

A Review of Visual and Cultural Identity Constructs of Global Youth and Young Adults: Situated, Embodied and Performed Ways of Being, Engaging, and Belonging

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The Routledge book series on Research in Cultural and Media Studies now includes the title, *Visual and Cultural Identity Constructs of Global Youth and Young Adults: Situated and Performed Ways of Being, Engaging, and Belonging*,¹ edited by art education scholar and professor Fiona Blaikie. This 276-page volume features thirteen chapters by a range of established and emerging researchers and scholars from across the globe, offering new ways of understanding how the shifting identities of young people are constructed through visual and cultural markers. The transdisciplinary collection is inspired in part by a symposium that Professor Blaikie organized at Brock University in February 2019, “Impression Management: Construction of Visual and Cultural Identities in North American Adolescents.” The chapters represent scholars from art education, anthropology, sociology, child and youth studies, gender studies, literacy studies, and educational studies exploring questions of youth and young adults’ strategies for interacting with society and finding their place within it. The contributors to this edited volume seek not only to illuminate their multi-layered understandings of research participants’ identity constructs, but also to engage with critical and experimental methodological approaches.

Visual and Cultural Identity Constructs of Global Youth and Young Adults embraces a ground-breaking and participatory, less autocratic means of constructing knowledge, drawing on, among others, posthumanism, new materialism, affect, worlding, weak theory, as well as gender and queer theory. The authors avoid invoking “grand narratives” (Blaikie, 2021, p. 1) to explain the results of their inquiries. Blaikie presents fellow authors and thinkers who self-reflexively explore the in-between moments in their data gathering, those hard to categorize or capture, and maybe even undesirable, but that leave a lasting impression. The

1 For the sake of transparency, it should be noted that although this reviewer was not involved in any aspect of the edited volume under discussion, Fiona Blaikie serves as the reviewer’s doctoral supervisor.

approach is in line with anthropologist Kathleen Stewart's (2007) rejection of "[t]he notion of a totalized system, of which everything is always already somehow a part" (p. 1). Stewart (2007) notes the following about such affect-laden instances: "Unwanted intensities simmer up at the least provocation" (p. 47). Long after concluding each chapter, the reader, not unlike the researchers, is left thinking about what makes these intensities stand out and what they might mean. To this end, in the opening chapter, art education scholar Dónal O'Donoghue (2021) explains the reason for deliberately omitting interpretive analysis when sharing narrative accounts of the experiences of his research participants, who were boys in single-sex schools in Canada. In his chapter, O'Donoghue suggested that the schoolboys could create artistic photographs, short films, and sound recordings. By eschewing a traditional analysis, the author creates a space for readers themselves to be free to think and experience the resulting accounts in their own way, without a prescribed interpretation. The effect is one of immediacy and a sense of direct witnessing.

The collection, which begins with a preface by Professor of Equity and Social Justice Education Wayne Martino, is organized in three sections. The first section, "Contextualizing Embodiments in Space and Place," contains, among others, a chapter by sociologist Kevin Gosine. "Reconciling divergent realms in the lives of marginalized students" discusses Gosine's humble roots in Toronto's Regent Park, a socially and economically marginalized public housing community that is Canada's oldest and largest. Raised by his mother and grandmother, Gosine, like many others in the neighbourhood, experienced racial and class-based oppression along with stigmatization, a "demonization and othering" (Gosine, 2021, p. 78), by the wider society. In response, a strong neighbourhood bond ensued and Gosine contrasted the resulting intensely collectivist spirit with the neoliberal, individualistic mindset of middle-class environments and professionals whose ranks he joined when he became an academic. The chapter argues for a third space within standard schooling; one where it is possible to embrace disenfranchised youth's lived experience, their strengths and sense of collective identity to foster improved academic engagement, thus supporting the potential for higher educational results and socioeconomic status.

The next section, "Making and Engaging," includes a chapter by Child and Youth Studies scholar Shauna Pomerantz and her then-11-year-old co-researching daughter, Miriam Field. In their chapter, "A TikTok assemblage: Girlhood, radical media engagement, and parent-child generativity," they model a "[r]adical media engagement [that] led us to ask different questions of each other because an unstructured space for inquiry was opened" (Pomerantz & Field, 2021, p. 152). Their chapter explores their process of making dance videos together that they post on TikTok, addressing St. Pierre's (2021) call for researchers to create new ways of approaching scholarly inquiry. In effect, they help to de-

velop a post qualitative inquiry based on "relationality, and not individuation" (Pomerantz & Field, 2021, p. 153), which may more appropriately tackle the problems that are particular to the 21st century. The third section, "Becoming and Belonging," features the final four chapters, among which an autoethnographic chapter by Giang Nguyen Hoang Le. "Living a queer life in Vietnam" is at times startling for its ability to draw the reader in as a complicit bystander to the emotional violence that the author suffered in a heteronormative family and society, both as a boy and a young man. The complexity of oppression defies hard boundaries and one of the moments in Le's first-person storytelling vignettes reminds the reader that the seeming line between victim and victimizer can be crossed. Under pressure as a male and secretly gay teacher at a traditional college in Vietnam and worried for his job, Le (2021) recalls performing masculinity so as to hide any traces of queerness:

I tried very hard to look strict and tough. I believed toughness represented the masculinity of a straight male teacher. Hence, I became very strict with my students, making them scared of me and, at the same time, I felt safe. I learned that making people afraid of you is a good way to hide your vulnerability. (p. 224)

The above excerpt demonstrates how Le disciplined himself in Vietnam to conform to gendered expectations. Using queer theory now as a doctoral researcher in Canada, he contests heterosexist hegemony and oppression as he looks back on his lived experience within the context of Vietnamese Confucianism and Buddhism. He also explores the struggle against alienation through performativity of gender and the sense of fitting in and acceptance of oneself, by oneself and by others. The chapter is illustrative of the volume's focus on the effort expended by young people on identity construction, transformation, being and belonging.

Moreover, the issue of how far to take performance to conform or to stage an intervention is taken up in anthropologist Colin McLaughlin-Alcock's chapter about the social difference experienced by young public artists in Amman, Jordan, against a backdrop of Ammani conservative society. Largely based on McLaughlin-Alcock's (2021) ethnographic fieldwork, which included conversations with artists in a progressive, graduate level fine arts program, the author notes that the different artists had a variety of approaches with which to address the "profound boundary separating Amman's art world from general society" (p. 243). Some artists wanted to confront and challenge, while others preferred a more gradual engagement. Yet, they always regarded "the artist as a socially dynamic site, a performative effective entity, through which wider constructions of difference can be reimagined" (McLaughlin-Alcock, 2021, p. 244). The role of the artist as a poten-

tial catalyst for change, perhaps a countercultural figure, however, is not guaranteed or necessarily supportive of social justice aims. While McLaughlin-Alcock observes that Foucault (2011) and Bourdieu (1993) see artists as standing apart from societal norms, giving them a certain autonomy that enables artists to be truth sayers, he also notes the work of researchers that find that artists and their cultural capital can be associated with gentrification, along with a neoliberal ethos, as well as with fostering cultural stereotypes, and an alignment with state power. The need to attend to the specific and to avoid generalizing comes through here, as human experience is subjective, and McLaughlin-Alcock (2021) situates his work as such, investigating “a particular kind of difference” (p. 232), which is situated in a particular historical time and a specific local site. This fits with the overall approach of the collection where unlike in modernist grand narratives, “meanings are contingent on multiple interpretations” (Blaikie, 2021, p. 1).

While identity construction of youth through visual arts and culture is the unifying theme of this volume, each chapter in this collection engages with the question of how knowledge is produced and what the role is of the researcher in the process. The authors practice various forms of self-reflexivity. Professors teaching graduate qualitative method courses will be particularly interested in this scholarly collection that showcases an array of innovative approaches to researching the lives of young people in and around schools. Doctoral students in the field of educational studies who are engaged in qualitative inquiry will find the collection helpful, too, as it models how to think with theory when analyzing qualitative research data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

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