Constructing, Performing, and Perceiving Identity(ies) in the Place of Online Art Education

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ABSTRACT

How young people construct, perform, play with, and perceive their own and others' identity online influences their participation and engagement in online art education. Art educators have argued that identity performance in the art classroom, both online and offline, is an important aspect to creating critical dialog and resistance to cultural and gender stereotypes. As a result, considering the fluid, dynamic, and contextual qualities of identity(ies) online is a necessary aspect of online art education. To explore this, I present the outcome of imposed anonymity in a research study involving a group of teens and their teachers in an online art social network. Participants were required to perform new identities, which enabled or disabled them from participating in the online art curriculum.

Playing with how one's identity is presented online is a relatively recent form of identity performance that has important implications for art education (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004). As the spatial boundaries of art classrooms expand through the use of social media there is the potential to perform and explore new networked identities (Sweeney, 2009). Experimentation and performance of identity are important aspects to how young people navigate, interact, and resist normative cultural and gender stereotypes online. As art educators embrace online spaces for the teaching of art (e.g. Buffington, 2008; Carpenter & Cifuentes, 2011; Han, 2011; Liao, 2008; Tillander, 2011), a reconsideration of youth cultural practices becomes necessary, which includes how they construct, perform, and perceive identity online.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the question of how identity construction, performance, and perception online can enable and disable creative production and participation in online art educational settings. In the first part of this paper, I will consider how identity performance online is a continual process that involves the construction, appropriation, and presentation of digital artifacts to represent aspects of self. Further, this performance of the self is done in relation to a specific time and space, which is also in constant flux. Engaging with identity performance in art education is crucial to resisting the stereotypes of gender, race, and class (Garoian, 2002). In the second part of this paper, I will use the serendipitous outcome of imposed anonymity in the study of a designed online social network and art curriculum to illustrate how some of the participants played with the presentation of their online identity. In this example, I present how two young women performed new identities online to enable their participation in the online curriculum. I then contrast their performance with the case of one young man who was dissuaded from participating because he could not link his already developed identity online into the social network used for the study. This illustration raises important questions about the role of identity construction, performance, and perception in the art classroom both online and offline.

Online Identity(ies)

When Sherry Turkle (1984/2005) first wrote "computers change the way people think—especially about themselves" (p. 152), she observed that the personal computer was changing the way youth understood and performed their identity. Later, she developed these observations as youth began to interact with each other online and found that there was pleasure in performing different identities in different online contexts (Turkle, 1995). Technology, especially online interaction, disrupts traditional notions of identity as fixed, unified, and whole (Slack & Wise, 2005). The use of digital technologies and online communication are neither inert actors nor the cause of social action. Instead, as David Buckingham (2008) argued, digital media has particular affordances that shape social behavior and are shaped by it. For youth, online identity performance is a significant activity through the posting of images, videos, and texts. Youth use these and various other digital artifacts to curate an identity across many different websites (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, &

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Robison, 2009). They curate specific identities for specific contexts, whether they are social or interest-driven online communities (Ito et al., 2008). The curation and performance of these varied identities reflect individual youth agency while also reflecting cultural values and practices. What is important to remember about these practices is they are identities-in-action (Weber & Mitchell, 2008). That is to say they are always evolving, becoming, and in relation to others and the technological platforms used.

All activity online is recorded and becomes what Matthew Fuller (2005) termed "flecks of identity." Online identities are interpretations of patterned activity that generates flecks of identities: images posted, profile pictures, pseudonyms, links bookmarked, sites visited, comments posted, videos watched, and so on. An individual can consciously and deliberately construct these flecks, and an observer can interpret them using various frameworks such as search queries and filtering. Both an individual's actions construct his or her own identity and the observer's interpretation of that pattern of activity construct an identity. In all of our online activity we create a record that is traceable. When aggregated, the flecks of identity that we create through our online activity could be interpreted as an identity. Every time one goes online s/he is creating a patterned identity through the act of looking and posting of images, texts, and videos. A whole web of associations is drawn and subject to interpretation when distinctions are made about what makes one identity different from another.

Alicia Juarrero (2002) characterized identity as a complex system, something that looks "more like bramble bushes in a thicket than like stones" (p. 103). Complex dynamic systems are not concrete, fixed objects. They are irreducible to their component parts. A complex dynamic system is defined or identified through its recursively elaborative patterns of activity. Juarrero used the concept of invariance, or robustness, to describe how complex dynamic systems operate with a meta-level stability. In patterns of activity, such meta-level stability is far from stable; in fact, it is always moving away from equilibrium. Juarrero deploys this idea of invariance to counter the Platonic ideal form, to dislodge the idea that any one component is a meta-level controller of identity. For example, the popular misconception that DNA is the sole determinant of disease, health, and physiology can be attributed to the linear, deterministic understandings of causality (Juarrero, 1999). No one event or object represents or even determines the totality of an identity; rather, Juarrero argues, it is the coordinated relations between other agents, participants, cells, and so on that make an identity one thing and not another. In other words, identity is not fixed, nor can it be isolated. This resembles what Judith Butler (2004) articulated: identity is a temporal performance within a scene of constraints. The scene of identity performance subsequently is interconnected within the time and space of relationships.

Teaching and learning online involves a qualitatively different interpretation of time and space. The asynchronous nature of communication online creates new conditions for identity perception, construction, and performance. It is important here to distinguish between space and place. Space and place are often conceptualized in terms of three dimensions: height, length, and width. Traditionally, the difference in the definitions of the two terms is that space is an area that is unoccupied, empty, or available, while place is defined as an area that is a point in space, usually occupied or identified with a defined boundary. Defining space and place as presence and absence in this way is inherently problematic because of the exclusion of time (Massey, 1994). Space, that which is empty, is often presumed to be static or fixed, and like space, place is similarly tied to a fixed identity or impermeable boundary. Space, then, can only be experienced and subsequently observed through time. Further, place is more than just an occupied point in space or defined by boundaries, rather it is fluid and patterned intersection of links, movements, relations. In other words, place is made and remade continually through the interaction of people and materials through time and space.

Doreen Massey (1994) stated "within this dynamic simultaneity

which is space, phenomena may be placed in relationship to one another in such a way that new social effects are provoked" (p. 4). Massey's assertion that place is fluid and dynamic because of the social interactions of individuals makes her insights particularly applicable to the place of online interaction. The flecks of identity carefully constructed and performed online are an important part of the cultural practices and places inhabited by youth. Given that many of these flecks are visual, art educators are situated in a unique role to critically consider their impact on teaching and learning.

Online Identity(ies) and Art Education

For many art educators, identity has played an important role in teaching about art and their students' artistic production. Much of what has been advocated recently concerns culturally inclusive strategies that allow for individuals, students, and teachers alike to consider, share, interpret, and critically engage with their own experiences, values, and practices (Keifer-Boyd et al., 2003; López, 2009; Sakatani & Pistolesi, 2009; Song, 2009). Similarly, art educators recognize the symbiotic relationship between youth identities and visual culture (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Freedman, 1994; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004) and as such advocate for a critical consideration of this relationship in art educational practice. A similar approach needs to be taken for online youth cultural practices, which include the construction, performance, and perception of (an) identity(ies) online.

Presenting a singular definition of online youth cultural practice as it relates to identity is problematic as it has been taken to mean a vast range of things to many different fields of study. Mary Bucholtz (2002) argued that a productive approach to the problem of understanding youth cultural practice is the understanding that "youth negotiate cultural identities in a variety of contexts, both material and semiotic, both leisure-based and at home, school, work, and in the political sphere" (p. 544). This is similar to Charles Garoian's (2002) suggestion that youth produce and perform identity as determined by the context, whether the context values or erases the differences brought by each student in the art classroom. Garoian and Gaudelius (2004) further elaborated that the space of technology acts as a pedagogical space in which teachers and students can resist cultural and commercial norms of identity and perform re-imagined relationships to technology. The quality of this relationship is one where s/he can perform an identity to explore new understandings of self in relation to others.

Further, Robert Sweeney (2008) suggested that these new performances form networked identities that have potent creative potential for art educators. Like Garoian and Gaudelius (2004), he proposed that, through identity performances and conversations in online environments like Second Life, teachers and students can explore, critically examine, and resist the normative roles and affects of representation of self in popular culture. Though there have been a number of claims that youth are performing and exploring new identities online (e.g., Baym, 1998), recent research suggests that the gender stereotypes for both young women and men are being predominantly performed and amplified through social media (Kapdizic & Herring, 2011). This is perhaps attributed to the fact that most social media services (e.g. Facebook) want users to use their legal identity to better target advertising to their demographic and that there is little taught in schools on how to better critically question and resist these normative forces online. In the next part of this paper, I present an example of how identity construction, performance, and perception play a role in online art education.

An Illustration of Identity(ies) Performance in an Online Social Network

The following illustration arose serendipitously from a larger study investigating the shifts in teaching and learning art through social media (Castro, 2012). In this study I worked as both the researcher and teacher in a password-protected, invitation-only, custom social networking site with four art teachers and 15 students. The teachers

were participants with their students in all aspects of the study in order to gain insights into the efficacy of the curriculum and technology used with their students. Each teacher had their own motives for joining the study, however each expressed an interest in learning how to use social media in their classrooms. The 15 students came from Grades 9 through 12. In consultation with the teacher participants, it was decided that this should be an extra- curricular project advertised through the art department to the entire school. The study was open to any student who was interested. The teachers and I advertised the study in all of the art classes and in the after-school art club.

To investigate the shifts in teaching and learning, the study used an emergent art curriculum (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008) that increasingly used the participants' knowledge (images and textual dialogs) uploaded to the site as a source for future inquiry. The general shape of the curriculum had three phases. The first phase focused primarily on creating a space for reshaping relations between participants' ideas about happiness in our culture and their personal lives, through context-sensitive constraints. Those constraints would be embodied in the weekly questions of inquiry, or prompts. The second phase shifted towards the collective knowledge that was being enacted by participants. Drawing from the understandings in complexity thinking (Davis & Sumara, 2006), I intended the second phase to be about generating a self-organizing complex system by using the history of ideas, as represented in the images, as a source for new inquiry through art. The third phase emphasized an extended individual inquiry in relation to the experience of inquiring with and through a collective of artists. This iterative process of inquiry was part of the design-based research (DBR) methodology used in this study.

Design-based research is an interventionist methodology similar to action research in that both seek to collaborate with participants in the research act. DBR differs from action research in that it focuses on the designed intervention such as a curriculum innovation, technological interface, or pedagogical strategy. Whereas action research calls for the researcher to work with participants identifying local problems and issues requiring inquiry, DBR works with participants to refine educational innovations (Wang & Hannafin, 2005). The researcher in DBR collaborates with participants in an iterative cycle to develop the design innovation and also develop new understandings of learning (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003; Joseph, 2004; Sandoval & Bell, 2004). In this study, the educational innovation was the emergent curriculum while also attending to the larger questions of teaching and learning online.

The study took place over the course of one school term from recruitment to final interviews. A number of data collection techniques were used. For this study I collected data from individual participant interviews at the beginning, mid-point, and end of the study, both offline and online; from my own observations of online and offline activity kept in a daily journal; and from images and texts posted by participants. The social network interface also enabled the collection of numerical data, such as the date and time an image was posted, number of images posted, and the number of times an image was viewed.

One of the major reasons for using a DBR methodology was the opportunity to design a curriculum, participate in its unfolding, and then iteratively respond. From week to week, each iterative step analyzed and interpreted participant responses, interaction, and inquiry. Each week, as a researcher, educator, and co-participant, I adapted the curriculum and my pedagogy in response to the themes I interpreted in participant dialogues and images, and when possible, from formal and informal interviews.

One of the unexpected understandings to emerge from this study was the role that identity construction, performance, and perception had on participant participation. In qualitative research there are oftentimes serendipitous discoveries that researchers had not anticipated initially yet yield important insights (Becker, 1996; Deegan & Fine, 1996). The question of identity and its impact on learning

were not parts of the original research question or design. Rather it emerged from specific conditions imposed on the study outlined below.

Imposed Anonymity

Institutional Review Boards (IRB) present challenges to research design, oftentimes shaping the research outcomes in unexpected ways (Sanders & Ballengee-Morris, 2008). In order to receive human research approval for this study I was required to preserve the confidentiality of all participants. This stemmed from a general apprehension that participants had the potential to reveal each other's identity on the open waters of the Internet by copying identifying images and texts and posting them outside of the closed social network site. In response to these concerns, one of the conditions of participation was that students could not post images that would identify themselves, others, or their school.

In this study, I held a privileged position in that I knew all of the participants' online and offline identities. Outside of my own role as participant in the study, the other participants—teachers and students—did not know who the other participants were. Early on I noticed two of the student participants were carefully constructing and performing identities while another was vocally resistant to participating due to the confidentiality requirements. It was then that I decided to collect additional data with each iteration of the study, which included asking questions that addressed how and why participants constructed their identities, performed them, and perceived others in the study.

Haine Walker, Gaelan Knoll, and John Freeman

In this illustration, I will focus on three of the 15 student participants: Haine Walker, Gaelan Knoll, and John Freeman because of the way that that Haine and Gaelan performed new identities to engage with the curriculum, while John named the imposed anonymity as the reason for his disengagement. Haine Walker was the only Grade 10 student participating in the study. Although she self-identified an offline identity of a female, she presented her online identity as male. I will refer to Haine Walker as "he (she)" throughout this paper. Haine Walker was active in his (her) Grade 10 art class, and self-identified as a student who puts effort into everything he (she) does in art.

Gaelan Knoll, a Grade 11 student, was a very active art student at the time of this study. Like Haine Walker, Gaelan Knoll self-identified as female offline, while online identified as a male. I will refer, as I do with Haine Walker, to Gaelan Knoll as "he (she)." John Freeman, a Grade 12 art student, whose offline and online identities were male, was one of the first participants to sign up for the study. During initial interviews, he expressed excitement to participate. I inferred from interviews that John Freeman was one of the most technologically experienced, in terms of social media, of all the participants. After one blog post expressing his excitement for the project, John Freeman stopped participating altogether.

Enabling Participation through Constructing Flecks of Identity

Participants had a number of modes available to represent themselves, without revealing a physical identity. They are organized as follows: pseudonyms and profile images, language, images, and gender. Participants were required to choose pseudonyms that could not be linked to their physical/legal identities. Their profile images were not to represent themselves directly, however, they were encouraged to create a visual metaphor of themselves. Some participants, both students and teachers, described how they controlled their language to present a particular identity. Images were also considered important to participants who were concerned with keeping themselves completely anonymous, by controlling what could identify them in the images. Haine Walker and Gaelan Knoll performed gender to conceal their physical identities or because it was an already common online practice for them.

Pseudonyms and Profile Images

The motivations for choosing pseudonyms and profile images can be described as two-fold: first, as a way to represent an idea of self visually through personal affinities and second, as a way to conceal offline identity. Haine Otomiya is a female character from the manga *The Gentleman's Alliance* written and illustrated by Arina Tanemura and Allan Walker is a male character from the manga *D.Gray-Man* by Katsura Hoshino. Both plots center on these two main characters that are both fifteen years old, the same age as Haine Walker. In Haine Walker's use of language and online posting of gender, he (she) tried to project a self-described male identity. Haine Walker chose characters from popular culture and mashed up two of them to create a new identity of his (her) own. The online identity of Haine Walker became an intersection of his (her) relations to the site and popular culture. Like Haine Walker, Gaelan Knoll mashed up two identities: Gaelan, a favourite manga character of his (hers), and Knoll, who came from Thomas Knoll, the lead author of Adobe Photoshop. In choosing the name Knoll, Gaelan described that he (she) got it from the About/Startup screen while waiting for Photoshop to boot up. His (her) pseudonym was unique to this social network. Gaelan reported in interviews that he (she) had a number of specific pseudonyms each tailored to the online community in which he (she) was a participant.

Figure 1: Gelan Knoll's self portrait and profile imageaelan Knoll's self portrait and profile image.

A number of the participants chose an object to represent themselves, yet did not feel it was necessary to stay with the same image throughout the study. To them, profile images were fluid, temporary, and suitable to the moment. There were no commitments to sticking with a profile image over time. Gaelan Knoll chose an image that was going to conceal his (her) physical identity yet represent himself (herself) in the relation to the social network (Figure 1). He (she), as did many others, chose a profile image in relation to his (her) own perceived role and relation to the site and study. It is here we see that teens implicitly, if not explicitly, understand the interdependency of identity and place in online activity. Perceiving and understanding the social conditions of an online place, teens are quite capable of constructing and performing identity to their advantage through the selection of carefully chosen images and text (boyd, 2014). Because places are constructed through social and material interactions, they create the scene of constraints (Butler, 2004) in which identity is performed.

Language

Participants also considered controlling and selecting the language they used, from textual descriptions of images to comments on someone's wall, as a representation of their identity. Haine Walker especially was sensitive to how language constructs an identity online; this was evident in his (her) ability to identify Stormy as one of the teachers. Many of the participants used emoticons — textual representations of facial expressions and shorthand (e.g., LOL, meaning Laugh Out Loud) — in their writing. The student participants assumed that teachers and adults do not use these sorts of writing conventions.

Images

Participants like Haine, who wanted to keep their physical/legal identities from being linked to their online ones, commented on how they had considered all of the associations with objects, places, and people that could be used to make those links. Gaelan discusses how

she used his (her) mother's mobile phone instead of his (her) own, in one of his (her) posted images (Figure 2) stating:

> It's her phone. I pretended it was mine. Because everybody knows what my phone looks like too. My friends were talking about it, saying that can't be Gaelan that's not her phone.

Figure 2: Gelan Knoll's mobile phone image.

Gender

Gaelan Knoll also took some pleasure in the challenge of remaining anonymous through considering everything from language to the objects depicted in photographs. Only two of the participants, Haine Walker and Gaelan Knoll, deliberately presented themselves online as not their biological gender. In this paper I have presented them as male (female) because it was how they wanted to be perceived online. In the school, their physical, biological, and social identities were self-identified as female. They had similar reasons for presenting themselves as males to conceal their identities, through choosing to represent themselves as far from their school identities as possible. On the one hand, Gaelan Knoll indicated that he (she) had often performed a male identity online, previous to participation on this site. When asked why he (she) performed as a male online, and specifically if it had anything to do with being treated differently, Gaelan stated,

> I don't know... I just have an inclination to do it. Like I know some people on deviantART do the same thing. They pretend that they are guys. I don't know, you feel stronger... yeah, stronger.

Haine Walker, on the other hand, described the decision to perform as a male just another layer of masking his (her) identity. Performing a different gender online is not a common practice (Kapdizic & Herring, 2011). When it does occur it is part of a pattern of posting misinformation to mislead those who do not know the person's physical identity (boyd, 2008). For Gaelan Knoll, it was a bit more complex than just posting misinformation as Haine Walker did. It was part of a pattern of activity in online places. Gaelan Knoll, as interpreted from interviews and his (her) behaviour online, was savvy in constructing and presenting online identities. On sites like deviantART, Gaelan initially presented himself (herself) as a male because it made him (her) feel more confident, but as Gaelan became more confident, he (she) felt the need to begin presenting a more aligned online/offline identity for a possible future career in art. The performance and construction of identities are contingent on the spatiality of place and the intersection of perceptions, interpretations, and descriptions of social relations and identities.

Reshaping Social Relations

Student participants like Haine Walker and Gaelan Knoll were enthusiastic that the perceived social relations that come with being in school were being reshaped through new online identities. However, none of the participants named teachers' judgment of their art as part of their anxieties around production and display. I interpreted from the interviews that these anxieties stemmed from social relationships with other students. When I asked if being anonymous gave Haine the confidence to post over 300 images, he (she) responded,

> If we actually knew who we were, would we actually talk to each other? Because in high school there is, like, a social status and grade difference. And no one really talks to everyone unless we were friends with them. I heard that lots of different people are doing this. So, I was thinking "wow" if we actually knew the people doing this we would probably stick to the people we would know.

Haine Walker's intuitions about participants sticking with already established relationships were partially true in the case of this study. Early on, it was observed that initial interactions occurred between those who shared their identities with each other. These exclusive relationships and resulting interactions, however, did, as participants interacted, expand to include those relations in the social network site. Haine Walker's desire for an egalitarian community was tempered by the realization that a social hierarchy could develop within the online community. Responding to interview questions about the requirement of anonymity on our social network, two other student participants confirmed that being anonymous removed the perceived judgments that come from being positioned in certain social relations at school—especially if one is not in a position of power afforded by social status.

Gaelan Knoll was able to distinguish how he (she) judged the work that was posted by participants she knew in light of her perceptions of their offline identities, and as a result tried to not link online and offline identities. Gaelan Knoll described how it was the removal of the fear of being judged in the offline world that enabled and attracted him (her) to being anonymous in this project. He (she) stated,

> Some of my friends I know who they are on the site and I sort of find myself judging them…. so I don't want them judging me the same way. Basically, I guess I feel nervous having my art looked at, but I suppose since it's online it's a bit less scary. I feel like when people look at my art they won't be judging me, but my art.

Being anonymous in this place provided the occasion for new identities to be constructed; it was, as Gaelan Knoll suggests, not removed from offline experiences, but provided a place to speak, act, and inquire through art without the perceived judgment of their position in social relations at school. The student participants on our social network like Gaelan and Haine described a perception of being judged on the merits of their artwork and not on where they were positioned in the social relations of school.

Disabling Participation

In initial interviews, John Freeman described himself and his friends as being active online, posting digital video and photography much more than was indicated by any of the other participants. John described his activity online, especially posting content, as being strongly linked to his social relations with his close group of friends in school. They would often perform, produce, and edit digital videos and photographs together, posting them online under each other's online user names on a rotating basis. When asked about the possibility of having a social network site as part of classroom content, John responded positively.

In addition to having course content posted on a social network, John Freeman was attracted to the opportunity to interact with a group of peers on a school-related social network site. After posting his first and only blog post, he invited a number of his friends to join our social networking site. After John Freeman's first blog post, he stopped participating on the site altogether. When asked at the end of the study about the issue of anonymity, he expressed frustration at not being able to know who people were on the site. He stated,

> I think it's frustrating. Cause you don't know who everyone is, and if you ever get a friend invite, randomly it is really weird, because you don't know why he or she did and you don't know who they are and they know who you are.

In John Freeman's response, I interpreted a need to link online and offline identities. In the first interview with him, when I asked about his Internet activity he described that working and interacting with his friends, who were from school, made up most of his time and activity online. Regardless of why his friends never signed up to participate in the study, it was a significant issue in why he did not participate beyond his one blog post. It seems that the characteristics of anonymity that elicited a positive response from Haine and Gaelan were the same characteristics that dissuaded John Freeman. For him, having established social relations was important in his online activities. When asked later in the interview at the end of the study about recommendations for using social networking in schools, John suggested that this should be done with people who were already close, such as a whole class. In this study, however, participants came from a number of different grades and courses as an extra-curricular project. The suggestion that a group should be able to link each other's online and offline identities indicates that, for John, social networking in schools should be an extension of social relations—whereas for participants like Gaelan and Haine, the online reshaping of the social relations in school enabled their participation. I conclude this article by considering the role of identity(ies) performance on student engagement in art education.

Considering Identity(ies) in the Art Classroom

Teacher participants described the quality of art, inquiry, and ideas produced and posted to the social network as reshaping their expectations. Their expectations were so reshaped that it resulted in identity confusion. At one point, Stormy (teacher pseudonym) suggested that I had created fictional identities of student participants because of the conceptual sophistication of images and ideas being produced and posted. She stated,

> I find Gaelan Knoll has this real... I am convinced it is another teacher. But I don't know... [laughs] I am not sure. I don't know what other teachers there are. At first I thought it might have been James [the pseudonym I used as a participant-teacher].... No, there's sophistication in the work that's coming out of this artist.

The day after the following interview, Stormy suggested that I was Gaelan Knoll. This had been something she was convinced of until the end of the project, and until the site was taken offline. In fact, Gaelan was one of Stormy's most active students, staying after school and working alongside her on most afternoons.

Expectations of art students' capabilities are a tangled knot of intersecting beliefs and social and cultural practices that are entrenched throughout the spatiality of places of schooling. The social relations that teens perceive as being present in schools and their position in these relations can disable a whole range of possible engagements and participation. Those same relations were just as important for the engagement and participation for students in this project . What Haine, Galean, and John's narratives suggest is that identity does play an important role in students' participation and engagement in online art education. Further, students' perception of their own social relations can be shifted and reshaped through the performance of new identities online. Due to the content constraints requiring anonymity on our social network, the place occasioned a reshaping of social relations, where new patterns of activity and flecks of identity were able to be performed and constructed. For some participants like Haine and Gaelan, the performance of their new identities gave them a new confidence to contribute images and comments that exceeded the expectations of their art teacher. While this was enabling for some, it was also disabling for those, such as John, who either felt constrained by the content requirements or relied on having a familiar network of relations already in place.

Before making recommendations to institute a place in schools for identity play, performance, and construction so that those who perceive themselves as marginalized have a place in which they can participate confidently, we also need to consider who could become newly marginalized. What this paper has articulated is that to discuss

places of learning, especially online, identity has to be considered. Identity is not a fixed or static object; instead, it is a place where overlapping, intersecting, and sometimes conflicting descriptions and interpretations result from social relations.

This illustration raises difficult questions about how identity play should be taken up and engaged with in online art education. For example, should identity play, performance, and construction be a structured activity in online art education? What role do students' perceptions of social relations play in confidence, participation, and engagement in the art classroom? And, why was it that some of the teacher participants mistook their students for what they equated with a professional practicing artist? Before rushing to judgment of the teacher participants and their expectations of students, we should consider more closely the tangled knot of social relations between teens, student perceptions of self, art curricula, cultural expectations of student art, teacher education, and art educational research. It is a convergence of factors that constructs an identity of what a student should think and produce. Even though we have shrugged off the notion of fixed stages of development in art (Kindler & Darras, 1998), there still remain the traces of what school art is and should be (Efland, 1976). The learning possibilities of social media are that it can become a third space (Wilson, 2008) where both teachers and students can resist these entrenched identities and the expectations that go with them, where they may perform new identities.

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