Communication and Creativity:
How Does Media Usage Influence Those Who Create Media Texts?

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Despite a rich history of research on the impact of various media on their users or consumers, very little has been done to investigate the impact these same texts have on those who produce texts themselves. As part of a larger multi-componential study of creativity, this article aims to show how adult media creators are directly and indirectly influenced by the media they consume, as well as how communication and media scholars may investigate media influence without neglecting the impact of other factors. Focusing on Australian fiction writers, this research found that media use was an important (but not the sole) component in developing their interest in writing, learning their craft, and generating and testing ideas.

Introduction

In the field of communication studies, an area that remains largely focused on media texts, it is surprising that very little has been done to investigate the impact these same texts have on those who produce texts themselves. How are adult media creators influenced by the media they consume? This question will be answered through a study of Australian fiction writers, which utilizes a model that can account for the complexity of both media effects and creativity. This study will show that the creators are influenced by the media they consume, but that, in line with recent media effects research, media are not the only influential factor. It will also demonstrate that the systems model of creativity enables researchers to situate media influence inside the broader social and cultural contexts that creators inhabit.

Although never discussed in those terms, the notion of various media influencing creative producers and creativity is already implicit in feedback models of communication, such as an early model by Defleur (1966), who built on Shannon & Weaver's basic transmission model (1949), or Maletzke's more complex model of the mass communication process (as outlined in McQuail & Windahl, 1981). In these models, engagement with a message or text leads to feedback taking the original message into account. In more cyclical models, where communication is an ongoing process (see, for example, Schramm, 1954), communicators learn from or build on each message in order to respond or produce their own. Despite this, an explicit linking of media consumption to the production of further media texts such as books, films, or music has been neglected in the realm of communication and media studies. Other disciplines, however, have taken up these ideas in different ways.

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In literary studies, for example, these concepts have been explored more overtly through ideas of intertextuality, allusion, tradition, parody, and pastiche, all of which pertain to drawing on other media texts in some way in order to create a new work (Orr, 2003; Rivkin & Ryan, 2004). In her theory of intertextuality, Kristeva (1986) argues that every text "is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (1986, p. 37). From these perspectives, a text may have a genealogy that connects it to a history of texts (whether through theme, style, etc.), spark ideas in another producer, or causes a reaction in the producer that then leads to critique, homage, or quotation in their own work. While this tradition discusses some of the ways in which writers may be influenced by the books they read, it does so without consideration of causation or why writers are influenced in different ways and at different times, if at all.

In psychology, these elements are also ignored in the limited number of studies conducted on the relationship between media and creativity. Studies in this area have generally used short-term exposure to a single text presented in different media forms in order to test whether children think more creatively after reading books, listening to the radio, or watching television (Greenfield et al., 1981; Runco & Pezdek, 1984). More recently, Hutton and Sundar (2008) tested the emotional impact of playing a dance-based video game on adult creativity (measured using a test for creative thinking). Although correlations were found in each study between media use and creative thinking, causation could not be established. The laboratory settings and testing measures used also rule out the applicability of their findings to real-world creators. The quantitative nature of these studies makes it difficult to consider the impact of ongoing (and in some cases, lifelong) exposure to media texts, as well as any of the many social or cultural factors that may be acting upon individuals in the "natural" environments they inhabit while creating. Any study ignoring these elements presents a limited view of the relationship between creators and the media they consume.

Some of these factors have been explored to varying degrees in education, sociology, and cultural studies. In research focusing on literacy, for example, Landis (2003) viewed reading and writing as social and cultural practices. The article explores how these practices are based on shared understandings as well as how they influence and are influenced by reading and writing more generally. Its focus on the educational setting, however, limits the ways in which it may be applied to media production for more general public consumption, which has a different set of social and cultural criteria. Conversely, Hesmondhalgh (2007) investigates these social, political and economic contexts of media production in great detail, but he confines his discussion of media influence to general consumer/audience effects and the creative potential of new technologies, such as digital television.

In *Art Worlds*, Becker (2008) follows the production process from idea through execution to distribution and evaluation, unveiling not just how producers rely on complex networks of cooperation, but also how they rely on the conventions of the art world itself. Rather than reinventing the wheel for the production of each art work, those participating in art worlds "rely on earlier agreements now become customary, agreements that have become part of the conventional way of doing things in that art world" (ibid., p.29). Important for this study, such conventions are not just passed on verbally, or through mentoring or observation; they are also embodied in existing works. In this sense, media consumption is an important component of the production process. Becker, however, does not explore this concept

further, missing the opportunity to address how media consumption may go some way toward explaining an individual's motivation to become a member of these art worlds in the first place.

What can be taken away from these studies, as well as from the rich history of more general media effects research (see Paton, 2010, for an overview), is the usefulness of examining creators within the social and cultural contexts they inhabit as they create. In doing so, media use or consumption emerges as an important, but not sole, component that leads people to create their own media texts. This notion mirrors areas in media effects research (see Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Jenkins, 1999; Bandura, 2009, for example) which focus on media use being just one of multiple factors that may influence individuals and social groups in any given situation. A model that draws on and synthesizes the strengths of these existing studies is the systems model of creativity put forward by Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1999), and supported by a qualitative study of 91 eminent creators (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

The systems model posits that creativity occurs in the complex system of interaction between individuals with their own unique psychology and biology, a social field of experts, and a cultural domain of knowledge. Similar to Becker's sense of conventions, Csikszentmihalyi's domain encompasses the knowledge, symbol systems, and cultural conventions of a particular area that an individual draws on to produce a creative work. This information can be found in the rules and practices passed from person to person, as well as in the language and symbols they use to communicate and record it. These rules and practices are embodied in the creative works that have already been accepted, as well as in those that will go on to be accepted into the domain. Rather than emerging fully formed and capable from a cultural vacuum, creative people must access, be drawn to, acquire, learn, and master the knowledge and skills of the domain before they can contribute something original and valuable to it. The systems model considers the domain an important part of creativity, but it places equal emphasis on individuals, each with a unique combination of biological and personal experience, and the social systems that lead other people, groups, and institutions to play a role in the creative production of a media text.

Through the concept of the domain, the systems model places the influence of media texts alongside the broader contexts also associated with creativity, such as upbringing, education, support systems, and social judgement. Utilizing the systems model, McIntyre (2001, 2006, 2008) studies the creativity of contemporary Western popular songwriters, finding that long- and short-term media use are one of several key factors that contribute to learning how to write songs and solving problems in current works-in-progress. Paton (2009) uses the model to discuss Australian fiction writers as critical readers of other people's work and the related genre of fan fiction. Not only do writers learn writing skills such as style, voice, and characterization from the books they read, but "imitation or emulation is often explicitly encouraged in order to learn and master the domain of writing" (2009, p. 132). While she shows that books have a considerable and sometimes visible impact on a writer's creativity, Paton argues that other factors, such as the real and imagined audience, feedback, and books sales can also be influential. In this way, Csikszentmihalyi's model is a method that communication and media scholars can use to analyze the influence of media as a significant, but not sole, component of the creative process, and to do so in a way that develops or supplements existing and valued research in the area.

Methodological Issues

The discussion that follows represents a small component of a much larger study investigating the system of creativity at work in Australian fiction writing. This study uses Csikszentmihalyi's model to analyze the multiple components of creativity at work in Australian fiction writing. Alongside information collected from writers' festivals and more than 30 readings and panels, secondary interview material and personal Web sites, data was also collected through in-depth interviews with 41 Australian fiction writers. These 16 men and 25 women were chosen based on a proven publishing record (with a total of more than 400 titles across the entire sample population) and an associated professional profile.[1] They also represent a range of genres, including literary works, children's and young adult fiction, science fiction and fantasy, romance, crime, and popular fiction.

The interviews were semi-structured with a question guide, similar to that used by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) during his study of creative persons, designed to encompass eight broad themes relevant to Australian fiction writers and their work. These themes included basic form and publication details, developing an interest, education or training, writing practices, ideas and decision making, professional support, peer support, and personal history. The responses discussed in this paper are derived from both general questions about the writer's experience and questions that specifically address reading or the use and consumption of written texts. Interviewees were not asked questions about the use of other media forms, although some did indicate in their responses where other media use was relevant to their creativity. Interview transcripts were analyzed for general patterns or relationships, as well as for their relevance to the three broad components addressed by Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity: the individual, the domain, and the field.

Research Findings

Unsurprisingly, many of the responses discussed in this paper were categorized as relevant to the domain component, which encompasses the symbol systems, cultural conventions, and artifacts of a particular area that an individual draws on to produce a creative work. Within this category, three primary patterns or themes relating to media and their influence were visible: developing an interest, learning to write, and idea generation and research.

Developing an Interest

Among the limited number of studies available on interest and initial engagement with creative writing, Kohányi (2005) and Piirto (2002) posit that the presence of a range of "predictive factors" such as childhood stress, mood disorders, high verbal ability, and voracious reading is sufficient to predict who may become a creative writer. While not discounting that the other factors may also be present in some writers, the ability to read and the related ability to write appear to be the only necessary conditions for becoming a writer. As would be expected, then, the results of this study indicate that exposure to, and interest in, a range of written texts was the most common factor that led the writers to engage with the

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[1] Self-published writers were not included in this sample.

domain of Australian fiction writing. W02 says that he became interested "like most writers do, just by being a voracious reader."[2]

> I've always been a reader from as long as I can remember […] So that's always what interested me and in all its different forms. When you're a kid you start off with comics, or you read adventure stories, you know, that kind of thing. You sort of graduate through different styles of writing but at a very young age I kind of thought "it's not that I like reading this, I also want to be the originator of this. I want to be the person behind this."   I think around the age of nine I knew I wanted to be a writer. (W02)

Like W02, most writers described themselves as avid or passionate readers as children.

> I was an avid reader as a young boy, so I think it naturally sprang from there. I loved words and narrative. Experimentation was perhaps inevitable. (W40)

> My interest in writing is strongly related to my love of reading. When I read a great book—even a great sentence—I feel that writing something like that is work worth doing. (W27)

> I've had a love of writing as long as I can remember fostered by my love of books. Books have always been my friends since I first learnt to read. Writing was a flow on from that early passion. (W35)

Although their responses are expected—and may therefore appear generic because of their familiarity—this does not make them less valuable. Rather, the ways in which each writer articulates how this interest in reading is translated into a desire to write (via experimentation, perceived value, or a sense of friendship) adds to the complexity of how these texts influence creative producers in different ways.

These varied connections between reading and a desire to write bring new light to early media effects research, such as the Payne Fund Studies (see Charters, 1933; Shuttleworth & May, 1933), which found that movies could stimulate imitation and influence beliefs and attitudes, but could not be considered a direct or sole cause, as not all people were affected at the same time or in the same way. These connections also correspond to later psychological studies by Bandura (1977, 2009) and the uses and gratification theory (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), which conclude that more complex psychological or social factors also need to be present in order for effects to occur. These readers have been influenced by texts and drawn to writing where others were not because of their unique combination of personal, social, and cultural factors.

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[2] The identities of interview participants are protected in this paper. Interviewees are identified by an alphanumeric code only. Some interviewee responses have been altered to further protect their identities. These changes are indicated by a de-identified replacement phrase inside a set of brackets, e.g., [Publisher's Name].

For almost all the writers interviewed, their early interest in reading (and consequently their interest in writing) was developed or encouraged by their family. Such encouragement or support was present in most cases, regardless of whether the writers' parents or other family members could not or did not read, or were great readers themselves. It is worthwhile to note that encouragement from family was often expressed in terms of the role they played in providing access to books, whether through buying, lending, or taking trips to the library. W14's experience appears to be typical of those writers whose family provided important access to books. Taught to read by her mother, W14 also mentions her grandmother and great aunts as well-educated women with a passion for books and history. "They told me stories and gave me books and let me loose in their extensive libraries" (W14).

This, however, cannot discount the normalizing effects the family's culture more generally may have had on the individual's transition from reader to writer. W34's interest in writing was connected to her family's love of books. "I was lucky to be brought up in a bookish family. Books were everywhere, the preferred present by most of us for birthdays, et cetera. Both my parents read aloud to us a great deal and talked about books. From the age of seven I knew that all I wanted to do was write books" (W34). Similarly, W17's interest was socialized by her family's attitudes to reading and writing:

> I was raised to believe that good writing and great literature were really very important. I think I was also raised to believe that writers and poets were who you celebrated and praised. Also, anything I did as a child was always praised. So I suspect I was raised in a context of supportive parents and supportive ideology of the schooling, that sort of thing. From a very young age, I thought I did want to write. (W17)

W12 felt that the storytelling culture within his family more directly influenced his interest in writing than the strong cultural storytelling tradition of the country where he was born. "It started, I think, with my mother telling bedtime stories and reading stories to my sister and me. So I was fascinated from the start with books and the process of storytelling. We were quite a storytelling family; it was a normal thing that we did" (W12).

That the writers' early engagement with the domain of writing and its symbol systems, as well as their social or familial contexts were influential in developing their interest in becoming writers themselves conforms with Bourdieu's (1977, 1993) concept of *habitus*. The *habitus* is the unique but also shared social and cultural trajectories that predispose a number of individuals to engage with the domain or "game" of writing, "to take an *interest* in the game, to be taken up, taken in by the game" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 18). As with the development of an individual's *habitus*, however, it is not enough to be exposed to and interested in the domain of Australian fiction writing to be able to function as a writer of either literary or genre works. The content, rules, and procedures of the domain must also be acquired and internalized.

Learning to Write

In this study, domain acquisition occurred across a range of formal and informal processes of socialization and enculturation. These include reading and schooling, as well as some degree of self-

directed learning, mentoring, and specific and additional training. The second theme (learning to write) addresses this concept of domain acquisition directly. For almost all of the writers in this study, reading, studying, or analyzing fiction texts was fundamental to their ability to write fiction. "It is by far the biggest single factor, no question" (W11). This shows the same pattern as Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) findings in his study of eminent creators (which included several poets and novelists) that reading is the primary method of domain acquisition for writers. "Writers say that you have to read, read, and read some more, and know what the critics' criteria for good writing are, before you can write creatively yourself" (ibid., p. 47).

Several of the writers learned to read before entering into formal education, generally teaching themselves to understand the symbol system of the writing domain using texts found in the home. "I remember before I went to school, I learnt to read by learning to read on my own and my parents being amazed that I could read the newspaper to them" (W02). For most of the writers in this study, however, basic reading skills were acquired in the first years of formal education, and then further developed through exposure to a variety of written texts in primary and high school.[3] Their combined experience of reading, writing, and English (as the study of prose and poetry) in these schools differed dramatically, occurring across several decades and including varying curricula and levels of teacher ability and enthusiasm for the subject.

Despite these differences, approximately half of the writers felt that their experiences in high school English classes were of benefit to them as writers, even where these benefits were deferred for several years, even decades. W16 believes the English curriculum she was exposed to was critical for her adult writing career. "Reading and studying books inspired me and I believe gave me the craft to write later in life" (W16). Schooled in the 1960s, W11 was made to read a considerable amount of classic fiction, which he enjoyed but didn't understand at the time, "so in a 'learning outcomes' or 'competencies' educational framework, that wouldn't have shown up, but years and years later I was able to benefit from what I was told" (W11).

The in-depth analysis of themes, style, or technique conducted in some of these English classes was not always enjoyable for the writers interviewed. "Studying books like that sort of ruins them for me" (W36). However, many saw the positive effects such study had on them as writers.

> I was compelled to read a lot of books in school that I would not have read otherwise. I think that this was good, in terms of broadening my style and outlook. (W31)

> Our study of literature in school was conventional and I suppose at times it was dry, but I gained an enormous amount from it which influences my writing still today. (W28)

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[3] The majority of writers in this study were educated in Australia, in either the state or private system (the remaining writers were educated in English-speaking countries, including the UK and New Zealand). Some left school early; others went on to university or other higher-education institutions.

Those writers who did enjoy this formal study of written texts believed that understanding how classic texts worked was important not just "because it exposed me—us—to the beauty and power of crafted language" (W05) and deepened their enthusiasm for the writing domain, but also because it taught them about the craft of writing itself.

> I began to understand that fiction wasn't simply telling great make-believe stories. Great writers, such as Thomas Hardy, used all manner of ways to make that story come to life through magnificent settings, characters you cared about, dialogue that leaped off the page and could provoke intense emotion in me. (W30)

> Studying the works of other writers is so important—not just reading them, but really studying them and coming to understand how the writer manages to achieve what they did in the book—the atmosphere of menace, for example, or the small subtle clues present in the text and so easily slid over. (W14)

Regardless of whether they enjoyed the process or not, almost all of the writers in this study acknowledged that the study of books involved in their primary and secondary education played an important role in their later creativity as adults.

Despite this belief in the influence written texts in particular had on their acquisition of domain knowledge and their ability to write, few writers described this influence in relation to the broader social and cultural context of the classroom or the Australian education system. Where they did acknowledge these broader systems at play, the writers generally saw it as a negative. "School required conformity and my most painful moments were when I was denigrated for writing differently. So I hid in the formula writing they wanted" (W16). In each of the cases above, however, the books they read in English classes and had access to in school libraries were selected because they met the criteria or could achieve the aims of curricula developed by state-related institutions. Not only were the students embedded in the formal education system, but so, too, were the books that played an important role in their learning how to write. The influence of these written texts was, in essence, mediated by broader social and cultural factors, such as the education system.

The writers in this study also found reading fiction and nonfiction texts outside of formal schooling a fundamental tool in learning how to write. For some of them, but particularly for those who also teach creative writing at universities and writers' centers, adult readers make better writers than nonreaders. W39 feels that writers who don't read a lot have "a limited toolkit" (W39). Conversely, those writers who read regularly or voraciously were developing their knowledge of the domain and learning more complex writing skills.

> You look at how the experts do it, the structure of a text, how they put their words together, how they maintain your interest and how they do the highs and lows and climax of books. (W38)

I think that the amount that I read, particularly for me, because I write intuitively, has formed some template in my mind of how characters interact and what a story is. (W09)

Often it's the voice, it's the way people let you into the story, it's the way they use detail to represent something much larger. There's that eye that picks out a couple of details when there might be two hundred in a room, that says this is what I'm giving you and you know what I mean and you do. I got that from reading. (W12)

For W25, engagement with written texts is not only useful "to learn the craft but also to learn what to write and what not to write" (W25). For others, reading helped to develop "models for rhythms of prose or plot, for uses of imagery, for permission to do things in new ways" (W33) or an "innate sense of style by observing what you think is good or bad about other people's writing" (W15).

As we can see here, books (and other texts) often acted as a surrogate teacher or mentor, particularly where formal schooling was lacking or writing mentors were unavailable. Simonton (1984) describes this process of learning as a mentor relationship with the "paragons" of a particular domain. Although face-to-face mentoring has benefits, Simonton argued that mentoring with those who lived in a different location or even another time, through analysis of the paragon's texts or artifacts, may help to avoid some of the problems associated with traditional mentor relationships, such as abuse or excessive mimicry. Francine Prose (2006) argues that this method of learning or "mentoring" has been in use for centuries:

Long before the idea of a writer's conference was a glimmer in anyone's eye, writers learned by reading the work of their predecessors… And who could have asked for better teachers: generous, uncritical, blessed with wisdom and genius as endlessly forgiving as only the dead can be? (2006, pp. 2–3)

From this perspective, individuals are able to learn from other writers through an "interrogation" of their works, investigating the decisions each writer has made about style, technique, language, and content. Here, the books already accepted into and embodying the domain of fiction writing provide writers with the opportunity to engage in some way with those who have already mastered the domain, but may no longer be accessible.

Although many of the writers described these types of impersonal mentoring relationships, they also learned how to write through more direct social interaction. For many of the writers in this study, domain acquisition was continued through their personal interactions with teachers, mentors, fellow writers, and editors. W09, for instance, found a role model in fellow writer W40, establishing a relationship that was less formal than a traditional mentor arrangement, but which provided her with emotional support during her early career. "So that positive motivation and I guess everything I've learnt off her about how to handle yourself as an author, that sort of mentoring has been really important to me" (W09). W33 established a relationship with a critically acclaimed author when she enrolled in a creative writing course. "He offered me practical knowledge about the craft and the process of managing a long work: 'this is what a draft looks like'; 'this is how you might consider editing it'" (W33). For other writers,

the act of publication itself helped them develop their writing skills, with the feedback they received from editors or readers often alerting them to aspects of their writing that functioned well, as well as those that could be improved in future projects. For W05, being edited "has been wonderful for helping my skills and I think I write much better now than I did when I was first published. Or at least I have a better idea of my faults" (W05). Similarly, W11 believes he learned more general writing skills "by being edited by a good fiction editor (especially editing my second novel) than from any single other source" (W11).

Although it is possible to say that a person cannot write a book without having read one, this does not mean that reading is the only method of learning used by writers in developing their skills and knowledge. Direct relationships with teachers, mentors, peers, and editors were also instrumental in learning how to write. Domain acquisition, then, occurs in a range of social and cultural contexts, including, but not limited to, interactions with written texts and other media.

Idea Generation and Research

The final theme of media use and creativity found in the research on Australian fiction writing was drawn from the writers' discussions of their work process, which was broken down into phases of idea generation, research and development, drafting, and revising. Here, the writers discussed their experiences, often contrasting their real-world work process with what they saw as the common misperceptions about creativity, particularly when it comes to idea generation.

For idealists such as Croce (1909) and Collingwood (1938), the real work of creativity occurs entirely in the head of the individual. According to Collingwood, "a work of art in the proper sense of that phrase is not an artifact, not a bodily or perceptible thing fabricated by the artist, but something existing solely in the artist's head, a creature of his imagination" (1938, p. 305). From this perspective, a "work of art" refers not to the material object, but to the ideas behind it. This concept that creative thinking—and consequently, idea generation—constitute the bulk, if not all, of the creative process is common, providing the basis for many marketed creativity "how-to" books and training programs (see de Bono, 1992; Osborn, 1963). Divergent, productive, and lateral thinking; brainstorming; and blockbusting have all been sold as programs to improve creativity by increasing fluency, flexibility, or frequency of ideas generated. This interest in creativity as a realm of ideas is also reflected not only in the number of products available, but also in the discourse of writing used by readers or audience members, who frequently ask the writers in this study where their ideas come from. Their answers, however, do not comply with the idealist perspective, nor with the myths and discourses of literary genius that creativity occurs solely in the head of the individual. The generation of ideas, rather, resulted from the interactions between individual writers and external social and cultural factors, including a variety of media texts.

Although it may be assumed from the proliferation of training programs mentioned above that "creative" ideas are elusive, most of the writers interviewed see an abundance of ideas in the world around them, drawing on observation and experience of people, places, and events, as well as on various fiction and writing domains and fields for story ideas. For W24, newspapers are a generous source of story ideas. "Ideas are everywhere. I've enough for a dozen lifetimes. Every time I read the paper I get one, but most are never used" (W24). Like W24, however, few writers rely solely on secondhand or narrative

sources for inspiration. Rather, they combine written and visual accounts with personal observation and experience.

> Ideas seem to come from everywhere and anywhere: an article in a newspaper or magazine, something I've been told, a news item that sparks a "what if" question in my mind, a memory. Sometimes it's just an interesting person I see in the street. (W08)

> My life, the lives of others, the world around me, other people's work, films, my previous forms of employment, eavesdropped conversations. (W15)

These writers are receptive to the details of the world around them. This openness to outside influence, including a variety of media texts, provides them with a rich array of information useful in generating ideas for their work.

Writers, however, are not only looking for ideas in media texts or their firsthand experience of the world, but have also received ideas more directly from the social and cultural spheres. In cases where writers are commissioned or contracted for specific projects, publishers and agents may also provide the original ideas for a story. W40, for instance, has a close relationship with her agent that allows for a free exchange of ideas that has directly influenced W40's work.

> A number of occasions in my career she's come to me and said "this publisher is looking for something like this and I think this sounds like something you'd be interested in," for example a children's series that's being published at the moment. I'd never thought of writing a children's fantasy series and she found out [Publisher's Name] was looking for people to do this and she phoned me and said "I really think you'd be good at this." So I did it and I'm so glad I did it. It's so much fun and I never thought of writing for children. Now it's opened up this whole new area for me to think about, a whole new place for me to go in my imagination. (W40)

As this shows, writers are neither influenced only by media, nor isolated from social factors during idea generation. Children's writer W01 received idea suggestions directly from the field in the form of fan letters from her target audience.

> Ideas are a strange fish. They come from all over the place. From countries I've travelled to, TV shows I loved as a kid, internet skimming, news articles, a mood a song puts me in, letters from kids suggesting gadgets or sometimes the letters have a theme that comes through that the kids really want addressed, E.G. when will the lead characters kiss? (W01)

Here, we can see that media texts are important stimuli for idea generation, but so, too, are other factors, such as the audience or personal experience.

In developing ideas beyond the initial generation phase, the research process can also contribute to each writer's store of knowledge—not necessarily of *how* to write, but of *what* they write about in terms of content. As they do during other forms of domain acquisition, the writers interact with a variety of people, environments, and cultural artifacts during this research phase. Typically, the writers in this study used multiple sources, both firsthand and secondary, to find and develop content. W01 researches the general content/themes and technical details for two different children's series with personal observation and by consulting books, Internet sites and relevant television programs. W30 combines travel and firsthand experience of locations with research using books and the Internet. "I travel overseas twice a year. That always yields ideas, books, articles, sights and sounds, et cetera. I go looking for books now that might help me and I use the Net for specific research. For example, I needed to know about an illness and the Net was great for that type of information" (W30).

For many writers, working with research materials relevant to their particular fiction writing domain directly influences idea generation and drafting. For W26, his research using a variety of media texts is similar to the chicken/egg paradox. "I read a lot of nonfiction, and sometimes it throws up ideas. If such an idea occurs to me, was I researching it before I had it?" (W26). This apparent paradox shows that creativity is less linear than it is suggested to be in process models such as Wallas' (1976) four-stage model of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Rather, some writers' interactions with research texts contribute to a more dynamic system of circular causality. "Generally the two trigger each other: Writing requires research and through research come ideas that need to be channelled back into the writing" (W33). In this way, the research phase further highlights the complex role media can play in creativity. Media, here, are used alongside other social and cultural sources for the (sometimes recursive) generation of new ideas and verification of existing ones.

Conclusion

The influence of media texts on creativity has been seen in a number of direct and indirect ways throughout this article. For most of the writers in this study, their interest in writing stemmed from an early engagement with written texts. For several others, the love affair started later in life, after an engagement with a specific set of books. Once their interest was sparked, they learned to write through further engagement with books, as well as through formal and informal training with the symbol system of Australian fiction writing. Overwhelmingly, the writers in this study believed that reading was one of the most important tools for learning how to write. Reading the works of those who had already mastered the domain of writing not only familiarized them with what has come before, but also helped to develop their own ideas about style, technique, character, rhythm, and genre conventions, as well as their own feel for what "works" and what doesn't. In their own writing process, the writers drew on this accumulated knowledge of the domain and undertook additional engagement with a variety of media texts in order to generate new ideas and test existing ones.

It should be remembered, however, that during the creation of a written text, individual writers are interacting in complex ways with a number of different social and cultural factors—not just with media texts. The writers' interest in the writing profession, for example, is often mediated or encouraged by family, relatives, and teachers. In some cases, they were able to learn the elements of writing directly

from mentors and peers, or in creative writing courses and workshops. For many, the act of publication itself, as well as the communication of their works to the reader, made them better writers, with the feedback they received from editors or readers often alerting them both to aspects of their writing that functioned well, and to those that could be improved in future projects. Media texts are just one of many factors that contribute to creativity in Australian fiction writing.

Studies that focus on single components in isolation from other influential and necessary elements fail to provide an adequate understanding of how creativity occurs, or how it may be pursued or improved. In order to understand the influence of media texts on creativity, it becomes necessary to take the interdisciplinary or multi-componential approach of Csikszentmihalyi's system model. Using the systems model of creativity, research like that which is presented here can provide a rationalist explanation for cultural production or creativity that accounts for a variety of media influences without denying the function played by other facets of the individual's experience or broader social and cultural groups and contexts.

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