"I got a lotta respect for him …":
Boys' Use of Visual Material Culture to Negotiate Local Masculinities

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an analysis of the ways in which boys in a New York City after-school club used visual material culture to negotiate aspects of their masculine identities. It draws upon a larger participatory visual-based ethnography that was originally intended to examine the ways in which youth in two communities (one in New York City and one in Yukon, Canada) used popular visual material culture in their everyday lives, and the role of local *place* in this process. Using an interdisciplinary conceptual framework, the author argues boys used visual material culture as a source and resource in making sense of, constructing, and negotiating local ideals of masculinity. In so doing, she begins to underline the complex relationship between youth lives and identities, visual material culture, and the local places they live with/in and through.

The purpose of this paper is to describe boys' negotiation of masculinity using visual material culture (e.g. fine art, pop stars, websites, fashion, and the like). It is drawn from a larger ethnography examining how youth in two communities (one in New York City and one in Yukon, Canada) used visual material culture in their everyday lives and the role of local place (i.e. sociocultural and physical landscape) in this process (Eglinton, 2008, 2009). In this paper, by zooming in on, and providing an analysis of, the multifaceted ways in which boys in the New York City site specifically used visual material culture to negotiate the masculine identities of themselves and others, my aim is to not only contribute substantive knowledge with respect to boys' gendered identities, but, more significantly, to provide an instrumental case (Stake, 2000) underlining the complex relationship between youth lives and identities, visual material culture, and the local places they live in and through. Boys from the New York City site have been selected as the focus of this paper as their use of visual material culture provides a particularly compelling example of young people's active participation in their identity construction and the power of local places to constrain and enable their self-making.

The ethnographic inquiry this paper draws on was developed in response to my own experiences as a visual arts and culture pedagogue, and as a means of answering back to empirical, theoretical, and analytical limitations in the art education literature. In my larger project I underlined several interconnected

issues: I noted how pedagogy in art education, which seeks to bring popular visual material culture (VMC) into the curriculum, is often characterized by a discrepancy between an "ideological analysis" frequently used in critiquing VMC, and the lived experiences youth are actually having with these forms (see Buckingham, 2003, pp. 316-317). I described one of my early experiences as an arts educator in the South Bronx area of New York City when I attempted to engage youth in a graffiti project:

> The image still haunts me: there I was, a twenty-five year old white woman from downtown Manhattan telling thirty-three black and/ or Latino 13 and 14 year-olds from the South Bronx about the meaning of graffiti: using my own experiences and perspective to teach youth about what, in many ways, could be considered their visual culture; "enlightening" young people to Haring and Basquiat, positioning myself as an authority. In fact, if pedagogy can be characterised as "interactive productivity"—a dialectic involving teacher, learner, and knowledge (Lather, 1991, p. 15)—this was not pedagogy.[1] (Eglinton, 2009, p.3)

I suggested that without an ethnographic understanding of what young people might "say, think or feel" (Hall, 1997, p. 3) about their visual material world, I could not expect to meaningfully engage with these (or any) young people (Eglinton, 2009, p. 3).

Inspired by my experiences, I highlighted a lack of systematic research in art education examining young people's everyday engagement with popular VMC. I argued many projects are limiting, as there is often an emphasis on ideological critique rather than on youth cultural practices (though *empirical* exceptions exist, for example: Addison, 2005; Darts, 2004; Elsden-Clifton, 2005; Levy, 2007; Springgay, 2003; Stanley, 2003). I illustrated how common theories driving practice and research in art education, based on aspects of modernism in art and cultural thought (Desai & Chalmers, 2007), are nonrelational and connectedly dualistic—separating, for instance, context, culture, and individual (Duncum, 2005; Gablik, 1991). I further underlined a "placelessness" (Nayak, 2003a, p. 11) to these theories: where youth experiences with VMC are considered decontextualised, rather than something active, situated, lived in and through social interactions constituting local places (Featherstone, 1991; Willis, 2000).

Addressing these issues, and hoping to find ways to connect with young people's experiences, I sought to understand the ways in which youth used, mainly popular, VMC in their everyday lives, and the role of place in this process by carrying out a visual-based participatory ethnographic study in two communities (again, one in New York City, and one in Yukon, Canada). These communities

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1 Lather (1991) is discussing the work of Lusted (1986).

were chosen for analytical and personal reasons. Analytically, I was interested in various dialectics including, for instance, center/periphery. Personally, I argued social science research should seek out the voices of those often unheard and/ or silenced (see Heron & Reason, 1997), and it was my observation that urban Black and/or Latino youth and rural First Nation (Aboriginal Canadian) youth, face various forms of exclusion from mainstream contexts.

Research questions narrowed in light of incoming data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). During fieldwork, I developed the more pointed question: How do young people use VMC to make sense of, construct, and/or negotiate aspects of self and world? Implicit in this question is a concern with place; the concepts of self and identity/ies are used interchangeably;[2] and world is appropriated from Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain's (1998, pp. 49-53) *"figured worlds"* including those spaces we construct and live with/in and through (e.g. the overlapping figured worlds of school or gender, as well as the figured worlds of youth in a particular area of New York City).[3]

Drawing on this study, in this paper I focus specifically on boys' masculinities in the New York City site. I briefly describe the interdisciplinary theoretical framework and methodological process that guided inquiry, before providing an analysis of how these particular boys used VMC to make sense of and negotiate local masculine identities. I conclude with implications for art education, touching on critical place-based pedagogy.

CONCEPTUALIZING IDENTITIES, PLACE, AND CULTURE

I developed an interdisciplinary conceptual framework to support an understanding of young people's engagement with VMC as a relational, active, place-based process. Identities, in this framework, are conceived as always in process, contextual, multiple, and enacted and produced in and through human (inter)action in everyday life (Castells, 2004; Hall, 1996, 1997; Holland et al., 1998; Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005, p. 8). Space, in this framework, consists of flows of social, cultural, political and economic relations (Jess & Massey, 1995; Massey, 1993; Appardurai, 1990). Place is interrelated with space—place is "localised space" (De Boeck, 1998, p. 25). Place is dynamic, productive, and conceptualized as both material space (i.e. physical space) as well as the meeting place or nexus of intersecting social relations, dominant narratives, political structures, influences, and movements in space (i.e. sociocultural space) (Massey, 1993).

2   Drawing on the writing of Fraser (1999), I recognise the inextricable tie between identity and self; therefore, for sake of clarity and brevity, I use the terms interchangeably. I do not, however, do this unreflectively and I recognize there are literature and debates focusing on the relationship between self and identity.

3   Generally, figured worlds are part of local places and aspects of local places are part of figured worlds.

Identities and place connect to culture (including VMC), which is conceived as the medium of human engagement with the world, and the product of that engagement (Cole & Engestrom, 1993). Culture exists both outside and inside individuals: it constitutes our minds and mediates and produces our identities (Cole & Engestrom, 1993). Culture can only be understood and produced in relation to place, and could be thought of as patterns of artifacts, including VMC, as well as language, narratives, values, and the like (Cole, 1996; Mitchell, 2000). Drawing on the sociocultural theory of tool mediation, cultural artifacts mediate our actions. They are continuously used and their meanings are (re)created through practice and performance in everyday life—through interaction with the world including interaction with other people (Cole, 1996; Cole & Engestrom, 1993, Cole & Scribner, 1978; Packer, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1995).

Using the framework developed for this study, I argued that people cannot construct any identity they wish (Buckingham, 2003; Grossberg, 1989, p. 93). I suggested the construction of an identity is dependent on the availability of particular cultural artifacts, and the use of artifacts and meanings invested in them are dependent on individual lives, histories, and collective experiences, as well as on aspects of local place. Indeed, the relationship between people, place, and culture is dialectical and productive. People do not simply reproduce identities, culture, and places, but rather the mobilization of aspects including, for example, history and individual experiences in and through an always unique local-global nexus, leads to the (re)construction of new cultural forms—including new places, figured worlds, and identities.

RESEARCH CONTEXT
Seeking to get at the space where youth, visual material culture, and local places intersect, I used an ethnographic approach and worked as a researcher/artist in what I have called "Hope," an after-school club in New York City for over six months. I supplemented this with 13 weeks of fieldwork in a rural community in Yukon Territory, Canada.

Epistemologically the work was contextualized with/in sociocultural constructionist forms that conceive knowledge as continuously produced in and through human (inter)actions (Lincoln, 2001; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Insights from participatory inquiry (e.g. Reason & Bradbury, 2001) were central in guiding my relationship with the youth, and helped to ameliorate the kinds of power relations exposed through postmodern and feminist critiques, by opening up a space for youth voices and the possibility of transformation and empowerment through research. Throughout I remained aware of the fact that all researchers are positioned, knowledge is partial, and power and authority are

threaded through inquiry (Clifford, 1986). I used a series of strategies including collaborative visual-based methods to deal with some of these issues.

I employed a "new" or "postmodern" ethnographic approach to advance inquiry (e.g. in Fontana, 1994). New ethnographies critique researcher authority, and respond to the changing ontology of culture from a stable unit to a dynamic shifting process (Faubion, 2001). Marcus's (1995) "multi-sited" design (e.g. New York City and Yukon, Canada) enabled me to ethnographically conceive the complex, local nature of young people's cultural practices. Data presented in this paper draws specifically from the New York City site: Hope after-school. Part of a free, city-wide after-school program, and housed in a New York City high school, Hope is open year round and attended by hundreds of New York City youths ages 6 and up.

At Hope, I worked with between 28-34 young people, boys and girls, aged between 10 and 15; the youths were predominately black and/or Latino and all came from families living on an income below, at, or just above the poverty threshold. During fieldwork, I carried out a participatory, visual-based ethnography. My methods included participant observation and in-depth open-ended interviews, as well as participatory visual-based projects (e.g. youth produced videos, collage, and photography). Drawing on visual anthropology (see Banks, 2001; Pink, 2001, 2006), I believe participatory visual methods offer young people a chance to reflect on their lives and identities; access the space where youth lives, VMC, and local place intersect; and generate data from the perspective of youth themselves. Throughout my time at Hope, I spent my afternoons conducting interviews; engaging youth in visual media; or, more simply, sitting around cafeteria tables talking with young people, listening to music, and/or browsing through magazines together.

BOYS' GENDERED IDENTITIES AT HOPE

In the following sections I focus on boys' gendered identities. I argue that masculine identities were continuously produced and negotiated at the site where youth individual and collective experiences, local places, and forms of VMC intersect. To make sense of this process, I draw on the concept of narratives where, appropriating Bruner (1990), I understand stories of masculinity as particular narratives constituted of overlapping values, discourses, ideals circulating localities and instantiated in embodied forms of VMC (see also Dimitriadis, 2001). For example, rap artist 50 Cent will instantiate a particular narrative of masculinity. I suggest that gendered identities are not only similar to, but are mediated by these narratives. That is, "gender narratives" (Eglinton, 2009, p. 256) both describe identities (types of masculinity) and are also cultural

artifacts that youth not only make sense of and use, but also negotiate in the construction of their gendered selves.[4]

GENDER NARRATIVES FOR BOYS AT HOPE

Gender is not a natural or biological category, but rather a contextual social concept, actively negotiated through mediated social (inter)action (Gottlieb, 2002; Jackson & Scott, 2002; Thorne, 1993). As gender identities were open to reworking and negotiation, youth at Hope had to continuously make sense of multiplicity—find spaces of commonality/difference in order to understand their own identities. In order to do this, it seemed young people constructed stories of gender or gender narratives that helped them organize masculinities and femininities into, say, good/bad, hot/not (see Bruner, 1990, p. 56). VMC was a tool youth used to invest meaning in and to make sense of these narratives. In the following section, I describe how boys used embodied forms of VMC to make sense of and invest meaning in one overarching gender narrative circulating their figured world: the "gangsta."

"Rappers are all gangstas . . .": making sense of the gangsta narrative. From the day I started at Hope, I wondered if there was a common lexicon of boys' identity types, for example, the jocks or something more local such as Nayak's (2003a; 2003b) "Real Gordies." I listened, watched, even pointedly asked: "Are there types of boys, you know like jocks?" It was twelve-year-old Malcolm, well-versed in all things "youth cultural," who finally told me in an interview, "Boys don't do that really." And he added, "There are some people that are like gangsta." Malcolm was right, despite the fact that girls at Hope referred to various femininities (for instance tomboys), the only overarching narrative for boys at Hope (at least the only one youth consistently mentioned) was the gangsta, sometimes called "ghetto" type.

Drawn directly from VMC, for youth (boys and girls), the gangsta narrative was based on, and made sense of through, gangsta rappers and hip-hop aesthetics. Gangsta rappers represented the "archetypal" gangstas whom bell hooks (2004, p. 27) called the "essence of patriarchal masculinity." For youth at Hope, gangstas

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4 Because identity categories such as gender and race are interlinked, trying to write about gender alone, pretending for a moment I can suspend other identities, was impossible. This being the case, while I have made every effort to stay focused on gender; the findings I describe must be recognised as wholly integrated with and dependent on the many identity categories youth at once constructed and lived through.

Furthermore, sexuality and sexual orientation form one of those categories which gender works in relation to in the expression and experience of identities. Gender and sexuality share a special relationship, where Jackson and Scott (2002) define this relationship as instantiated through the heterosexual/homosexual binary in sexuality which "mirrors, and is interrelated" with gender (p. 14). In this paper, rather than conflating gender and sexuality, like Tobin (2000) I imagine sexuality as an aspect of gender in the production of romantic and/or intimate relationships, as part of the gender order where powerful narratives about sexuality constrain youth identities (see, for example, Connell, 2002), as well as relate to gender in much the same way that class, race, and nationality are part of identity configurations (Jackson & Scott, 2002).

were hyper-masculine, invested in violence, and epitomized survival. Gangstas were urban and invariably raced (or constructed) by youth as black (see also, Archer, 2003; hooks, 2004, p. 146).

Writing about racialized masculinities, O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000, p. 3) articulate the themes of "black macho," "black cool," and "black flash." These themes, I suggest, offer a loose frame for fleshing out the characteristics of the gangsta narrative constructed by boys at Hope. For example, beginning with black macho, which the authors describe as "hardness," boys such as 13-year-old Louis (known to be somewhat of a bully himself), told me: "gangstas act all big and bad." For these youth, gangstas were survivors. They had tenacity and were able to overcome adversity. Gangsta hardness also meant hyper-heterosexuality and sexist behavior. This understanding was drawn directly from hip-hop and gangsta rap, where gangsta hardness is coded in rap artists' talk of violence and survival, and in their sexist attitudes (Boyd, 2002, p. 117; hooks, 2004; Quinn, 2005).

Intertwined with hardness was "coolness" including "being 'laid back'—in effortless control" (O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000, p. 3). Majors (1990) describes the "cool pose" which includes a particular walk, style, and attitude. Hope youth included this cool pose performance as part of the gangsta narrative. It was a way of talking, walking, and being that mirrored the hardness and style of rappers. Part of cool pose included what O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) call "black flash" which connected with the exaggerated wealth of gangsta rappers. Sinewy, tightly wound, self-assured Freddie, who self-identified as "100% Boricua" (Puerto Rican) described the flash gangsta style by drawing on his lived experience at home in Spanish Harlem.

Freddie: If you really want to go into the topic of gangsta, Harlem they wear like, I don't understand, but they think it's cool, but why do you still have to have the tag still on your hat, the tag still on your shirt? . . . I saw it the other day on the train. . . . Some guy had it on his pants. ...

Freddie: They think it's cool. I don't think it's cool. Why you gonna leave the tag on?

Kristen: Who started doing that first?

Freddie: Well the rappers and then people pick it up from the rappers.

Freddie's reference to rap artists in the context of his experience gets at a significant point: VMC was not only the basis of the gangsta narrative where hardness, coolness, style, and flash were derived from and constructed through VMC, it was also a means of making sense of the local masculinities which

intersected youth lives. More succinctly, VMC was both a source for producing, and a resource for making sense of, gender narratives.

LOCALIZING GENDER NARRATIVES AT HOPE

"Masculinities," as Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman (2002) wrote, "[are] accomplished through the exploitation of available cultural resources such as the ideologies prevalent in particular societies" (p. 3). In every community some "versions" of masculinity will be more dominant than other versions (Connell, 2002, pp. 81 3; Mac an Ghaill, 1994).[5] Indeed, as it is impossible to conceptualise gender apart from social context and from other social categories that give each other meaning (Archer, 2003, p. 21), the versions of masculinity that hold particular sway, for youth in certain places and times, will depend on local circumstances as well as on categories such as race, class, or sexual orientation (see also Holland et al., 1998).

At Hope—where the boys I worked with lived in and through various social inequities—the dominant or "popular" (Frosh et al., 2002) masculinity, was the classed and raced masculinity based on the gangsta narrative described in the previous paragraphs. Embodied as a black (and in New York sometimes Latino), hyper-masculine form, the gangsta masculinity was drawn from the boys' lived experiences and VMC, as well as propagated by the local "gender order" (Connell, 2002). Adapting Connell (2002), the local gender order, which is part of all local places, is made up of the dominant values and ideals of gender. It articulates the prevailing and compelling ideologies of communities, institutions, and nation-states that postulate the ways in which males should act and the roles they should take. For boys at Hope, masculinity was comprised of these enduring Western ideologies which were part of the prevailing gender order that traditionally held "real" men to be, for example, "tough, emotionally unexpressive, detached, responsible, and occupationally successful" (Majors, Tyler, Peden & Hall, 1994, p. 250). The gangsta masculinity for boys at Hope, therefore, was extremely powerful: it held popular and personal appeal for black and Latino youth living in an urban environment, as well as influential sway, as it was connected to and bore the imprints of more powerful overarching Western models of masculinity.

However, despite the significance of the gangsta masculinity, the boys at Hope did not (and could not) fully invest in all the ideals of this particular

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5 Though contested, the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" drawn from Connell (e.g. Connell, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) is useful in imagining how forms of masculinity gain dominance not through force but through the transmission of ideals woven through the gender order; championed through community, through VMC itself, and through institutions such as schools. (See Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; for a summary of critiques on concept of hegemonic masculinity.) Archer (2003) helpfully wrote of "hegemonic masculinities" (p.15), and further of "local hegemony" "developed and utilized to account for the ways in which particular discourses may be powerful, or hegemonic, within highly localized instances" (p. 16).

masculinity. It seemed that although the boys' lives may have resonated with some of the social experiences of gangsta rappers (i.e. living through difficult material conditions, growing up black or Latino in the inner-city), and although dominant ideals of masculinity that circulated place were influential and pervasive, the boys were active agents with individual identity combinations, families, and trajectories. It was, in part, these individual and collective local experiences that seemed to not only constrain their investment in various ideals (e.g. boys could not for various reasons fully invest in the hardness propagated by gangsta rap), but also were brought to bear on what the boys themselves considered to be the most important ideals of masculinity. In this case, of the countless ideals and valued qualities of masculinity drawn from both the gangsta narrative and gender order more broadly that boys revered, sometimes reworked, and consistently used in the negotiation and performance of their own identities, four were most profoundly evident in the data: toughness; survival; community, friends and family; and talent. As space is limited, I will focus here on toughness only and begin to illustrate how the boys used VMC to negotiate the meanings of this valued quality in resonance with their own experiences and material circumstances.

"Why do you gotta go around with guns in your pocket instead of using your fists?": negotiating toughness. For the boys at Hope toughness, found in both the gangsta narrative and in traditional constructions of masculinity, was the most esteemed ideal of masculinity. In concert with their own lives, boys seemed to produce this ideal in resistance to a gangsta toughness that postulated a hyper-masculine hardness asserted through violence, including gun use, and getting into "beefs" or fights with other rappers. All of the boys denigrated and rejected gangsta rappers' use of guns. As Malcolm flipped through pages of Vibe magazine he pointed to a picture of 50 Cent and spoke about the controversy surrounding a particular photo of the rapper holding a baby, with a gun tucked into the back of his pants. "He a coward," he told me. "I mean why would anyone be carrying a gun? He probably have a bullet-proof vest on right now." During an interview, Freddie also spoke about 50 Cent.

Freddie: Well I don't know 'cause I'm not gonna grow up like him he scared of everybody—

Kristen: Is he scared of everybody?

Freddie: Because well in my opinion, because why you gotta go around with guns in your pocket instead of using your fists? [Makes fists with hands]. You know like fists [punches the air]. . .

Freddie: I'm very against guns. If I ever got into a fight, just to let you know, whoever uses guns, they're cowards. I understand the cops that's a different story because they're protecting the world, but me? I would never use guns in my life. I would always use my fists.

As Freddie denounces the use of guns, and labels those who use them cowards, it could be argued that he resists the gangsta connection between toughness and gun use, without fully rejecting the ideal of toughness. Instead, negotiating between violence propagated in the gangsta narrative and a more traditional masculinity constituting the gender order in place that insists men stand up for themselves, Freddie at once reworks 50 Cent as a coward and, in a sense, reworks what it means to be tough: carrying a gun is now cowardly and using your fists is tough. Boys negotiated the meaning of toughness within the framework of their own lives, age, and family experiences which sometimes kept them from desiring or obtaining weaponry. For example, 10-year-old Jeremy, who had personal experiences with gangs, mentioned how his older brother told him to never under any circumstances carry a weapon.

Another aspect of being tough was staying out of trouble, not getting into beefs or fights with other rappers, and generally doing your own thing. Again, almost in opposition to the hardness and violence propagated by many of the gangsta rappers, boys talked about toughness as being able to, "say no to beefs." In an interview Jeremy mentioned, "Don't get in trouble, 'cause one time my brother put some place that he told us not to go and you know I don't want to end up there someday if I misbehave or whatever." Continuing to draw on hip-hop, the boys described VMC they believed embodied a toughness that was different from the violence and trouble-making of the gangsta rapper (even though many of the artists they cited would still be considered in this genre). Citing rapper Young Jeezy, 11-year-old Gabe from the Bronx spoke in an interview about staying out of trouble: "I got a lotta respect for him [Young Jeezy], you know, he's cool he doesn't look for no trouble he's just out there to make money the right way by makin' music he doesn't dis [disrespect] anybody." For boys at Hope, "respect" was not only a term, but also an organising concept: a means of articulating and measuring valued qualities of masculinities including toughness, survival, community, friends and family, and talent. In hip-hop vernacular, respect is a means of expressing honour, remembrance, or the outward expression valuing of friends, family, other artists (see Boyd, 2002). Here Young Jeezy is respected by Gabe for not looking for trouble.

Although the boys respected those artists who stayed out of trouble, this did not mean that one did not stand up for oneself. On the contrary, for the boys, an aspect of toughness was not letting people "step on you." The boys spoke

about VMC in which men stood up for themselves and their family and friends. Speaking about wrestler John Sena, Gabe remarked, "John Sena …I know it's the business [wrestling] like to make the money, but to me, John Sena is like a person [who]…never backs down. He's always there to stick up for himself."

Finally, being tough was about having tenacity and determination. Drawn directly from gangsta rap and hip-hop, this trait was not reworked by boys, but understood through gangsta rappers. Tenacity was spoken about in the context of artists who had been through hard times and kept going or who always knew what they wanted and worked hard to get it. During an interview, Jeremy spoke about 50 Cent and compared 50's determination with his own: "You know, he know his whole life that he wanna make music, and he did it, and I will do it too."

Overall, the boys did not simply mirror the ideals of toughness or hardness as they were constructed by the popular gangsta masculinity or by the dominant gender ideologies in local place more broadly, but rather drew on, and reacted to and against forms of VMC, bringing VMC into concert with their own lived individual and collective experiences. It seemed the boys needed to constantly negotiate between the powerful meanings of masculinity, which are part of places, and conveyed through VMC and their own individual lives and material circumstances. VMC played a central role in this negotiation: not only were various ideals and, more broadly, narratives embodied in VMC, but youth used VMC as a further resource to continuously negotiate and actively rework the meanings of these ideals: to, in a sense, negotiate new local masculinities.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As noted at the beginning of this article, one of my aims was to contribute a singular analysis of the ways in which these particular boys' in New York City used VMC to negotiate aspects of their masculinities; however, my more significant agenda was to demonstrate the complex relationship between youth lives and identities, local places, and visual material culture. My intention was to offer a small slice of the larger ethnography—in a sense, provide a case—that would start to exemplify the ways in which young people's engagement with VMC is relational, active, at once personal, collective, local (and global). Although multiple implications for art education can be drawn from this cultural analysis (see Eglinton, 2009) here I simply suggest this analysis points to the importance of theoretically, empirically, and pedagogically (re)positioning youth as active agents who participate in the construction of their own identities. Further, it underlines the need to (re)conceptualise culture, places, and identities (including identity markers such as race and gender) as fluid, relational, and dynamic (see, Desai, 2003; Dolby, 2001; McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood & Park,

2003). Finally, this analysis points to a crucial need for understanding VMC as important "tools of identity" (Hannerz, 1983) and for a deeper reflection and emphasis in art education on the ways that young people's use of VMC in the construction of identities is linked to local places, which I found to constrain and enable youth actions, meanings, and practices.

In this sense, I would suggest a critical place-based pedagogy (Gruenwald, 2003; see also Graham, 2007; Gruenwald & Smith, 2008) offers promise for art education.[6] Rather than focusing strictly on ecological issues, a critical place-based pedagogy summons youth and educators alike to explore the multiple identities constituting places, and the ways in which those identities are constructed and continuously transformed in concert with the dynamics of localities (Freire & Giroux, 1989; Graham, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003). What is more, critical place-based pedagogy brings together the importance of transformation through critique and the examination of ideology, injustices, and inequality—three powerful aspects inevitably threaded through young people's use of visual material culture in actively constructing and negotiating their selves and worlds.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

6   Place-based education is pedagogy that takes into account the local social and natural communities with/in which students live out their lives. A great deal of place-based education is focused on ecological concerns, much of it targeting concerns of rural and/or indigenous communities (e.g. Bequette, 2007).

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