, allowed me to adhere to the determined set of themes, but it also allowed for some flexibility to meet the needs of the participant (including a short, flexible time-frame because the participants were young). The semi-structured interview method also allowed me to respond to the direction in which the participant took the interview (Bryman, 2004). An interview guide can be found in Appendix A. The data from these interviews was collected through the use of recordings made of each interview, as well as

additional notes made by myself during the interview.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, with the aid of youth and teen librarians at various branches of the Edmonton Public Library. As Leedy and Ormond (2010) suggest, purposive sampling was used because the children were chosen for a specific purpose: they were young adults who read literature by Westerfeld or Green, or YA literature in general, and who may or may not connect with these authors through social media. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling with the help of the librarians at the various branches of EPL. These librarians allowed me to attend different afterschool programs held at their respective branches to briefly describe to the young adults what my study was about and why I was recruiting interview participants. I then left information sheets and child/parent permission forms with my contact information on them and asked anyone interested in participating to contact me. The permission forms for the adolescents and the parents had to be signed and returned to me before the interviews could take place.

Evaluating Results

To ensure the analysis conducted in this study is reliable and true to my findings, I relied on four criteria as outlined by Marilyn Domas White and Emily E. Marsh (2006) in their article *Content Analysis: A Flexible Methodology.* The four criteria were: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability.

Credibility. According to White and Marsh (2006), credibility refers to the process of "identifying all important factors in the research question and accurately and completely describing the ways in which these factors are reflected in the data gathered" (p. 38). I achieved credibility by conducting a phenomenological study, that was informed by my research questions, in order to understand the perceptions and perspectives of young adults who read YA literature and who may or may not connect with authors like Green and Westerfeld through social media. This was done using a semi-structured interview method, which also allowed for a rapport to build between the participant and myself in hopes that the participants were made to feel comfortable enough to answer the questions openly. I also ensured that each participant fully understood the nature of the study being conducted, and why the experience and opinions of each participant was important to the study. This was accomplished through a five-minute

introductory briefing for each participant at the start of the interview, along with a five-minute debriefing, or member check, with each participant at the end of the interview to ensure he or she felt comfortable with what was discussed and that my understanding of the interview was in line with the participant's perception of the information communicated (Sandelowski, 2008). Each participant, prior to the interview as well as during the introductory briefing, was informed through verbal communication that the interview could be stopped at any time, and any information provided could be immediately destroyed.

Transferability. According to White and Marsh (2006), transferability refers to the "applicability of findings from one context to another" (p. 38). I attempted to ensure transferability of this study by thoroughly describing the context and research design. The participants in this study do not represent all young adult populations, and this study does not provide a definitive attitude of young adults towards social media usage. However, it is hoped that transferability of this study can be achieved by conducting a similar study in which participants are chosen from different age groups, and authors who engage with social media are chosen from different writing genres (i.e. Focusing on Margaret Atwood, who is an active Twitter user, and interviewing participants from an older age group). Results of the study can be provided to local public libraries to encourage these libraries to become involved in the interactions taking place between authors and readers through social media. This can serve as promotional events to draw people into the local public library, creating an interactive atmosphere between reader and author right there in the library. As mentioned earlier, the sample size also allows for transferability of results.

Dependability. According to White and Marsh (2006), dependability addresses the idea of "replicability . . . [of] findings during repetitions of the study" (p. 38). The participants involved in this study had varying degrees of social media interaction, specifically in regards to how much they interacted with Westerfeld and Green and how much they took part in discourses surrounding complex themes in the works of these authors. Although my goal was to study interactions between the participants I was interviewing and the two authors, I ensured dependability by studying the variant results of participants who chose not to interact with authors via social media as much as I studied the results of participants who did interact with the

authors via social media. All results were recorded so that all aspects of the results are represented within the findings and conclusion of the study. If a participant did not engage with these authors through social media as much as other participants, this was included in the results to allow me to discuss why some participants did engage with the authors and some participants did not. This, as well as interviewing the optimal number of participants, ensured that the results are complete and comprehensive.

Confirmability. According to White and Marsh (2006), confirmability "relates to objectivity . . . by looking at the data, not the researchers, to determine if the data support the conclusions" (p. 38). Confirmability for this study proves to be somewhat complicated by my own immersion in the world of these two authors and social media. Both Westerfeld and Green are authors whom I enjoy reading works by (in fact, I would say that they are two of my favourite YA authors). I follow both authors regularly on social media for my own enjoyment, and I have a strong interest in social media and the possible educational benefits it can offer in the classroom. My research for this study began with Westerfeld, whom I was familiar with before starting this study. I read all of Westerfeld's books, and followed his Twitter, blog, and forum regularly. Green, however, was introduced to me by my thesis supervisor, Dr. Margaret Mackey, for this study. I began by reading Green's works, but I soon found myself deep within the world of Nerdfighteria. I went back and watched all of the videos produced by *vlogbrothers* (starting with their first video on January 1st, 2007, and continuing through all 6000 subsequent videos and counting). I began subscribing to Green and his brother Hank's various YouTube channels, joining the *Ning* Nerdfighteria forum (http://nerdfighters.ning.com/group/nerdfightersformypantstheforum), following Green on Twitter and Tumblr, taking part in The Project for Awesome, and even self-identifying as a Nerdfighter.

Because of this familiarity with both authors and an interest in social media and education, I have a predisposition to certain interpretations and patterns of thinking regarding the data. While this can be both positive and negative, ultimately, I see my familiarity with the authors and strong interest in the educational benefits of social media as an asset. As I noted as an overarching theme of this thesis, being so immersed in the world of these authors has afforded me an "insider" look into these online communities. I understand the lexicon of these communities (e.g. Steampunk, beasties, cosplay, etc. for Westerfeld; and Nerdfighteria,

PizzaJohn, DFTBA, etc. for Green). I know all of the "inside" jokes for these communities so that when I speak with other Nerdfighters or Westerfeld fans, we speak in an almost different language.

Despite my familiarity with these authors and my interest in social media, I addressed confirmability through regular consultation with my supervisor, and with the use of a research assistant during my Pilot Study to ensure my content analysis codes were mutually exclusive and unbiased.

Ethics Approval

As this study involved human subjects, approval was required from the Faculty of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (REB 1) as per the University of Alberta's requirement for research involving human participants. A Human Ethics Research Online (HERO) application form was completed and submitted. Approval from the Edmonton Public Library was required for onsite research. Procedures regarding the Respect for Vulnerable Persons, as per the University of Alberta General Faculties Council (GFC) policy manual, was strictly adhered to. According to the GFC policy manual (2012):

> Respect for human dignity entails high ethical obligations towards vulnerable persons - to those whose lack of competence and/or decision-making capacity make them vulnerable. Children, institutionalized persons or others who are vulnerable are entitled, on grounds of human dignity, caring, solidarity and fairness, to special protection against abuse, exploitation or discrimination. Ethical obligations to vulnerable individuals in the research enterprise will often translate into special procedures to protect their interests.
> (n.p.)

As this study required participants under the age of 18, extreme care and caution was taken to ensure the safety, dignity, and protection of these participants. Each participant was made fully aware of the research being conducted through complete transparency and description of the study purpose. Each participant was informed, both before the interview meeting and again at the beginning of the interview, that he or she could choose to cease with the interview process at any point before, during, and after the interview. The parents or guardians of each participant were also made aware of this, and contact information for the researcher was provided to the parents

or guardians if they had any questions or wanted to withdraw both their child and the information shared by their child at ANY time until the completion of the study. This information was provided to the parent prior to the interview through a Letter of Information (Appendix B), which also provided full disclosure of the purpose and intent of the study, as well as the data collection procedures. A Letter of Consent (Appendix C) was provided for the parents or guardians of the participants to sign, and a Letter of Assent (Appendix D) was provided for the participants themselves to sign. These letters outlined the rights of each participant, including complete privacy and confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at ANY time until the completion of the study. Both letters had to be signed by the participants and the parents or guardians of the participant to ensure complete knowledge and understanding of the study and what the study entailed. Appendix E contains a request letter for institutional permission from various branch managers of the Edmonton Public Library to recruit young adults for the study through Teen programs offered at that branch.

All data, both physical and digital, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within my home for five years, as per the GFC Policy 92.2. After five years, the data (physical and digital) will be destroyed. During the study, any digital data collected using a digital audio recorder was stored on an encrypted and password-protected file on my computer, and a password-protected USB drive stored in the

> ### *The Doobly Doo*
>
> *A timeline of the Pilot Study and Main Study data collection, interviews, and writing/analysis can be found in Appendix F, along with a discussion about the overall timespan of the study.*

locked filing cabinet. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant for the purposes of data recording, ensuring complete privacy and confidentiality of each participant. Only I have knowledge of the participant's personal name and corresponding pseudonym.

CHAPTER 4
The Authors

Introduction: Scott Westerfeld and John Green

For this study, I chose to focus on two specific YA authors who are active social media users: Scott Westerfeld, and John Green. I was introduced to Westerfeld, as both an author and active social media user, about six years ago by my friend and colleague Karri Shea. She herself was just venturing into the world of online and self-publishing, and was very familiar with social media and authors who were active users of it. The more she spoke of this new world and what YA authors were involved in social media, the more interested I became in *how* these authors used it, and what they used it for. I was introduced to the second YA author discussed in this study, John Green, by my thesis supervisor Dr. Margaret Mackey. Dr. Mackey was aware of Green's active presence on social media, and suggested that I include him as a second data source for my study.

When I began my initial data collection in 2012, both authors were fairly comparable in social media and real world popularity. While Green's social media output (in terms of number of tweets and blogposts produced) was higher than Westerfeld's, both authors were comparable in terms of book popularity and social media followers (or, the number of fans who subscribed to updates from both authors' various social media accounts). During 2013, however, Green's popularity began to grow as his latest novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, was released the previous year. His popularity boomed even more when *The Fault in Our Stars* was released as a film by Fox 2000 Studios in 2014. By the time I began the actual writing of my thesis, John Green's popularity had effectively eclipsed Scott Westerfeld's. As of 2016, Westerfeld's Twitter followers are upwards of the 53,000 mark; Green's Twitter followers, however, have ballooned to over five million. In this chapter, I discuss two of the three themes mentioned in the Introduction to this study: the scale of online resources coming from YA authors and their online community members, and my own experience of becoming a part of Westerfeld's and Green's fan communities. I broach the scale of online resources coming from YA authors in brief biographical introductions to Westerfeld and Green. In Green's biographical introduction, I also discuss the star power that *The Fault in Our Stars* has afforded Green, what effect this stardom has had on his personal and professional life, and the controversy that this rise to fame has

created among the online author community. I end this chapter with my own experiences as an observer of the online communities that surround each author by addressing how being part of these online communities has served to personalize Westerfeld, Green, and their writings to me.

Scott Westerfeld

Biography: From adult to young adult. Scott Westerfeld is a 52-year-old American YA author. Westerfeld and his wife, fellow YA author Justine Larbalestier, currently split their time between Sydney, Australia, and New York City (Burling, 2014; Corbett, 2009; Hiltbrand, 2006; "Scott Facts," n.d.; "Scott Westerfeld," 2006). Born in Texas, Westerfeld received a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Vassar in 1985, before pursuing graduate work in Performance Studies in 1987-88 ("Scott Facts," n.d.; "Scott Westerfeld," 2006). He left the program before finishing his master's thesis on Japanese all-girl garage bands (Hiltbrand, 2006). Westerfeld held several jobs that involved writing before focusing on being an author full-time. They included textbook editor, substitute teacher, and ghostwriter ("Scott Facts," n.d.). In a Q&A Westerfeld took part in for Goodreads where he answered questions from fans, he said that his favourite non-writing job was,

> . . . designing educational software, which may be clear to readers of
> *Peeps*, *Midnighters*, *Uglies*, and *Leviathan*, with all those explanations of parasites, math,
> magnetism, and aerodynamics. I've always thought that science and fiction writing have a
> lot in common because they're both about modeling reality. ("Interview with Scott
> Westerfeld," 2014, n.p.)

It was when Westerfeld was laid off from his textbook-editing job in 1996 that he began to pursue a writing career. He made the goal of living cheaply for one year, and getting published during that time (Stone, 2006). Westerfeld began writing science fiction for adults, publishing *Polymorph* (1997), *Fine Prey* (1998), *Evolution's Darling* (2000), *The Risen Empire* (2003a), and *The Killing of Worlds* (2003b). He also worked as a ghostwriter during this time, writing five *Goosebumps* books, three *Powerpuff Girl* books, and a legal thriller credited to a well-known trial attorney that he "can't talk about" (Corbett, 2009; Hiltbrand, 2006; "Scott Facts," n.d.; "Scott Westerfeld," 2006, para. 1; Stone, 2006). Then, Westerfeld received a request from a friend that changed his writing path completely: an idea for a paranormal TV series. Westerfeld came up with the idea of five teenagers, all born at the stroke of midnight, who had special

powers. The TV series did not sell, but Westerfeld pursued the idea as a book series and began his foray into the world of YA writing with his first YA trilogy *Midnighters* (Corbett, 2009; Hiltbrand, 2006). According to Westerfeld, he received his first advance for a YA novel in 2002 for $7, 500 (Hartigan, 2014).

Westerfeld's *Midnighters* series began with *The Secret Hour*, published in 2004 (2004a), and continued with *Touching Darkness* (2005c) and *Blue Noon* (2006a). He also wrote *So Yesterday* (2004b), a satire about mainstream advertising. His next series, a social commentary on beauty standards, was the science fiction *Uglies* series, consisting of *Uglies* (2005d), *Pretties* (2005b), *Specials* (2006c), *Extras* (2007), and *Bogus to Bubbly: An Insider's Guide to the World of Uglies* (2008). The *Uglies* series went on to become a *New York Times* bestseller ("Books," n.d.; Corbett, 2009; "Scott Westerfeld," 2006). In 2012, Westerfeld teamed up with author Devin Grayson and illustrator Steven Cummings to publish *Uglies: Shay's Story* (2012c) and *Uglies: Cutters* (2012b), a retelling of the *Uglies* story but from a different character's point of view and in graphic novel format. Westerfeld went on to write *Peeps* (2005a) and *The Last Days* (2006b), two loosely related science fiction vampire novels. In 2009, the first novel in Westerfeld's steampunk series was released, titled *Leviathan*. *Leviathan* was followed by *Behemoth* (2010), *Goliath* (2011), and *The Manual of Aeronautics* (2012a). The series takes place during World War I, where the war is fought with hybrid creatures based on Charles Darwin's 19th-century discoveries about DNA and bioengineering. The books are beautifully illustrated by Keith Thompson. According to Westerfeld, "Steampunk culture is crafty and very visual. People make their own clothes and toys and props, and I found the book had to reflect that" (Corbett, 2009, para. 7). *Leviathan* alone uses 70-pound paper, contains a full-color allegorical map of Europe, and 50 interior illustrations, all financed largely by Westerfeld himself:

> It's completely nutty, but this story pushed most of my buttons—steampunk, airships, military history . . . I thought, 'What if I never have another huge series?' This was my chance to take the leverage I had earned with *Uglies* and do something with it. (Corbett, 2009, para. 4; "Leviathan Series," n.d.)

Westerfeld released his latest novel, *Afterworlds*, in 2014. *Afterworlds* centers on an 18-year-old protagonist who is learning to navigate the YA publishing business, and it draws heavily on his own experience as a writer in the YA publishing industry (Burling, 2014; Hartigan, 2014). In fact, some of the YA authors Westerfeld's protagonist encounters along her

way are based on real-life authors and friends of Westerfeld (including John Green himself) (Brown, 2014). The release of *Afterworlds* was prefaced with a creative social media campaign that included a book trailer (Simon & Schuster Books, 2014) produced by Westerfeld's publisher, Simon & Schuster, and a satirical "attack ad" from the "Committee to Protect YA," produced by Westerfeld (Westerfeld, 2014). The "attack ad" features many of Westerfeld's friends and fellow YA authors (including Holly Black, Maureen Johnson, Gayle Foreman, John Green, E. Lockhart, and Shannon Hale) claiming that his book is "all lies," and does not accurately depict the YA author community. Westerfeld also released satirical "reviews" of the novel by some of the authors previously mentioned. Figure 3 below is a screenshot of the "reviews" for *Afterworlds* on Westerfeld's website (www.scottwesterfeld.com). In 2015, Westerfeld teamed up with authors Margo Lanagan and Deborah Biancotti to release their action and adventure series *Zeroes*.

You can listen to me talking about *Afterworlds* here on Wisconsin Public Radio.

Some more lovely reviews:

"It's a fabulous conceit and a masterful accomplishment. Unmistakably Westerfeld in full command of a prodigious talent, doing something complicated and difficult and making it look easy, even as it grabs you and drags you through its dark streets, laughing and crying along with both Darcy and Lizzie."
—Cory Doctorow, BoingBoing.net

"I recognize nothing of myself or any of my friends in this book. Well, except for the true parts, of course. And the parts that aren't true certainly COULD'VE happened. But no, no. It's all lies."
—John Green

"I don't know what Westerfeld means to say in his depiction of the people who write YA novels, but we don't drink together, kibbitz on one another's novels, pontificate on narratology, or share dirty secrets. Ever. No characters in this book are based on any famous writers I know. Really. Stop looking at me that way."
—E. Lockhart

"My lawyers have advised me not to comment on this book."
—Maureen Johnson

"Who the **** is Scott Westerfeld?"
—Shannon Hale

Figure 3. Screenshot of Westerfeld's *Afterworlds* review page (http://scottwesterfeld.com/books/afterworlds/).

Why YA? Westerfeld has been very vocal about his shift to YA writing. When discussing why he targeted *Midnighters* towards young adults, he said:

Staying up till midnight when you're 25 is not that magical so it just seemed like it had to be for kids. . . . And then I had so much more fun writing in YA. I just like the people in

it, and it's great to have all these champions among the librarians. The books last a lot

longer. (Corbett, 2009, para. 11)

With writing for YA, Westerfeld also has the opportunity to shift genres "without any confusion" (Stone, 2006, para. 5). He is able to write novels about science fiction, fantasy, or even contemporary realism, and they all end up in the same Young Adult Literature section. According to Westerfeld, this ultimately makes YA very lucrative because these teens are reading widely, and consuming large numbers of books. They have not yet specialized into one genre (Glover & Williams, 2014; Stone, 2006).

It is not just the selling numbers that attracts Westerfeld to writing for YA, however; it is the young adults themselves and their lack of pretension. To Westerfeld, young adults are more demanding readers: "They don't allow a lot of self-indulgence. They're not into a character standing and looking at a dishrag thinking about how the dishrag is like their life. It's more about old-fashioned storytelling" (Hiltbrand, 2006, para. 9). Young adults also question more the way the world works, and their own place in it: "They can imagine, in the way 'mundane' adult readers do not, the world being utterly different" (Stone, 2006, para. 4). To Westerfeld, writing for YA is just more "fun," and his fan mail has more exclamation points; "What's not to love?" (Stone, 2006, para. 7).

Reading is social. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the first overarching theme to appear from the data regarding Westerfeld was just the sheer amount of content he posts online. Since venturing into the world of YA, Westerfeld has become an active user of social media. He has been an avid Twitter user since 2009, amassing 53,000 followers, and sending out over 19,000 tweets. Below is a screenshot of Westerfeld's Twitter page from March 2016, showing his number of followers and tweets produced (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Screenshot of Westerfeld's Twitter page.

He has also maintained a very extensive website since 2004 which contains a blog, a page that lists all of the books he has written and provides various reading and classroom discussion guides for these books (all written by Westerfeld himself), a forum for fans to connect to each other, a page with biographical information, a page detailing his appearances, and a page that has various videos of book trailers and interviews he has done (see Figure 5 for a screenshot of Westerfeld's website home page).

Figure 5. A screenshot of Westerfeld's website and blog.

For Westerfeld, these social media tools have become an important part of being a YA author: "Reading is social . . . You can go online and share your fan art and fan fiction and predictions about the next book. Once you make it social, teenagers become exponentially more interested in it" (Hartigan, 2014, para. 10). Westerfeld is often surprised by the number of tweets and comments he gets from teens about his books, thanking him for his books or asking him questions about them (Glover & Williams, 2014). He sees his fans reading a lot more, and interacting with each other about what they are reading through social media: "There is a huge amount of feedback and a huge amount of interaction between your consumers" (Glover & Williams, 2014, p. 105). For Westerfeld, however, this interaction with his consumers just "makes sense":

> It makes so much sense to me to interact with my readers, I can't imagine not doing it. Maybe that goes back to my science fiction roots. In sf, fans and writers have been interacting at conventions for decades, so the internet isn't such a big innovation. But it sure makes it easier. (Nation, 2008, para. 12)

Westerfeld uses social media tools like Twitter and his blog to encourage these interactions. For example, I tweeted to Westerfeld to ask him a question related to his website, and despite his large number of followers, he responded to my tweet within 20 minutes (see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6. Screenshot of a tweet to and response from Scott Westerfeld.

Figure 7. Screenshot of a tweet to and response from Scott Westerfeld.

Westerfeld's blog also allows him to interact with his readers through initiatives such as Fan Art Fridays, where he encourages his readers to send him their fan art of his books. He then posts

this fan art on his blog, often commenting on the drawings and art and encouraging his readers to continue to create (see Figure 8 for an example of a Fan Art Friday post).
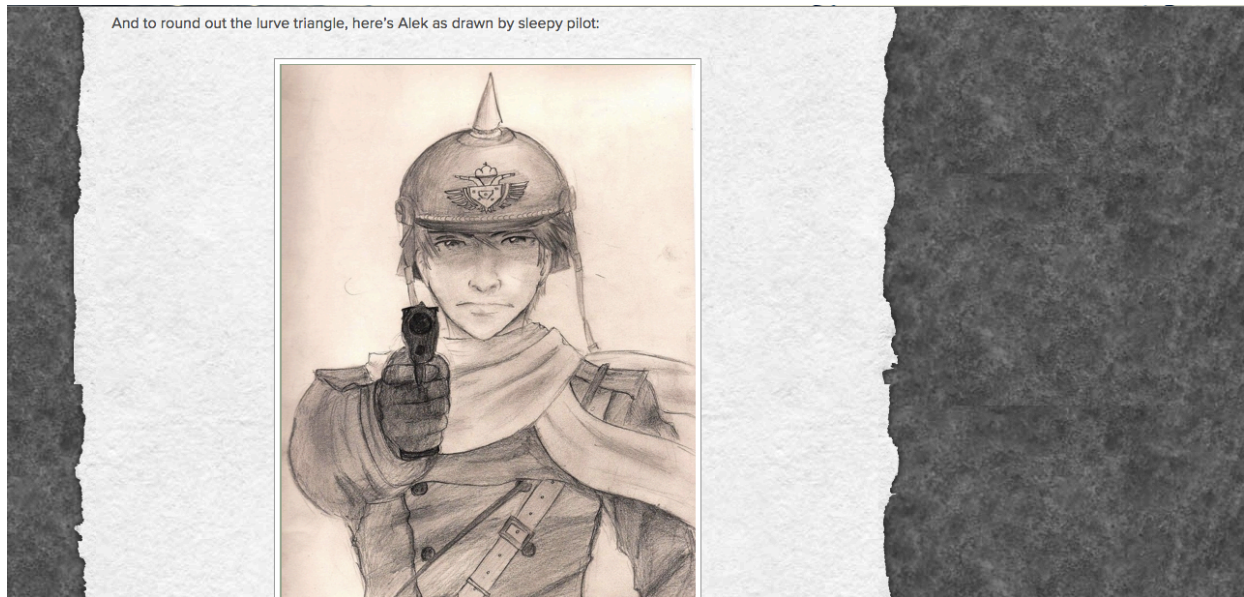
Figure 8. An example of fan art sent in to Westerfeld that he posted on his blog.

Westerfeld's frequent social media use allows him to engage with his readers on multiple levels. He is able to respond directly to reader questions or comments about his books (or even his life in general), but he also actively encourages his readers to create new art from his books. He gives his readers a voice and a platform to share what they have created from his books by hosting initiatives like Fan Art Fridays on his blog. Westerfeld sees reading as a social experience, and he encourages his readers to see it as a social experience as well by interacting with them, and encouraging them to interact back.

John Green

Biography: Regrettable nerd. John Green is a 37-year-old American YA author. He currently lives in his hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana with his wife and two children (Alter, 2014). Though now he is considered by some to be the "undisputed king of YA" (Shafrir, 2014, para. 6), his formative years in middle and high school were far from royal. Green grew up in Orlando, Florida with his mother Sydney, father Mike, and brother Hank. In middle school, he was what he termed a "regrettable combination" of "nerd" and poor student, resulting in frequent bullying (Talbot, 2014, para. 39). He spent much of his youth feeling alienated and anxious (Alter, 2014);

feelings he recognizes now as mental health issues that he still deals with (and discusses openly with his fans). When Green was 15, he chose to attend Indian Springs School, a boarding school in Alabama (Alter, 2014; Talbot, 2014). This turned out to be a very positive move for Green, offering "the kind of verdant, self-contained setting where one could have a pre-emptively nostalgic coming-of-age" (Talbot, 2014, para. 39). He began reading authors such as Salinger, Vonnegut, Morrison, and Chabon, and he found peers who enjoyed reading these authors and discussing them (Talbot, 2014).

In 1995, Green enrolled at Kenyon College, choosing a double major in Religion and Literature and focusing on early Islamic history (Alter, 2014; Talbot, 2014). He began attending an Episcopal church, and at one time considered entering the priesthood. After college, he worked as a student chaplain in a children's hospital where he counselled dying children and their families. He eventually considered entering Divinity school, but ultimately decided not to and instead began working for Booklist, a book review magazine (Alter, 2014). He was originally hired to do data entry but became close with the magazine's editor-in-chief Bill Ott, and Ilene Cooper, a staff editor and children's/YA author (Talbot, 2014). It was Cooper who encouraged Green to write, working with him on the draft of his first book, *Looking for Alaska*, for over three years. Dutton Juvenile, an imprint of Penguin, purchased *Looking for Alaska* for $8000, and published the book in 2005 (Alter, 2014). Green has published four books in total: *Looking for Alaska* (2005), *An Abundance of Katherines* (2006), *Paper Towns* (2008), and *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012). He has also co-authored a book with David Levithan called *Will Grayson Will Grayson* (2010), and he contributed a short story to the compilation novel *Let it Snow* (2008) along with fellow YA authors Maureen Johnson and Lauren Myracle.

Author, vlogger, social media mogul. As mentioned in Chapter One, Green also produces vast amounts of online content for readers and fans. Twenty years after enrolling at Kenyon College, Green has come far from his "regrettable combination of nerd and poor student" years. In fact, Green and his brother Hank can be considered social media moguls, leading the movement of Nerdfighters to Decrease World Suck. In 2007, YouTube was in its second year of existence, and the Green brothers embarked on a life changing social media venture. Green and his brother, who were not very close at this point in time, would see each other at their parents' house once a year, and often only communicated through instant messaging when they were not together. For

a whole year, they decided to stop all forms of textual communication and only speak to each other in person or through videos posted to YouTube on alternating days. From this venture, *vlogbrothers* was born (Talbot, 2014) (see Figure 9 for *vlogbrothers* homepage).
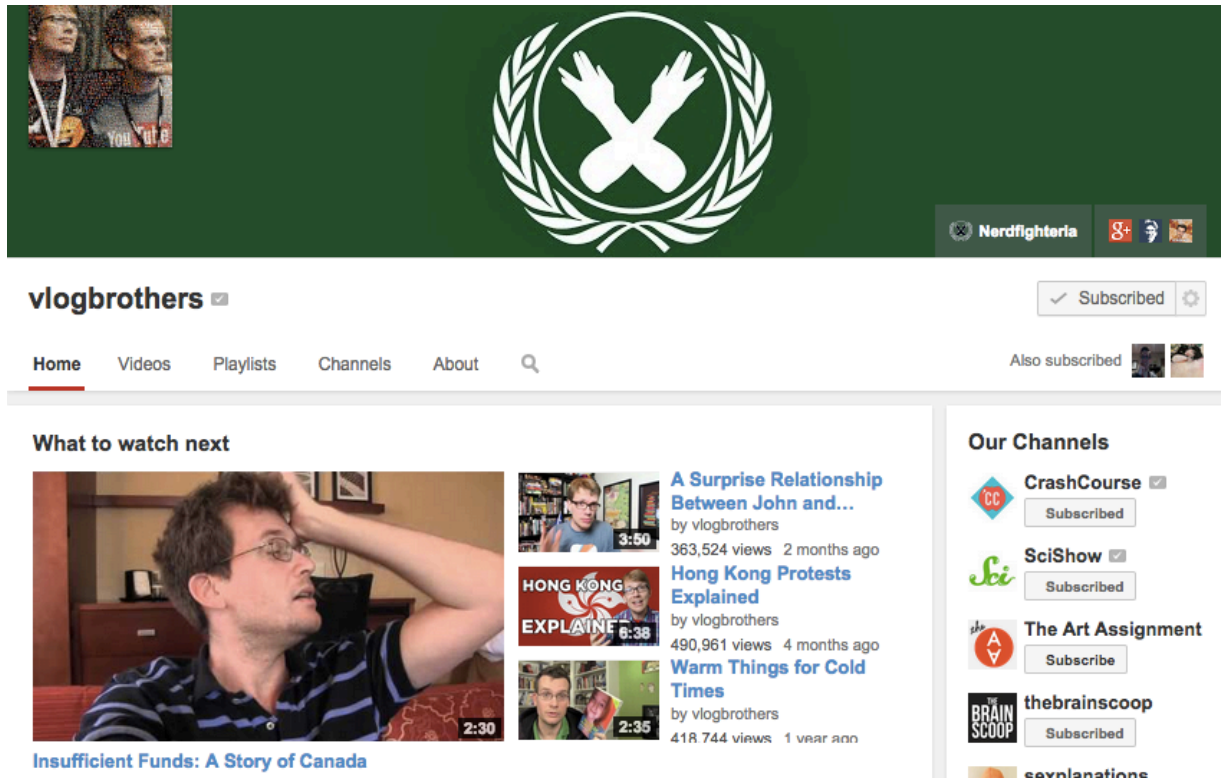
Figure 9. Screenshot of *vlogbrothers* channel homepage.

Vlogbrothers continues today, though Green and his brother no longer post everyday (John Green posts a video every Tuesday, and Hank Green posts a video every Friday). Their videos are short in length, not exceeding the four-minute mark (and if they do exceed this mark, the transgressor must do a "punishment" as chosen by the other brother with input from subscribers to the channel). The videos are often comprised of life updates, filling each other in on life and their families. Sometimes the videos are silly, discussing the seemingly random nature of income tax forms and the existence of one specifically for fishing boat proceeds (now the name of John Green's very famous Tumblr blog) (J. Green, 2007). Sometimes the videos are serious, discussing who and what Boko Haram is (J. Green, 2015a). And sometimes, Green uses the videos to answer questions sent to him by fans and readers via Tumblr, Twitter, and

YouTube comments, covering a number of topics about his personal life, his work, and his books.

Green also hosts or cohosts with his brother three other YouTube channels: *CrashCourse,* an educational video series that teaches subjects such as World History and U.S. Government Politics; *Mental Floss*, a weekly program that provides trivia information; and *hankgames*, where the Green brothers play various video games while providing commentary (see Figures 10, 11, and 12 for screenshots of the homepages for each YouTube channel).

> ### *The Doobly Doo*
>
> *While Green hosts four YouTube channels, he and his brother Hank Green actually help write and produce many more. They include: SciShow (hosted by Hank), SciShowSpace (hosted by Hank), The Art Assignment, Healthcare Triage, hankgames (hosted by Hank), Lizzie Bennet Diaries, Emma Approved, The Brain Scoop, Sexplanations, HanksChannel (hosted by Hank), Animal Wonders, The Warehouse, and How to Adult.*
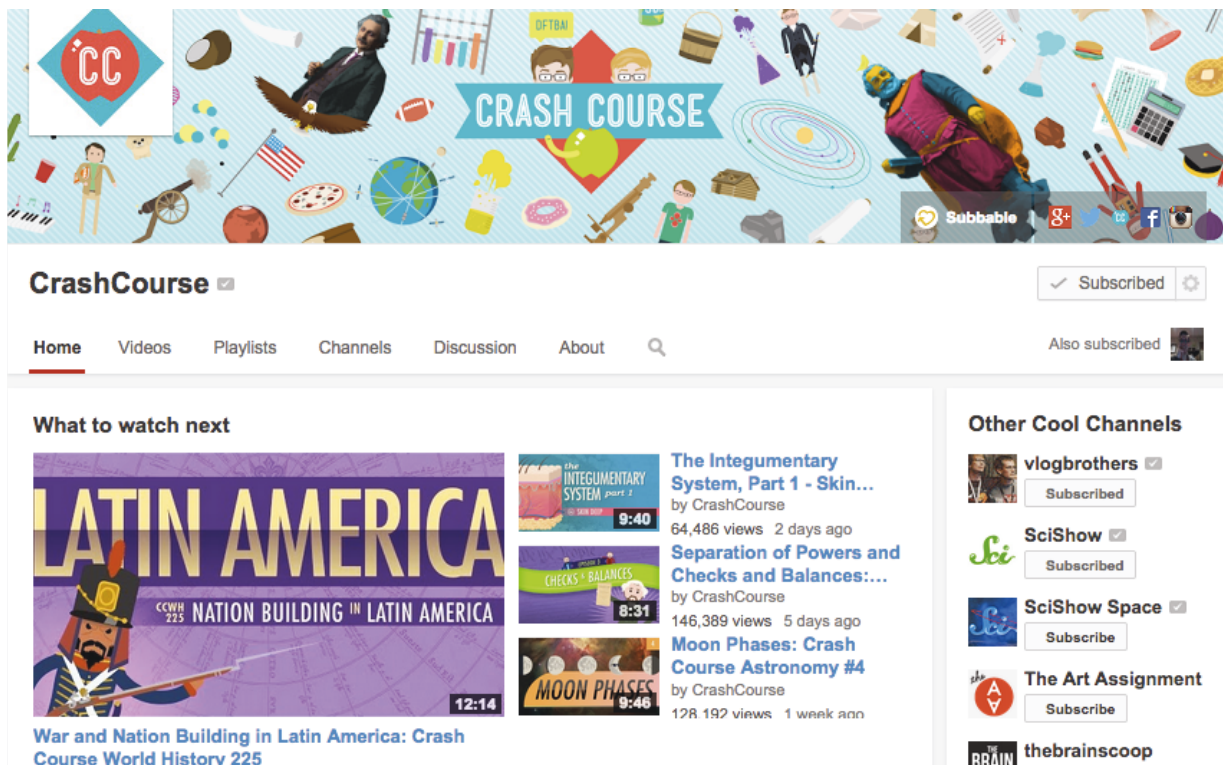
Figure 10. Screenshot of *CrashCourse* channel homepage.
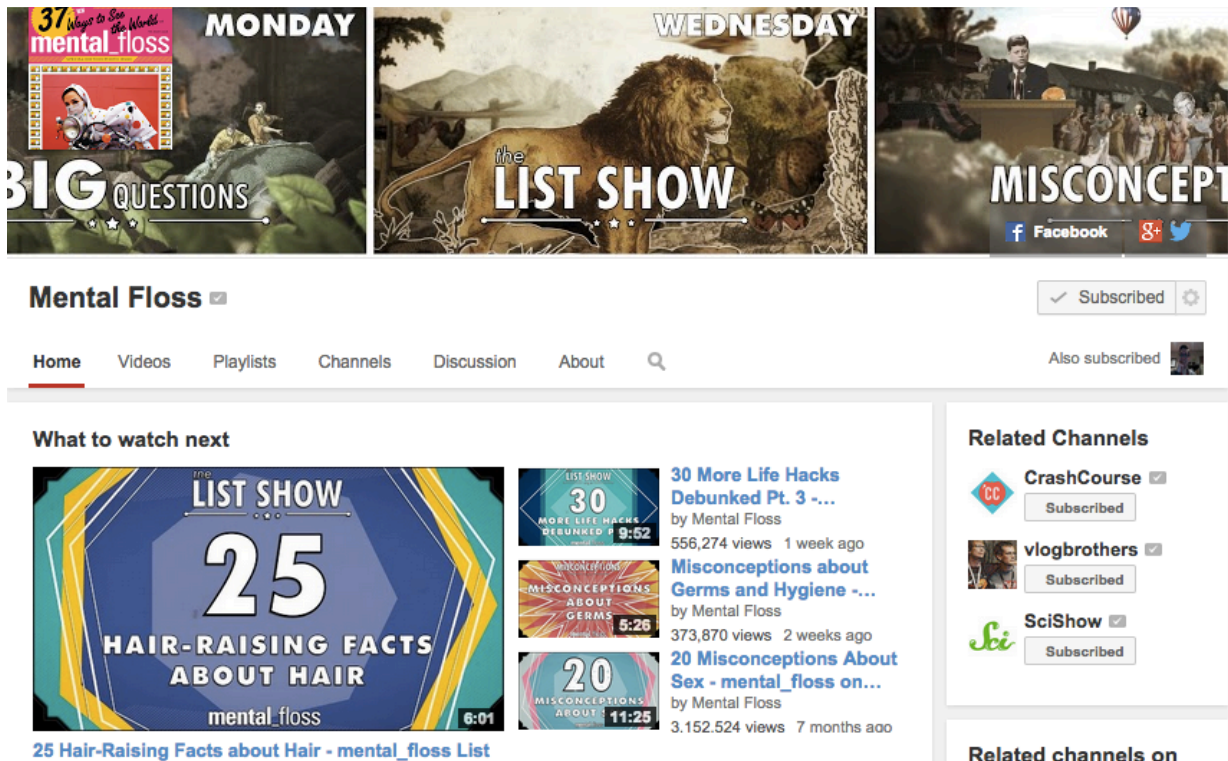
Figure 11. Screenshot of *Mental Floss* channel homepage.
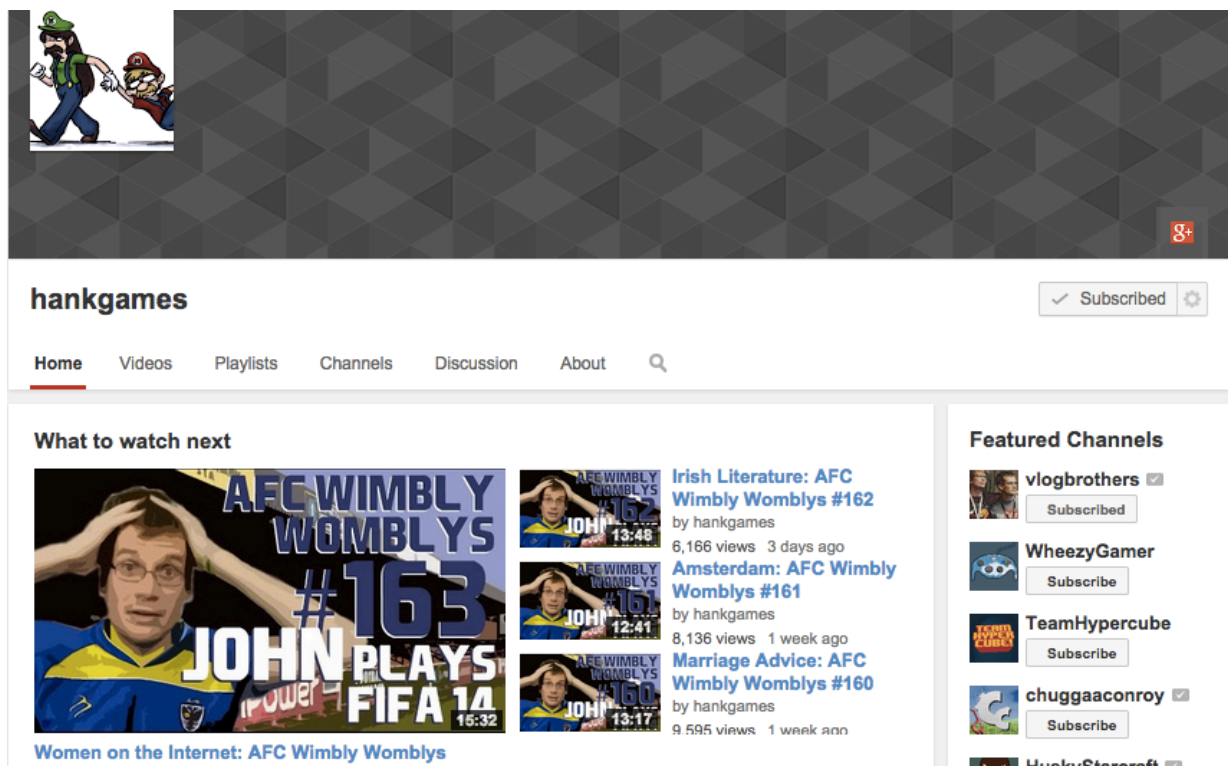
Figure 12. Screenshot of *hankgames* channel homepage.

Below is a table (Table 3) documenting when the Greens started each of the four YouTube channels discussed, as well as how many subscribers and total views each channel has (as of March, 2016). This shows just how great a reach the Greens have through YouTube.

Table 3
Green Brothers' YouTube Channels

	Date Joined	Subscribers	Views
vlogbrothers	January 1st, 2007	2,751,555	597,075,301
CrashCourse	May 19th, 2006	4,123,669	353,610,356
Mental Floss	March 17th, 2011	1,320,431	151,208,897
hankgames	November 15th, 2010	170,232	33,527,922

Green is also a very prolific user of two other forms of social media: Twitter (@johngreen), and Tumblr (fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com)[4]. While it is not possible to obtain Green's followers and overall blog post output for Tumblr, below is a screenshot of Green's Twitter profile, which shows how many tweets he has produced and how many followers he has (as of March, 2016) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Screenshot of Green's Twitter page.

Since 2007, Green and his brother have expanded their reach into other areas besides social media. In 2010, they started their own conference for online video-creators and fans called

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[4] Green also has five other Tumblr blogs, which were discussed in Chapter 3.

VidCon. In their first year, VidCon drew numbers upwards of 14,000 attendees (Alter, 2014). They also started a charity called the Foundation to Decrease Worldsuck, where funds are raised through the annual Project for Awesome (P4A). P4A, which started in 2007, takes place every year. During the campaign, people post videos about and that advocate for various charities to YouTube, and "as a community, we promote these videos and raise money for the charities" ("About: Online creators decreasing worldsuck," 2014). The most recent P4A took place on December 11th and 12th, 2015, and raised $1,546,384 for various charities (http://www.projectforawesome.com).

The Greens have also started a for-profit merchandise company called DFTBA Records. The company sells fan art and fan-designed merchandise, and grossed over $2.3 million in 2013. Over $1 million of that went to the artists, with the rest being invested into business costs and staff (Alter, 2014).

Green's network of followers on Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube, has been affectionately termed Nerdfighters and is comprised significantly of young adults. The term Nerdfighter, a nomenclature invented by Green and his brother in an almost joking manner, came from a video uploaded on February 1st, 2007, to the *vlogbrothers* channel, where Green misread the name of the arcade game Aero Fighters as Nerd Fighters (Alter, 2014; Shafrir, 2014). Nerdfighters are the "passionate" and "devoted" fans of John and Hank Green "that have evolved into a loosely connected movement of proudly disaffected adolescents, the long-awaited Earth-inheriting of band geeks, theatre guys, and English-major nerds" (Shafrir, 2014). As Green himself puts it, a Nerdfighter "is a person who instead of being made out of like bones and skin and tissue is made entirely of awesome" (J. Green, 2009b). The Nerdfighter catchphrase is DFTBA: Don't Forget to be Awesome, the phrase with which Green ends each of his videos (Alter, 2014).
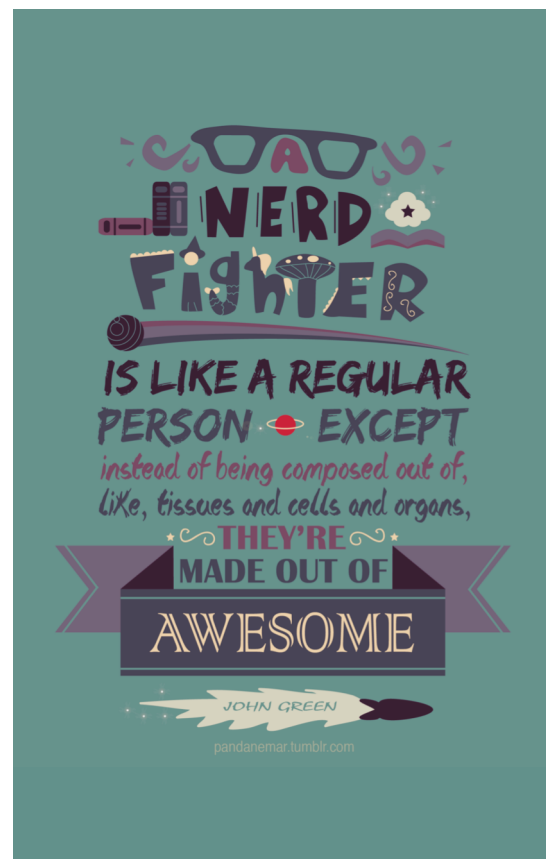

Figure 14. Fanart made by a member of the Nerdfighter community (source: http://pandanemar.tumblr.com/).

Nerdfighters, who number in the millions now, exist in an online community termed Nerdfighteria, where "Via forums and blog posts (Nerdfighters.ning.com), [they] encourage one another to volunteer, champion causes (including the Greens' Foundation to Decrease World Suck), and provide support to fellow 'nerds'" (Philpot, 2014, para. 16; Talbot, 2014). To Green, the online community of Nerdfighteria acts as a place where people can "experience unironic enthusiasm" and "not have to couch [their] joy or [their] pain behind all of this protective irony" (Shafrir, 2014, para. 42). As Michelle Dean (2013) in her article "A Note on Nerdfighters" puts it,

> The most beautiful and intriguing parts of any identity tend to be the fluid ones. And the young people [N]erdfighteria attracts, after all, are often as confused and lonely and frustrated as they are because they don't fit into [boxes]. (para. 6)

Nerdfighteria provides a safe place online where young adults can go and just be themselves, unabashedly and excitedly sharing with each other their favourite television shows, movies, books, art, hobbies, music, etc. They do not have to conform to any ideals but their own.

The Fault in Our Stars. Green's devoted Nerdfighter following may have started back in 2007, but it was not until 2012 and the release of his highly anticipated novel, *The Fault in Our Stars* (TFiOS), that his social media popularity began to rise. The novel centers on two young adults: Hazel, the sarcastic and clever heroine battling terminal thyroid cancer; and Augustus, the goofy but chivalrous survivor of osteosarcoma (a form of bone cancer). The two meet at a cancer support group and eventually fall in love. Green had struggled with the story for TFiOS since the beginning of his career. He had wanted to write about young adults with cancer since his time spent as a chaplain at the children's hospital. He spent eight years writing the story, but could never find the right voice (Alter, 2014). According to Green, the story began very differently from what is it today. It was set at a children's hospital in Indianapolis, and was about a support

group for teenagers living with terminal illness. The group leader was "this handsome, alcoholic, 22-year-old hospital chaplain, who was [based on] me. . . . It's so embarrassing to look back on it, because he was always hooking up with hot doctors. It was just wish fulfillment" (Shafrir, 2014, para. 26).

The book changed when Green met a young Nerdfighter named Esther Earl at a Harry Potter conference in 2008. Esther, who had thyroid cancer, was well known on social media "for her honest, wry depiction of her illness" (Shafrir, 2014, para. 27). Esther died in August of 2010 at the age of 15. Said Green about his friendship with the young Nerdfighter, "When I first

> ### *The Doobly Doo*
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> *Green further discussing his friendship with Esther:* "She was just a great friend. You know that creator-fan relationship that often emerges? It wasn't like that. It was just a friendship. It's weird to have a 15-year-old friend, but I don't know, I'm kind of used to it, I guess. And then I was part of her Make-A-Wish in the last couple months of her life, and then after that, we were just close friends until she died. She died the day after my birthday, actually, like 20 minutes after my birthday, just after midnight" *(Shafrir, 2014, para. 29).*

became friends with Esther, I realized how wrong [the book] all sounded. . . . Then I stopped working on it completely until after she died, but I saved maybe 5,000 words or something [of the original]" (Shafrir, 2014, para. 28). While Green does not consider Hazel as being based on Esther, she certainly had an influence, to the point where Esther's story is intrinsically tied with "*Fault* mythology" (Shafrir, 2014).

The Fault in Our Stars debuted at No.1 and spent a total of 121 weeks on the best-seller list. Green developed a fairly extensive marketing campaign for the book, which began six months before the publication date with the reveal of the book title in a 2011 *vlogbrothers* video (J. Green, 2011), and the promise to sign all 150,000 books in the first print run. The marketing in this one video alone created a frenzy of pre-ordering, sending *The Fault in Our Stars* to the top of Amazon's book charts before the book was even published (Alter, 2014; Christie, 2014; Talbot, 2014)," and effectively encouraging Penguin (Green's publisher) to release the book five months earlier than originally announced:

> They called me and were like 'We've been watching the comments on your internet television show and it appears that the Nerdfighters would like the book to come out before May,' and I was like 'Yeah, of course they would, so would I.' And then poof, it happened! (J. Green, 2011)

Nerdfighters were embracing the novel with an evangelical zeal, and it showed in the sales numbers (Alter, 2014; Talbot, 2014). Therefore, the decision by Fox 2000 to eventually turn the book into a movie only made sense. Green was approached by Wyck Godfrey, one of the producers of the *Twilight* films, about adapting the book to film. Godfrey and Fox 2000 encouraged Green to be as involved in the production process as possible, having him sit in and help approve casting auditions, and even having Green engage with his fans by posting videos and pictures from the set to his various social media accounts – a marketing strategy that clearly worked (Alter, 2014; Shafrir, 2014). The trailer for the film has been viewed over 33 million times (as of March, 2016). In the seven days leading up to the movie's June 2nd, 2014 release date, the movie had garnered incredible and unprecedented social media attention, including:

- 4.0 million Facebook likes
- 38.4 million YouTube views
- 1.9M tweets[5]
- 132K[6] Google searches (Bauckhage, 2014)

The Doobly Doo

On June 14th, 2015, John Green began another press tour for his latest book-to-movie, Paper Towns. *For this tour, Green and the two stars of the movie, Cara Delevingne and Nat Wolff, traveled across Europe and the U.S.*

Green has attended numerous Hollywood events to help promote the movie, from the MTV Movie Awards (see Figure 15) with Shailene Woodley, who plays Hazel in the movie, to the Golden Globes after-parties with Ansel Elgort and Nat Wolff, who play Augustus and Isaac in the movie, respectively. Green's pictures and tweets from these events garnered tens of thousands of likes (Shafrir, 2014). *The Fault in Our Stars* now has more than nine million copies in print all over the world. His other four novels sit in the top ten of the New York Times Young Adult best-seller list. His five books total 13.5 million copies in print in North

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[5] All tweets that included the movie's title plus a number of search words, e.g. "movie" OR a list of movie-specific hashtags were counted. The numbers are global, conducted using a Twitter API partner service.

[6] This was determined by using Wikipedia traffic as a conclusive proxy for Google Search numbers.

America, and his novel *Paper Towns* has also been adapted into a feature film (Alter, 2014). It is estimated that *The Fault in Our Stars* alone earned Green a yearly amount of nine million dollars, before taxes and fees (Robehmed, 2014).
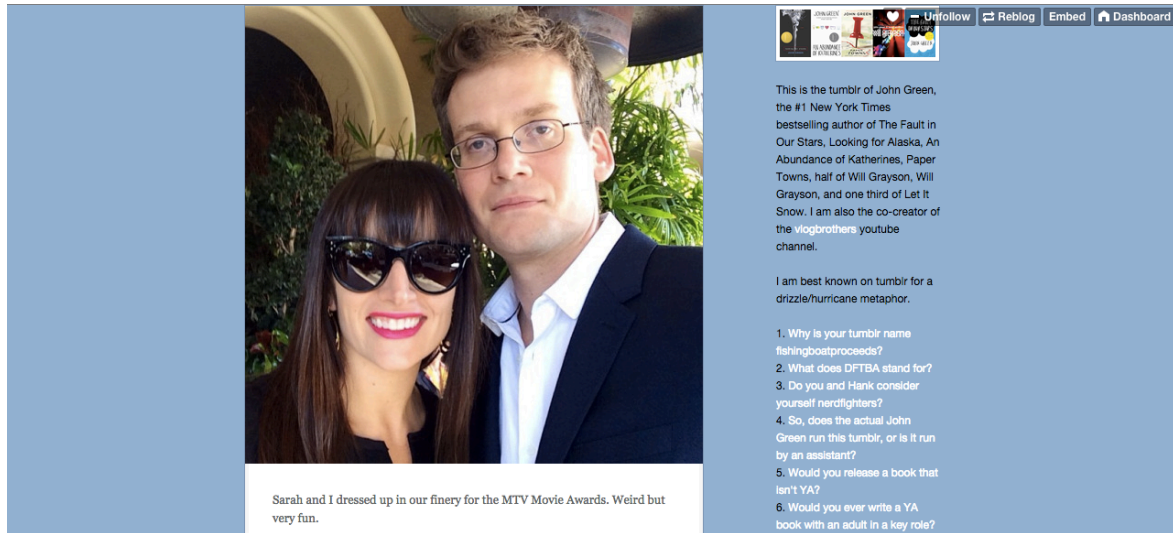
Figure 15. Picture posted by Green to his Tumblr blog of his wife and himself attending the 2014 MTV Awards.

Green has struggled to take this new level of stardom in stride. As a sufferer of anxiety, he found the massive crowds he drew during the nation-wide tour to promote the movie unsettling (Alter, 2014). He has become very wary about the nature of celebrity-life:

> People are stopping you, and they're saying nice things, but like, it makes you constantly consciously aware when you're in public that you are not actually your private self, or that you can't actually be your private self. . . . In the same way that if I yell at my kid about a Hot Wheel or something, and then I turn around and there's a Nerdfighter and she's like, 'I'm such a big fan!' and I'm like, 'Well, I'm trying to have a corrective moment with my son, and this is weird'. (Shafrir, 2014)

Green had been able to balance his publishing career and his video-producing business quite efficiently until *The Fault in our Stars* became a movie. With the release of the movie, however, came a change in Green's demographic. His audience is obviously much larger, but not only that, it has also grown to include adults (myself included). This has left Green "torn between his two roles," trying to balance his "day job" of producing videos with writing another novel (Alter, 2014, para. 5).

Just how much of this fame can be directly attributed to *The Fault in Our Stars*, however? Were there other factors at play (i.e. Green's already existent fan base of Nerdfighters and internet fame)? In 2014, John and Hank conducted a Nerdfighter census, which had over 100,000 participants. In the census, one of the questions was "When did you start watching?" (meaning, when did the participants start watching *vlogbrothers*). The highest percentage of people (25%) started watching *vlogbrothers* in 2012, which is the year *The Fault in Our Stars* was published. The next highest percentage of people was 20% in 2013 (H. Green, 2014). Green also wrote a Tumblr post on May 29th, 2013, called "Why Has The Fault in our Stars Been So Successful?" In the post, he had this to say:

> **The Fault in Our Stars is NOT successful primarily because I am famous on the Internet** [bolded in original]**.** I know this because I was famous on the Internet when *Paper Towns* was published, and also when *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* was published. (*TFiOS* has almost a million copies in print; *Paper Towns* sold perhaps 4% as much in its first year.) Having the built-in audience of [N]erdfighteria is tremendously important to me and to my work, but both *Paper Towns* and *WGWG* sold less in hardcover than *Looking for Alaska*, which was published when I was entirely unknown online. . . . I do think the initial goodwill that [N]erdfighters showed the book—streaming onto amazon and [G]oodreads to give the book positive reviews—probably helped the book begin to reach outside the community. But this also raises a critical point, which is that on average **[N]erdfighters seem to like The Fault in Our Stars almost exactly as much as what I will call for lack of a better term 'regular people.'** [bolded in original] (J. Green, 2013a)

Further to this point, on October 15th 2013, Green produced a *vlogbrother's* video called "Thoughts for Nerdfighteria," where he discussed how much Nerdfighteria has grown in the past six months, and what that growth meant for the Nerdfighter community. In the video, he said this:

> So Nerdfighteria is growing in lots of ways; like my books are reaching a much larger audience than I ever imagined. I mean Hank, I don't regularly get emails in like all capital letters from 80-year-old grandmothers that are like 'My granddaughter told me to read your book and I liked it and now my entire retirement home's book club is reading it. P. S. What happens to Anna's mom?' [Reference from *The Fault in Our Stars*]. And

that's awesome because a) we need more old people in Nerdfighteria and b) it's good to

know that 80-year-olds and teenagers ask the same questions. (J. Green, 2013b)

Just because Green feels his rise to fame is directly related to *The Fault in Our Stars*, however, does not necessarily mean it is true. There may not be a clear-cut answer to exactly why Green has catapulted to the heights of fame he has, but regardless, his rise to stardom shows no signs of slowing just yet.

The king of YA. Green is not the only person who finds his skyrocket to fame unsettling. Shortly after the success of his novel, articles began to appear citing Green as the "saviour" of YA, the "undisputed king of YA," and even the "Teen Whisperer" (Badavi, 2014; Shafrir, 2014). They credited Green with "ushering in a new golden era for contemporary, realistic, literary teen fiction" (Alter, 2014, para. 9). Doree Shafrir's (2014) article "How a Nerd-Hero Writer Became the Breakout Star of This Summer's Most Unlikely Blockbuster" explicitly states,

> Green represents a trend in YA that the publishing industry has termed "realistic fiction,"
> a departure from the paranormal and dystopian series that have been clogging the shelves
> for the past few years, like *Twilight, The Hunger Games,* and *Divergent.* (para. 20)

Similarly, *The New York Times* writer A. J. Jacobs (2014) actually termed this genre of realistic fiction "Greenlit," suggesting that while Green did not necessarily invent the genre, he is "the reigning emporer" (paras. 1-2). To be considered "Greenlit," the book must have "a snarky, wry protagonist having conflict with defective authority figures in a first-person point of view" (Romano, 2014, n.p.). Because of this YA "royalty," articles began discussing a phenomenon known as "The John Green Effect," or the "John Green Bump" (Alter, 2014; Gray, 2014; Romano, 2014; Ursu, 2014). According to Alter (2014), all it takes is a "blurb or Twitter endorsement" from Green about a book to rocket that author into stardom (para. 9).

Author Rainbow Rowell is often cited as having received this "John Green Bump" for her book *Eleanor & Park* after Green wrote a "heartfelt, glowing review in the *New York Times*" (Romano, 2014, n.p.). This terminology, and the concept behind it, has rubbed many people the wrong way. As Ursu (2014) points out, it is demeaning to Rowell and her success to wholly attribute it to Green's review. Ursu goes on to say, "The idea that first person funny-sad contemporary YA realism is 'the John Green genre' might come as a surprise to all the women who have been writing it for a decade or two or three" (para. 7). Rowell herself weighed in on

this topic in a series of tweets, which can be seen below (see Figure 16; read in order from bottom to top).

> **Rainbow Rowell** @rainbowrowell · 1h
> But it was bizarre (for us both) to watch people talk about my book as if he was responsible for it. And for me.
> ↩ ⟲ 58 ★ 254 •••

> **Rainbow Rowell** @rainbowrowell · 1h
> I've since met and read John Green. He is great. I'm happy to be his friend. (Truly.)
> ↩ ⟲ 88 ★ 319 •••

> **Rainbow Rowell** @rainbowrowell · 1h
> Two years ago, a male author I'd never met or read before reviewed my book in the NYT, and people started calling him my mentor ...
> ↩ ⟲ 78 ★ 252 •••

Figure 16. Tweets from author Rainbow Rowell discussing "The John Green Effect."

Furthermore, the suggestion that Green's "realistic fiction" is a welcomed "departure from the paranormal and dystopian series that have been clogging the shelves for the past few years, like *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Divergent*" (Shafrir, 2014, para. 21), all written by female authors, is privileging one genre over another (Ursu, 2014). As these articles citing Green as the savior of YA continued, critics such as Aja Romano (2014), Mary Ann Badavi (2014), and Anne Ursu (2014) fervently pointed out the sexism behind this movement: "by choosing [Green] to be the crown prince of YA, the entertainment industry has continued its cycle of promoting the work of white men as 'real' work, and the work of women as 'simple'" (Badavi, 2014, para. 6).

Green himself addressed this issue directly in a YouTube live stream event that took place on June 4th, 2014. In response to the question, "How do you feel about people lauding you as the savoir of YA literature?" Green had this to say:

> I think it's ridiculous, to be honest with you. YA literature is not in need of saving and hasn't been in need of saving in a very long time, and ah, if it did need saving I would not be the person to do it. Um, you know I think from the outside, there's always, from a pop culture perspective, or a sort of general media perspective, there can only be one thing, you know? Like there can only be paranormal romance, there can only be dystopia, or now, there can only be um, *The Fault in Our Stars* or whatever. But it's not the truth, that isn't the way the actual world of YA books looks or has ever looked. . . . To me, the real story of young adult literature is not actually about whatever the big cultural book of the moment is. The real story of young adult literature is that more than a thousand books are read by at least ten thousand teenagers a year, that like they're, that we have incredible breadth like, that we have great dystopias and great fantasy, great sci-fi, great mysteries, great romances, and all of that stuff can live together and be in conversation, um, because they all – we all – share the same shelf. (J. Green, 2014)

Unfortunately for Green, not only has he become the "undisputed king of YA," he has also become the scapegoat for this inherently sexist way the media is portraying him. The myriad of opposing articles that have surfaced since the alleged advent of "Greenlit," however, have brought to light this sexism. Hopefully this discussion continues, and we continue to think critically about how sexism is portrayed in the media.

The public eye. Green's fame has also left him open to a particularly nasty form of public scrutiny. On Friday, June 12th 2015, A Tumblr user made a post that implied John Green was a pedophile. The post claimed that Green uses social media as a way to exploit teenage girls in a sexual manner. Green reblogged the original post and responded to it on his Tumblr. Following is an excerpt from the original post as reblogged by Green[7]:

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[7] The original Tumblr user who made the post deleted his or her account shortly after Green reblogged it, removing the original post from Tumblr. Because of this, I had to rely on Green's reblogging of the post on his Tumblr for the quotation rather than citing the original source.

When in reality, it's because he's a creep who panders to teenage girls so that he can amass some weird cult-like following. And it's always girls who feel misunderstood, you know, and he goes out of his way to make them feel important and desirable. Which is fucking?[sic] weird? Also he has a social media presence that is equivalent to that dad of a kid in your friend group who always volunteers to "supervise" the pool parties and scoots his lawn chair close to all of the girls. (J. Green, 2015b)

Green has responded to this post, denying that he abuses or exploits children in any way. In his post, he also addresses the idea of "online hate," saying that "while there are wonderful examples of outrage fuelling long-term, productive responses to injustice . . . too often the internet moves from jolt to jolt, from hatred to hatred" (J. Green, 2015b).

Not only did this incident prompt a flurry of activity on Tumblr and Twitter in response to the claims, it also garnered national and international attention (See Figure 17).

Figure 17. Screen shot of article from The Daily Mail in the United Kingdom discussing the claims made about and the response from Green http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3122298/John-Green-slams-Tumblr-users-accusing-sexual-abuse-pedophile.html.

Even Green's response to the claims has been shrouded in controversy. In his Tumblr post, Green says "Throwing that kind of accusation around is sick and libelous and most importantly damages the discourse around the actual sexual abuse of children" (J. Green, 2015b). Some have come to his defense, such as fellow YA author Libba Bray in her blog post "On John Green, and Why I Love Him" from June 12th, 2015. In this post, Bray provides the many reasons why she is such a fan of John Green. She also mirrors his response regarding the sexual abuse allegations:

> But the Internet can also be a very ugly place, the equivalent of the worst middle school cafeteria ever—everybody camped at their tables waiting for somebody to throw the first carton of milk and the food fight to be on while people crowd around yelling, "Fight! Fight! Fight!" What was said about John was not just mean-spirited and, again, WRONG. It was damaging—and libelous. It's actually actionable. (Bray, 2015)

Critics, however, have responded to these comments made by Green and his fellow YA authors, suggesting that rather than condemning the original poster for "throwing" accusations of sexual abuse around, the adults involved in the situation should have "listen[ed] to her, ask[ed] questions, consider[ed] her point of view, or argue[d] that she deserves space and that the adults need to leave her the fuck alone" (jennygadget, 2015). And maybe, jennygadget has a point. In the original Tumblr post, the author (who has never been confirmed as male or female) never explicitly says that Green is a pedophile, merely that he or she finds Green's interactions with his fans (online and offline) "creepy." [j]ennygadget suggests that if anything, Green and Bray's responses to the post do nothing but strip the original author of his or her sense of autonomy in a world controlled and regulated by adults:

> And god forbid you tell them that he's creepy or a perv – even though what other language do you have to describe it? – because that's a serious accusation, missy. Serious business, unlike girls having the right to feel comfortable in the spaces they occupy. Never mind that if adults believed that your comfort and autonomy was serious business you wouldn't feel the need to imply actual abuse in order to be listened to, you'd' get to just say you don't like it and leave it at that. (jennygadget, 2015)

Green's brother Hank has somewhat addressed what critics like jennygadget have to say in a Tumblr post:

Whenever I say 'I can't understand why someone would…' I try to recognize that as my failing, not theirs. Yes, maybe the thing that they think is awful, but the inability to understand it is my problem, not theirs. So I do spend a lot of time trying to understand them, and trying not to be frustrated by the fact that, in my search, I see posts from people who are legitimately confused about whether my brother is a child abuser. . . . It's weird to say that the person being attacked is attacking simply by responding, but that's how it feels to people. That doesn't make those feelings right, but they are understandable. (H. Green, 2015)

In his post, Green's brother Hank appears to dance around the comments presented by jennygadget and those who feel the same way as her. He validates those feelings, but in the same breath, undermines them by saying "That doesn't make those feelings right." It is hard to pinpoint who is "right" and who is "wrong" in this situation, and maybe that is because this situation is too complex to make that sort of delineation. What *is* clear from this incident, however, is that the nature of online life and relationships is complex and murky, much like life and relationships in the offline world – but perhaps accelerated because of issues of anonymity and celebrity.

Stepping back. After the sexual abuse controversy surrounding Green hit its peak, Green made the announcement that he would be stepping back from certain forms of social media. In the same post by Green mentioned above, he goes on to say that he no longer thinks it is viable for him to continue to use his main Tumblr blog (www.fishingboatproceeds.com) in the way he has been using it:

> I think at this point it's impossible to continue to use

The Doobly Doo

On June 6th, 2015, Green and his brother Hank released the first episode of their new podcast, Dear Hank and John. The following is the description for the podcast, which can be accessed on both iTunes and Soundcloud: "Hank and John Green (YouTubers and etc.) answer questions, give questionable advice, and talk about Mars (the planet) and AFC Wimbledon (the 4th tier English football club)" (iTunes Description, www.itunes.apple.com*). Dear hank and John was not included in the data collection for this thesis as it was developed after the data collection period, but as of March 2016, the podcast has 12,500 followers (or, subscribers) on Soundcloud (numbers not available for iTunes).*

tumblr in the way I've used it since 2011. My life is different (in ways that are both good

and bad); this community is different (in ways that are both good and bad); the world is different (in ways that are both good and bad). So if this blog begins to look more one-way, with more original content and less reblogging/commenting/answering asks/etc., that's why. (J. Green, 2015b)

By June 16th, 2015, five days after publishing it on Tumblr, Green's post had been reblogged and liked 55,258 times. In the three months following the post, Green posted on Tumblr 252 times (as of September 14th, 2015), with just 1.1% of those posts answering and responding to fans. In comparison to the 9% of posts collected in the data collection period (See Chapter Five) that directly responded to fans, this number seems quite small. How this decision will affect the Nerdfighter community remains yet to be seen, but this is certainly an unprecedented break from the online world for Green that already has him connecting less with his fans, and producing less online content, on this platform at least.

Observing From the Ground Floor

As I mentioned earlier, at the onset of this study, Westerfeld and Green were comparable in terms of their social media and real world popularity. Over the past few years, however, I have watched Green skyrocket into stardom. He went from an author of relatively "normal" popularity, to the "King of YA." Westerfeld, in this case, acts as a "control." He represents what a "normal" author does online, while Green is the "extreme" in social media output[8], social media popularity, and now, real-world popularity. I have watched this explosion in popularity from the ground floor, sometimes lurking on Green's various social media platforms, and sometimes participating in them. In this next section, I discuss the second overarching theme of this study as mentioned in Chapter One: My own experience of the excitement of participating in these online communities with Westerfeld and Green. Below is my account of becoming a fan of Westerfeld and Green, and what it felt like to watch Green become the YA behemoth he is now.
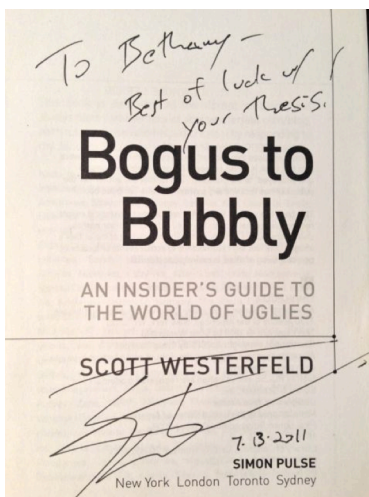
Figure 18. My copy of *Bogus to Bubbly* signed by Westerfeld.

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[8] Green's high level of social media output in comparison to Westerfeld's is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Bogus to bubbly with Scott Westerfeld. When I first started data collection for this study (pilot) in 2012, I was already a fan of Westerfeld. I had read his *Uglies* series and his *Leviathan* series, and I even had a signed copy of his book *Bogus to Bubbly: An Insider's Guide to the World of Uglies* (see Figure 18). I followed him on Twitter, was a frequent visitor of his website and blog (even setting up an RSS feed to it), and enjoyed talking about his books to any friends that would listen. I have not participated in Fan Art Fridays on his blog, but I look forward to seeing what kind of art he will post each week.

I have spoken with Westerfeld over Twitter multiple times, resulting in what I would call a feeling of connection with the author. He has answered general questions from me, offered me writing advice, answered a research question I had about his website (as mentioned earlier), and even just joked around with me over Twitter (see Figures 19, 20, and 21 for my interactions with Westerfeld over Twitter).

Figure 19. Westerfeld responding to a tweet with writing advice.

Figure 20. Asking Westerfeld a general question about literary tattoos.

Figure 21. Response from Westerfeld over Twitter.

Becoming a Nerdfighter. For Green, I had some catching up to do. I began first with his books, picking up a copy of *The Fault in Our Stars*, which had just been released. The book, I thought, was beautifully written, and so I went back to the first book he had ever published, *Looking for Alaska*, and began reading my way through the John Green canon. I also began watching a few of his more recent *vlogbrothers* videos on YouTube, but I felt a bit like someone who came late to the party; there were many inside jokes that I just did not understand (e.g. French the Llama, puppy-sized elephants, the "In Your Pants" forum, DFTBA). So, I decided to start at the beginning. I began with the very first *vlogbrothers* video, "Brotherhood 2.0: January 1st," posted by Hank Green on January 1st 2007. From there, I went on to watch all 6000-and-some videos posted by Green and his brother Hank. I learned all about the inside jokes, the initialisms, *hankgames*, *CrashCourse*, DFTBA.com, the Project for Awesome, Nerdfighteria, Green's Twitter page, and I even discovered the microblogging platform Tumblr through Green.

At the beginning of this study, tracking Green's social media output and popularity did not seem like a daunting task at all. While his social media output was greater than Westerfeld's, their online popularity and real-life popularity were similar. I began data collection just as Green

published *The Fault in Our Stars*. Though I was aware of the fact that the book had topped

bookseller charts months before it was even released, I was not prepared for just how big it, and

Green, would become. The more interviews Green began to do with different newspapers (e.g.

The New York Times, *The Guardian*, etc.) and morning news shows (e.g. *The Today Show*), the

more his social media following began to grow. In June 2011, when Green announced the title

for *The Fault in Our Stars,* he had just over one million followers on Twitter (Kirch, 2011). By

January 2014, Green had gained almost another million followers, putting his total close to the

two million mark (Greenfield, 2014). As of 2016, Green has passed the five million followers

mark on Twitter.

Unlike Westerfeld, however, Green's surge in popularity has essentially made him less

accessible as a YA author through social media. His social media output does surpass that of

Westerfeld, and he does frequently respond to his fans over Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube, but

Green himself has admitted that his popularity makes it impossible to respond to everyone. In the

screenshot below (see Figure 22), Green responded to a fan who asked why he "never answers"

questions submitted through his Tumblr blog.
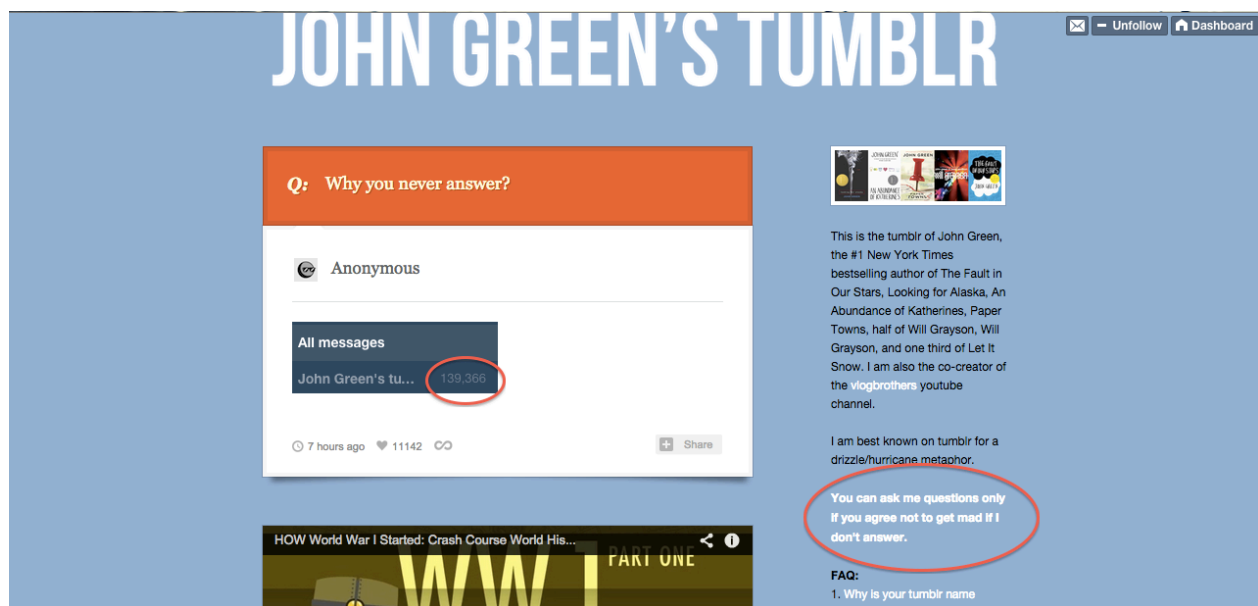
Figure 22. Screenshot of Green responding to a fan question on his Tumblr blog.

According to Green, he "never answers" because he has over 100,000 questions in his Tumblr

"Ask" box alone (centre, circled in red). Green also has a caveat on his Tumblr page regarding

asking questions, where he says "You can ask me questions only if you agree not to get mad if I don't answer," also in reference to the amount of questions he receives daily in his Tumblr "Ask" box (right, circled in red). Even Westerfeld, who is a friend of Green's and considers himself a Nerdfighter, has commented on Green's level of social media stardom (see Figure 23).

Figure 23. Westerfeld making a joke about Green's social media stardom.

Since 2012, I have observed from the "ground floor" this phenomenon of Green's rise to popularity and YA royalty. After watching the entire *vlogbrothers* series from the beginning, I definitely began to self-identify as a Nerdfighter. I have attempted to contact Green many times via Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube. While I have always received a response from Westerfeld when trying to connect with him over social media, I have only ever connected with Green once. I posted a comment on a *vlogbrothers* video in which Green discussed a new game he would be playing on the *hankgames* channel. I asked Green if he would still answer fan

> ### The Doobly Doo
>
> *UPDATE: Green and his brother Hank responded to another question from me in their Dear Hank and John podcast. Listeners are able to submit questions to be answered on the podcast by emailing them to* hankandjohn@gmail.com. *Knowing that Green likes to discuss English football, I chose to cater my question to him by specifically asking about English football and how the singing/chanting became such a big part of the English football culture (based on my own experience of attending an English football game in London). Green answered my question (which was delightful and exciting to hear as I listened to the episode on the bus) in their February 22nd, 2016 episode entitled "Grief is Super Weird".*

questions and talk about different issues while playing video games, and Green responded to my question (see Figure 24).
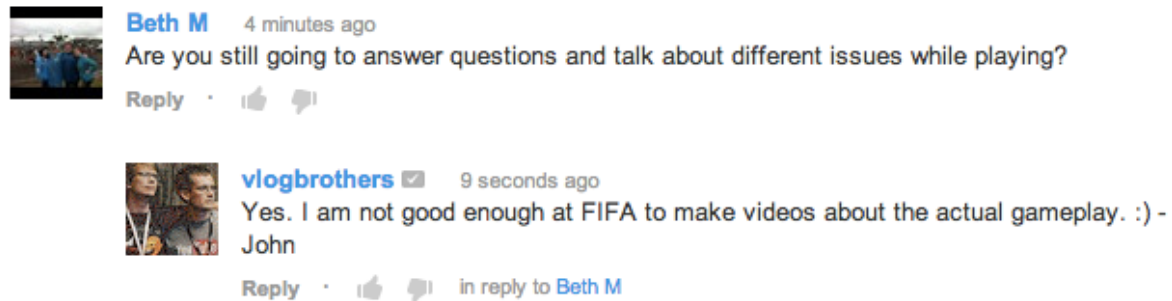
Figure 24. Screenshot of a question I posed to Green on YouTube, and his response to my question.

Individual vs. Community

Knowing and understanding the level of popularity Green has reached, I am not surprised that I have only ever connected with him twice. In fact, I was quite shocked when Green responded to my questions on YouTube and his podcast. Green's level of social media and real-world popularity, however, has meant that I have a much different "relationship" with him than I do with Westerfeld. When I first began observing the social media use of Westerfeld and Green, I fully expected that I would be able to connect with both authors equally. As I watched Green become as popular as he is now, however, I had to resign myself to the fact that I would probably never be able to connect with him as I have with Westerfeld. I feel confident that when I attempt to reach out to Westerfeld over social media, I will receive a response, almost like a friend that I have only ever connected with online. With Green, I do not feel this same sense of connection.

I do, however, feel very connected to the Nerdfighter community, which indirectly connects me to Green. As Green addresses Nerdfighters frequently in his videos, Tumblr posts, and tweets, I feel as though I am part of a bigger community that has a very sincere relationship with Green. In that sense, I have developed two very different relationships with the authors than expected: A more personal and individualistic relationship with Westerfeld, who has a smaller social media and real-life following than Green; and a larger, online community-oriented relationship with Green, whose social media and real-life popularity seemed to explode overnight. Is one type of relationship "better," or more "authentic," than the other? At this point, I am not sure; but I can say that I have a deeper connection to the books of these two authors

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because of my more personal, individualistic relationship with Westerfeld and my larger, online community-oriented relationship with Green.

This deeper connection to Green and Westerfeld's books, for me, stems from a sense of "knowing" Westerfeld and Green; from "knowing" their personalities and seeing glimpses of who they are in their writing. I say "know" in quotations marks because of course I do not *actually* "know" Westerfeld and Green; I "know" their public personas that they have crafted through social media, which is a phenomenon that could be the subject of a Master's thesis in and of itself. Regardless, the connection that I have with Westerfeld, which is more personal, and Green, which is more community-oriented, adds a deeper level to their writing for me because I know the emotions, ideas, and writing processes behind it. I know Esther Earl's story, and how *The Fault in Our Stars* provided Green an outlet to deal with the complex emotions surrounding childhood death. I know Westerfeld's love of the visual nature of steampunk, and how it was important for him to capture as much of those visuals as possible with his *Leviathan* series. Knowing the author's context to these books adds that sense of "insider knowledge"; the feeling that I know something that not everyone reading the books knows. In that way, I feel more personally invested in the books, and more personally connected to the characters.

Not everyone, however, may enjoy connecting to an author's books in this way. The connection to Westerfeld's and Green's books that I feel is ultimately influenced by the authors themselves. I do not read their books starting as a "clean slate"; I have already developed certain opinions and expectations for the books based on the personal and public information that Westerfeld and Green share. Although I enjoy this kind of reading process, I know that there are others who would prefer going into a book a "clean slate." They would rather not know the author's motivations, which is okay, and which highlights one of the great things about different social media like Twitter, blogs, and YouTube: it *can* help people form connections, like those formed between Westerfeld and Green and their fans. If a reader *wants* to make this kind of connection with the authors and their books, then social media can facilitate that connection – but only if that is the type of connection the reader is looking for.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced two of the three overarching themes this study is organized by: The sheer amount of online content created by Westerfeld and Green through social media as

a way to interact with their readers, and my own account of becoming a part of Westerfeld's and Green's online communities. I provided brief biographies of Westerfeld and Green, before discussing Green's rapid rise to fame and how it has affected his interactions with social media. I then discussed my own experience participating in the online communities following Westerfeld and Green, and the kind of deeper connections to the authors this participation has afforded me. In the following chapters, I will provide the findings for the author data and participant data, before discussing these findings in relation to the research questions posed in Chapter Three of this study.

CHAPTER 5

Findings: Author Data

Pilot Study: Content Analysis

For this project, a Pilot Study was conducted from September 10th, 2012 to November 1st, 2012 as a way to test the methodological framework used in the data collection and analysis. The study allowed me to explore the research territory. It also allowed me to develop the coding scheme and interview guide used and improve upon these methodological tools as needed. Specifically, the Pilot Study made apparent the need to document YouTube video data and Tumblr post data in more detail, allowing for a deeper analysis of both social media tools. The Pilot Study also allowed me to test my interview guide and alter the questions as needed to gain more insight into young adults' social media usage. Because of this, the Pilot Study data and the Main Study data are presented below as two separate sets, though it is still important to view both sets of data as one set in the larger context of what this data means for social media use by YA authors as a way to connect to their readers.[9]

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[9] Grey text signifies Twitter and blog content.

Twitter
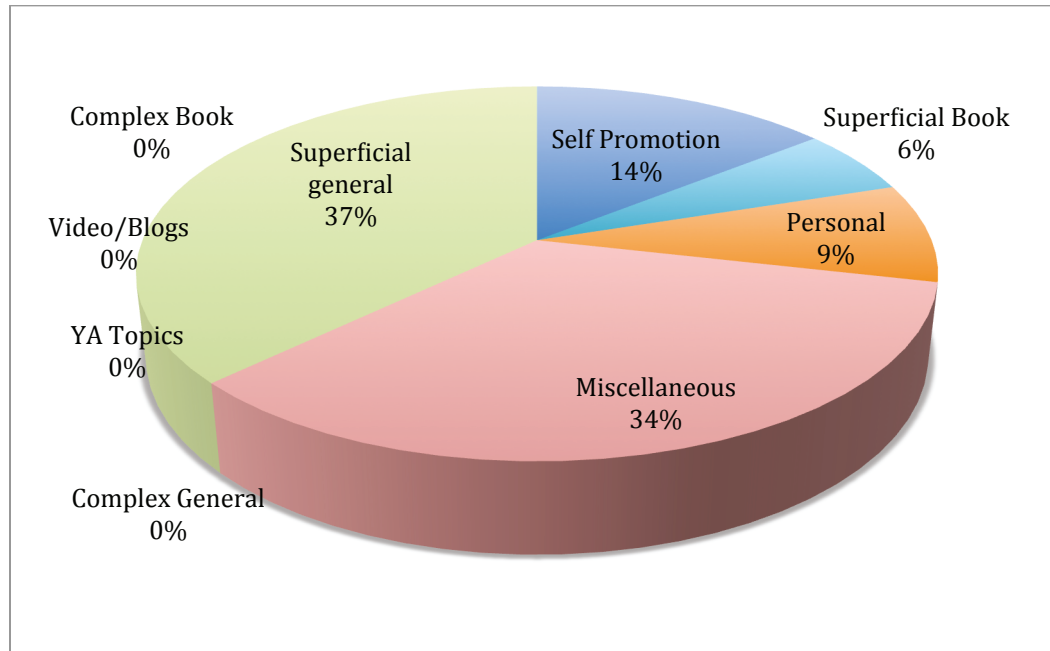
Figure 25. Chart of tweets produced by Westerfeld between September 10th and November 1st, 2012.

As Figure 25 demonstrates, out of 35 tweets produced by Westerfeld during the approximately two-month period,

- 43% were *Direct Address*
  - 37% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
  - 6% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 34% were *Miscellaneous*
- 14% were *Self Promotion*
- 9% were *Personal* while
- 0% were *Video/Blogs*
- 0% were *YA Topics*
- 0% were *Direct Address Complex General*
- 0% were *Direct Address Complex Books*

An example of *Direct Address: Superficial General* tweet produced by Westerfeld included this one, which simply said "@___ Happy birthday, yo," to another Twitter user. *Direct Address: Superficial Book* tweets sent by Westerfeld included this one, "@_____ It's also a great example of ensemble character building," in which Westerfeld replied to a reader question regarding a character plotline choice in one of Westerfeld's book series.
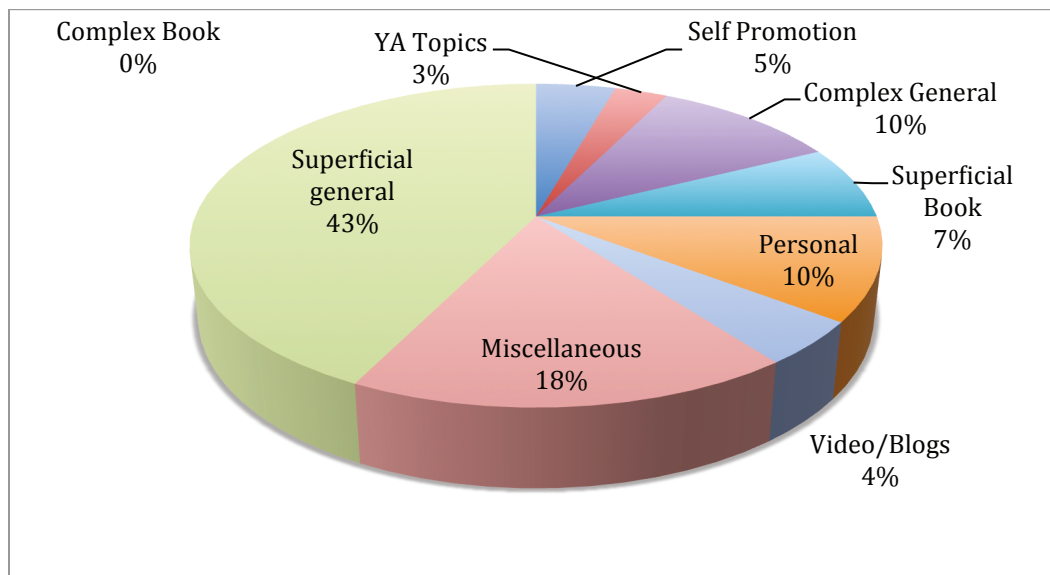
Figure 26. Chart of tweets produced by Green between September 10th and November 1st, 2012.

As Figure 26 demonstrates, out of 68 tweets produced by Green over a period of approximately two months,

- 60% were *Direct Address*
    - 43% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
    - 7% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book* tweets.
    - 10 % were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 18 % were *Miscellaneous*
- 10% were *Personal*
- 5% were *Self Promotion*
- 4% were *Video/Blogs*
- 3% were *YA Topics*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*

The following was an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* tweet by Green, "@_____ I AM FILING A WORKERS COMPENSATION CLAIM. #mypapercut HURTS SO MUCH AND IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT." An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* tweet made by Green was this one, "@_____ I was so thrilled with it. Thanks for reading it." In this tweet, Green thanked a fellow twitter user for reading and reviewing one of his novels on the user's blog. "@_____ the amount of gas isn't the issue; it's the shortage of working pumps in a city that always had relatively few stations," was an example of a *Direct Address: Complex*

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General tweet made by Green, in which the author addressed the most recent US election and the stance held by both presidential candidates regarding gas.

General tweet made by Green, in which the author addressed the most recent US election and the stance held by both presidential candidates regarding gas.

Blogs

Figure 27. Chart of blog posts produced by Westerfeld between September 10th and November 1st, 2012.

Data analysis of Westerfeld's blog revealed that out of six blog posts over a period of approximately two months,

- 34% were used for *Direct Address*
  - 17% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
  - 17% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
- 33% were *Self Promotion*
- 17% were *Miscellaneous*
- 16% were *YA Topics*
- 0% were *Personal*
- 0% were *Video/Blogs*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex General*.

With regards to Westerfeld's various *Direct Address* posts, the following excerpt was coded as being *Direct Address: Superficial Book* as it was Westerfeld responding to a reader who sent in a picture of themselves dressed as a character from one of the author's works:

"Continuing with the Leviathan theme, here's a young boy (who's name I don't know, because Twitter sent it to me) with the self-confidence to cosplay Deryn! Awesome, dude." An example of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* post made by Westerfeld included this one in which he answered a reader question regarding the importance of religion in one of his books[10]:

> *How important is religion in the Leviathan universe with regard to the Clanker/Darwinist* *thing? Is it a general rule of thumb that Clankers = Catholics & Muslims and Darwinists* *= Protestants?* There's probably a loose correlation, yeah. But not a rule. (I mean, the Russians are more Catholic than not, and they're Darwinists.)
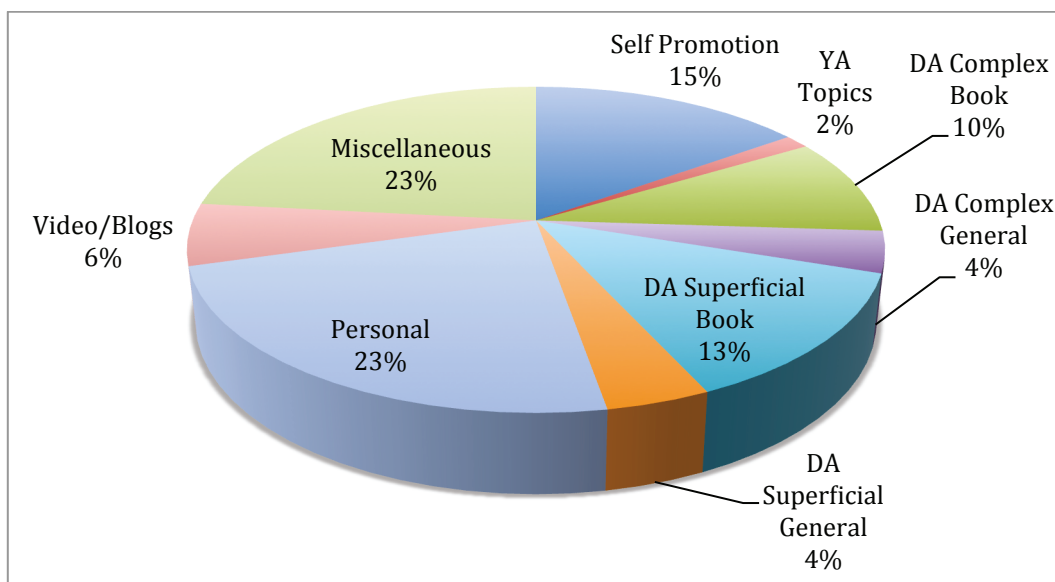
Figure 28. Chart of blog posts produced by Green between September 10th and November 1st, 2012.

As demonstrated in Figure 28, out of 139 Tumblr blog posts produced by Green over approximately two months,

- 31% were *Direct Address*
    - 13% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
    - 4% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
    - 10% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
    - 4% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 23% were *Miscellaneous*
- 23% were *Personal*
- 15% were *Self Promotion*

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[10] Reader questions are in italics.

- 6% were *Video/Blogs*
- 2% were *YA Topics*

The following was an example of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* blog post in which Green responded to a reader regarding the portrayal of cancer in one of his books:

> *As a 3-time cancer survivor, TFiOS stood out to me for what are probably different reasons than most readers. I thought the realities, and mindsets, of being sick were handled very well. It came across as a very… honest portrayal. I've been wondering where you got the context to not only understand it, but describe it faithfully. I imagine that your time as a (chaplain, IIRC) and interactions with Esther contributed, but were they the only sources? Also, what about the medical details?*
>
> 1. Thank you.
>
> 2. The time I spent as a chaplain was very helpful, because I got to know a lot of different people with many different kinds of cancer. But for the first several years after my months as a chaplain, all the writing I tried to do about illness was terrible.
>
> 3. So I do think knowing and caring about Esther was probably the most important thing in terms of thinking about the mindsets and emotional realities of chronic illness. I also talked a lot to families of people with cancer and I read a lot of books about cancer, which were extremely helpful. But if I hadn't known Esther, I never would have written The Fault in Our Stars. I might've eventually finished a book about adolescent illness of some kind, but it wouldn't have been this one.

In regards to an example of a *Direct Address: Complex General* blog post, the following excerpt was from a reader in which he or she addressed Green's response to a previous post:

> *I'm somewhat (very) upset that your answer to the person who talked to you about his/her depression didn't include vital resources such as the suicide hotline. Can you please post that if anyone needs help, they should call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255.*
>
> Yes.
>
> Also, I am not a mental health professional and as such probably shouldn't answer such questions at all, just as you should not look to your physician to write you novels.

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* blog post was from a user who notified Green concerning the following:

I'm not sure if you already knew this, but The Fault in Our Stars is nominated for the Young Adult Fiction category of the Goodreads Choice Awards.

I did know, but thanks for sharing this news with me.

I always feel weird about sharing such things or publicizing them, because I know that most authors do not have the so-called "social media presence" that I have, and that if it's something voted on the public, you guys will probably skew the numbers because nerdfighters are so lovely and everything.

And the truth is there are lots of very good books on that list, and I probably don't deserve to win it. But anyway, it is an honor to be nominated.

As an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* blog post, a user asked Green about answering questions:

Do you answer all of your questions? because I asked a question a long time ago and it never got answered. just curious.

No, there are more than 12,000 unanswered questions, so…yeah. The vast majority of them are repeats (please don't ask a question until you've read through the Q&A), but no, I don't answer every question.

YouTube
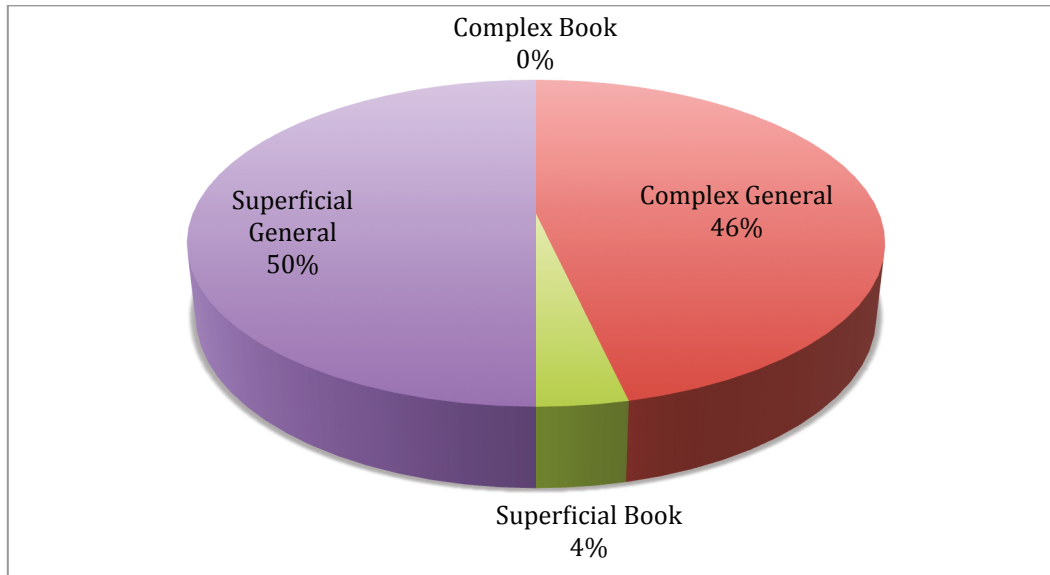
Figure 29. Chart of YouTube videos produced by Green between September 10th and November 1st, 2012.

The analysis of Green's YouTube videos only incorporated the use of the four *Direct Address* codes, as stated above. It was determined that out of 27 video posts produced by Green during the approximately two-month period,

- 50% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
- 46% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 4% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*

Video posts that contained *Direct Address: Superficial General* content included a video entitled "TINY BALLS! Nerds Do Vegas." This video was a description of Green's recent visit to Las Vegas and the sightseeing the author did while there. A *Direct Address: Complex General* video post made by Green included a video entitled "Existential Airport Anxiety." In this video, Green discussed the nature of our "Information Society," and what implications it has on our level of distraction. A *Direct Address: Superficial Book* included a video post entitled "Burning Peeps, My OTP, and Velociraptors: It's Question Tuesday." In this video, Green addressed reader questions, including a question regarding a box set of books and when it would be available in store.

Main Study: Content Analysis

During the main portion of this study, I used the same coding scheme for the tweets, blog posts, and video posts produced by each author. The Pilot Study allowed me to test this coding scheme, and I determined that it worked well for the data I was coding. I did, however, make a change to how the blog and YouTube data for Green was broken down before the coding process. Green actually maintains five blogs in total: one main blog, and four blogs dedicated to answering book-specific questions. For the Main Study, I chose to code the blog post data from each of these blogs individually, rather than grouping all of Green's blog data together, as a way to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the blog data shared by Green[11].

For Green's YouTube data, I again employed the same coding scheme used in the Pilot Study. As with Green's blog data, I separated his YouTube data into two sets: One set for his *vlogbrothers* channel and one set for his *hankgames* channel. I also recorded more detailed data about the top five videos from both of Green's YouTube channels being studied. For the purpose of this study, the top five videos for each channel were the five videos that had the most views that were posted between September 2012 and March 2013. For these videos, I recorded how many views each one had, as well as the number of likes and dislikes each video had.[12] I chose to note the number of views, likes, and dislikes for these videos in an attempt to study what types of videos produced by Green received the most viewer interaction.

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[11] As noted above, Green's blogs www.onlyifyoufinishedwgwg.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedtfios.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedalaska.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.com, www.onlyifyoufinishedpapertowns.com are all used to directly interact with his readers; therefore, these fives blogs were only coded using the four Direct Address categories.

[12] On YouTube, users are able to "like" or "dislike" a video by either clicking the "thumbs up" button on the video, or the "thumbs down" video. See Appendix G for an image of the "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" buttons on YouTube.

Twitter

Figure 30. Chart of tweets produced by Westerfeld between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

As demonstrated in Figure 30, out of 96 tweets produced by Westerfeld over a period of approximately four months,

- 46% were *Direct Address*
    - 33% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
    - 12% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
    - 1% was *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 28% were *Miscellaneous*
- 15% were *Personal*
- 9% were *Self Promotion*
- 2% were *YA Topics*
- 0% were *Video/Blogs*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*

The following is an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* tweet by Westerfeld: "@_____ I FedEx Chapstick to myself at random times, just in case." In this tweet, Westerfeld is conversing with another user about how often they both lose their "Chapsticks."

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* tweet by Westerfeld is this one, "@____ Yeah, beasties are constructed in ovum. (Which is why they're all 'its')," in which Westerfeld discusses with a user how certain beasts in his novels are created. An example of a *Direct Address: Complex General* tweet can be seen in this one, "@____ Serious question: Who does it serve if *every* critique of gun culture is treated as an attack on people like your husband?," in which Westerfeld engaged in a conversation about Firearm Regulation in the U.S. with another user.
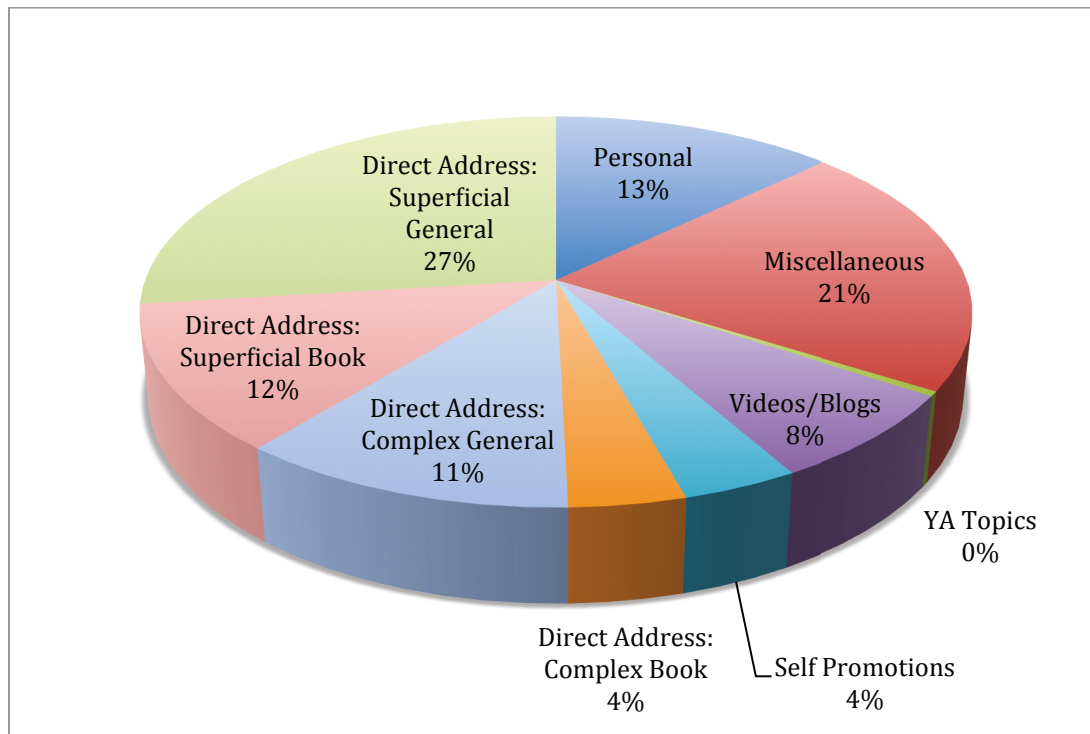
Figure 31. Chart of tweets produced by Green between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

As demonstrated in Figure 31, out of 256 tweets produced by Green over an approximate four-month period,

- 54% were *Direct Address*
  - 27% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
  - 12% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
  - 11% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
  - 4% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*.
- 21% were *Miscellaneous*
- 13% were *Personal*

- 8% were *Videos/Blog*s
- 4% were *Self Promotion*
- 0% were *YA Topic*s

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* tweet produced by Green was this one, "@____ lol. I'm hoping I don't get stranded at my office (sans heat). Good luck getting home!," in which Green conversed with another user about a snow storm that was affecting them at the time. The following is an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* tweet sent by Green: "@___ I wrote that line in Starbucks. I wrote it like eight different ways and then *click* it just sounded right. #1book140." In this tweet, Green answered a question about how he "came up" with a specific line from his book *The Fault in Our Stars*. An example of a *Direct Address: Complex General* tweet sent by Green was this one, "@___ That's just not true. Pennies have been eliminated in many countries; prices don't rise," in which Green engaged in a discussion with a user about the value of eliminating the penny in the U.S. "@___ #readpenguin I think falling in love is a process, not an event. By the end, Gus well and truly loves her #readpenguin" is an example of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* tweet sent by Green, in which he answered a reader's question about Gus's love for Hazel in *The Fault in Our Stars*.
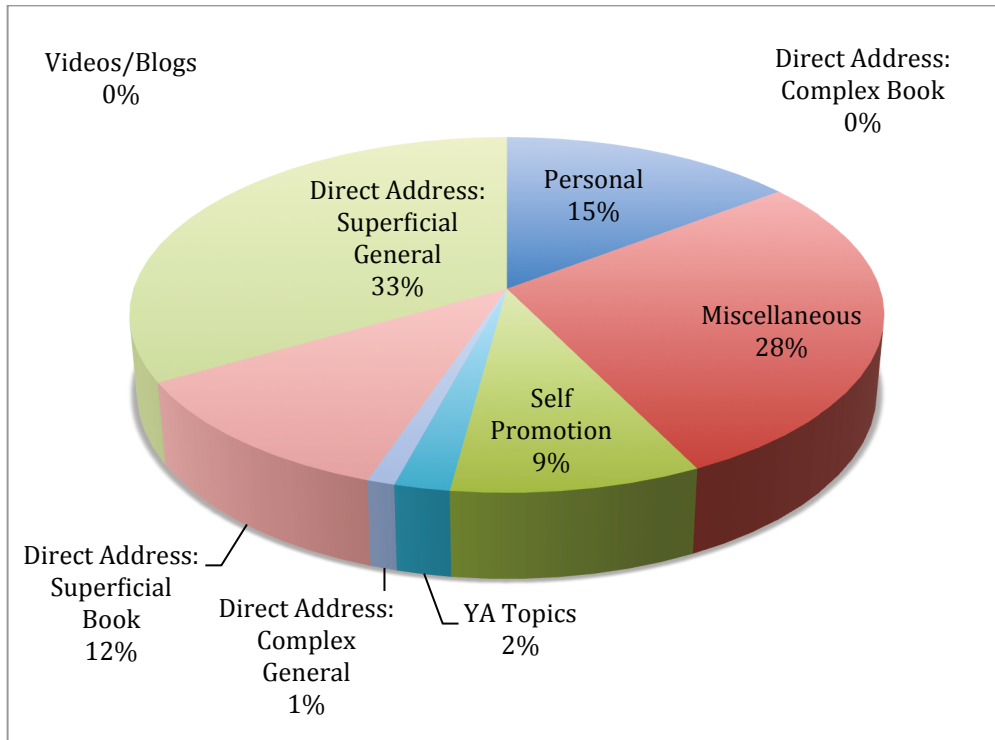
Blogs
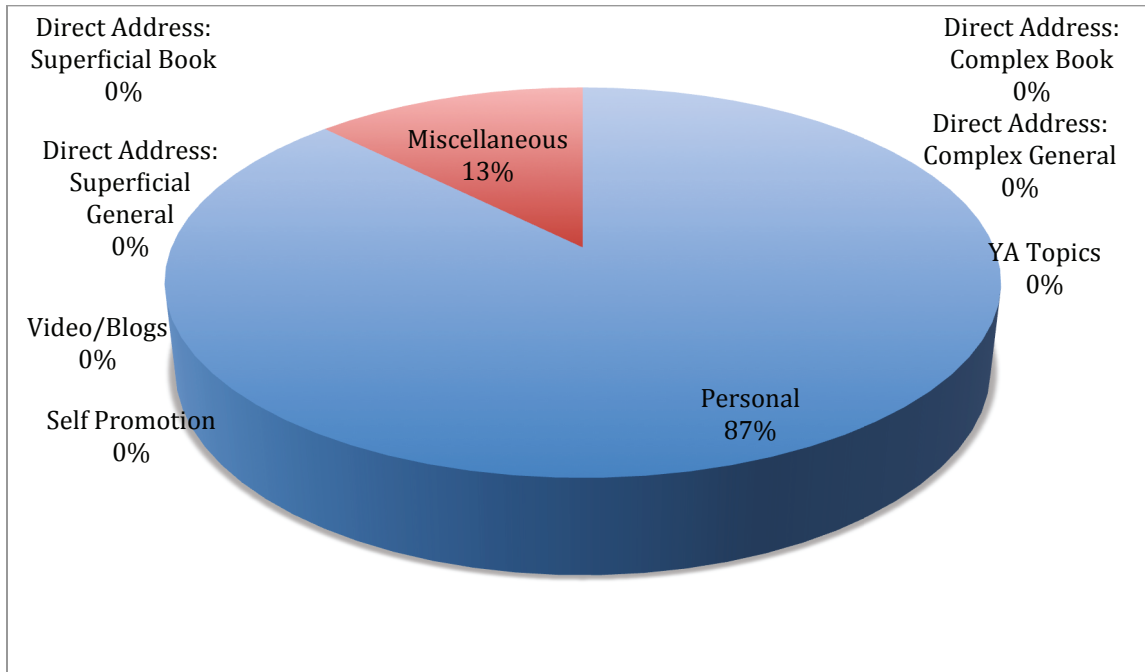
Figure 32. Chart of blog posts produced by Westerfeld between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

As demonstrated in Figure 32, out of eight blog posts produced by Westerfeld over approximately four months,

- 87% were *Personal*
- 13% were *Miscellaneous*
- 0% were *Self Promotion*
- 0% were *YA Topics*
- 0% were *Videos/Blogs*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*

As there were no *Direct Address* blog posts produced by Westerfeld during this time, I am not able to include any examples for this section.
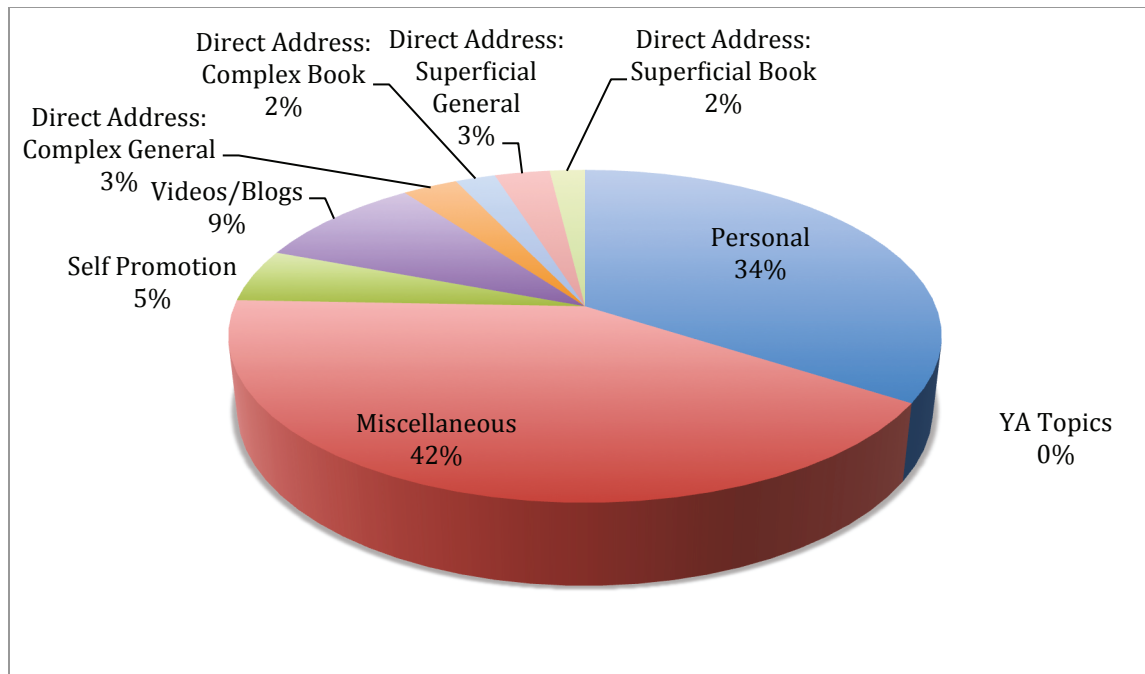
Figure 33. Chart of blog posts produced by Green on his Tumblr blog *Fishing Boat Proceeds* between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

As mentioned earlier, I broke down Green's Tumblr blog posts according to the individual blogs he maintains rather than combining them into one large blog data set. For Green's blog *Fishing Boat Proceeds*, a total of 477 posts were produced from September 2012 to March 2013: 108 posts were produced during the Pilot Study (September-November 2012), and 369 posts were produced during the Main Study (November 2012-March 2013). An analysis of Green's posts during the Main Study revealed that,

- 42% were *Miscellaneous*
- 34% were *Personal*
- 9% were *Direct Address*
    - 3% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
    - 3% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
    - 2% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
    - 2% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
- 9% were *Videos/Blogs*
- 5% were *Self Promotion*
- 0% were *YA Topics*

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* blog post produced by Green was this one, in which Green addressed a reader comment about publishing:

So, when are we getting DFTBA Publishing?

Well, DFTBA is distributing Mike Falzone's book Never Stop Shutting Up, which is awesome. And we are considering publishing a few things at some point in the future. But there are a few important hurdles to consider here. This will be boring and businessy, but I like to be transparent with you guys:

1. Unlike music and merch, publishing is already pretty efficient at targeting niches. One of the reasons a small company like DFTBA can work is that we provide extremely high royalties to our artists (with very few exceptions, most of what you spend at DFTBA.com goes directly to the artist). We can do this because we work with creators who have established audiences and know what kinds of stuff those audiences want and how to make it for them. Books are different: The overall profit margins are slimmer, and the upfront costs are bigger. (This is primarily because good books need good editors, which is highly skilled and not-inexpensive work.)

2. Also, DFTBA is only interested in businesses where we can add value both to the lives of our customers and to the lives of the creators we work with. Writers don't need our help to get their work available on the kindle, and they can use Amazon's CreateSpace to publish printed books. So it seems to me the only place we could add value would be in *fancy* books—like, ones that are printed and bound with exceptional quality. CreateSpace doesn't do that well, and there are some books you just want on your shelf instead of on your kindle.

3. Publishing a book involves big upfront costs with no assurance of sales, and because of the way inventory is taxed (NOW IT'S GETTING BORING!) you don't really want to risk having lots of leftover stock in the warehouse for years and years.

So those are the barriers to entry for us. That said, we do hope to publish a few books in the coming years!

An example of a *Direct Address: Complex General* blog post was this one, in which Green addresses his dislike for Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*:

(I was asked why I dislike the novel Atlas Shrugged *so much; I answered; people asked me to make the answer rebloggable, and so I have. All of this, as always, is offered with the caveat that I might be—and often am—wrong.)*

1. *Atlas Shrugged* is a novel of ideas. The plot exists only so that Ayn Rand can lay out her set of philosophical beliefs. So it's the kind of book that makes you feel smart because you "get it," but the story itself is paper-thin and is carefully constructed to explain and celebrate Rand's objectivism. I have an inherent problem with novels of ideas, because I think they fail to do most of what is interesting and useful about fiction, but I particularly dislike them when the ideas are bad ideas.

2. The philosophy of objectivism is absolutely repugnant to me (and also does not hold up to scrutiny). The philosophy of selfishness is all built around the idea that the person ingesting the philosophy feels special (i.e., that we all identify with John Galt), and of course we do all identify with John Galt, because we all feel that the world is against us and we are secretly a unique flower that could bloom brilliantly if only we did not have to carry the weight of other, lesser people.

But the fact that when we read *Atlas Shrugged* we all identify with the elite is itself evidence of the book's crappiness, because either A. only extraordinary people happen to read Ayn Rand, or B. we all feel extraordinary, because we are so busy being our multitudinous and complex and extraordinary selves that we do not imagine other people as being as complex or interesting or extraordinary as we are.

All of my novels are written in persistent and direct opposition to the ideas put forth in *Atlas Shrugged*, and since there is nothing to the novel except its ideas (the language of the novel imho could not be less interesting), it follows logically that I would strongly dislike the book.

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* blog post by Green was this one, in which he addresses a question about the drizzle/hurricane metaphor from his book *Looking for Alaska*:

What is the drizzle/hurricane metaphor that you're best known for on Tumblr? (sorry, I'm new.)

I love you, last person on tumblr who's never see a peopleraindrizzlehurricane quote.
I love you.

And an example of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* blog post by Green was this one, in which he addresses a question about "killing off" his characters:

> *Hey, some people on tumblr are wondering if writers feel upset or get a thrill when they kill their characters. Care to enlighten us?*
>
> I get a version of this question dozens of times every day, so let me just answer it in the most direct way I know how to:
>
> **I have never killed anyone, fictional or otherwise.** I have no idea what it's like to kill someone, but it seems like it would be horrible. One of my biggest goals in life is to get through it without knowing anything of what it's like to kill another human being.
>
> People die. That's true in novels, and it's true in life. Dying is one of the very few things we all do. To deny or ignore the omnipresent reality of death seems to me a disservice to human beings. That said, acknowledging in my novels that death exists does not make me a murderer any more than acknowledging that cancer can be treated makes me an oncologist.

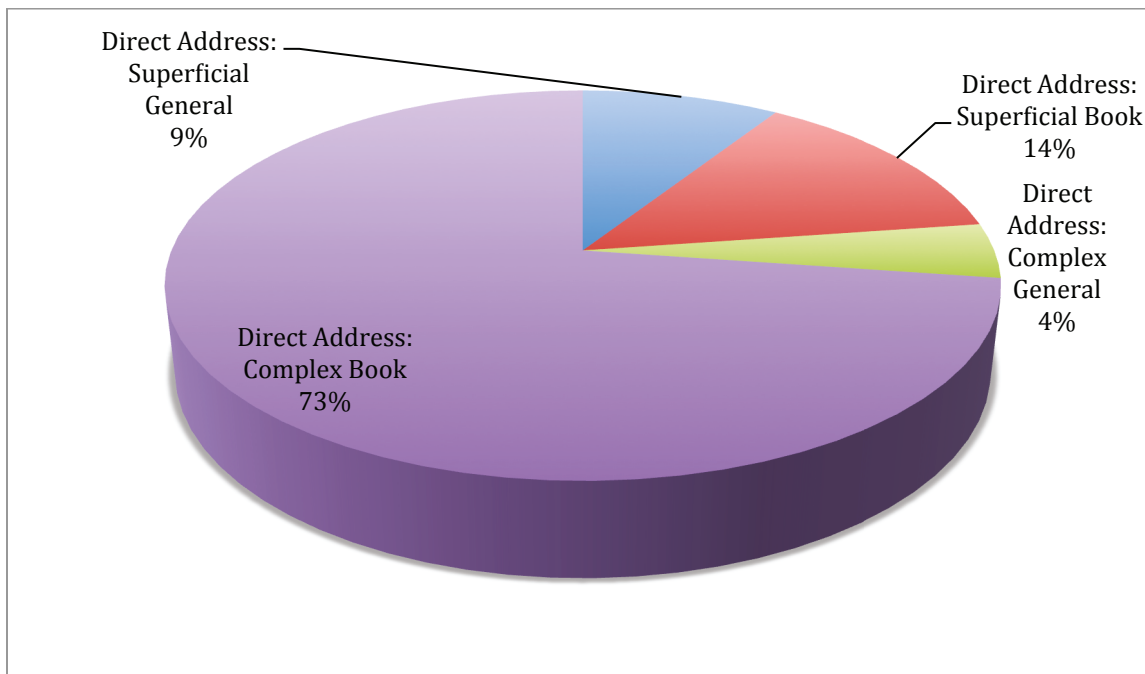Figure 34. Chart of blog posts produced by Green on his blog *Only if you Finished The Fault in Our Stars* between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

Green's blog *Only if you Finished The Fault in Our Stars* contained a total of 38 posts produced between the period of September 2012 to March 2013. There were 16 posts uploaded during the Pilot Study period (September-November 2012) and 22 posts uploaded during the

Main Study period (November 2012-March 2013). An analysis of the posts uploaded during the Main Study revealed that,

- 73% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
- 14% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 9% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
- 4% were *Direct Address: Complex General*

An example of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* post produced by Green on this blog was this one, in which he answers a reader question about a decision made by one of the main characters in the story:

> *Anonymous said: Do you think Gus' decision not to tell Hazel about his relapse was a selfish or selfless act?*
>
> I think that's more of a both/and proposition than an either/or one.

The following is an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* post produced by Green, in which he addresses a reader question about his writing style in *The Fault in Our Stars*:

> *Anonymous said: I can only apologise for my boring typographical question - like a boat against the current in a sea of symbolism - but why is the dialogue in TFiOS set out much like play script as opposed to conventional speech? (I haven't read any of your other books so please forgive my ignorance if this is a theme or indeed, previously answered)*
>
> Well it goes back and forth some, but I do this a lot more in my other books, especially KATHERINES. English grammar never really learned to capture dialogue very well. (Like, from Louise Erdrich to David Foster Wallace to James Joyce, many authors find the accepted rules of dialogue writing total unacceptable.)
>
> In my mine at least, when Hazel is trying to tell a story, she writes it as a story, with "he said" and whatnot. And when all that matters to her is what she said, she reflects that by focusing attention on the dialogue itself (as in that scene outside the hotel in Amsterdam).

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* post produced by Green was this one, in which he addresses a question about publishing another book after *The Fault in Our Stars*:

> *Anonymous said: dear john, i am sorry to bother you but i read till page 16 of the questions and you didn't answer this question : what did you mean when you said that you were like peter van houten, that you thought that you will never write anything worth publishing again? pleas tell me that it isnt true, you are my favorite author, and i cant*

wait to read your next book. (sorry for my spelling, i am from argentina so inglish is my
second language and on top of that i cant write without a spelingg mistake)

Your English is much better than my Spanish, so fear not.

I meant that I have felt in the past like I would never again write anything worth
publishing. I do not feel that way now. (I will probably feel it at some point in the future,
though.)

I plan to write many more books, so don't worry!

And an example of a *Direct Address: Complex General* post produced by Green was this one, in
which he addresses the reader's role in creating fiction:

          said: You think readers can think anything they want about writing, as it is
as much theirs as the author's. I used to agree until I read an article by Laurence
Perrine, who claims the problem with symbols is we believe they can mean anything we
want. He argues that symbols are confined to an area of meaning, defined by the author,
in which the interpretations are infinite but not unlimited. If we are outside the area we're
wrong. This contradicts your idea b/c it limits the reader. What do you think?

I don't think the area of meaning is defined by the author—at least not exclusively—but
otherwise I agree.

When i say books belong to their readers, I do not mean, "If you think *Huck Finn* is a
novel that defends slavery, you are entitled to your opinion." That reading is wrong. It's
as wrong as thinking that $2 + 3 = 7$.

I mean that readers should not define reading as the act of divining an author's intents.
Readers are co-creators of a fiction, and should be empowered.

As a thought experiment: Imagine that *Huck Finn* contained the exact same words that it
currently contains, but that Mark Twain insisted it was a book about how slavery is a
great idea. I would argue that Mark Twain would be every bit as wrong about the novel
as anyone else who thinks that it is a pro-slavery novel.

The author defines the area of meaning through choosing the words in the novel. But
beyond the words in the novel, the author is not in the defining-an-area-of-meaning
game. Readers do that collectively.

(All of this stated with the caveat that I might be wrong and have been wrong before.)

Figure 35. Chart of blog posts produced by Green on his blog *Only if you Finished Looking for Alaska* between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

On Green's Tumblr blog *Only if you Finished Looking for Alaska*, a total of 10 posts were produced between September 2013 and March 2013. Seven of these posts were uploaded during the Pilot Study (September-November 2012), and three of these posts were uploaded during the Main Study (November 2012-March 2013). An analysis of the posts uploaded during the Main Study revealed that,

- 67% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 33% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex General*

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* post on this blog was this one, in which Green answers a question regarding the wine Green's characters drink in the book:

> *Anonymous said: Why Strawberry Hill wine in particular?*
>
> …It is what I drank in high school.
>
> (Trying to think of some metaphor…)
>
> Yeah. It's just what we drank in high school.

An example of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* post produced by Green was this one, where he addresses a question about the death of a character:

> *Anonymous said: Does it matter how Alaska died?*
>
> So there are going to be questions in your life—big questions—that need to be answered and deserved to be answered but nonetheless go unanswered.
>
> There will be questions around deaths and friendships and romances and religion and mysteries of every variety that never get solved to your satisfaction. The interesting question to me is: Can you go on in the face of that uncertainty? Can you live with integrity and hope even even with these unanswered questions?
>
> Finding a way to live with that ambiguity matters.
>
> It certainly matters to Pudge and the Colonel and Takumi and Lara what happened, and one assumes it will never stop mattering to them. But the real question is whether they will be consumed by that question or whether they will be able to live with it and keep going.
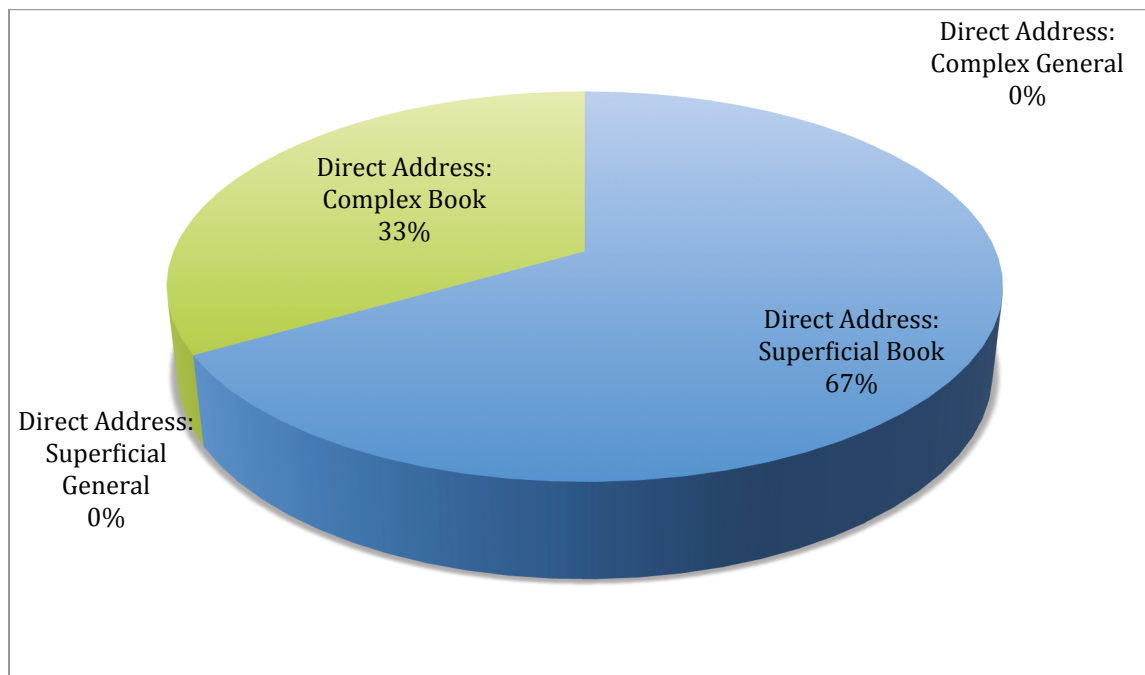

Figure 36. Chart of blog posts produced by Green on his blog *Only if you Finished An Abundance of Katherines* between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

Green's Tumblr blog *Only if you Finished An Abundance of Katherines* had a total of 13 posts between September 2012 and March 2013. Six posts were uploaded during the Pilot Study (September-November 2012), and seven posts were uploaded during the Main Study (November 2012-March 2013). An analysis of these posts during the Main Study revealed that,

- 57% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
- 43% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*

A *Direct Address: Complex Book* post produced by Green included this one, in which he answered a question about a quote from the book:

> _____said: Could you possibly expand on this quote: "You don't remember what happened. What you remember becomes what happened," because I found it super interesting and confusing.
>
> Well, it's true. Memory shapes history. We like to think that we can observe or remember something "objectively," but there's no such thing as objectivity. Human memory is a flawed and eccentric mechanism; it's not like a hard drive.
>
> When I was writing KATHERINES, I was obsessed with how memories get formed. And what interested me most is that humans can't distinguish between accurate and inaccurate memories. They all feel the same degree of true. So in the absence of confirming data like news reports or photographs or friends' accounts or whatever, we have absolutely no reliable way of knowing which (if any) of our memories are actually accurate.

And an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* post produced by Green was this one, in which he addresses a comparison of *An Abundance of Katherines* to another book:

> _____said: I'm not sure if I should ask this but were you, in any way, influenced by The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time when you wrote this? The stories are very different but Collin and Christopher have a lot in common. And also, the writing technique. I loved how we were all whiny Collins, btw. And uh... you're a fugging genius. (did I get it right? XD) Thank you for this book.
>
> I'm not positive, but I think I read CURIOUS INCIDENT after I wrote KATHERINES. But yeah, they're very similar in some ways, although Haddon chooses to tell the story

from Christopher's point of view, which is an audacious choice (and one that he pulled off brilliantly, I think). Also, Colin is not obviously autistic, at least not to the degree that Christopher is, although you could certainly argue that Colin would these days be diagnosed with Asperger's.
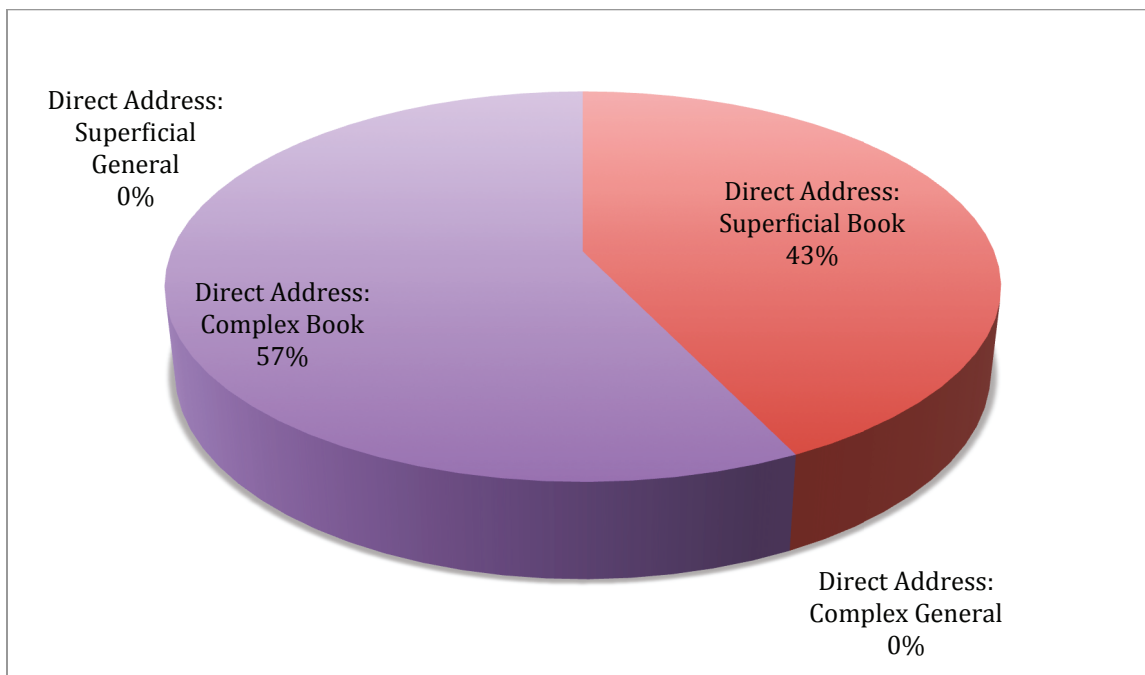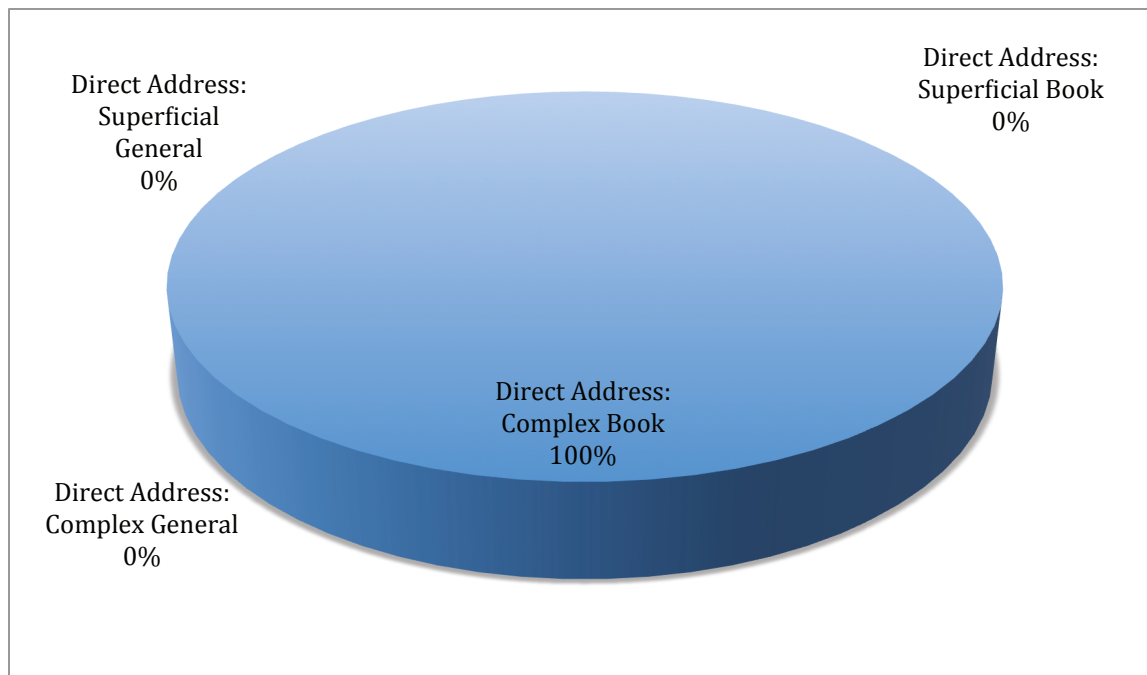

Figure 37. Chart of blog posts produced by Green on his blog *Only if you Finished Will Grayson Will Grayson* between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

Green's Tumblr blog *Only if you Finished Will Grayson Will Grayson* had the smallest number of posts in total, with only three posts being produced by Green from September 2012 to March 2013. An analysis of the posts produced by Green during the Main Study (November 2012-March 2013) revealed that,

- 100% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*

During the main portion of this study, Green only wrote one blog post (uploaded on January 12th, 2013). The post addressed a question from a reader about who Green dedicated *Will Grayson Will Grayson* to and why.

_____ *said: Who is Tobias Huisman and why did you dedicate the book to him?*
Tobias was one of the first nerdfighters and was extremely active in the first forums set up around Brotherhood 2.0. He is also a very nice guy. Over the four years between my meeting him and the publication of WGWG, I watched Tobias become comfortable and open with his sexual orientation (he's gay) and also saw the many challenges that he faced with integrity and courage. He inspired a lot of the book, so I wanted to dedicate it to him.

YouTube

Figure 38. Chart of YouTube videos produced by Green on his *vlogbrothers* channel between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

Like the Pilot Study, the analysis of Green's YouTube videos only incorporated the use of the four *Direct Address* codes; however, the video data was broken down according to the two separate channels Green maintains. It was determined that out of 21 video posts produced by Green on his *vlogbrothers* channel,

- 43% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 33% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
- 19% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 5% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*

An example of a *Direct Address: Complex General* video posted by Green included the video "Policy and Politics: Brotherhood 2.0 Week Begins," in which Green discussed the tax proposals of the two major candidates for President of the United States. An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* video posted by Green included the video "Terrible at Frenching: My Spicy Summer Camp Story," in which he discussed his first kiss at summer camp. The video "An Evening of Awesome at Carnegie Hall" was an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* video. This video was actually the live stream event that Penguin Publishing held for Green and his brother Hank in honor of the one-year anniversary of Green's book *The Fault in Our Stars*. While the event was dedicated to Green and his book, it included special guest performances by Green's favourite band The Mountain Goats, a musical set by his brother Hank Green, and special guest reading by Neil Gaiman, and of course, a reading by Green from his book. An example of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* video posted by Green included the video "Across Three Continents: A Tale of Tumblr, Copyright, and Excellent Posters," in which Green discussed intellectual property as it pertained to his book *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Top Five Videos for Vlogbrothers

Video	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Code
Cooking with a 3-Year-Old	691563	29427	217	Direct Address: Superficial General
The Abandoned Ferris Wheel Spins Anyway	677366	12848	98	Direct Address: Complex General
Understanding the National Debt and Budget Deficit	447335	13202	177	Direct Address: Complex General
What to do With Your Life	415794	21007	80	Direct Address: Complex General
Addicted to the Internet	388930	10040	141	Direct Address: Complex General

Figure 39. Chart of the top five videos produced by Green on his *vlogbrothers* channel. All views, likes, and dislikes data recorded on March 27th, 2013 (data includes both Pilot Study and Main Study data).
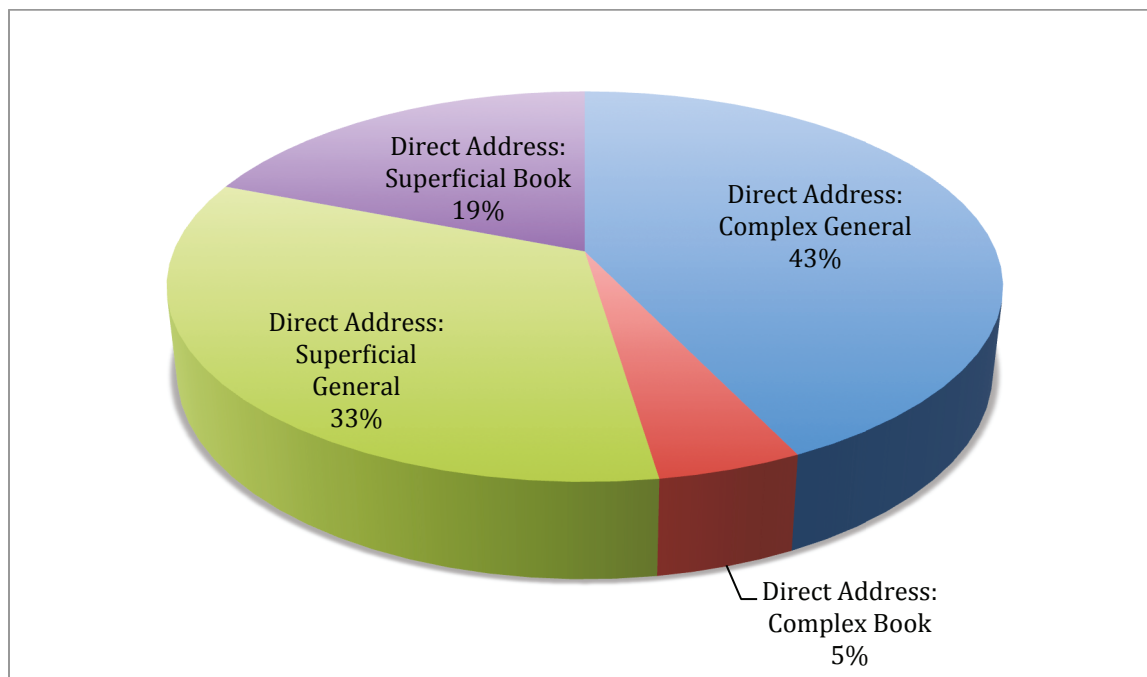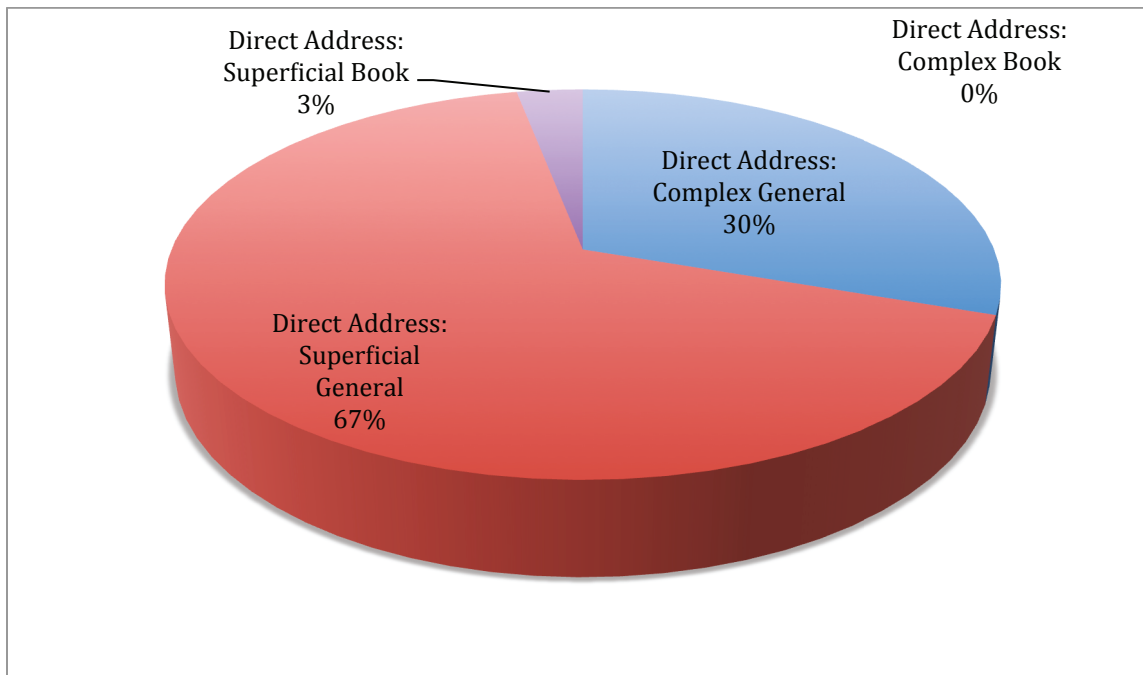
Figure 40. Chart of YouTube videos produced by Green on his *hankgames* channel between November 2nd, 2012, and March 16th, 2013.

On Green's channel *hankgames*, it was determined that out of 33 video posted produced,
- 67% were *Direct Address: Superficial General*
- 30% were *Direct Address: Complex General*
- 3% were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*
- 0% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*

An example of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* video produced by Green included the video "NaNoWriMo: The Miracle of Swindon Town #188," in which Green discussed the yearly writing event National Novel Writing Month, which takes place every November and in which writers are encouraged to reach specific writing goals (like writing 10,000 words). An example of a *Direct Address: Complex General* video produced by Green included the video "Vote!: The Miracle of Swindon Town #187," in which Green encouraged the Nerdfighter community to vote in the upcoming Presidential election. The video "Winning the Printz Award: The Miracle of Swindon Town #206," was an example of a *Direct Address: Superficial Book* video posted by Green, where he discussed winning the *Printz* award for his novel *Looking for Alaska*. There were no videos produced by Green on this channel that could be coded as *Direct Address: Complex Book*.

Top Five Videos for HankGames

Video	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Code
One Direction: The Miracle of Swindon Town #204	29173	803	11	Direct Address: Superficial General
Why Do People on Tumblr...Google Autofill: The Miracle of Swindon Town #181	28517	703	6	Direct Address: Superficial General
Is It Wrong To...Google Autofill Part 1: The Miracle of Swindon Town	26383	725	3	Direct Address: Complex General
Why Do Nerds...Google Autofill: The Miracle of Swindon Town #180	23669	623	3	Direct Address: Superficial General
Taylor Swift's Ex-Boyfriends: The Miracle of Swindon Town #212	22660	767	6	Direct Address: Superficial General

Figure 41. Chart of the top five videos produced by Green on his *hankgames* channel. All views, likes, and dislikes data recorded on March 27th, 2013 (Data includes both Pilot Study and Main Study data).

CHAPTER 6

Findings: Participant Data

Interviews

Like the content analysis data collected for this research project, I am presenting the interview data collected in two separate sets: The Pilot Study data and the Main Study data. This is because after conducting three interviews during the Pilot Study, I adjusted the interview guide I was using in an attempt to gain further insight into why some young adults chose not to use social media. Many of the participants volunteering to take part in the study were revealing that they were non-social media users. During the Pilot Study, the three participants shared some information as to why they chose not to use social media. For the Main Study, I adjusted my interview questions to probe even further into why some participants chose not to use social media.

Presented first in this section is an account of the recruiting difficulties I came up against during this study. Then, I provide some general information about the participants (age ranges, gender, social media usage, familiarity with Westerfeld and Green, other YA books mentioned), as well as a brief profile of each participant. The thematic findings from the participant interviews in the Pilot Study and Main Study are then discussed further in Chapter Seven of this study.

Recruitment: Online vs. offline teens. At the onset of this study, my parameters for recruiting participants were quite strict: They had to be young adults between the ages of 11-17, they had to read books by Scott Westerfeld and John Green, and they had to be active users of social media. As I began my search for participants who fit this criteria, however, I soon realized that these parameters were going to be problematic. Finding young adults who were perceptive readers of YA literature was not an issue. As I mention in the Methodology section of this study, the participants were recruited through purposive sampling with the help of teen and youth librarians in the Edmonton Public Library system. These librarians introduced me to young adults who were avid readers, often taking part in afterschool reading programs at various library branches. Finding participants who were familiar with YA authors Scott Westerfeld and John Green proved to be more difficult, and finding participants who were active users of social media proved to be equally as difficult. Because of these recruitment difficulties, I chose to expand the

participant parameters of this study: Participants simply had to be avid readers of YA literature, despite their awareness levels of Westerfeld and Green and their levels of social media use.

Despite the abundant amount of literature suggesting that young adults are active social media users, I am not the only researcher to have difficulty finding these young adults. Laura Winton (2012), in her Master's Thesis *Young Adults in Crossmedia Fiction*, vetted participants for her study in roughly the same population pool as I did. Winton's research involved young adults who use participatory venues and fan communities online, but like the young adults in my study, her participants were not as active online as the literature suggests. According to Winton (2012), "it is worth considering that a perhaps underestimated number of young adults see little appeal in participatory venues, fan communities…" and other online venues (p. 102). Winton (2012) suggests that perhaps the frequent assumption that young adults are so engaged with different online venues or affinity spaces is misguided, or that they tend to be more "spectators" than "participators" in these venues. What is very clear to both Winton (2012) and myself about our participants, however, is that just because they are not participating online as much as the literature suggests, does not mean they are not avid and perceptive readers of YA literature. Rather, their engagement with these stories occurs through more traditional media formats. In the following participant profiles, I discuss just how perceptive and engaged with complex themes my participants were in the books they were reading.

General Interview Data
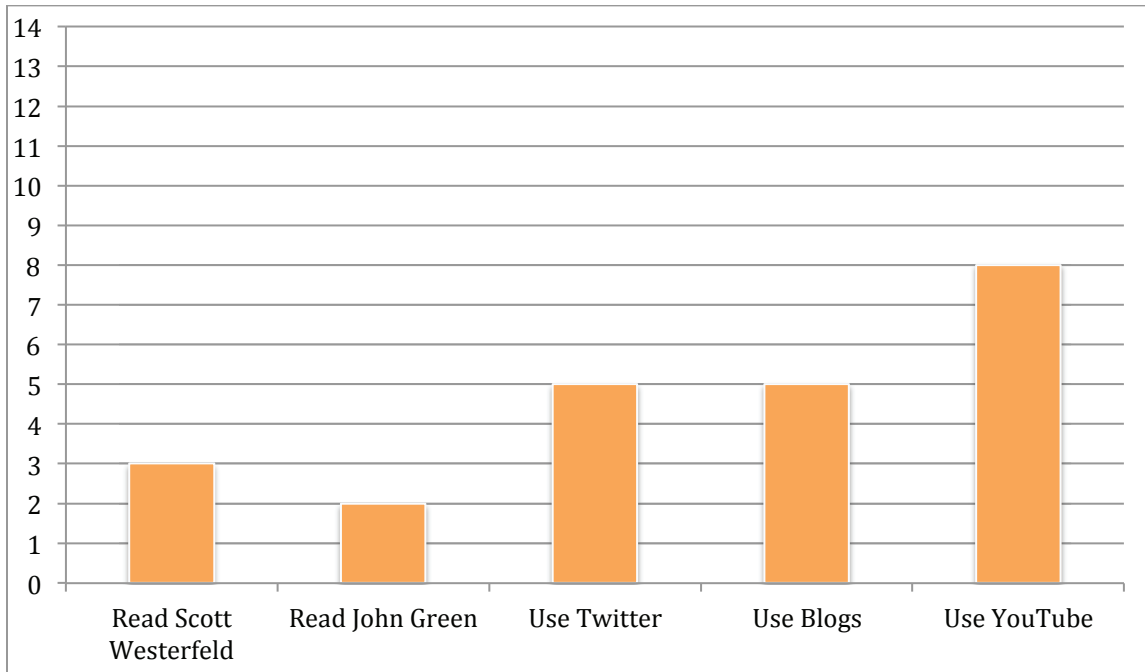
Figure 42. General participant information about author knowledge and social media usage, where N=14 and is represented as numbers on the vertical axis.

The participants ranged in age from 11-17. Out of 14 participants in total, there were two males and 12 females. As seen in the chart above:

- 3 out of 14 participants read books by Scott Westerfeld
- 2 out of 14 participants read books by John Green
- 5 out of 14 participants used Twitter
- 5 out of 14 participants used Blogs
- 8 out of 14 participants used YouTube

The Doobly Doo

Though the majority of the participants had not read books by Westerfeld or Green, there were some other books and authors that were mentioned frequently: the Percy Jackson *series was mentioned by six participants,* The Hunger Games *Trilogy was mentioned by four participants, the* Harry Potter *series was mentioned by three participants, and* Twilight *was mentioned by two participants.*

Participant Profiles

Irene

Irene, 11, was very shy during her interview, so her interview was shorter than the other participants in this study. She did not know who Scott Westefreld or John Green were, but she indicated that she really liked to read. Her favourite series was *Nancy Drew*, and she also really liked the *Encyclopedia Brown* series by Donald J. Sobol, both being mystery series. We did not talk very much about any complex themes found in the *Nancy Drew* books or the *Encyclopedia Brown* series, but we did discuss why it is fun to try and solve the mysteries in each book as you read it. Irene also indicated that she did not use social media. She was aware of Twitter and blogs, but she did not use them, and she only used YouTube to occasionally watch videos. She did not use YouTube to post her own content or interact with other users.

Genevieve

Genevieve, 11, was one of the youngest participants I interviewed for this study, but she showed no sense of shyness when talking about her favourite books. She had not read any books by Westerfeld or Green, but she did read Rick Riordan. As a huge fan of Riordan's, she excitedly told me all about the three different Riordan series and how they focus on different aspects of Greek mythology. She began reading the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series at the same time she began studying Greek mythology in school, so it was exciting to have the two line up. Genevieve even described how she and her best friend tended to set the lead in terms of what the rest of her classmates read. Any series Genevieve and her best friend read, her classmates usually followed suit (including when she read the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling, the *Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, and the *Percy Jackson* series by Riordan). When asked if Genevieve used social media, she indicated that she did not because she was afraid of cyber-hacking and cyber-bullying. She did indicate, however, that she visits Rick Riordan's website every day to read interviews with him, find out secrets about the next book, and discover any other "extras" he releases there.

Allison

Allison, 12, was a self-proclaimed "Harry Potter nut," eagerly telling me all about her favourite fantasy and science fiction books as soon as the interview began. She indicated that she had not read any books by Westerfeld or Green, but she was hoping to at some point. She was especially interested in reading Westerfeld's *Leviathan* series. Allison explained that J. K. Rowling is her favourite author because her books are so "immersive." She likes that she gets to grow and learn along with Harry, Ron, and Hermione, making her feel like she is part of the story. We discussed at length the complex nature of certain characters in the *Harry Potter* books, like Snape, and how people can be both "good" and "bad" at the same time. Allison indicated that although she does not use Twitter, she uses both YouTube and blogs, creating and posting content on her own personal blog.

Angie

Angie, 12, was reserved during her interview, though she seemed excited to talk about her favourite books. Though she did not read books by Westerfeld or Green, she did know about the two authors. Angie seemed really interested in talking about her favourite book series, like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins*, Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling, and the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* books by Rick Riordan. She also talked about *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, describing her favourite parts of the book to me and discussing some of the more complex themes from the book. Angie was very much a non-user of social media, claiming to not use Twitter or YouTube and only using a blog because it was required for school. In class, Angie was required to write entries in a class blog about what books she was reading. When I asked if Angie enjoyed using blogs in school, she said she preferred speaking face-to-face with people about the books she was reading rather than having to write entries in a blog about them.

Maria

Maria, 12, was very eager to discuss her favourite series at the time with me, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. She did not know of Westerfeld or Green, so we spent most of the interview discussing *The Hunger Games*. Maria was very capable of discussing some of the more complex themes in *The Hunger Games* with me, such as children having to fight to the death in the games to survive. Maria was also one of the more active social media users I interviewed. She had a

Twitter account, which she uses to follow celebrities and talk to her friends, and she often read her aunt's blog. She also used YouTube, and was a fan of few notable YouTube stars, like *Dan is Not on Fire*. Maria also indicated that she liked to comment on YouTube videos, being the only participant I interviewed to do so. Maria was an active user of social media, creating content on two different platforms: Twitter and YouTube.

Kelly

Kelly, 13, was very shy when we first began. It took five to ten minutes for her to relax and offer more in-depth answers to the questions I was asking. She was not aware of who Scott Westerfeld and John Green were, but she had read other popular young adult series that were frequently mentioned by my participants like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer. She displayed a thorough understanding of the complex themes that can be found in *The Hunger Games*, discussing decisions that Katniss had to make for good or for bad throughout the books. While she did claim to use Twitter, she admitted to not using it very frequently. Kelly would be considered a "listener" on Twitter, using it mostly to see what her favourite celebrities were tweeting and never interacting with anyone through the medium. While Kelly did use Twitter, she indicated that she was not familiar with blogs or YouTube.

Megan

Megan, 13, was very excited to talk with me about reading. We immediately began discussing Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, which she really enjoyed. We discussed how all of her friends had read the novel and promised her that she would cry while reading it, but she actually did not cry. She enjoyed the book very much and found it very sad, but she is just not a "crier." We also discussed what other John Green books Megan wanted to read, such as *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns*. Megan had also read *Leviathan* by Westerfeld, but she found the book to be "dry" and did not finish it. *Leviathan* was the only book by Westerfeld that Megan had read. During the interview, Megan easily discussed the more complex themes in *The Fault in Our Stars*. We even delved into the complex themes she was dealing with in the *Shatter* series by Tahereh Mafi, which she was reading at the time. Megan was an avid user of YouTube, discussing her favourite vloggers with me, but she indicated that she did not know Green was a vlogger and she never left comments on YouTube videos or interacted with anyone in those spaces. She also claimed to

have a Twitter account, though she did not use it very often, and said that she knew what blogs were but also did not use them or read them. Megan would be considered a "listener" on social media, using it to listen in on her favourite vloggers but never interacting with anyone in that space.

Chelsea

Chelsea, 13, was shy during the first few minutes of the interview. When we started to discuss her favourite books and what she was reading at the time, however, she became more excited and open to talking. Chelsea did not know who John Green was, but she was aware of Scott Westerfeld and actually indicated that she was planning to read the *Uglies* series soon because most of her friends had read it already. We discussed her two favourite authors, Rick Riordan and Derek Landy, and her very strong opinions on which Rick Riordan series was the best (*The Heroes of Olympus*, in her opinion). Chelsea showed a deep sense of critical thinking while reading, explaining that she felt Riordan's writing technique was simply better in *The Heroes of Olympus* (as opposed to his first series, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*). She said that Riordan's use of allusions and comedy in *The Heroes of Olympus* made for a better and more developed series. Chelsea indicated that while she knew what Twitter, blogs, and YouTube were, she did not have a Twitter account or use blogs, and she only used YouTube to watch videos and never to comment or interact with anyone in that space. Like Megan, Chelsea would be considered a "listener" on social media.

Isabelle

Isabelle, 13, was an avid reader who could not wait to discuss books with me. As soon as the interview started, she began listing all of her favourite books, series, authors, and poets, including *Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* by Rick Riordan, *The 39 Clues* (written by a collection of authors including Rick Riordan), *Cleopatra Confesses* by Carolyn Meyer, and poetry by Edgar Allen Poe and Dylan Thomas. Though she had not read any books by Green or Westerfeld, she was aware of Westerfeld's *Uglies* series. Isabelle showed a keen sense of critical thinking while reading, indicating that she was a big fan of Rick Riordan because of his ability to combine mythology with "dramatic flare" in his writing. When we discussed social media, Isabelle indicated that she did not use it very much

because it was a "distraction," and because of the possibility of cyber bullying and privacy concerns. She knew what Twitter, blogs, and YouTube were, but claimed she only used her class blog and sometimes a Tumblr account she had. She tried to avoid all other forms of social media, mostly at the request of her parents, and she only used Tumblr to find book and author quotes for class. Isabelle was a non-user of Twitter and YouTube, but she was an active user of blogs, using her class blog to create and post her own content and interact with her classmates. She was more of a "listener" when it came to her Tumblr, though, as she never actively created content or interacted with people through it.

Nicole

Nicole, 13, was an avid reader like Isabelle. She listed many book series as her favourites, including *The Immortals* series by Tamora Pierce, *Fell* by David Clement-Davies, *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling, *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins, and even the *Uglies* series and the *Leviathan* series by Scott Westerfeld, though she had not read anything by John Green. We discussed some of the more complex themes in the *Uglies* series, including how dynamic the main character in the series is and how you watch her change throughout the books. When I asked if Nicole used social media, she immediately said no, indicating that she was just not interested in the online world.

Bria

Bria, 14, was also fairly reserved during her interview. When I asked what her favourite book or series to read was, she answered very timidly *City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare. When I asked her to tell me a bit about the plot and the characters in the story, she became much more open and easily told me all about the book. She indicated that she did not know about John Green, but she was a fan of Scott Westerfeld and had read the *Uglies* series. We discussed some of the complex themes in *Uglies*, and why she liked the complexity of her favourite character in the series. Bria claimed to have a Twitter account, but indicated that she did not use it very much. She mostly used it to follow celebrities, but she had never tweeted herself. She also did not use blogs, but she did use YouTube, saying that she often would watch videos on the video streaming service but she would never comment or like a video. She made the comment that YouTube was much easier to use and understand than Twitter. Bria would be considered a

"listener" when it comes to social media, using it to listen in on what's happening but never creating content herself.

Karri

Karri, 15, was very open and excited to talk about her favourite books from the moment the interview began. When I asked what her favourite books were, she immediately listed Stephen King books, *The Mortal Instrument* series by Cassandra Clare, and John Green books (though she had not read anything by Westerfeld). When I asked if she considered herself a Nerdfighter, she said "not quite," because she had not read all of Green's books, but she really liked *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Looking for Alaska*. She had a very firm grasp of the complex themes found within Green's books, such as how "complicated" the character of Alaska is. She was also familiar with all three types of social media discussed in this study. She claimed to use Twitter mostly to see what different celebrities were tweeting, but not tweeting anything herself. She did claim to use blogs for school, having to write entries about what books she was reading. She also claimed to use YouTube, though she admitted to not having seen any of Green's YouTube videos. Karri would be considered a "listener" on Twitter and YouTube, but more of a content creator when it comes to blogs.

Adam

Adam, 16, was the first male participant I interviewed for this study. He was more shy than some of the younger participants, but he did seem to enjoy discussing his favourite books and authors with me. Adam indicated that although he usually liked to read short stories and novels, he really enjoyed the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series by Rick Riordan. He did not know of Westerfeld or Green, and he had not heard of any of their books. Like many of the other participants in this study who read the *Percy Jackson* series, Adam really liked it because of the Greek mythology aspect. We discussed some of the more complex themes in the *Percy Jackson* series, like acting in the best interest of the "bigger cause" and not just yourself. Adam claimed that he did not use Twitter or blogs, but he did use YouTube to watch videos (though he did not comment on videos or interact with other users). When I asked Adam why he did not use social media like Twitter or blogs, he simply said that he was just not interested in social media like that.

Jacques

Jacques, 17, was the oldest participant interviewed for this study. He was very outgoing, and seemed to really enjoy discussing his favourite books with me. Though he was not aware of Westerfeld or Green or any of their books, he was a big fan of the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series by Rick Riordan. When I asked him why he liked that series so much, like the other participants, he said that he really enjoyed learning about the Greek mythology in it. Similarly to Adam, when we discussed the complex themes in the series, Jacques said that he found the choices Percy had to make in the series interesting because he had to choose for the good of everybody and not just himself. Jacques indicated that he did not use Twitter or blogs, though he did know what they were. The only social media Jacques did claim to use was YouTube (and Facebook), but he only used YouTube to watch videos and did not comment on videos or interact with other users. Like Adam, when I asked Jacques why he did not take part in other types of social media, he said that he was just not interested.

<center>**Interview Themes: Pilot Study**</center>

An analysis of the participant interviews during the Pilot Study revealed three themes: *Young Adult Literature Engagement, Social Media Use, and Social Media use in a Library or Classroom Setting.* The first theme indicated the youth's level of engagement with YA material, and their awareness of the authors and their works. The second theme revealed the youth's level of engagement with social media tools, and the third theme uncovered the youth's stance on the incorporation of social media tools in an educational/library setting and their hypothetical involvement with these tools in this particular setting.

Young Adult Literature Engagement

With respect to the first theme, I found that all three participants interviewed were highly engaged with young adult materials. They were also able to express complex ideas and opinions regarding challenging themes or characters within specific YA literature. For example, Nicole (13) said this about one of her favourite characters:

> *I think it's because you can definitely see the character changing throughout the entire book. She's very dynamic, she isn't just, you know, unchanged by everything that's going on.*

Social Media Use

Though all three participants considered themselves to be non-users of social media, they were aware of the various types including Twitter, blogs, and YouTube. Their uninvolvement or non-use of social media tools was explained as a result of certain dangers and threats such as cyber-bullying, potential violation of privacy, and being vulnerable to cyber-predators. As Genevieve (11) stated:

> *I don't do any like, social networks, um, bad experiences with them, and like families and my friends all get like hacked or something ... and get hacked and all my personal stuff be like, public.*

Social Media Use in a Library or Classroom Setting

However, when social media tools were discussed in relation to usage in an educational setting

facilitated by an authority figure, the three participants expressed that they would be more inclined and more trusting of engaging with an author using social media tools. As Allison (12) explained:

> *Well of course there's going to be people, this is just what the internet is, there's going to be people hating on what you ask and there's going to be people...I don't know, it may not be 100% safe but I think it would be a worthwhile way of asking an author a question* [in an educational setting].

<div align="center">

Interview Themes: Main Study

</div>

Like the analysis of participant interviews during the Pilot Study, the analysis of participant interviews in the Main Study revealed the same three themes discussed above. During the Main Study interviews, however, I probed further into the theme of social media use, resulting in an expanded set of themes discussed. These themes were: *Young Adult Literature Engagement*, *Social Media Use: Privacy and Cyber-bullying*, *Social Media Use: Complicated Interfaces*, *Social Media Use: Those Who Did Use it*, and *Social Media Use in a Library or Classroom Setting*.

Young Adult Literature Engagement

Much like the young adults interviewed in the Pilot Study, all eleven of the young adults in the Main Study expressed critical thoughts about complex themes in the YA literature they were reading (whether it was by authors Westerfeld and Green or not). For example, Jacques (17), had this to say about the actions of his favourite character in the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series and how the other characters felt about these actions:

> *Um, I think simply because they don't understand and he has to get this done. Like he has to reach his goal for the greater good… the ends justify the means. A Machiavellian quote there. *Laughing**

Jacques showed an understanding and ability to think critically about the actions of this character, and consider whether he thinks the actions are warranted. Similarly, Megan (13) was able to express her thoughts on the complex themes found in Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. Regarding one character's choice to lie to others about his cancer returning, Megan had this to say:

I don't think what he did was right, but I don't think it was necessarily wrong, because um, he did end up telling her, but he took a while, um, if he had told her, um, they might have had more time together or something because she'd want to spend more time and something, but I don't think Augustus [told her] because he didn't want her sympathy… it's just a "cancer kid" thing I guess.

Like Jacques, Megan was able to articulate how she felt about a character's complex choice, and why she felt the way she did. Bria (14) too expressed some thoughts on the complexity of body image after reading Westerfeld's *Uglies* series:

Um, because they don't wanna do what everybody else does, they kind of wanna stay the way they are and they don't think that they're ugly. And um, more people need to really see that. They're not ugly, they don't need to be somebody else to be pretty.

Social Media Use: Privacy and Cyber-bullying

Like the participants in the Pilot Study, many of the participants in the Main Study considered themselves non-users of social media. This lack of social media use was most frequently attributed to privacy and cyber-bullying concerns. For example, Chelsea (13) said that she finds it "concerning" when she has to give her full name to different social media websites, and so she often avoids using them. Isabelle (13) shared a similar concern, saying:

…my mom talked about that [online privacy], and the best way to prevent that is not to go on sites like that… if we had to provide an email address or any other kind of personal information, because like if you even provide your email address, some people like hackers could go through all that and find out information, so I don't really want to do that.

Specifically referring to Twitter, Megan discussed why she no longer uses the social media website:

I started using it for like a week, and then there were a bunch of people following me that I didn't know and I was like whoa, what's going on, 'cause it's not like Facebook at all, you can just do whatever you want on it, you can follow whoever you want.

For some participants, the discussion even turned to the concept of cyber-bullying. Isabelle again shared why she did not like using social media websites, saying:

…because it was like a huge distraction and my parents did not really like it… All the

fights going on, the social life was getting a little tedious because those fights.

Social Media Use: Complicated Interfaces

As I mentioned, however, privacy and cyber-bullying concerns were not the only reasons why these participants avoided social media. Bria specifically mentioned how complicated Twitter was, saying that she found it "confusing," and that she would use it if there were "instructions." Karri (15) shared the same sentiment about Twitter's complicated interface:

I had Twitter in the past, but I didn't have any tweets or anything, I just used it to see what all the celebrities and big-name people I like were tweeting. Um but then I found that it just got like, kind of confusing because they would re-tweet things, and like, I don't know, and there was so many Tweets every day and it just kind of got, it was more like sorting through everything than just reading through it quickly.

Social Media Use: Those Who Did Use It

As indicated in Figure 42, YouTube was the most frequently used social media website, with eight out of the 14 participants claiming to use the website; whereas, only five out of the 14 participants claimed to use Twitter and blogs. The eight participants who did use YouTube described it as being "easy" to use. Megan described YouTube as being "really accessible," and that she preferred using YouTube over other social media websites. Similarly, Bria described YouTube as being "easier" to use than Twitter.

As I just discussed, some of the participants found Twitter to be confusing and so they no longer have accounts. Out of the five participants that did have Twitter accounts at the time, two admitted to "barely" using them. Maria (12), who did have an active Twitter account at the time, still said that even though she had an account, she did not use it very much because,

Most people in my class don't have it… I don't know, most people make friends on Facebook, but they don't have Twitter because it's not as popular I guess?

Three out of the five participants interviewed who said they used blogs claimed they only used blogs for school. Karri described how blogs were an integral part of the reading process for her class:

We're encouraged to read at least one book a month, and then you write a short summary and then there's like a list of questions that the teacher's given us, like if you

could change the setting, where would you change it? Questions like that, and you have to answer one of the questions and go into detail, and then you post that and other people read it, and then you're supposed to comment on other people's blog posts and everything.

She went on to describe why she liked using the blog in class:

Yeah I find it really easy cause it's very, it's fun to show people what you're reading, and you get to recommend the book, like at the end you can say "Oh I really enjoyed reading this book, you guys should," or you can say "Oh I have some critiques about this book."

Another participant, Isabelle, described how her teacher would post her class assignment instructions on a class blog, and they get all of their assignment information that way. The other two participants who claimed to use blogs in school described very similar scenarios to Karri and Isabelle.

Social Media Use in a Library or Classroom Setting

When asked if the participants could connect with an author through social media under the supervision of a classroom teacher, librarian, or another adult, the answers were much more mixed than the Pilot Study. Seven out of the 11 participants interviewed during the Main Study said that they would connect with an author over social media if a teacher or librarian provided them with the opportunity. When asked why she would be interested in connecting with a YA author over social media, Irene (11) said:

Well there's just sometime I'm reading a book and… I wanna, like, ask her [the author] something to find out more about it and why she wrote it.

Bria too found the idea of connecting with an author as part of a classroom or library setting exciting, saying,

Um, well for people out there who write, it would be a good way to um, really, how to brainstorm and come up with ideas, and write properly, and just get your favourite author's perspective on what gave them the idea to write, like if you're a writer. I write all the time, so it would be a good way to get ideas and stuff like that…

Isabelle explained why she would be interested in connecting with a YA author through social media, but she was very explicit about when it would be appropriate:

As long as I'm not being like exploited or something, then yeah. Because like it actually

makes people more interested in reading, if stuff is interactive like this.

The four participants in the Main Study who indicated they would not take the opportunity to connect with a YA author, even if facilitated by a teacher or librarian, said they simply had "no interest" in doing so. According to Angie (12),

Um, I don't think like I would need to, because I am usually pretty satisfied with the book, and I don't feel like I need to ask anything about it.

Similarly, Adam (16), Kelly (13), and Jacques all said that they were just "not interested" in doing something like that. Jacques expanded on this further, saying,

Just uh, I'm fine with what, I'm not like a big writer or anything so I wouldn't really have anything to say, I just, for entertainment purposes I like reading the book. I wouldn't really delve into too much…

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

Discussion and Conclusion

In the following chapter, I will discuss the author social media data and the participant interview data and how it relates to my Research Question and six Sub Questions. In relation to the author social media data, I will discuss the theme of the large amount of content these authors produced, even during the finite collection period of this study. In relation to the participant data, I will discuss the theme of what barriers and emotional

> ### *The Doobly Doo*
> *Research Question Reminder*
>
> How does the use of social media tools facilitate discourses surrounding complex themes found in YA literature?
>
> Sub Questions
> 1. How often do Westerfeld and Green use social media tools?
> 2. What do Westerfeld and Green use these social media tools for? (i.e. publicity, promoting their books, discussing their works with their readers, direct address to readers, etc.).
> 3. How are readers engaging with authors through these social media tools?
> 4. What are the negative outcomes of using these social media tools, if any?
> 5. Do readers' perception about the author's work change as they engage with the author through social media?
>   a. Does online interaction affect readers' interpretations of the morally ambiguous themes within the author's work?
> 6. What are the educational benefits/outcomes of using these social media tools, if any?

considerations prevent young adults from participating online. The chapter is divided into three sections: the author social media data, the participant interview data, and the limitations and future research recommendations I make for this study. In the first section, I discuss the author social media data for *Twitter*, *Blogs*, and *YouTube* in relation to Sub Questions 1 and 2 by type. In the second section, I discuss the participant interviews in relation to Sub Question 3, *Participant Social Media Use*, Sub Question 4, *Internet Dangers: Moral Panic* and *Internet Dangers: Cyber-bullying*, Sub Question 5, *Reader Perception*, and Sub Question 6, *Educational Benefits*. In the third section, I discuss the limitations of this study, including the data collection and participant recruitment, and my recommendations for future research.

Figure 43. Graph of social media tools and code applications per tool for Pilot Study and Main Study.

Author Social Media Data

Twitter. The content analysis of the use of social media by authors Scott Westerfeld and John Green yields some significant conclusions regarding the discourses between author and reader over these tools. In response to my Sub Question 1, "How often do Westerfeld and Green use social media tools?" it was determined that both authors use social media like Twitter and blogs on a frequent basis. Green produced a total of 3180 tweets during the Pilot Study and Main Study, while Westerfeld produced a total of 1310 tweets during this time. Similarly, Green produced 541 blog posts during this time, while Westerfeld produced 14. According to researchers, an average Twitter user has a total of 48 to 255 tweets; whereas, a "heavy" user has a total of 626 to 752 Tweets (Huberman, Romero, & Wu, 2008; Zhao & Rosson, 2009). These numbers suggest that Westerfeld and Green are "heavy" Twitter users, using the medium frequently regardless of the reason.

In response to Sub Question 2, "What do Westerfeld and Green use these social media tools for? (i.e. publicity, promoting their books, discussing their works with their readers, direct address to readers, etc.)," it was determined that Westerfeld and Green primarily used Twitter for *Direct Address*, though most of these discussions were not of a complex nature. During the Pilot

Study, 43% of Westerfeld's tweets were *Direct Address*, with the next highest percentage of tweets being *Miscellaneous* at 34%. A full 60% of Green's tweets were *Direct* Address, with the next highest percentage of tweets also being *Miscellaneous* at 18%. During the Main Study, 46% of Westerfeld's tweets were *Direct Address*, with the next highest percentage of tweets being *Miscellaneous* at 28%. 54% of Green's tweets were *Direct Address*, with the next highest percentage of tweets again being *Miscellaneous* at 21%. According to researchers, the idea of "conversation" within Twitter communities is becoming more prevalent, and more fundamental in the creation of and communication between online communities (Dann, 2009; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009; Java, et al, 2007; Pear Analytics, 2009). As Dann (2009) states: "Conversational posts provide the building blocks of the social interaction between users, which leads to the development of community, creation of interpersonal relationships, and the perception of reciprocity between Twitter users and their followers" (n.p.). Based on the data observed, Westerfeld and Green actively participated in the Twitter community by using 60% and 43% respectively of their overall tweets to engage in *Direct Address* with their readers, indicating that the main purpose of both authors for using Twitter was to engage in these direct interactions. Westerfeld and Green were reaching out to their readers through Twitter, engaging in direct conversations with them, answering their questions, and even just saying "Hi!" as a way to move beyond the traditional and limited connections established between reader and author through books.

Out of the four types of *Direct Address* tweets produced, Figure 43 indicates that *Direct Address: Superficial General* made up for the majority of tweets produced by each author with 143 tweets in total. There were 49 *Direct Address: Superficial Books* tweets, 36 *Direct Address: Complex General* tweets, and only 10 *Direct Address: Complex Book* tweets. This data indicates that though there was *Direct Address* between these authors and their readers, this *Direct Address* was not often about complex themes.

Green, however, did partake in these discussions of a complex nature more than Westerfeld. During the Pilot Study, 10% of Green's tweets were *Direct Address: Complex General*, while Westerfeld produced no tweets discussing complex themes of any kind (book or general). During the Main Study, 11% of Green's tweets were *Direct Address: Complex General* and 4% were *Direct Address: Complex Book*, while 1% of Westerfeld's tweets were *Direct Address: Complex General* and he had no *Direct Address: Complex Book* tweets. This data

indicates that both Westerfeld and Green field questions from readers of a complex nature over Twitter, but Green appears to field more of these questions than Westerfeld. Whether this is because Green simply receives more questions of a complex nature than Westerfeld, or because he chooses to answer more than Westerfeld, is unclear.

Blogs. In response to Sub Question 1, Westerfeld and Green differed significantly in their blog post output. According to a study conducted by Baker & Moore (2011) of 182 bloggers, the average number of blog posts produced a week was 5.02. These numbers suggest that while both Westerfeld and Green are "heavy" Twitter users, only Green could be considered a "heavy" blog user averaging 22 blog posts a week. Westerfeld was a far less active blogger than Green, averaging less than one blog post per week.

In response to Sub Question 2, it was discovered that unlike Twitter, *Direct Address* did not account for the majority of posts produced by each author; however, the *Direct Address* posts that were produced were primarily of a complex nature. During the Pilot Study, 34% of Westerfeld's blog posts were *Direct Address* interactions with his readers, with the next highest type of blog post produced being *Self Promotion* at 33%. 31% of the blog posts produced by Green were *Direct Address*, with the next highest type of blog post produced being *Miscellaneous* at 23%. During the Main Study, however, the highest numbers of blog posts produced by Westerfeld were *Miscellaneous* posts, at 87%. He had no blog posts of a *Direct Address* nature. Similarly, 42% of Green's blog posts were considered *Miscellaneous*. *Direct Address* posts were the third highest type of blog post produced at 22% across all five Tumblr blogs. This data indicates that both authors did not use their blogs to engage in *Direct Address* with their readers as much as they used their Twitter accounts to do so; in fact, they appeared to use their blogs primarily to post content of a *Miscellaneous* nature.

Again, unlike Twitter, the most common type of *Direct Address* blog post produced by each author was of a complex nature. Figure 43 indicates that 47 of the blog posts produced by both authors, during both the Pilot Study and the Main Study, were *Direct Address: Complex Book*. 30 of the total blog posts produced by each author over the course of both studies were *Direct Address: Superficial Book*, followed by 17 *Direct Address: Superficial General* posts and 16 *Direct Address: Complex General*. This increase in blog posts produced of a complex nature can be attributed to the fact that Green maintained four other blogs specifically dedicated to

answering questions about his various books. Many of the questions submitted to Green by his readers were regarding complex themes found within his books. Though Westerfeld did not utilize his blog as a means to engage in *Direct Address* with his readers during the Main Study, he did still engage in discourses of a complex nature with readers on his blog during the Pilot Study (17% *Direct Address: Superficial Book*, 17% *Direct Address: Complex Book*, for a total of 34% *Direct Address*). This data suggests that blogs (Tumblr or regular) allow for more discourses of a complex nature between the authors and their readers than Twitter allows. Green in particular took part in these discourses more frequently – even encouraging them by maintaining blogs to specifically answer reader questions about his books. Considering the concise nature of Twitter, which limits its users to 140 characters or less, it is understandable that blogs appeared to facilitate more discussions of a complex nature between the authors and their readers. As there are no character count limitations for blogs, they would afford the authors more freedom and space to adequately engage with complex themes in their writing.

YouTube. In response to Sub Question 1, it was discovered that Green was also very actively involved in the social media website YouTube. According to a survey conducted by Yang, Hsu, and Tan (2010), of 341 YouTube users who posted videos, 82.4% of users had posted a total of 11 videos to the video sharing site, 12.9% of users had posted a total of 11 to 50 videos on the site, and 4.7% of users had posted a total of over 51 videos to the site (p. 145). As the majority of users had posted only 11 videos or less to the site in total, Green's 81 videos posted between September 2012 and March 2013 alone suggests that he is a very active user of the video sharing website. This data indicates that Green can be considered a "heavy" user of all three social media tools.

In response to Sub Question 2, it was discovered that the YouTube data collected for Green differed from the Twitter and blog data in that YouTube was used specifically as a means for Green to engage in *Direct Address* with his readers. What is interesting about Green's YouTube data is how little he used the social media tool to engage in discourses of a *Direct Address: Complex Book* nature. Instead, his YouTube videos were mostly of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* nature, with 42 of these videos in total over the Pilot Study and Main Study. The second most type of video produced, however, were videos of a *Direct Address: Complex General* nature. Like blogs, this medium proved to afford Green the ability to address complex themes

without any kind of time or word limitation, even if the themes were *Complex General* (e.g. discussions about politics and political policy). This indicates that both blogs and YouTube have the potential to better facilitate complex discussions between author and reader than Twitter does.

As Figures 39 and 41 indicate, the type of YouTube video produced by Green on either of his YouTube channels that garnered the most engagement with watchers were videos of a *Direct Address: Superficial General* nature. On his *vlogbrothers* channel, the next four videos with the highest watcher engagement were all of a *Direct Address: Complex General* nature. Green's *hankgames* channel only had one *Direct Address: Complex General* video, ranking number three in the top five watched and engaged-with videos. It was hoped that collecting this additional YouTube data would indicate which types of videos garnered the most attention: *Direct Address: Complex Book, Direct Address: Complex General, Direct Address: Superficial Book,* or *Direct Address: Superficial General*. Out of the top five videos on the two different channels (ten videos in total) for which YouTube views, likes, and dislikes were recorded, five videos were *Direct Address: Complex General* and *Direct Address: Superficial General*. Ultimately, I think this data is inconclusive and that the engagement for more than just the top five videos for each channel needs to be tracked. This larger data set would allow for more conclusive themes to emerge regarding what type of video produced by Green attracts the most "attention."

Author Social Media Data Conclusion: Creating Content

As I stated in Chapter One, an overarching theme of this study is the sheer output of content both authors create on social media. Based on the numbers presented in this study, it is clear that both authors are active and avid users of social media. Both Westerfeld and Green are heavy Twitter users, using the platform to directly address their readers. These interactions tend to be more superficial in nature; a possible outcome of the design of Twitter and its focus on brevity (i.e. tweets must be 140 characters or less). While the data shows that only Green can be considered a "heavy" producer of blog content, Westerfeld still maintains his blog with the type of regularity that encourages readers to come back at least once a week. The data also indicates that blogs offer a better medium for the authors to directly address their readers about more complex topics, again possibly due to the nature of blogs and their lack of spatial/character restraints. The data again shows Green to be a heavy producer of YouTube content, with the

platform also having the potential to better facilitate complex discussions between authors and their readers. While Green's output during the data collection period of this study was certainly greater than Westerfeld's, that does not diminish the fact that both authors have found ways to utilize these platforms by creating content and fostering dynamic affinity spaces for their readers.

Interview Data

Participant social media use. In response to Sub Question 3, the interview data revealed that these particular participants were not as engaged with social media as anticipated, despite all being avid readers of Young Adult literature. According to multiple studies conducted by the Pew Research Center, 95% of young adults are "online," and "eight in ten online teens use some kind of social media" (Lenhart, 2012; Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith, & Beaton, 2013a; Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith, & Beaton, 2013b; Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Though the majority of participants were not aware of Scott Westerfeld or John Green, they all showed an awareness of complex themes found within the literature they were reading. They were all able to talk candidly about these themes and how they felt about them, and in fact seemed to really enjoy being able to share their thoughts and feelings about the books they were reading. They are not, however, sharing these thoughts and feelings with the authors, through social media or other forms of communication

The participants who do use social media are not using it to take part in affinity spaces related to their favourite authors, but they did manage to find other affinity spaces for them to take part in, to various degrees. To use the terms coined by Crawford (2009), seven out of the eight participants who claim to use YouTube were not "disclosing" information in the sense that they did not create, comment on, or like videos, but they were certainly "listening"; they watched the videos, being receptive to what they were viewing. The five participants who indicated they used Twitter were also more "listeners" than they were "disclosers." They suggested that they "barely" used their Twitter accounts, revealing that they more or less used Twitter to see what friends and celebrities were saying. Again, this is more in line with "listening" than it is "disclosing." The five participants who indicated that they used blogs, however, would be classified as "disclosers." Though the creation of content for their blogs was often at the direction of their schoolteachers, they were still creating and disclosing information in a shared affinity space with their classroom peers. The participants in this study displayed a wider range

of social media engagement, or lack-there-of, than research suggests. These participants ranged from disclosers in a school-mediated affinity space, to listeners in non-school mediated affinity spaces, to simply non-users of social media in general. The reason behind this lack of social media use from the participants in this study leads us to Sub Question 4, and the negative outcomes (if any) of using social media.

 Internet dangers: Moral panic. In response to Sub Question 4, the participants displayed a keen awareness of certain internet dangers, and as a result, they did not engage with social media as much as research suggests. In fact, very few of the participants interviewed used social media at all, for reasons such as cyber bullying, privacy concerns, and complicated interfaces. According to the Pew Research Center study *Teens, Social Media, and Privacy* from 2013, "one in six online teens say they have been contacted online by someone they did not know in a way that made them feel scared or uncomfortable" (Livingstone, 2014; Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith, & Beaton, 2013a, p. 12). Further to that, according to the Pew Research Center study *Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites* from 2011, 88% of young adults who use social media have witnessed other people be "mean or cruel" on social media websites, and 15% of these young adults have been the target themselves of this online meanness (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickhur, & Rainie, 2011). Though very few participants interviewed for this study revealed that they had received this type of online contact, there was definitely a heightened sense of wariness about it, as Megan indicated with regard to Twitter and why she no longer uses it.

Is this wariness warranted, however, or is it simply another case of Moral Panic? According to researchers, there is growing fixation by popular press, other media, and even the government on the "dangers" of the internet; a fixation that is not necessarily warranted and is termed as "Moral Panic Theory" (Berg & Breheny, 2014; Facer, 2012; Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Lawson & Comber, 2000; Livingstone, 2014). Moral panic theory arose from an academic/intellectual response to social, cultural, and political conflict in the 1960s (Garland, 2008; Howarth, 2013; Young, 2009). According to Howarth (2013), it emerged from a "re-thinking of deviancy and moral disturbance" (p. 683). It concerns the exaggeration and sensationalization of "moral threats" posed by cultures that are divergent from social core values (Cohen, 2011; Garland, 2008; Howarth, 2013; Young, 2009). For example, internet use by

children and young adults is often a target of this moral panic, with media and the government fixated on the possibility of these young people accessing pornography or other material that is deemed "inappropriate" (Lawson & Comber, 2000). Furthermore, this moral panic regarding internet use by children and young adults also fixates on the dangers of cyber-bullying, sexual assault/abuse, and even "meeting strangers" online (Berg & Breheny, 2014; Livingstone, 2014).

The following screen captured articles, published by the Daily Mail UK, exemplify much of the sensationalized discourse surrounding youth internet usage (see Figures 44 and 45):

Figure 44. Screenshot of a Daily Mail article: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2629866/Heavy-web-use-harms-childs-mental-health-Every-hour-raises-risk-warns-watchdog.html.
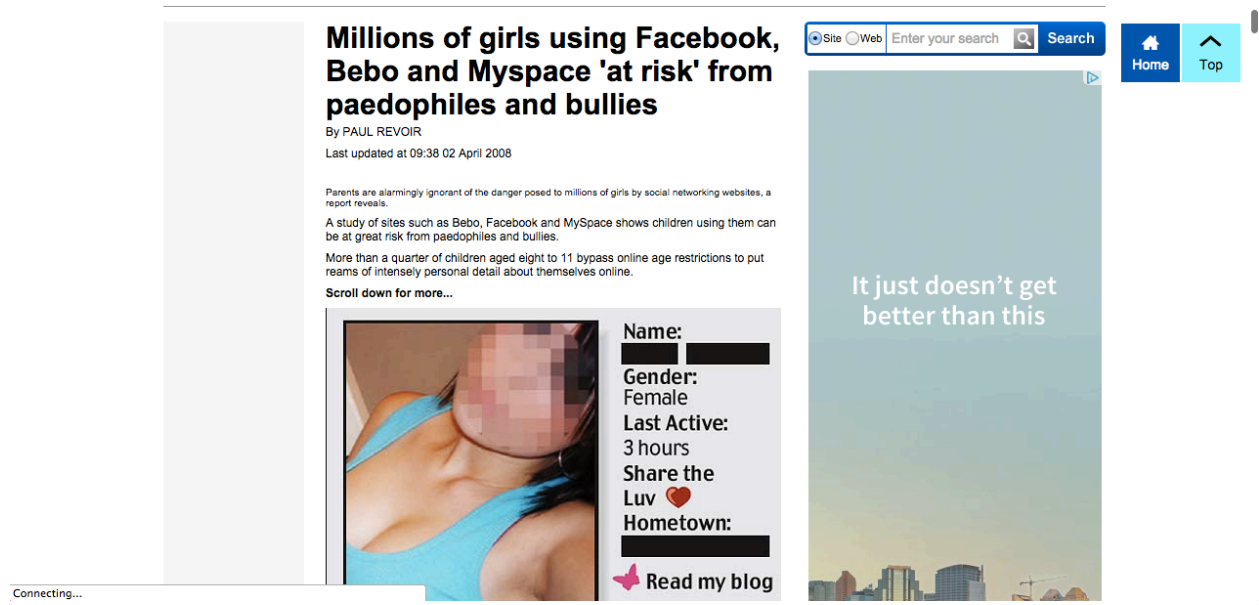
Figure 45. Screenshot of a Daily Mail article: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-553348/Millions-girls-using-Facebook-Bebo-Myspace-risk-paedophiles-bullies.html.

Stories such as the two pictured above often ignite public debate about the safety of youth internet use. These media sources, in particular commercial media, are invested in fueling parental anxiety around youth internet use, blurring the lines between advertising safety software, offering advice, and providing a "public service" (Facer, 2012). Nowhere in both of these articles, however, does the Daily Mail link to the "studies" cited. This is problematic given how these claims are contested by existing research on youth internet usage (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). As Professor Sonia Livingstone (2014) notes in her TEDx Talk *How children engage with the internet*, research shows that little has changed regarding the difficulties that youth face on a day-to-day basis, online or off. According to Livingstone (2014):

Something very important the research tells us too is that in the years that we've been coming to terms that the internet is fundamental in our lives, there's been no overall real long term changes in any of the childhood troubles and difficulties that children encounter. No real changes in childhood abductions, or sexual abuse, or accidental deaths, or mental health problems, or suicide. What there has been is a new kind of visibility to some of these very longstanding and persistent childhood difficulties, so the internet makes visible sexual harassment at school or bullying in a way that perhaps we were not previously so aware. But the internet is not the cause of human misery, people are. And that's the case whether the rate of children's problems is going up or going

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down, or taking a new form. (n.p.)

Livingstone goes on to discuss the balance of online risks versus online opportunities, suggesting that the two are positively correlated: The more children and young adults experience opportunities online, the more they encounter risks. Similarly, the more independent these children and young adults are in the world offline, the more risks they are exposed to. Falling victim to the moral panic surrounding youth and the internet leads parents and other authority figures to restrict internet use by these youth in an attempt to avoid exposing them to risks. Unfortunately, this also restricts these youth from experiencing opportunities online as well, and effectively impeding their ability to develop any type of resilience against possible future risks (Livingstone, 2014).

With this in mind, the responses of some of my participants regarding why they do not use social media suggests to me that moral panic may be at work here, though maybe not so much when they are in the classroom. As Isabelle indicated in her interview, her mom spoke to her regarding the dangers of social media and explained that the best way to avoid cyber-bullying and privacy dangers is to just "…not go on sites like that." Genevieve had a very similar view of social media use and avoiding certain risks by not taking part in social media. However, many participants indicated that they would use social media under the supervision of their teacher, suggesting they feel a sense of security when they are online in the classroom. According to Livingstone (2014):

> If we could think of more places, if we could encourage more range of places for children to go online, and if we were more confident in exploring and encouraging them to explore a kind of journey of possibilities rather than locking them into rather safe, walled gardens, then I think children would be spending less time online casting around, not quite sure where to go, and taking up some of those suggested links or opportunistic invitations that can lead them into trouble. (n.p.)

The response of my participants to using social media in the classroom suggests that maybe it is our teachers who can help find these "places" for youth to explore online. The classroom appears to have become the pinnacle of safety and security for youth, particularly regarding internet use, and we need to take advantage of this as a space where youth can experience both opportunities and risks in a controlled and supervised setting.

Internet dangers: Cyber-bullying. On the other hand, what is perhaps most interesting about the lack of social media use by these participants is how it ties to Green's current "pulling back" from social media. Green himself has been dealing with a series of "negative" experiences over certain forms of social media. Despite how one feels about Green's reaction to these negative experiences, it is easy to see that they were disturbing and hurtful to him. He even explicitly states this in a *vlogbrothers* video from October 6th, 2015, in response to a Nerdfighter question about the benefits of taking "breaks" from social media:

> . . . I can say that I haven't missed social media as much as I thought I would. It had become a really unhealthy place for me in a lot of ways. For the last like, eight years, I have been surrounded by a community online that is incredibly generous and kind to me and to my work, and the criticism has almost always been really thoughtful and respectful. But there's been this small and really persistent amount of vicious and hateful stuff directed at me that I just have found tremendously hurtful and it hasn't been good for my mental health . . . . And while there are definitely things I miss about my old internet life, I find it much easier to write and do other work without all of that other stuff floating around in my head. (J. Green, 2015c)

This makes me wonder; are these non-users of social media onto something? If Green, a social media mogul with an online army of Nerdfighters, is having negative interactions in his own online affinity space of Nerdfighteria that are bad enough to make him pull back from social media, then maybe we need to focus more attention on the non-users of social media and why they choose not to use it. As Merchant (2012) indicates,

> it is worth underlining the fact that we simply do not know enough about children and young people's experience of online social networking and how this is interwoven with life offline. Despite the succession of Pew internet reports from the US . . . we only gain a limited impression of the spread of [social networking sites] . . . . Even fewer [studies] explore the experiences of online social networking and the role it plays in the everyday lives of young people. (p. 14)

Young adults (and adults alike) appear to be having interactions with social media that are more complicated than previously thought, and their feelings about social media appear to be just as complicated. Research suggests that cyber-bullying and other often-touted "internet dangers" are not as prevelant among today's youth as we think, though it is clear from Green's experience that

these risks do exist.

Reader perception. Due to the lack of social media engagement between my interview participants and authors Westerfeld and Green, I was unable to gather data regarding Sub Question 5 of this study. This is addressed further in the Limitations section of this chapter. I chose to leave these questions in as part of the study, however, as markers of the expectations that could not be met with my participant sample set.

Educational benefits: Social media in the classroom. Sub Question 6 was somewhat addressed, however, by the participant interviews when I probed further about social media use. The participants who use blogs in the classroom often discussed the social aspect of them. This use of blogs in a classroom setting relies on Westerfeld's theory that "reading is social" (Hartigan, 2014, para. 10). As Karri explained, she likes using blogs in class because it allows her to share what she has read with her classmates. It affords her a space to talk with her classmates about the books they are all reading, recommending or critiquing as they see fit; an affinity space, if you will, though not a completely voluntary space. As Curwood et al. (2013) suggest, greater accessibility of internet-connected devices is making it possible for young adults to use online spaces to "collaborate and communicate," both inside and outside of school (p. 678). Much like the affinity space Karri shares with her classmates, the incorporation of online affinity spaces into the classroom allows for "multiple and self-directed forms of participation," ranging from active involvement to "legitimate peripheral participation," or listening (Curwood et al., 2013, p. 678). It takes Westerfeld's theory that reading is social and provides a space for that sociality to happen.

Interview Data Conclusion: Barriers and Moral Panic

As mentioned in Chapter One, another overarching theme of this study are the barriers and emotional considerations relating to online participation by young adults. These barriers are inherent in the "internet dangers" young adults face today, whether these dangers are legitimate or simply moral panic. We need to do more research on the non-users of social media to understand what exactly is driving them away, how much of it revolves around supposed "internet dangers," and in what conditions would they feel safe coming back? If it is in a

classroom setting, as the data from my participant interviews suggest, then we need to do more research on where these "places" are that our teachers should be guiding them to. Is it on Twitter or Tumblr, or even YouTube? Are these the websites that allow children and young adults to explore opportunities and risks while still engaging in certain affinities like books, or are there other online spaces better suited to this type of educational exploration?

Limitations

The limitations within this study stem mainly from the topical nature of the media analysed within the specified collection dates, as well as the strict parameters regarding the participant selection. The particular time frame that was chosen to collect and analyse the tweet, blog, and YouTube data produced variant results regarding the number of *Complex Book* and *Complex General* themes found within Green's YouTube videos. During this period, there was very little discourse of this nature; whereas in a previous pilot content analysis study of just Westerfeld and Green's social media usage, Green's YouTube videos proved to contain much more discourse of a complex nature, both regarding content in his books and complex subject matter in general. I believe that a longer period for social media data collection would resolve this issue, which could ensure that a wider variety of topics and themes be covered by each author within the various social media tools.

Identifying participants that have engaged with Westerfeld and Green via social media can also be considered a limitation of this study. These are very narrow parameters for identifying eligible participants, and unfortunately, due to time restraints, I was unable to find participants that matched these parameters. As such, I had to expand the participant requirements to simply young adults who were avid readers of YA literature, in hopes that the participants would at least know of Westerfeld and Green. This resulted in a participant pool that had a very limited knowledge of these authors, and little to no experience using social media. This created an issue when it came to answering Sub Questions 5 and 6 from the research questions. As my participants were not engaging with YA authors through social media, I was not able to gauge whether their perceptions about certain YA works changed as they engaged with the authors of these works. This is turn made it difficult to conclude what the educational benefits and outcomes are, if any, of using these social media tools. Curwood et al. (2013) discuss this issue

in their own research, stating that contemporary research often focuses on the "exceptional cases" of young adults who use social media to interact with other users and create original content. In fact, they believe that it is only 1 in 5 young adults who are using social media to create and distribute their own transformative works (Curwood et al., 2013). While Curwood et al. are quick to suggest we need to study the exceptional cases (i.e. the 1 in 5 young adults), based on my own participants and their more complex relationships with social media, I suggest that we need to study the other four young adults; the ones who are choosing not to participate in social media and online affinity spaces.

A longer period of recruitment for eligible participants might yield a participant pool that better matched the requirements of this study (i.e. participants who both read Westerfeld and Green, and who interact with the authors via social media). In addition, investigating alternative modes of recruitment, such as recruiting from public libraries as well as middle schools, could also rectify this issue.

Future Research

Future research in the area of author/reader connections through social media should be conducted to determine specifically how certain aspects of social media can facilitate discourses of a complex nature. However, we also need to direct more research towards the non-users of social media, and why they are choosing to go offline, despite what the literature suggests. By studying different social media interfaces (e.g. Twitter, YouTube, and blog interfaces), researchers can determine what aspects of certain social media interfaces make them more conducive to discourses of a complex nature over other social media interfaces (i.e. Which better facilitate the development of Affinity Spaces). Analzying YouTube viewer comments, as well as the comments left by readers of each respective author's blog, could also be used to measure the level of engagement with certain YouTube videos and blog posts. Future research should also involve a larger participant pool with young adult participants who do read literature by Westerfeld and Green, and who engage with the authors via social media. This could allow for greater insight into how young adults do specifically engage with these YA authors through social media, and whether the discourses are of a complex nature.

Conversely, more research needs to be done on why young adults choose not to use social media. Why are they choosing to "listen" rather than "disclose," or why are they choosing to go

offline altogether? Would classroom access to affinity spaces encourage creative responses by young adults to what they are reading? Or would they prefer more traditional, offline forms of creative writing and other responses to their reading? A larger participant pool that includes both offline and online young adults would allow for researchers to study why some young adults choose to avoid social media, and determine under what circumstances they would feel comfortable using it.

Earlier, I discussed how teachers can act as ambassadors to online affinity spaces, helping young adults gain access to these spaces in safe settings like the classroom. Are teachers the only ones who can encourage young adults to use affinity spaces though? How else can we make young adults comfortable enough join these spaces and make use of the benefits they provide? What also needs to be studied further is how new people are welcomed into online communities and affinity spaces, especially if they would prefer to "listen" instead of creating and distributing content. John and Hank Green try to address this issue of inclusion in their 2009 video "How To Be a [sic] Nerdfighter: A Vlogbrothers FAQ." In the video, they answer the question of how to be a Nerdfighter with "If you want to be a Nerdfighter, you are a Nerdfighter" (J. Green, 2009). While the use of an FAQ video such as this can act as an entry point for some young adults into the online community of Nerdfighteria (by explaining such things as what a Nerdfighter is, how to become one, and where to find other Nerdfighters online), for some, there may still be an inherent barrier to access by even just having to label oneself as a Nerdfighter. In my own experience, I was welcomed into the Westerfeld online community by a fellow fan of Westerfeld. She spent the afternoon showing me the ropes, so to speak, of the Westerfeld community and how it works. With Green, however, I essentially dove into the community head first by watching all of the *vlogbrother* videos in chronological order. While this approach worked for me, a graduate student with a fairly competent sense of the internet and how it works, it might not be appropriate for a young adult who already has some reservations about internet security and the safety of using various social media platforms. More research needs to be done to determine other avenues of access to affinity spaces outside of the classroom.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

How does the use of social media tools facilitate discourses of a complex nature between YA authors and their readers? This research suggests that the answer to this question is complicated, in a way that I did not expect. Social media offers avenues through which young adults can hone literacy skills. Its worldwide reach opens the lines of communication between people young and old in a global way, allowing them to find online affinity spaces where they can create, share, and explore with like-minded individuals. Sites like Twitter, blogs, and YouTube can act as platforms within affinity spaces, allowing young adults to share their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, art, writing etc., with their peers. Authors like Scott Westerfeld and John Green, who are avid users of social media in their own respects, display just how these tools can be used to engage in discourses of complex themes found in literature with their readers. Their use of social media to answer questions from readers, both of a complex and superficial nature, indicate that these tools can be used in recreational and educational settings alike to engage in discourse of complex themes found in literature. While the findings of this study lead me to believe that social media tools like Twitter, blogs, and YouTube enable varying levels of direct author/reader engagement and discourses of a complex nature, the findings of this study also show that this engagement cannot take place if young adults are not using social media.

Questioning the Literature

Regarding the participants interviewed for this study, it was revealed that they were mostly non-users of social media and therefore did not participate in these types of discourses using any social media tool. These findings were very much at odds with what the literature suggests. Teens today are often painted as technophiles, spending hours online and on various social media sites. Literature suggests that the use of smartphones to check websites like Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, and YouTube is highly prevalent among these teens, almost to the point where their phones have become an extension of themselves. The participants I interviewed for this study, however, painted a very different picture regarding young adults and social media use; essentially, that their social media use is virtually non-existent. It was clear during my interviews with these participants that they had the ability to engage in conversations of a complex nature

on YA literature, and their willingness to consider using social media tools in a controlled setting like a classroom suggested the potential for greater author/reader engagement via social media; however, I was unable to determine whether these participants would specifically engage in discourses of a complex nature via social media tools due to their non-usage of social media in general. Given the small number of participants I was able to recruit for this study, I am not able to make any definitive conclusions regarding how and why (or why not) young adults use social media; but, given the reason listed by many of my participants for their non-use (such as cyber bullying and privacy concerns), it is clear that young adults have a more complex relationship with online life and social media than what is typically discussed in the literature.

Using Social Media: The Emotional Pluses and Minuses

Throughout this study, the theme of my own personal experience of becoming a fan of these authors has supplemented the author social media data and the interview data. I have discussed the excitement I felt each time I was able to connect with Westerfeld over Twitter, and Green over YouTube (and eventually his podcast). Experiencing events like the Project for Awesome and "An Evening of Awesome" made me feel connected to these online communities in ways I had never experienced before. And not only that, my involvement in these online communities has afforded me a connection with my two favourite authors, Westerfeld and Green, in ways that I have never experienced before with other authors. Having a connection with two people I admire so much has deepened my own engagement with their novels, and I feel a sense of excitement in knowing that so many other people (adults and young adults alike) get to experience that connection with the authors as well. In some ways, this ground-floor experience has coloured my expectations of young adult activity with YA authors. Being a part of the burgeoning Nerdfighter community, I fully anticipated that my avid reader participants would be just as active in social media as I was, connecting with their favourite authors in a similar fashion to myself. I was very wrong about this. Instead, my participants found social media sites like Twitter confusing and frightening (when considering the possibility of cyber-bullying and other "internet dangers"), or simply not interesting.

With the discovery that the majority of my participants chose not to use social media for various reasons, it became evident that there is a group of young adult social media users who are not being discussed: the non-users. While there is some literature on the concept of lurkers

and listeners, or those who use social media but do not contribute to it or create content in any way, much more research needs to be done on why young adults are choosing not to use social media. What are the barriers that prevent this engagement? Is it out of a fear (warranted or not) of social media and the dangers so often reported in the media about it? Is it more physical barriers, such as access and affordability? Or is it simply lack of interest? As Livingstone (2014) said in her TEDx talk, social media and internet use offers opportunities to young adults for growth and engagement with the world. More research needs to be done to determine what the major barriers to social media use are for young adults so that we can find a way to help them move past these barriers. We need to find ways to use the joy that I, and the thousands of other Nerdfighters and Westerfeld fans, experience connecting with these authors to counter the fears described by my participants. Encouraging young adults to reach out to their favourite authors over social media in a classroom setting may provide the sense of safety and security my participants need, but is a classroom setting the only way to do this?

As I discussed at the end of Chapter Seven, we need to find other avenues through which we can introduce young adults to the benefits and experiences that social media can offer. A way of doing this could be to identify the "web insiders"; the affinity space and online community ambassadors who can guide novice young adult social media users through these vast and complex spaces. We need to find ways of identifying these ambassadors and determine what entry points they can use to bring new people into these online spaces; however, we also need to keep in mind that some young adults are simply just not interested in being online. These young adults need to feel confident enough to make their own decisions about online participation, and they should in no way feel pressured to participate in online spaces that hold no interest for them.

Ultimately, the subject of young adults and online participation is much more complicated than the literature suggests. While researchers often tout the benefits of affinity spaces and online communities, and jump to studying the "exceptional" young adults who create and distribute content in these spaces, my participant pool for this study shows that there is much more happening here. Young adults are struggling with internet fears, online "drama," and in some cases, even a lack of interest in the online world in general. It is clear from the findings presented in this study that we cannot make any assumptions about young adults and online activity. What we can do is educate young adults about both the dangers and benefits of using social media and taking part in online spaces, and trust them to decide for themselves what their

level of participation should be. Whether they choose to interact with their favourite authors online, spend their time listening in these online spaces, or simply avoid these online spaces altogether, the choice is ultimately theirs, and we need to respect that choice.

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Appendix A

<u>Interview Guide</u>

Participant Qualification
1. How old are you? What year were you born?
2. What are your favorite books to read?
3. Do you like books by John Green? (*Looking for Alaska, The Fault in Our Stars*)
4. Do you like books by Scott Westerfeld? (the *Uglies* series, *Leviathan*)
5. Do you use Twitter?
6. Do you follow Scott Westerfeld on Twitter?
7. Do you follow John Green on Twitter?
8. Have you ever read a blog?
   a. Do you know what a blog is?
9. Have you ever read Scott Westerfeld's blog?
10. Have you ever read John Green's blog?

Reading Westerfeld/[favorite author]
1. What is your favorite book or series by Westerfeld [favorite author]?
2. Tell me a bit about it—plot, story. etc.
3. Why do you like this book?
4. Who is your favorite character?
   a. Why?
5. Do things ever happen in these books where a character does something that may be "right" or may be "wrong"? Like telling a lie so you don't hurt someone's feelings?
   a. How do you decide whether it is "right" or "wrong"?
   b. Do you ever disagree with the main character's decision, or with something the main character does or says?

Reading Green
1. What is your favorite book or series by John Green?
2. Why do you like this book?
3. Who is your favorite character?
   a. Why?
4. Do things ever happen in these books where a character does something that may be "right" or may be "wrong"? Like telling a lie so you don't hurt someone's feelings?
   a. How do you decide whether it is "right" or "wrong"?
   b. Do you ever disagree with the main character's decision, or with something the main character does or says?

Social Media Version One

Twitter
1. Show some examples of tweets—show Twitter
   a. If you had the chance to ask you favorite author a question over Twitter, do you think you would?
      i. Why or why not?
      ii. What about it makes you want to/not want to?
   b. What would you ask him/her

i. Why that question?

Blogs
   1. Show some examples of blogs—show a blog
      a. If you had the chance to ask you favorite author a question over a blog, do you think you would?
            i. Why or why not?
            ii. What about it makes you want to/not want to?
      b. What would you ask him/her
            i. Why that question?

YouTube
   1. Show some examples of YouTube videos
      a. If you had the chance to ask you favorite author a question over YouTube, do you think you would?
            i. Why or why not?
            ii. What about it makes you want to/not want to?
      b. What would you ask him/her
            i. Why that question?

Social Media Version Two

Twitter
   1. Who/what kinds of people do you follow on Twitter? (i.e. Friends, performers, actors, authors, etc.)
      a. What kinds of people would you follow if you could?
   2. How often do you use your Twitter account?
   3. What do you usually use it for? (i.e. To see what friends are saying, to check out the news, etc.)
   4. Have you ever Tweeted to Westerfeld?
      a. What did you say? (i.e. Did you ask a question? Did you send him a comment?)
      b. Did he answer back? What did he say?
      c. If you asked a question, did his answer clear up the question for you?
      d. What did you learn from Tweeting him?
   5. Have you ever Tweeted to Green?
      a. What did you say? (i.e. Did you ask a question? Did you send him a comment?)
      b. Did he answer back? What did he say?
      c. If you asked a question, did his answer clear up the question for you?
      d. What did you learn from Tweeting him?

Blogs
   1. Do you have a blog?
      a. If yes, do you ever write about the books you read on it?
   2. Do you read other people's blogs?
      a. Do they ever write about books they are reading on their blogs?
   3. When did you start reading Westerfeld's blog?
   4. Do you ever post comments or ask questions on Westerfeld's blogs?
      a. If yes, what kind of comments do you post, or what kind of questions do you ask?

5. What is your favorite type of blog post to read by Westerfeld (i.e. Fan Art Friday, posts about YA literature, posts about his book tours, etc.)
6. Do Westerfeld's blog posts help you understand things about the books?
    a. How?
7. When did you start reading John Green's blog?
8. Do you ever post comments or ask questions on Green's blog?
    a. If yes, what kind of comments do you post, or what kind of questions do you ask?
9. What is your favorite type of blog post to read by Green? (i.e. Posts about the movies, posts about book tours, posts about his new book, etc.)
10. Do Green's blog posts help you understand things about the books?
    a. How?

Letter of Information

A Proposal to Study How Discourses of a Complex Nature
Are Facilitated Through Social Media

February 2013,

Dear _____,

My name is Bethany MacCallum, and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta conducting a study in support of my Master's Thesis for the School of Library and Information Studies program, under the direction of Dr. Margaret Mackey. Your son or daughter is being asked to take part in this study because he or she has shown interest in the Young Adult (YA) literature by authors Scott Westerfeld and John Green, and because he or she follows both authors by reading their blogs and Twitter accounts, and watching their YouTube videos.

The purpose of this study is to learn how social media websites like Twitter and blogs can be used to hold conversations about complex themes in books by Scott Westerfeld and John Green. It is important to understand how websites like Twitter, YouTube, and blogs can be used to hold these conversations because these websites are so popular with young adults. Understanding how Twitter, YouTube, and blogs can allow for these conversations will help researchers like myself to find ways to bring them into school and public libraries, letting children take part in these conversations using tools they know and love using.

For this study, your son or daughter will take part in one face-to-face interview with myself. The interview, which will be structured more like an informal conversation between your son or daughter and myself, will be between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview will be recorded using a portable recording device, and later analysed. The data collected for this study will be checked and made sure it is correct by a thorough transcription of the interview.

Your son or daughter will not be given money to take part in this study, and there are no costs to take part in it; however, it is hoped that this study will help me better understand how websites like Twitter and blogs can benefit your son or daughter in school. It is possible that your son or daughter may initially feel shy during the interview process. I will make sure that your son or daughter feels welcome, comfortable, and safe at all times during this process to get passed any initial shyness. The interview will take place in a separate and quiet room at the library away from other people to make sure your son or daughter is comfortable. During the interview, should your son or daughter become uncomfortable discussing the complex themes found within YA literature because he or she feels they did not understand them correctly, or they simply do not want to discuss them, the interview will be stopped. There may be risks to being in this study that are not known. If I learn anything during the research that may affect whether you want your son or daughter to continue being in the study, I will tell you right away.

You do not have to allow your son or daughter to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary, and your son or daughter may refuse to answer any questions at any time during the interview process. Your son or daughter may choose to opt out of the study at any point, including before, during, and after the interview. You can have any data collected removed from the study at **ANY** time during or after the study until May 2013, when the study will be submitted to my department as part of my Master's Thesis. To remove information before study completion, please email me at the email address listed below. The recorded interview with your son or daughter will be immediately and permanently erased, and the transcript (if completed) will be shredded and thrown out. If you choose to allow your son or daughter to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign a Letter of Consent form. Your son or daughter will also be asked to sign a Letter of Assent form, which will make sure they understand the purpose of the study, what they are being asked to do for it, and that they may choose to stop with the interview at any time.

Complete confidentially and anonymity of your son or daughter will be guaranteed in this study. He or she will be assigned a false name, and I will be the only person who will know of the false name and corresponding real name. All recorded data will be stored on a password protected file on my personal computer, as well as in a password protected file on a flash drive. This flash drive will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, along with all print data collected, for five years following the completion of this study (June 2nd, 2013). After this time period, all data will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality. I will be the only person who has access to these protected files and locked filing cabinets. The only exception to this promise of confidentiality is that I am legally obligated to report evidence of child abuse or neglect. If you wish to receive a copy of the study and research findings, please contact me at the information provided below and I will provide you with a copy.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor at:

Bethany MacCallum (MLIS Candidate)   Dr. Margaret Mackey (Supervisor)
3-20 Rutherford South   3-20 Rutherford South
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2J4   Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2J4
780-492-4578 (School)   780-492-4578 (School)/ 780-492-2605 (Office)
bmaccall@ualberta.ca   margaret.mackey@ualberta.ca

Appendix C

Parent or Guardian Letter of Consent

A Proposal to Study How Discourses of a Complex Nature
Are Facilitated Through Social Media

Date:_____

Child's Name (Please Print):_____

As the parent or guardian of the child in this study, I verify that I fully understand the following:

- I confirm that I have read the letter of information provided.
- I confirm that any questions or concerns that I had were answered completely.
- I confirm that I understand the general purpose of the research in which this interview is apart.
- I confirm that no data within the interview can identify my child.
- I confirm that I understand that the Letters of Consent with my child's and my names on them will only be available to the researcher.
- I confirm that I understand the choice for my child to opt out of the interview or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- I confirm that I know that this interview will be recorded.
- I confirm that I understand that my child can ask for the recording device to be turned off at **any** time.
- I confirm that I understand that any data collected will be used for educational purposes only.
- I confirm that data recorded from this interview will be kept for five years in a secure place. After the five-year period, the information will be destroyed.

I give my permission for my son or daughter to be interviewed.

Parent/Guardian Signature:_____

Researcher's Signature:_____

Appendix D

Participant Letter of Assent
How I Talk With Authors Through Twitter, Blogs, And YouTube, And What We Talk About?

Hello! My name is Bethany MacCallum, and I am studying to become a Librarian at the University of Alberta. I am looking for help with a project that I am doing for school, and I am asking you to help me in this project. I would really like to hear about how you talk to Young Adult authors John Green and Scott Westerfeld through Twitter, blogs, and YouTube, and what you talk about, so I am asking if I can interview you about these things.

Our talk will be private. I will not tell your parents, friends, or teachers what we talk about. You can ask for the interview to stop at any time before, during, and after the interview. The interview will be between a half hour and forty-five minutes, and no longer.

You can choose NOT to do the interview.

If you do choose to talk to me, your parents or guardians must also sign a consent form saying that you are allowed to.

If you would like to talk to me, I would be grateful if you could sign this form and bring it back to your public library.

If you have any questions about anything, please contact me at the email address below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter!

If I talk to Bethany about her project:
- I understand why I am being interviewed.
- I understand that this is for Bethany's school project.
- I understand that the interview will be audio recorded.
- I understand that I can ask for the recording device to be turned off at **any** time.
- I understand that the interview will be private.
- I understand that I can stop the interview at any time, and anything I talk about will be permanently erased from Bethany's recording device and computer.

I have decided that I would like to talk to Bethany about her project "How I talk With Authors Through Twitter, Blogs, and YouTube, And What We Talk About?"

Child's Signature:_____

Researcher's Signature:_____   Date:_____

Bethany MacCallum (MLIS Candidate)
780-492-4578 (School)
bmaccall@ualberta.ca

Appendix E

Letter of Contact

A Proposal to Study How Discourses of a Complex Nature
Are Facilitated Through Social Media

My name is Bethany MacCallum, and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta conducting a study in support of my Master's Thesis for the School of Library and Information Studies program, under the direction of Dr. Margaret Mackey. I am contacting you about recruiting participants for my study from the _____ Branch of the Edmonton Public Library.

The purpose of this study is to learn how internet-based tools like Twitter and blogs can be used to encourage discussions of complex moral education in books by Scott Westerfeld and John Green. Young adults between the ages of 11 and 18 are using websites like Twitter and blogs to connect with peers, and even the authors of their favorite books, who share the same interests as them. It is important to understand how tools like Twitter and blogs can encourage discussions among young adults about morally complex themes because these tools are so popular with them. Understanding how Twitter and blogs can encourage these discussions will allow researchers like myself to find ways to bring them into the classroom, letting children take part in these discussions using tools they are familiar with and are comfortable using.

I discovered that _____ Branch has a Teen Book Club (or other teen reading programs), and I was wondering if it would be possible for me to recruit young adults from the Book Club to take part in my study. Taking part in this study would involve a quick (half hour) interview between myself and the young adults to see if they follow their favorite authors on social media, and how they would interact with these authors if they could. I have gone through all of the necessary ethics approval processes to interview young adults and have been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta.

If you know of whom I could contact specifically about recruiting young adults to take part in my study, or if you have any suggestions on how I can recruit young adults at the _____ Branch, I would greatly appreciate it.

Thank you for your time,
Bethany

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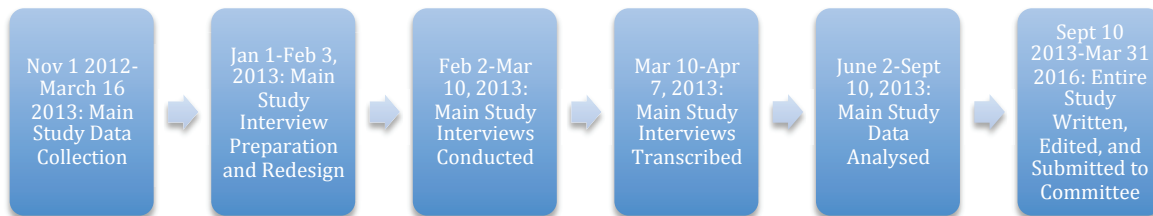**780-492-4578 (School)/ 780-492-2605 (Office)**
margaret.mackey@ualberta.ca

APPENDIX F

Pilot Study and Main Study Timelines

Pilot Study Timeline

Sept 10-Oct 31, 2012: Pilot Study Data Collection	→	Sept 19-23, 2012: Ethics Approval for Entire Study	→	Sept 30-Oct 28, 2012: Pilot Study Interviews Conducted	→	Oct 21-Nov 4, 2012: Pilot Study Interviews Trascribed	→	Oct 28-Dec 16, 2012: Pilot Study Written and Completed

Main Study Timeline

Nov 1 2012-March 16 2013: Main Study Data Collection	→	Jan 1-Feb 3, 2013: Main Study Interview Preparation and Redesign	→	Feb 2-Mar 10, 2013: Main Study Interviews Conducted	→	Mar 10-Apr 7, 2013: Main Study Interviews Transcribed	→	June 2-Sept 10, 2013: Main Study Data Analysed	→	Sept 10 2013-Mar 31 2016: Entire Study Written, Edited, and Submitted to Committee

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the writing and editing of this study took longer than anticipated. This study began in September 2012 and the writing, editing, and submission of the final study (comprised of the Pilot Study and Main Study data, interviews, analysis, and findings) took from September 2013 until March 2016.

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Image of the Like and Dislike buttons on YouTube