# Chapter 17
# "The More I Write…The More My Mind Evolves Into Something Outstanding":
## Composing Identities with Social Media Tools

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter draws from a one-year qualitative investigation of a ninth-grade English classroom in a new technology-rich high school. The study explores the question, What identities did students compose as they alternately resisted and embraced the use of digital media in the writing classroom? Presenting a case study of one student, Shane, the chapter traces the ways in which he responded to the teacher's invitations to use digital media, thereby discursively crafting particular identity performances in on-site and online communities. Analysis identifies a number of tensions specific to the use of authentic audiences and purposes in the 21st century digital writing classroom and reveals three identity performance categories: Shane the comedian, Shane the subversive, and Shane the artist. In analyzing the ways in which social networking tools, literacy practices, and identity performances converge in the classroom, the chapter challenges dominant pedagogical assumptions about using new technologies in the schools to engage learners.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Since you're here, why don't we take an adventure into my mind? But I hope you're ready, because it's one crazy, crazy place in there. - Shane, Literacy in Our Lives Video Project*

With this introduction, Shane, a ninth-grade student in a new technology-rich high school, summoned his classmates to view a video he made to fulfill the first major project in his English class, the *Literacy in Our Lives* project. Becky, Shane's teacher, asked students to develop videos, both as a way to introduce themselves to one another and to document the literacy practices they used in their everyday lives both in and out of school. In so doing, Becky hoped not only to sensitize students to the ways in which they already were proficient readers and writers of text, but also to signal that reading and writing in this classroom community, and across the school, meant using digital media and developing the 21st century literacy practices needed for postsecondary education and the workplace of the future (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). In asking students to share their videos with each other in an online forum, she hoped to form a classroom community that functioned equally effectively in online and on-site contexts.

But just as Becky had specific goals and a particular audience in mind for the project, so too did Shane. He crafted his introduction to the video to prepare the audience for "an adventure," thereby heralding his own arrival in this classroom community and school, staking his claim for attention. In preparing his peers to watch the video and to foray into his mind, "a crazy, crazy, place," he braced viewers to expect the unexpected, creating anticipation that Shane's video would be both different from the others and entertaining. He was right on both counts. While his classmates typically pursued a literal approach to this literacy project, documenting their favorite books, movies, and songs, Shane took the assignment to a new level by writing an original script complete with a montage of goofy images accompanied by old, corny songs. He created a spoof of the creative—yet tortured—artist stereotype, with the voice-over of a stern taskmaster insisting upon obedience to school rules while the camera documented Shane breaking them. He declared himself a serious gamer and pretended to throw a laptop on the floor, overcome by feigned anger when his online opponent insulted him. He included a clip in which he was standing on a street corner with white loose-leaf paper in his hands, yelling at passing cars, "Buy my writing! Buy my writing! Doesn't anyone want to buy my writing?"

We do not know if Shane made any money pitching his words that day, but we do know he garnered the class's attention, his teacher's, and ours. This chapter features a case study of Shane, drawn from a one-year qualitative case study of a ninth-grade English classroom in a new technology-rich high school, exploring the research question: What identities did students compose as they alternately resisted and embraced the use of digital media in the writing classroom? This chapter traces the ways in which Shane responded to Becky's invitations to use digital media while discursively crafting particular identity performances in on-site and online communities. The next section explains why we selected Shane and his teacher, Becky, for this study.

## CASE STUDY PARTICIPANT SELECTION

We relied upon purposive sampling techniques to select our focal student and teacher because we wanted to understand how teachers and students used digital media to compose texts and identities. We wanted to work with an exemplary teacher who valued writing and new technologies in the classroom, and we

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