

TROUBLING IDENTITY AND LITERACY: YOUNG ADOLESCENTS'
SUBJECTIVITIES AND LITERACIES USING POPULAR CULTURE TEXTS

by

MARGARET CARMODY HAGOOD

(Under the direction of Dr. Donna Alvermann)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this 20-week, cross-continental study was to map how seven, 12- and 13-year-old young adolescents living in Australia and the United States used popular culture in their literacy lives to construct notions of themselves. Guided by poststructural theories of the self and cultural studies theories of production and consumption, this study addressed (1) how adolescents are named, structured, and situated in particular ways, as particular people based upon categorizations of adolescence and on the adolescents' interests in popular culture, (2) how adolescents use popular culture to perpetuate categories that have named them, but also to push against and sometimes to temporarily knock down those categories that force them into being particular people with particular identities, and (3) how adolescents shape new ideas, categories, and understandings through the tensions of being produced as particular people and of constructing ways of being someone different. Data gathered over two, 10-week periods in Australia and the United States included 8-12 hours of daily observational fieldnotes taken before, during, and after school and occasionally on weekends; taped interviews with adolescents, teachers, and parents; dialogue journals between the researcher and each adolescent; researcher journal notes; artifacts; and adolescents' photo self documentary of the popular culture texts in their lives. Data were analyzed within each local context and across global contexts using poststructural rhizomatic cartography and chiaroscuro, an artistic technique. Analysis of data showed how adolescents read and used texts differently. Sometimes they used texts as a perpetuation of an identity they wanted for themselves, while other times they used texts to push against identities that defined them in particular ways. Implications of this study suggest that adolescents' uses of popular culture are a complex mix of identity production and subjectivity construction that relate to societal structures that name and define adolescents and their uses of popular culture.

INDEX WORDS: Adolescents, Popular Culture, Literacy, Identity, Subjectivity,
Poststructural theory, Cultural Studies, Rhizoanalysis, Chiaroscuro

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To

A, Amanda, L'il J, Rosa,

Tee, Timony, and Tommy:

Seven of the most dedicated teachers I've ever had.

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PREQUEL¹:

A NOTE TO THE COMMITTEE

She would never say where she came from
Yesterday won't matter if it's gone
While the sun is bright
Or in the darkest night
No one knows
She comes and goes

Don't question why she needs to be so free
She'll tell you it's the only way to be
She just can't be chained
To a life where nothing's gained
And nothing's lost
Without a cost

There's no time to lose I heard her say
Catch your dreams before they slip away
Dying all the time
Lose your dreams
And you will lose your mind.
Ain't life unkind?

Goodbye Ruby Tuesday
Who could hang a name on you?
When you change with ev'ry new day
Still I'm gonna miss you.

“Ruby Tuesday”

Lyrics and Music by Mick Jagger
& Keith Richards (1967)

Performed by *The Rolling Stones*

¹ A literary device used to show nonlinearity of a period of time: a writing that is written last, but is deliberately placed before previously finished writings. George Lucas used the notion of prequel in *Star Wars: Episode 1, The Phantom Menace* (McCallum & Lucas, 1999), which was written, produced, and filmed after Episodes Four through Six, and then placed before them.

In high school I kept a notebook of lyrics that I handwrote as I listened to songs over and over on a yellow, waterproof Sony Walkman. “Ruby Tuesday” was the first song I transcribed into the spiral book because I was drawn to the line “Lose your dreams and you will lose your mind.” Fifteen years later, when I began to write this dissertation, I wrote this line down and taped it to my computer monitor alongside a printed email note I had received from a friend who had written, “Rock on pop woman. Kids everywhere need you to pull this off.” These two tidbits have kept me going toward an unknown ending for the past year through reading, writing, reading, analyzing, reading, and rewriting. Jagger and Richards’s (1967) lyrics have time and again reminded me of Foucault’s (1984/1990) statement “that it is not necessary to know exactly what I am” (p. 9). In an interview entitled “Truth, Power, Self,” Michel Foucault (1982/1988) said,

The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say in the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don’t know what will be the end. (p. 9)

I’ve long wondered what the ending of this project would be. With twists and turns this study has taken shape, a shape unlike a standard sort of dissertation. But I didn’t begin the doctoral program in Reading Education at UGA thinking that I’d write an alternative dissertation. Eventually though I began to take seriously Foucault’s (1984/1990) stance that “There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (p.8).

Richard Rorty (1989) shared Foucault's sentiments. He wrote that writers feel a sense of conjuncturalism—the need to try “writing at just the right moment in just the right way” (p. 174). What is that right way? Is there a right way? I wanted to know. I needed the space to think differently, to look differently while still remaining part of higher education.

After long conversations with parents, teachers, mentors, adolescents, siblings, researchers, and friends who encouraged and prodded me to find a way to represent this study so that it would be reader friendly for them, I decided to try a different way of writing, albeit with the writing and thoughts of others influencing my own writing and thoughts. That meant stopping my habit of looking for others' words to explain what I wanted to say, while knowing all along that these works guided me. In fits and starts I wrote and rewrote. First I wrote with others words. Then I rewrote and translated again what I had written, still lost in others' words, in others' thinking. Throughout multiple drafts of trying to say the same thing in different ways I kept in mind that I wanted this text to be accessible to parents, teachers, and adolescents, while also meeting the needs of academic research, of researchers and teacher educators.

Mansfield (2000) stated that people in society are “unsettled by things that cross lines, especially those that seem to belong to both sides, that blur and question the whole process of demarcation” (p. 83). I have tried to cross lines with this work—to force what Reinking and Alvermann (2000) described as “a collision between two alien worlds” (p. 450)—in an effort to write up this study as research that would be seen as scholarly but also read by people outside of academia. This is my attempt to write using a “double gesture,” a “double writing, that is a writing that is in and of itself multiple” (Derrida,

1981/1972, p. 41). I'm not sure if I've capably written in a double gesture, though I've tried. Verdict's out. We'll see.

In the *Haunters of Ruins: The Photography of Clarence John Laughlin*, authors Lawrence and Brady (1997) honor the artistic work of the late Clarence John Laughlin, a renowned photographer who documented in his own obscure way the raw and natural beauty of Louisiana, my original stomping grounds. Laughlin's photographs were built around his use of chiaroscuro, a concept used by artists to create depth for two-dimensional objects using shades of light and dark. Speaking of their desire to "get it right" in their representation of Laughlin's work, they wrote in their opening,

For anyone whose mind perceives more complexity than can be expressed on a bumper sticker or in a sound bite on the evening news, the challenge is to create a single linear text, choosing and placing each letter and each word to march in an orderly sequence across one page and onto the next. Words set carefully in this fashion invite a reader to follow the lines of letters, decipher the linear sequence of words, and re-create in one's consciousness an approximation of the full complexity originally perceived in the mind of the author. (p. 1)

These authors desired to re-create in words Laughlin's photographic lifework and to present this information in such a linear fashion that readers would clearly understand what Laughlin had in mind as he worked and authored visual texts. I came to realize that the data of this study didn't work linearly. Attending to the data and to my desire to think differently, this text might not look like or read like a traditional academic text.

I greatly admire Laughlin's work and his use of chiaroscuro in his photography to include the image and its shadow. The idea of the image and its shadow has long been

part of representation. Roland Barthes (1973/1975) theoretically applied chiaroscuro to the process of reading. He theorized that texts carry shadows, too. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes (1973/1975) wrote

There are those who want a text without a shadow, without the ‘dominant ideology;’ but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text. The text needs its shadow: this shadow is a *bit* of ideology, a *bit* of representation, a *bit* of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro. (p.32)

This dissertation does in fact carry shadows, and the shadows have produced a form of chiaroscuro that has led to writing and representing the data in a different vein. The study that follows combines the elements of academic research with the writing and representation of the layperson, which is my attempt to think and perceive differently than I have before. My hope is that I’ve written it well enough so that it is recognized as an academic work. In this writing I’ve come to think like Fuery (1995) that “Only when the darkness of the systems of knowledge is recognised can there be any sense of illumination” (p. 76). The shadows of this text illuminate my own different ways of thinking and of representing data differently. Not as a better form of representation, just a different one. In the chapters to come, no formal citational references appear, though this study was surely informed by theory and research. The most salient references are contained in the Appendix.

As readers, don’t feel constricted by the linearity of the presentation of this text like the biographical writers documenting Laughlin’s work felt. Appearances are deceiving, and assumptions are made about proceeding based upon appearances. I am

bound by the constraints of the structure. Read this text rhizomatically, if you like, in the order that works for you. I think that no matter what I write or how I write it readers will form their own opinions of the text and will construct their own illuminations and shadows from their reading.

This writing occurred rhizomatically—data connected to ideas and to writing in non-linear ways. So readers can jump in wherever they want, which might not necessarily be at what appears to be the beginning. So, if methodology of this study is of greatest interest, skip around and read Chapter 7, or begin with the background of the study in Chapter 1. If the theories and research that informed the study seem most appealing, turn to the Appendix. Or read first Chapters 2-6 if the literacy practices involving popular culture of seven adolescents if it is of greatest interest. Find a middle and jump in where you'd like!

March 29, 2002

Athens, GA, U.S.A.

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PREFACE

“I just don’t get it. You’re still into studying popular culture? I thought you said that you were interested in literacy, adolescents, and education,” Caroline ribbed me.

I imagined that she rolled her eyes to emphasize her point as we talked. I can’t recall how many times I’ve had this conversation with my sister in the past several years. It’s okay, I thought to myself. We don’t necessarily see eye-to-eye on topics related to education, but she’s a good person with whom to discuss ideas—she’s a teacher and a single mother. I’m a researcher and teacher educator; before that I was a classroom teacher.

“I just don’t know what in the world you get out of popular culture,” she continued. “You know, I am really just offended by a lot of it. I have to tell Matthew (her 14-year-old son) to turn off most of the music we hear when we’re together in the car. Most popular culture—it doesn’t even have to be music—is totally inappropriate, violent, over-the-top, or sexually suggestive, and it’s not all that thought provoking either. Young people are growing up way too fast and are just trying to act like celebrities and fashion models and rappers who make big money. The majority of popular culture is all a moneymaking scheme anyway, and young people get swept up in it. So why go there?”

I switched the phone to my other ear and doodled on a sheet of paper as I listened to her argument.

“I am aware of some popular culture, but I don’t think it’s absolutely necessary to know all the ins and outs of young people’s current interests. I mean, I understand that

it's what young people like. It's entertainment," she reasoned. As she talked, I stopped my continuous tracing of an infinity shape on the top right corner of my page and began to scribble down some ideas. Caroline went on.

"And it might help us as teachers to have some popular magazines, or whatever, available in our classroom for young people who have few interests and are not interested in or really good at reading so that we can hook them and teach them to read. But when it comes down to it, I just don't think that knowing about young people's popular culture has a whole lot to do with real teaching and learning."

She paused. I stopped jotting notes and returned to tracing the infinity sign. It was becoming darker and bolder as my pen moved around in a figure eight. I thought about saying something, but then I began rereading what I had written on my paper. I waited to see where she wanted to go with the conversation. She then tried to lighten what seemed to be the making of a serious conversation by shifting away from the topic of popular culture and schooling altogether.

"Now," she careened in a mock teacherly voice, "What would you like to know about *Snoopy Dog Dog*?"

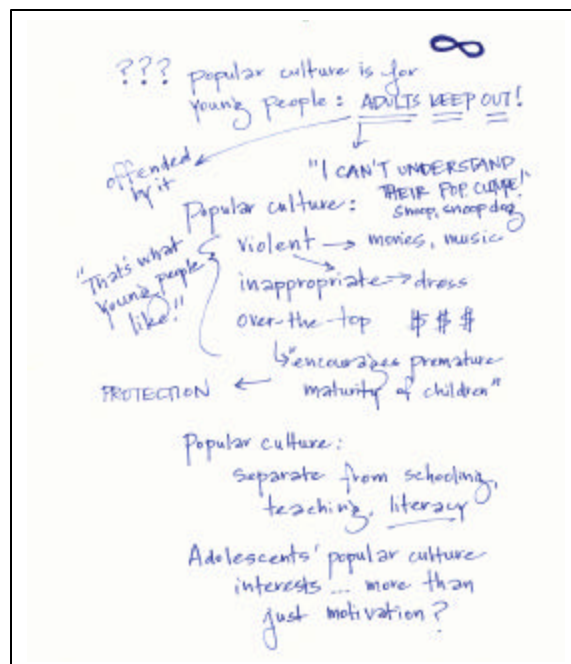
I burst out laughing at her unexpected segue back into the same conversation. "You've mixed up a lot of popular culture there," I teased her. I wondered if her scrambled word choice was intentional, but decided not to ask directly. "Do you mean *Snoopy*, as in the Charles Shultz's *Peanuts* comic character, or do you mean *Snoop Dog*, the rap artist?" I thought for a moment and added all the derivatives to my list. "Well, there was a point where he went by *Snoop Doggy Dog*. Which one do you want to talk about?" I asked.

“Oh, Margaret!” she groaned and laughed. “I don’t have *any* idea! I know just enough to get by,” she lithely replied.

“Isn’t that part of it though?” I piped up, swiveling around in my chair. Now I had questions to ask. “As an adult, a mother of four adolescents, and a teacher? Isn’t it sort of cool, and appropriate, by the way, to be the adult on the cusp of popular culture? As a cusper, you can show others that you know something about popular culture without actually claiming it or being in to it. It’s a comfortable position. But you have to be extremely careful! If you come across to adolescents, or adults, as knowing *too* much, they might think *you’re* into popular culture. And then as a cusper you’re in for big trouble!”

“Don’t worry about me. But that might be something that you want to consider for yourself,” she quickly remarked.

I smiled, mirthfully confused by her comment. After we hung up the phone, I sat and reviewed the notes I had scrawled on a pad during our conversation.



My conversation with Caroline mimics conversations I've had with other adults who live or work with adolescents. Popular culture is a loose and amorphous term that encompasses lots of things, and people's perceptions of it trigger immediate and strong responses. For some, popular culture equals pleasures—mindless imbibing, indulgence, a happy, carefree state of being. It's the idea of sheer enjoyment, like Caroline explained. People say, "Oh, popular culture. It's all right. It's just entertainment." Described like this, popular culture is just leisure, play, and gratification, and might include watching a weekly sitcom, reading a good romance novel while sitting on the beach, or playing two hours of video games. For those with this view, popular culture as pleasure might be used as a reward for a job accomplished: first work, then play. It's harmless; and besides, people need a bit of fun in their lives.

For others, popular culture symbolizes the bane of living in an indulgent society. Popular culture represents mass production of goods and total acceptance of what capitalism offers. Mention popular culture to people who think this way, and a world of images are conjured up of consumerism at its worst. When asked, some people respond like Caroline, saying, "I am offended by much of popular culture." Others say, "It's all just the same. People use it and don't even think about it." These perceptions of popular culture view consumption as mundane homogenization of differences among people—like the modular dress styles produced by companies like Gap or Old Navy. Much of people's reasoning for these feelings results from views that popular culture produces far-reaching effects of Americanization on people and cultures globally. Popular culture is immediately categorized in negative terms: inappropriate, violent, greedy, suggestive,

modular, sexual, tempting, encouraging, wrong. It's dangerous because it is ubiquitous and has become commonplace in our day-to-day lives.

What is it about popular culture that brings about such strong, dichotomous emotions and views from anyone—from Caroline and me, from critics and fans? Popular culture is actually so vast and vague a topic that to assume any understanding of it, without breaking it into bits and pieces and describing specific aspects of it, is to assure some miscommunication about how people use it in their lives. To be sure, to discuss popular culture as a general subject elicits a gambit of feelings, including disdain and disgust, respect and pleasure, concerns about private and public life, and all feelings in between.

Caroline is not alone in her thinking that popular culture connotes the world of adolescent life. People of all ages experience popular culture through various media—music, movies, books, the Internet, magazines, television, and the like. Young children attach themselves to characters such as The Little Mermaid or Winnie-the-Pooh, dressing up like them, watching shows about them, wanting to buy toothbrushes with these figurines on the ends of the brush. Adults aren't too different with their interests in popular culture, either. They find pleasure in weekly television shows, getting together in groups to watch Thursday night "Must See TV," for example. And if that doesn't strike a note, how about watching Monday Night Football, doing the Hustle, or having a Dorothy Hamil hairdo?

And though popular culture affects people of all ages, it is most often associated with adolescents and youth culture. Perhaps it is because popular culture is apparent in observable facets of adolescents' lives that it is often attributed only to this age group. It

seems that adolescents' uses of popular culture are limitless. They seamlessly weave snippets of popular culture into their speech and language. Their interests in popular culture, which include reading books and magazines, watching television and movies, chatting on and surfing the Internet, and playing sports, inform their thinking and beliefs. And these interests often become focal points of their conversations. Popular culture is also given credit for, and many times blame for, the ways adolescents choose to dress and behave.

People who do research on literacy and popular culture often use the term literacy practices to describe the ways that people use popular culture texts—such as books, movies, the Internet, etc.—in their day-to-day lives. Adolescents use these literacy practices involving popular culture—such as talking, dressing, writing, reading, viewing, behaving, and thinking— to develop notions of themselves that others recognize as part of their identities. Adolescent identities that are informed by popular culture are controversial and suggest to some people the heavy-handed influence that popular culture has on impressionable youth who will one day be the leaders of our societies. So, when adolescents' constructions of themselves in the ways they dress, act, and read are connected to popular culture, discussions about education, adolescent literacy, and adolescents' literacy practices become only ever-more complicated and heated among adults.

Caroline nailed me, and she was right: I am a prime example of one of those who has experienced mixed emotions about the uses of popular culture in my own life and in relation to adolescents' lives. I've argued out of both sides of my mouth, vacillating between embracing popular culture as part of my own literacy habits and discrediting any

literacy practices remotely related to what I categorized as popular culture. Though popular culture has figured prominently in my life, I have been on both sides of the debate as an adolescent and adult, as a student, teacher, and researcher. Like adolescents who use popular culture in their day-to-day lives, I am continuously confronted with the ways that popular culture has attempted to shape my identity and with my own my literacy practices involving popular culture that I've used to construct my own understandings of myself.

I can't help but recall the popular culture that shaped who I saw myself as being and from which I constructed understanding of myself almost two decades ago in my teenage years. As a 13-years-old, I made decisions that often involved literacy practices with popular culture. For example, I thought myself to be an aspiring athlete—not just in playing but also in learning from others. I attended local Centenary College basketball games at the Gold Dome with my father and brothers, watched with a passion college and professional basketball on television, and tried to emulate the male players I admired. (Female players received little press, and the professional female NBA had yet to be considered for organization.) I studied these men and gathered information about the sport by reading the popular culture that surrounded their play. I read game programs, listened to announcers call players' names and numbers, and observed how only the best players had their numbers retired and hung from the walls or ceilings of basketball arenas.

I also vividly remember having to choose a number that was to be printed on the front and back of the basketball jersey for the girls' team on which I played point guard. Coach Beneke wrote down the other girls' preferences on a clipboard. When it came time

for me to call out the number I wanted, I said that I needed to think about it overnight. For me, choosing a jersey number was a complicated matter that involved more than just selecting any number randomly or using a lucky number. I recall thinking that it was just as important as choosing a name for confirmation into the Catholic Church! I believed that the number was important for showing others on the court and in the stands that I knew more than just how to play the sport. I wanted to be connected to the college and professional players I respected. I needed help.

Before I made this decision that I recall as being monumental in my life I sought counsel from my older brother who was better versed on accomplished NBA players and their associated jersey numbers. I greatly respected Michael's opinion, as he was a high school basketball player, and I was just a junior high kid. Playing horse on the basketball court at my parents' house, he took me through the line-up of several NBA greats—Elgin Baylor, a *Los Angeles Laker* forward, *New York Knicks*'s Dave DeBusschere, and Clyde "The Glide" Drexler who had just begun his pro career with the *Portland Trailblazers*. All of these men were good shooters and excellent defenders, Michael guaranteed me. As well, two of Michael's own fellow basketball teammates at Jesuit High School also took the number 22 to famed glory in their high school basketball league. Armed with this information, I returned to my coach the next day and aptly chose the number 22. Even though it was never retired, that number ironed onto the jersey under "Carmody" in white block letters remained my team number throughout junior high and high school.

Aside from popular culture surrounding sports, I was also quite taken with Madonna, not only as a musician but also as a dancer. I read and used videos, album covers, and articles involving Madonna to construct notions of myself. Not long after

Madonna hit the music scene wearing a mini on MTV while singing her first song, “Lucky Star,” miniskirts fast became all the rage at local junior high school dances. Though miniskirts were quite a different fashion style than any I knew in the mid 80s, I was less impressed with them than with studying Madonna’s dance moves. My girlfriends and I sat for hours in front of MTV, hoping to catch a glimpse of Madonna’s video so that we could study her moves and learn to dance like her. I remember thinking that Madonna was different from other celebrities of the time. One night I sat in bed and contrasted a picture of Madonna to the illustration of Muffy in *The Preppy Handbook*, which had been popular at my junior high the previous year.

As an eighth grader, I also participated in popular culture that was central to membership in my peer group. Several of my friends watched the miniseries “All the Rivers Run” on HBO and talked at length about it at school. My parents didn’t pay for that station at our home, so I missed out on the television drama. I couldn’t add to or be a part of the conversations with my friends at school until I bought a paperback version of the story that was displayed in a bookstore at the local mall. I was overjoyed to get the book, and I spent the entire weekend reading so that I could join in the discussion at school the following Monday.

I also routinely watched *Dynasty* (despite my parents’ disapproval) along with the rest of my girlfriends on Wednesday nights. Our Thursday cafeteria conversations primarily covered the antics of Sammy Jo Carrington, played by Heather Locklear. When our commentary on Sammy Jo’s behavior from the previous evening’s episode waned, discussion usually turned to the latest issue of a fashion magazine that someone brought to school. I wasn’t into fashion magazines, so I kept my lack of interest to myself. When

the other girls began to talk about models and dress designs, I was quick to exit when I thought no one would notice.

I preferred to talk music: *A-ha*, *Bon Jovi*, David Bowie, Jackson Brown, *Culture Club*, *The Cure*, *The GoGos*, *The Police*, *Run DMC*, *The Talking Heads*, *Squeeze*, *The Tubes*, and *Yaz*. I had never seen *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*; it was an R-rated film. But Anne, my older sister, owned a bootlegged soundtrack, and I learned some of the songs as she drove me around town. I kept these lyrical gems handy for sharing if another person divulged some obscure and original music tidbit that I didn't know. This practice seemed similar to trading baseball cards. Knowledge of band names, albums, song titles, and new releases served as stats, and sharing rare or new information was like trading the best card in one's collection.

Funny thing is I never stopped being interested in popular culture despite my entry into adulthood. However, my interests in popular culture became a problem as an adult when I chose to become a teacher. During my undergraduate studies in teacher education, I learned to value school-based literacy in particular ways, ways that privileged particular kinds of academic literacy—particular kinds of talking and writing and particular kinds of print-based texts and award-winning books. Then, during five years of classroom teaching, I became a critic of popular culture—at least outwardly and in my identity as a teacher—when working with students. I personally kept up with the shifts and changes in Madonna's re-creation from pop-star to sex goddess to spiritual feminist, watched *Party of Five* weekly and MTV daily, and read *Spin* and *RollingStone* magazines, along with *Catholic Digest*, from cover-to-cover on the days my issue arrived in the mail. But I told myself that these practices were less than scholarly, only

entertainment to be read about or watched while on the Stairmaster at the gym, and involved mere mindless pleasures only fleetingly relevant to the rest of my professional life.

I was so concerned that my popular culture interests were unrelated to teaching and learning that I wouldn't admit to the students I taught that I even kept up with the current music scene or that I knew the ins and outs of the Salinger family! Instead, like I imagine the teachers who taught me thought, I began to think that popular culture was for playtime, for leisure, for fun—not for learning, work, and school. What's more, I learned to separate pleasure and fun from work and school. Mention of popular culture was reserved for areas outside of the classroom. I became one of those teachers who espoused the “first work, then play” motto, thinking that the meeting of the two in school would no doubt end in some catastrophe!

As a classroom teacher, I was never quite sure what to do with the popular culture that my students inevitably brought with them to school. I realized that students' popular culture interests yielded a plethora of information about them and about how they used literacy to inform their thinking about themselves and others, just as my own popular culture literacy habits gave others glimpses of me. I listened to my students' talk and observed how popular culture was woven into their discussions. I formed some cursory opinions of their popular culture interests and literacy habits that informed my thinking about their identities. But I never found out from the students I taught how they perceived popular culture or how they used popular culture in their lives. Without opening up the conversation with them, I could only work off my own assumptions of what I understood.

And, at that point in my life, popular culture was trivial in the classroom and unworthy of academic study.

My segmentation of popular culture between private and public lives as well as between texts deemed high and low culture pointed to my own understandings of the identity I thought I should take on as a teacher and particularly as a literacy teacher. I thought that my job was to teach my students about all they didn't know—and popular culture didn't seem to fit that category. They seemed to know a lot about popular culture! What's more, the association of popular culture with mindless activity, play, and pleasure didn't seem to fit well with the good literacy instruction, which I thought should address hard work and intellectual stimulation. Students' popular culture was summarily left outside the classroom. No stories written about *Power Rangers*, *X-Men*, *Hanson*, *The Shaq Attack*, *American Girl Dolls*, *Beanie Babies*, or *Donkey Kong*. No renditions of Playstation or Saga video games or discussion about the *Spice Girls*. No books read by R. L. Stine or from the Walt Disney series. No movies shown that had hit theatres around the United States. When my students protested, I responded quickly, declaring that they were more imaginative, more intellectual, and certainly more original in their thinking than what popular culture texts presented to them. I reasoned that they received plenty of exposure to popular culture outside of school, and *I* had other things to teach *them*. I told them that they needed bigger challenges to their thinking that popular culture couldn't provide. At the time, I believed what I said.

As a teacher who prided myself on good literacy instruction, I definitely steered clear of what I learned to consider commonplace and trivial. I opted instead to highlight what I thought were educationally sound texts—those that had merit according to my

teacherly criteria and that complied with implicitly sanctioned, school-defined popular culture (such as seasonal units about holidays, book discussions about Newberry Award winners, School Spirit Weeks, and celebrations of the 100th Day of School). I certainly tried to hold my students' attention and to engage them by exposing them to new ideas, but I avoided acknowledgement of their popular culture interests in the classroom, though it was certainly there. I engaged in discussions about my students' popular culture interests while outside the four walls of our classroom—on the playground, in the cafeteria, after school in the bus line—but those interests were curtailed at the doorjamb to our classroom. Never were they a part of literacy instruction.

My students undeniably learned about school-sanctioned subject matter over those years. But sometimes I wonder if *I* learned much about *them* and their literacy practices? I tried to segment literacy practices about popular culture from literacy practices involving high culture, but my students seamlessly crossed the boundaries I drew. Sometimes they smuggled their interests into the classroom and camouflaged them either by relating their own interests in popular culture to some sort of sanctioned curriculum study, which allowed the discussion of one in order to legitimize the other, or by keeping their popular culture interests under wraps in an intellectual way. The second tactic was certainly easier for students to control. They couldn't abide by my quirky and clumsily set guidelines that privileged only my objectives for them. And besides, popular culture was so much a part of their literacy lives that to ignore it was to ignore my students themselves. In the clothing they wore, the language they spoke, the writing they did, the topics they discussed, the books they chose to read during silent reading time, the school supplies they prized—all of these bits and pieces of popular culture illustrated the

ways they used literacy to construct notions of themselves. The insularity from literacy practices using popular culture that I tried to maintain didn't change anything for the students.

Five years ago I left classroom teaching to obtain a higher education degree in literacy education. As I settled into a routine of being a student again, I found all the popular culture interests of my life that I once kept separated from my work as a teacher of literacy began to move around fluidly again. No longer did I feel the need to parse out my literacy interests—high from popular culture. Actually I found whole areas devoted to the study of a broader notion of literacy that included media studies, visual literacies, and cultural studies. I also found that scholarly articles had been written about people's uses of popular culture in their lives that addressed their uses of the ostensibly mundane and that argued the legitimacy of popular culture. I read arguments for and against popular culture.

Over time, I found that educators in other parts of the world such as Australia, Canada, and England had begun examining how popular culture intersects with literacy. Popular culture once again seemed to cross boundaries across my in-school and out-of-school lives! But what has perplexed me over these recent years as a student is that though popular culture has become a legitimate focus in higher education, often the reach of edited books, journal articles, research reports, or book chapters remains within the confines of higher education. These writings, which are about popular culture of the everyday life, seemed to have been written for readers with an affiliation to higher education.

This book is my attempt to understand how it is that adolescents use popular culture as part of their literacy lives to make sense of themselves and the world around them. Based on a study of seven adolescents from China, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, and the United States living in either Australia or the United States, this book provides an in-depth examination of the intersection of adolescents, popular culture, and literacy. I could have written this book using the standard format of academic research: outlining a problem, conducting a literature review, describing the methodology, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, and giving implications for further study of the problem or of a related subject area. Though all of these research components were employed to guide this study of adolescents' popular culture literacies and constructions of themselves, writing this book in a standardized academic research genre would argue against the overall purpose of doing this study and would undo my attempts to acknowledge the working of popular culture across contexts. Rather than continue to delineate popular culture from high culture or to separate pleasures and enjoyment in popular culture from academic texts, I would like to show how each impacts the other in the writing of this book that is accessible to multiple groups of people both within and outside of higher education.

From my work with a diverse group of adolescents from all over the world, I share my understanding of adolescents' uses of popular culture as part of their literacy repertoires to construct notions of themselves. This book is written for interested adults—parents, teachers, social workers, principals, researchers, employers—who live and work with adolescents and who conceive of their time with adolescents (through education, parenting, social work, employment of adolescents, etc.) as a mix of teaching and

learning from the adolescents in their lives. It is also written for adolescents who diligently try to teach others about themselves through uses of popular culture as other, older people constantly teach them. This book attempts to provide for both adolescents and adults a different viewpoint and perspective on adolescents, their literacy practices surrounding popular culture, and their uses of popular culture to assemble notions of themselves. The perspectives shared in this book provide alternative jumping-off points to an ongoing discussion between adults and adolescents about the changing nature of literacy practices that affects both adolescents and adults as they attempt to teach and learn from the other.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Popular culture has been studied in all sorts of ways and described in articles, on television, in books and research reports. In the late 1990s, a wave of articles appeared in *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines that featured youth today. Dubbed Millennials, Tweens, and the Nintendo Generation, among other things, young adolescents (those between the ages of 10 and 14) were characterized in relation to the recent technological revolution where kids had access to all sorts of computer technologies and media. Because of their access, young adolescents' interests in new media equated to new forms of popular culture.

On the heels of this media publicity, a large-scale study was published on teenagers' uses of media just before the turn into the 21st century. This study, *Kids & Media @ the New Millennium*, reported that U.S. youth between the ages of 8 and 13 choose to spend an average of six-and-a-half hours a day using media-related activities outside of school. The breakdown showed that on a daily basis young adolescents watch a little over four hours of television and movies, spend an hour playing video games and using computers, read print media (newspapers, magazines, books) for almost an hour, and listen to a little over an hour of music.

This trend for adolescents to engage with and enjoy popular media, and ultimately popular culture, extends beyond the United States. In other countries such as Australia, too, adolescents' uses of popular culture are on the rise. Many adolescents now

have more access to all sorts of texts—movies, video games, television, home computers, the Internet, and personal communication tools such as email, cell phones, and instant chat devices (ICQ, MSN Messenger, etc.)—than ever before. To get along in today's world, it makes sense that youngsters work with, read, and use all kinds of texts, being able to manipulate the texts for their own purposes as well as to employ texts in ways that others have determined for them.

How is it that popular culture gets sidled up with adolescents, and what happens when it is commonly believed that adolescents' popular culture interests dominate their lives? This belief that popular culture and adolescents must be spoken in the same breath abounds. It is not uncommon for people to assume that popular culture is all encompassing in adolescents' lives, that they live for, breathe, and emulate popular culture in order to be a part of some peer group. It seems that in many contexts—in advertising, on television, in magazines, on the radio, in research projects and reports—popular culture permeates adolescence, and the duo are a force to be reckoned with because of the strong influence that popular culture seemingly has on adolescents' behavior, lifestyles, and actions. For some people, popular culture is a mindless consumer culture that adolescents partake in just because it is made available to them. However, as seven adolescents showed me, adolescents see their relationships with popular culture differently from this assumption that they are acted upon and become victims to a life inundated with signs, images, and messages implicitly or explicitly propagated within their popular culture interests. Actually, enormous gaps and discrepancies exist between how others identify adolescents as particular kinds of people with particular popular

culture interests and how adolescents perceive themselves as users of what they deem popular culture.

I used to think I knew what popular culture was. But, then again, I used to think I understood adolescents and what they were all about, too, and how and for what purposes they use popular culture in their lives. As a thirty-something European American woman, I assumed that I knew a lot about adolescents. Like many adults, my assumptions were based upon my age, practical experiences, and readings about the life period of adolescence. By this I mean that I've experienced the period of time known as adolescence, and as an adult I've worked with adolescents and read a lot about them and popular culture.

These assumptions about adolescents, their literacy lives, and popular culture shifted and changed when I hung out with, became friends with, and studied how seven, 12- and 13-year-olds use popular culture in their own lives. It was only after I spent approximately 8 to 12 hours a day during two, 10-week periods in Australia and the United States with teenagers, listening to their conversations with pals, going to school with them, emailing them daily, chatting with them through notes and online, observing how they actually define and use popular culture in their lives both in- and out-of-school, and interviewing them, their parents, and their teachers that I began to rethink what adolescents do with popular culture as part of their literacy lives. A diverse bunch of adolescents—Amanda, Tee, L'il J, Rosa, Tommy, Timony, and A (self-chosen pseudonyms)—all of whom are quite different from myself either by age, culture, race, religious affiliation, class, and/or gender, have been good teachers. They instructed me

over and over again and pushed me to learn that what I thought I knew about adolescents, their literacies, and popular culture isn't what I now know.

The Grade 8 school day ends at Kehara State High School in Southeastern Queensland, Australia, and the after-school activities gear up in the Brisbane area. I sit on Tee's bed, the bottom bunk in the bedroom she shares with her older sister Rachel. She hurriedly changes out of her pine green school uniform skirt and matching school shirt and into a pair of tan, corduroy $\frac{3}{4}$ length pants that she made in sewing class and a new light blue, sleeveless t-shirt she recently bought at the trendy store in the mall that reads "Angel" in white letters across the chest. While waiting, I pull my notebook and a mechanical pencil out of my black backpack, and Tee tells me that she was the first girl in her class to want to make $\frac{3}{4}$ length pants, though the assignment was to make shorts. "All the other girls copied me," she said.

We go to the lounge room, where she says she likes to unwind. Flipping on the stereo and rifling through her small but growing CD collection, she finds the *Mary, Mary* CD that the youth director of her church recently bought for her because he knows that she loves to listen to music and to dance. She flips through the tracks of their newest album, *Thankful*, and listens intently to the first couple of measures of each song. She returns to the song "Shackles" and spends the next hour choreographing a new dance as I sit on the floor with my back against the white sofa that faces the television cabinet. She worries that the sequence of dance moves is probably too difficult and intricate to teach to the other girls in her dance class at school. She decides that she'll keep this one for herself.

When she finishes, we stop in the kitchen for a glass of Milo before heading to her bedroom. She picks up her copy of *Lockie Leonard, Scumbuster*, which is on her bedside table under her new teen devotional bible, and spends the next 20 minutes silently reading a chapter for homework. I sit across from her and jot some notes from the day. Her mom calls for her to get going, and she leaves to go to the Kehara Baptist Church where Tee coaches a team of 8-year-old netball players. It's almost 7:00 P.M., and I head back to my apartment to write.

On another day, I attend classes with Tommy. He and I talk a lot about differences in cultures—between U.S. and Australian cultures, and between Australian and Asian cultures. Tommy stays after class to discuss kanji stroke formation with his Japanese teacher, and then we go to band practice where he plays the trumpet. His mom picks us up after practice, and she takes us to their Old Queenslander-style house, just a few minutes away from the school. We drop my backpack and his black “No Fear” satchel next to one of the legs of the computer desk. As he boots up his computer, he tells me about opportunities to go to Japan next year as an exchange student through school. When the Windows picture comes onto the screen, he turns his attention to his keyboard and does a quick search on the Internet for some information on Australia's hosting of the Olympics for the theory section of an HPE (Health and Physical Education) class assignment. Then, he downloads three pages to a disk: two on the 2000 Olympics to be held in Sydney and one on the 1956 Olympics hosted in Melbourne. He reads them quickly, and then puts the disk into his satchel to take to school the next day.

Tommy spends the next hour sketching a penciled picture of Goku by hand, one of the *Dragonball Z (DBZ)* characters. He pulls up several *DBZ* websites and toggles

between them to study other drawings of Goku as he improves his own. He notices that several sites have added new information since yesterday. When he finishes his drawing, he writes a caption in kanji. He thought he'd have time to scan the drawing into his computer for a website he is creating on Japanese animé. He really wants to get his site up and running. He checks his watch and tells me that he's tired, and he's yet to have tea. He reasons that he'll wait until tomorrow to scan and upload the jpeg drawing. We head upstairs. Tommy serves us each a glass of milk and some apple crumb cake that he made in Home Economics class. Pretty good, I tell him. He disagrees, saying, "Ah no. It's too dry. I think it should be called apple crumble!"

The stairs leading up to A's family's four-room apartment are lined with his athletic gear: a basketball, an Australian football, a soccer ball, two pair of joggers, and a cricket bat and ball. After having a warm orange cordial and a sleeve of chicken flavored rice biscuits for afternoon tea, A pulls up his spreadsheet he began in Excel and completes his science project while chatting online through IM with virtual friends. He is focused on the tasks at hand and seems to forget that I am sitting beside him as he works on his laptop. He is supposed to use graph paper and a pencil for the assignment, but he finds Excel more efficient and interesting. And besides, he reasons when I ask, by doing his assignment on the computer, he can practice English conversational skills and writing as he chats. A asks if I think that Tommy, who is A's best friend at school, will also make a spreadsheet instead of using graph paper for the class assignment. Because Tommy also likes computers and because he and A are competitive, I think that Tommy will also make a spreadsheet, but I shrug my shoulders, not wanting to speculate about how Tommy will complete the homework. A decides not to worry about Tommy, and shuts

down his laptop. Rummaging through a pile of sci-fi books, the L, M, S, and W volumes of a series of encyclopedias, a manual for speaking English, and several newspapers written in Chinese on his desk, he finds a workbook, opens it to a marked page, and reads aloud twice in Chinese a 400 word passage he must memorize for Saturday Chinese School. I can't understand anything he's saying, and he tells me that the passage is about a grandfather taking his grandson fishing. He says, "Because I am a Chinese boy, I have to do lots of home work to make me do really well in school so that I can get a good job." He then recites the paragraph several times as we walk his delivery route, distributing the weekly neighborhood newspaper.

Amanda stares out the open window during her forty-five minute bus ride home from Kehara. She lets out a deep sigh. It's 33° Celsius, and her red hair has turned a maroon, almost brown, hue near her temples where she's sweating. I sit quietly next to her until she speaks and carefully orders her afternoon activities. First, she'll have some Tim Tams and a glass of Milo for tea. Then, she'll head next door and see if Cory wants to continue the dual play of *Tomb Raider II* on the Playstation that they began earlier in the week. Next, she'll watch *Seinfeld*, *The Nanny*, and *Charmed* with her mom and younger sister during dinner. After a shower, she'll read a chapter of her Babysitters' Club book and drift off to sleep with B105 playing in the background on her stereo. While she ticks off the events of her afternoon, I write these items down in my notepad. She leans over my shoulder and double checks what I've written. In her organization of the afternoon events, she realizes that it's the end of the month, and roughly calculates the number of minutes her mum might have left over on her Internet account. She thinks

she'll ask if she can go online tonight before her shower to see if her cousin that lives in Sydney is online so they can chat.

Each of my relationships with these adolescents living in Australia was different, and the adolescents approached their uses of popular culture and their relationships with me differently. Though we all spoke English, my U.S., Louisiana-tinged Southern accent most apparently and outwardly differed from their accents, and each of their accents was also affected by their cultural surroundings. Being an immigrant to Australia from China, A had only begun to speak English in the last four years and was bilingual in Chinese and English, whereas Tee immigrated to Australia from New Zealand when she was 5-years-old. I couldn't distinguish her Kiwi English accent from an Australian accent. Amanda and Tommy were both born and raised in Australia, and both were interested in Japanese studies, of which I knew nothing.

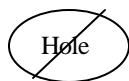
But I differed from these adolescents in other less aurally noticeable ways too, such as by class or religious persuasions. But rather than perceive these differences as hindrances, I thought of them as ways to assist my developing understandings of their uses of popular culture. Indeed, my interactions with Tommy, Amanda, A, and Tee highlighted the differences between and among us and forced me to focus on our different perceptions of their uses of popular culture.

My Southern accent didn't seem to even register with Simon Fair Timony, Rosa, and L'il J—the three, 12- and 13-year-old adolescents living in the southeastern United States who agreed to be part of this study. Even though Rosa was bilingual in Spanish and English, her English pronunciations were similar to my own. Yet differences between us continuously forced me to rethink my assumptions about adolescents, literacies, and

popular culture. Though these adolescents knew I'd returned from a stint in Australia, they had no knowledge of or contact with the adolescents who befriended me in Australia. As the teens in Australia ended their days and readied themselves for bed halfway across the globe, the kids in the United States were just beginning that same day, preparing to head to their eighth-grade classes at Hancock Middle School.

At 7:15 A.M., Rosa waits with her brother Mario at the bus stop and jumps up and down, flapping her arms to keep warm. The sleeves on her grey synchilla jacket are too long, and when she waves her arms about, Mario tells her she looks like a bird. She seems to ignore him, but the moment the yellow school bus turns left up her street she immediately stops moving around. She turns off *Revelation*, the new 98° CD that is playing on her Discman, and slips it into her black backpack before she steps on the bus, and I follow her. She gives a nod to the bus driver and then stops short to scan the passengers for her friend. She yells in Spanish for her pal to save her a seat. Plopping herself into the seat near the back of the bus and next to Viviana, Rosa hands over the backpack and CD player and keeps a watchful eye on the bus driver so Viviana can listen covertly to the newly purchased album. I sit behind them, and the seat next to me remains empty until we arrive at Hancock. Rosa opens a notebook and writes a note to another girlfriend that she won't see until lunch. I watch over her shoulder as she switches between English and Spanish as she writes in neat cursive letters. She folds the note into an intricate star shape. Then, she takes an orange glitter pen that she keeps attached to one of the straps of her tiny black backpack and draw a smiley face at one of the points. She puts the note in her jacket pocket and turns around to ask me to remind her to pass it off to her friend between second and third period.

On another day, Simon Fair Timony (a.k.a. Timony and SFT) flags me down as I make my way through groups of eighth graders hanging out in the breezeway before the first bell rings. Timony and Danté are sitting in their usual spot—on the black metal handrail of the stairway outside the band room. I walk over to meet them. He picks up his bright yellow canvas backpack on which he has drawn a sign in blue ink that reads



next to “*NIRVANA* RoCkS” written in green ink and shoves his friend’s copy of *Left Behind* into an enormous hip pocket on his JNCOs jeans. The two boys jump off the railing, and the three of us meander around outside the building. We head toward the front of school where few students hang out, and Timony recounts his “incredibly frustrating” morning. Danté and I listen, and I take notes on a small palm-sized pad of paper. Timony explained that he completed his math homework in the car while telling his father about six email inquiries he received that morning from other webmasters who read the posting on Timony’s home page and want to affiliate with his *Dragonball Z* website. He tells us that he gave a hasty explanation to his father’s questions about what affiliation is all about and why it is so important that Timony received the emails in the first place.

Later that week, I lean on the doorjamb of L’il J’s bedroom as she dances around and readies herself for school. She grabs from atop her bureau a pair of large silver hoop earrings that she borrowed from her auntie two weeks ago, slides 15 slender, silver, bangle bracelets onto her left wrist, and picks up her language arts anthology from a chair. She searches around the room and locates two lyric sheets she’ll need for church choir practice after school. *Limp Bizkit*’s video version of “My Generation” plays on

Channel 99 on her 18-inch T.V. as she puts on a pair of black chunky-heeled boots. She glances up at me and says, “L’il M, I know you like that song. That is my song now!” After Fred Durst finishes singing, she flips off the music video channel using a remote control. She then completes her morning ritual: blows a kiss to a large poster of *Ja Rule* that hangs over her bed, puts her school id around her neck, checks her purse for house keys, gel pens, makeup, and perfumed lotion, and then slams her bedroom door. Her bracelets jingle as she makes a mad dash for the bus stop. Though I’ve offered her a ride this morning, she tells me that she needs to take the bus so she can get the 411 on what’s happened since she last saw her friends on the way home from school the day before. I get into my car, quickly jot some notes, and then meet up with her on campus.

Once at school, we head to the gym. L’il J pulls her eighth grade pass out of her literature book and flashes it to a teacher at the door for admittance. She tells me to follow her. We walk the length of the basketball court where L’il J finds her girlfriends congregated on the highest two risers of the bleachers. She clomps up the bleachers in her boots, her bell-bottom jeans swishing and her bangle bracelets clinking. She makes a spot for herself in the middle of the group, sits down, and tells me to sit next to her. A couple of girls scoot to their left to make room for me. She spends the next 15 minutes discussing the premiere of the *Nelly* video, “E-I,” which aired on MTV the night before, and critiquing her friends’ clothing. From her perch atop the bleachers, she keeps a close eye on a group of boys who are playing basketball. She both cheers for and jeers at them.

As with my time spent with the teens in Australia, the teens in the United States became accustomed to my presence in their daily lives and to my notebook, my micro

hand-held tape recorder, and my constant questions. In both Australia and the United States, the adolescents reacted differently about my interest in their lives. While some of them were immediately interested in being “shadowed,” others were initially reserved about their participation in the study and needed to work through some issues before signing up. As Tee tried to figure out how my presence would affect her, she asked, “You’ll be like our best friend?” “Yeah, kind of,” I responded, “But sometimes you can pretend like I am not there.” “Oh,” Tee said, “So you’ll be like a tag-a-long.” That seemed to fit so I agreed with her, and she acquired her parental consent the following day. Likewise L’il J immediately decided to be a part of the study. She reasoned that she had a lot of work to do, teaching me all about being 13-years-old. First she told me to make a fist. When I did, she made a fist too, and then hit her fist on top of mine. She said, “Okay, your turn.” I took my fist and hit it on top of hers. She nodded her head and said, “Now, you know our handshake, and you’re strait.” But then, she looked me up and down and noted that I needed to “get strait” about my attire if I was going to hang out with her.

A few of the teens needed to test me first, seeing if the relationship between us would work. For instance, Timony was interested in the project, but he required a trial period before agreeing to my prolonged presence in his life. After a couple of days of going to classes with him at school, he approached me and said, “Yeah, I’ve been thinking. It’s kinda cool and weird to think that an adult wants to know what it’s like to be 13. But it’s fun, so I’ll do it.” Amanda and Rosa were both interested in the project, but unlike the concerns that Timony had, they needed to get approval from their peers before signing on. They wanted to see how their friends would react to my inclusion in

their friendship group, especially as it affected their socializing together during lunch and between classes at school. As Rosa explained, “I am loyal to my friends first, and if they didn’t think it was a good idea for you to hang around us, then I wouldn’t have signed up [for this study]. Once they said it was okay, I asked my mom. She didn’t really want me to do it because she doesn’t speak English, so I asked my dad. He said it was okay, so he signed the form.” Amanda told me that she was really interested in “helping me with my research,” but she wanted to “clear things first” with her friends. After talking things over with them, Amanda reported back to me saying, “I am glad I got picked. My friends said that it would be a good opportunity for someone like me. I’m not really in the popular crowd much.” I asked L’il J what her friends thought about her participation in the study. She rolled her eyes and looked at me as if I were crazy. Somewhat with exasperation in her voice, she replied, “I don’t care what they say! It ain’t none of their business what I do anyway!” Tommy signed up without reserve, and A needed my assurance that he could “represent an Australian adolescent” before he agreed to participate.

Though some of the teens asked for their friends’ permission before asking their parents, all of them, once they felt comfortable with me, still had to reassure their friends at school that I wasn’t a threat to their peer group. It seemed weird to most of the teenagers that an adult wanted to hang out with them. They wanted to know if I was a teacher, a parent, a student teacher, or a psychologist. Often reassurances resulted from one of the adolescents telling the other kids who inquired about my presence about what I was not. Tee explained to her friends, “Don’t worry. She’s not a teacher. She’s like my shadow, but she’s tall.” L’il J often justified my presence to others, not only by explaining that I was not a teacher, a parent, or a mentor, but also by trying to show her

pals how I was in some way like them. “Her name’s Margaret,” she told her group of friends, “but call her L’il M. She’s cool. We rock in her car. Yesterday we listened to *Outkast*, and she listens to 95.5 and B103 [both radio stations popular with her friends at the middle school]. You know, we hang. I tell her stuff, and she listens.” Timony often kidded about my presence with his friends. Jay asked, “Is that the woman who is stalking you?” Timony and I both laughed. Timony said, “Yeah, I guess you could say that. But she’s cool. I mean, she doesn’t care if we cuss and stuff. She just wants to see what it’s like to be me!” “So, are you a psychologist?” Jay wanted to know. “Nah, I already have one of those,” Timony answered for me. “She’s like a college kid doing some research, and I am like her guinea pig.” I laughed, and Jay seemed satisfied with Timony’s response. Amanda explained to her friends, “I don’t think of Margaret as a lecturer or a teacher, but a good friend.” A told his friends that I was “the American woman” and Tommy explained to them that I wasn’t an exchange student at Kehara.

These adolescents and their friends, their parents, and teachers and I all had to become familiar and comfortable with each other’s presence. And though I had lived in the same country with the teens in the United States, they—like the teens in Australia—differed from me. Indeed, I was nearly twenty-years-older than all the adolescents. Rosa had immigrated to the United States from Mexico when she was five-years-old, and was bilingual in Spanish and English. L’il J was African American, and Timony, a European American boy. Though I shared some similar interests with these teenagers (such as Rosa’s involvement with Catholicism, Timony’s use of computers, and L’il J’s fetish for contemporary music), these teens were different from me, and it was through my exploration of those perceived differences between us and their uses of popular culture

that I came to question my own assumptions about adolescents and their uses of popular culture.

Who Are You Anyway and What is it That You Do With Those Texts?

If adolescents and their popular culture interests are so different, then why do so many assumptions abound about them? In many ways, the process of naming youth as adolescents and naming certain texts as popular culture both aids and worsens how assumptions about adolescents' uses of popular culture are perpetuated. The process of naming things is a tricky one indeed. Categorization and classification are systems ingrained into daily living. Rarely does anything get past a process of naming, for the process of naming something and categorizing it makes life more efficient. So, people are categorized by age, race, nationality, body type, education, religious affiliation, ethnicity, bodies of land, socio-economic class, ability, gender, and even family name. Music, books, movies, video games, and magazines are categorized by genres, each genre with its own criteria for inclusion. Places are classified and named for the purposes they serve: the mall, the park, the school, the playground, the athletic fields, the library.

People can't do without the process of naming things and associating those things named with particular people, contexts, or activities. Take myself as an example. I have been categorized and named in particular ways, ways that have been constructed societally over time, and accepted by the communities in which I live. I have taken up those categories as part of who I am. Categories in my life include woman, female, adult, European American (of Irish descent), graduate student, Roman Catholic, thirty-something, able-bodied, Southerner, and middle class. Because of the structures set in

place and accepted in the society where I live, I am categorized accordingly and defined in particular ways. In other words, because I am a woman, I am not a male or a man. As an adult, I am not a child or an adolescent. Because I am of Irish descent on both sides of my family, I am not of Middle Eastern or Asian descent. Because I am still a student, I am not a professor. As a Roman Catholic, I am not a Baptist. Being thirty-something- keeps me from being in my twenties or forties. Categories attempt to name us and to make us into particular people and not into other people.

Naming and defining something, whether it is a book, a person, or an aisle at a grocery store is a powerful means of producing meaning and uses and for organizing what would otherwise be unnamed chaos in our lives. So, in some ways, categories are useful because they serve specific purposes. Categories order the world so that it seems to make sense, and people use categories to fit other people, ideas, feelings, places, subject matter, and the like into particular, defined structures. Everyone constantly defines everyone else. These definitions produce feelings of stability, of known ground, of boundedness based upon distinctions made between items that belong to the category and have certain characteristics and that which doesn't fit the category because it doesn't possess the same criteria for inclusion. I am, for instance, an adult—neither a child nor an adolescent, when these categories are determined by age distinctions.

When I began to hang out with 12- and 13-year-olds, it seemed odd to adults and to some adolescents, too, because I had broached a category defined by age. I had to push against the categories that named me as a particular person, and often it was through my uses of popular culture that I could cross boundaries. So, for example, in an e-mail discussion with Timony, we talked about music interests among other topics of his

choosing. I told him that I also listened to *Nirvana*, *Soul Asylum*, Lenny Kravitz, and the *Red Hot Chili Peppers*, and he sent back a response promptly, saying, “I didn't think you listened to that kind of stuff, but, your only in college. It's not like you only listen to the *Allman brothers* or anything.” It was in connecting the popular culture from my own life to that of the adolescents that I could name myself and be recognized as someone other than an adult. During my stint with these seven kids, I had to blur the boundedness between the category of adult hanging out with adult friends and adolescents hanging out with adolescent friends. Furthermore, I had to continuously explain to adults and adolescents alike that I was not a mentor, a teacher, a parent, a doctor, or a school administrator. It seemed odd for many people that I—as an adult who was neither teacher nor student—solely wanted to hang out with adolescents on their own terms in order to learn from them and about them.

Placing items within a category and classifying the items as possessing particular characteristics and excluding others simplifies life for those doing the categorizing. Categories order the world and highlight shared qualities and differences. Adolescence, popular culture, and literacy are examples of categories that have been constructed to contain certain attributes that define each of these categories in ways that stabilize their meaning and make them recognizable as particular categories that include some characteristics and that exclude others.

*Where did the Category Adolescence Come From?*¹

Historically, adolescence as a category didn't exist until the 1880s when it became societally constructed as a particular life stage due to a matter of economic

¹ See pages 214-217 for further discussion of the creation of the term adolescence and adolescents

necessity. Until that time, people between the ages of 12 and 18 were often already workers (laborers, farmers, apprentices, etc.), and if they weren't workers they were still attending some sort of formal schooling because they came from families that could afford them those opportunities. However, the Industrial Revolution produced a need for more skilled workers who were adept at new skills. So, those people between the ages of 12 and 18 became a category called adolescence. Adolescence became a stage sandwiched between young children who were learning basic skills and adults who were competently a part of the work force. During this time, adolescence as a category signaled that those in this age period were not yet adults—not yet of an age to be considered competent. This stage of life first became apparent as a category when schools were set up to accommodate this age group. To keep adolescents out of the job market and from competing for employment with adults, it became necessary to also characterize this life stage as incomplete and incompetent. Adding biological factors to this category of adolescence furthered its determined and bounded categorization.

Biological factors further solidified the characterization of adolescence. Not only did age play a role in this life stage, but age was also attached to incompetence and to the thinking that adolescents weren't as knowledgeable as adults. Furthermore, adolescence became described as a biologically driven category. By characterizing adolescence as a period of crisis and turmoil, adolescents could be further distinguished from childhood and adulthood. In order to grow into competence, adolescents, who were also characterized as out of control and without direction due to the hormonal changes, needed to learn to control themselves by overcoming bodily urges with a mind over matter mentality.

In sum, this is how the category of adolescence became known as a particular life stage. This created category was built upon the determined factors that this age period was incompetent (as opposed to adults' competencies), biologically driven (unlike adults), out-of-control and irrational because of the changes in the body, and in need of discipline and education. These factors ensured that people between the ages of 12 and 18 became adolescents (an identity within the structure of adolescence) who were not seen suitable to work in jobs that needed the attention of a proper adult. Adolescents, being incompetent, therefore, needed further schooling to learn how to control themselves and their bodies through rigorous mental exercises and training. Rather than join the forces of workers and laborers, adolescence as a period of life made it possible and mandatory for those defined by age as adolescents to continue in formalized education.

*How's Popular Culture Involved With Adolescence?*²

As the Industrial Revolution affected many parts of the world, adolescents, in Australia and the United States, were made to spend more time in school in order to better prepare them for work in the later years. In both places, the inception of adolescence brought about a formalized education that consisted of reading and writing that was heavily influenced by English culture, which consisted of high culture as opposed to popular culture. This is all to say that popular culture, which was common and pleasurable to the masses and to the common people, was excluded from formal education. The need for formalized education to instruct adolescents in proper growth and discipline didn't include popular culture that was associated with pleasures and mindless drivel.

² See pages 239-254 for further discussion of the relation between popular culture and adolescents

To this day, assumptions about the workings of popular culture loom large cross continentally in Australia and the United States. In both countries, popular culture has long been considered the dregs that society offers. Associated with low culture (as opposed to high culture), popular culture is commonly assumed to be a mass-produced form of entertainment relating to leisure activities (not to difficult thinking), to mindless pleasures (not to work), to uses of the body (not of the mind), and to the modularization (not to originality) of youth culture. In many ways, popular culture is thought to proliferate the passive acceptance of transparent, predictable, and stereotypical identities proffered in texts that adolescents like. And because the category of adolescence produces identities for adolescents that view them as incompetent and biologically driven, adults (parents, teachers, caregivers) often worry that popular culture has a strong-hold on adolescents' beliefs, attitudes, and behavior that ultimately inhibits their intellectual growth.

One thing is for certain: having hung out with teenagers in Australia and the United States, I realize that popular culture is much broader than its common definition—a product produced for mass distribution that is fashionable among many people. But *popular culture* has become so ubiquitous among adults, producers, and marketers it seems that everyone knows or should know and understand what popular culture is. Not so. Popular culture isn't necessarily a term that teenagers know or use on a regular basis.

When I first discussed popular culture with Amanda, she asked, "Oh, you mean like what's considered popular within like our culture, like in Australia—like didgeridoos and kangaroos and koalas and stuff like that?" Tommy responded, "Yeah, I just think about popular, but I don't get the culture part. I just think of popular culture and I think of

something that I enjoy doing,” and A explained that he thought popular culture “is a way to communicate and make friends with other people.” L’il J translated the term popular culture into her own words, saying that popular culture is “what’s tight,” and Rosa agreed with that description, but then added that “popular is just having your own little style, like not trying to be like some other person.” Timony scrunched up his face when I told him that I wanted to learn about popular culture in his life. He said that he didn’t know what that was, and I explained some people describe popular culture as something that adolescents his age like. He shrugged his shoulders and quipped that “people just feel they have to like go with whatever like is popular at that point in time, and they just do whatever other people are doing. But I don’t do that.” He went on to say that he didn’t have anything to do with popular culture and stuff like that though he could “spot popular culture a mile away.” Tee, on the other hand, noted that she could show me how to use popular culture because she, in fact, was popular.

As part of this study, the adolescents were each given Polaroid cameras and instant film and asked to document their own uses and definitions of popular culture in their lives. Their photographs showed an array of definitions and uses of popular culture. Pictures ranged from technological equipment (televisions, stereos, cds, computers, playstation games, musical instruments, and the Internet), to social situations (friends, fashion, parties, sports), to family (siblings and mothers—as Timony said, “because everyone loves their mama, and if that’s not popular culture then I don’t know what in the world is!”) and family-shared interests (having religious affiliations, going on family vacations, hosting exchange students, and attending Saturday school.) For Timony and

Amanda, but not for others, popular culture also included books—reading print-based texts.

According to all of these adolescents' own uses and definitions, popular culture *might* include what *is* trendy and cool at a particular moment, such as grunge music or a particular style of clothing. All of them could describe what would be considered popular culture within their schools generally. But, as I learned from them, popular culture *always included* what the individual considers trendy. As Tommy explained, “when I think about it, it is sort of like things that I like to do and that sort of stuff because it’s popular for me...But I can’t really think of what everyone likes because not everyone likes to do everything the same.” Tee echoed Tommy’s statement. When discussing something that she didn’t consider popular culture, she’d qualify her statements. “Reading books is not popular culture for me because I don’t do it often, and I don’t really like it. But for some people it would be.” Sometimes popular culture of a larger context such as school and of an individual’s own interests match up, and sometimes they don’t. What some groups consider trendy isn’t necessarily trendy to other groups or individuals, and all of the adolescents stated as much.

But, whether trendy or cool to the group or to the individual, these adolescents all agreed by their definitions and uses that popular culture connoted pleasure—pleasures formed from an individual’s choice. Amanda summed it up well: “Popular culture has to come from the self in order for it to be popular culture. If popular culture is mandated, like the law, or if someone thinks that everyone must like something or do something, then people don’t have a choice, and it’s not popular culture.” In short, popular culture involved individual decision making to determine which texts were of interest and use to

adolescents as individuals. According to these seven, something was only deemed popular culture if it was pleasurable and fun, but also interesting and appropriately challenging. Boring, monotonous, out-grown, or too challenging texts lose designation as popular culture.

Assumptions about the category *adolescence* and those marked as adolescents often work in tandem with assumptions about the category *popular culture*. The category of adolescence positions youth by age that marks them as usually smarter, more experienced, and more independent than children, yet not-as-smart-as and still dependent upon adults. In this betweenness, adolescents are often afforded more freedoms and privileges related to popular culture than children but are not granted the freedom and privileges of adults. So, for example, adolescents attend movies with a broader range of rating (i.e., G, PG, PG-13, M) than children, but adolescents cannot legally attend a movie with an R rating at a theatre. Or, adolescents are granted some filtered admittance to the Internet at school, but they do not have the full Internet access their teachers do.

Furthermore, negative perceptions of popular culture often intersect with those of the betweenness state of adolescence as a period of indecision. Critics of adolescents' affinity for popular culture attribute social decline and decay to adolescents' pleasure in leisure activities and to what they consider passive engagement with popular culture texts. News stories regularly portray negative aspects of society (e.g., violence, drugs, alcohol) and social ills (e.g., rebellious behavior, teen suicide, teen sex) in relation to adolescents and to their interest in popular culture.

Where Do/es Literacy/cies Fit In with All of This?

Literacy has been traditionally thought of as solely the ability to read and to write printed text. Literacy, used both in-school and out-of-school, for many adolescents like these seven living in Australia and the United States involves the uses of a wide range of media and popular culture. When placed in a bigger picture of everyday life, literacy is a plural term. Adolescents read, write, listen, speak, act, and view texts in more than a singular way and with more than just one kind of text, and all of these practices comprise the literacies of their lives. *Literacies* are what adolescents use to connect and to communicate with one another and with the rest of the world. In this sense, literacy is not only the ability to read a book or to write an essay. Literacies also include uses of contemporary popular culture seamlessly intertwined with media. So, literacies and literacy practices abound everywhere—through textbooks, in conversations, on websites, in social gatherings, over radio waves and cable lines, in composing and reading notes and emails in different languages, using body gestures, clothing, and nonverbal actions, in drawing and design, when watching television or reading novels, magazines, newspapers, and the like.

In both Australia and the United States, adolescents use an array of literacies to learn about the structures of the world, to categorize others and themselves, and to figure out who they have been taught that they should be. At the same time, adolescents also use literacies in intricate and complex ways to question those structures that order the world and to push against the categories that have determined who they and others are supposed to be. In other words, adolescents also use literacies to undo the structures in order to form new categories, new structures, and new ways of being.

Adolescents' literacies certainly include reading, writing, and making meaning from print-based texts. Their literacies encompass an array of activities such as Tommy's attention to proper brush strokes for kanji formation, Tee's reading of chapter from a novel for homework, Timony's signs scrawled onto his backpack, or Rosa's writing on the bus. But literacies involving popular culture appeal to more than just gaining meaning from them. Actually, literacies are significant to adolescents' personal lives—to their own and to others' understandings of them as particular literacy users. In other words, adolescents' uses of literacies are more bounteous than prescribed ways of reading and writing. Kanji strokes, handwritten signs on a backpack, discussions of Japanese animé, note compositions, and the folding of those notes, are all illustrations of a more complex picture of how adolescents incorporate popular culture literacies in their everyday lives in order to be a particular kind of person and/or to challenge assumptions about being a particular kind of person so as to communicate something different about themselves to others.

Adolescents' literacy practices, therefore, are not just passively performed to gain information from text. Instead, adolescents such as Tee, Tommy, A, Amanda, Rosa, Timony, and L'il J use popular culture literacies in socially and culturally specific ways that include the melding of both mind and body in order to be acknowledged as particular people rather than as other people; to gain access, privileges, and recognition; to teach and to learn; to engage in work and pleasure; and to form allegiances and friendships and to exclude those who don't fit the definition of the category. In this way, adolescents' literacies involving popular culture more specifically are social and cultural practices that shift and change depending upon their needs and uses of the literacies in context specific

situations. Popular culture literacies are what adolescents use to identify with categories that name them and to push against categories that have named them and forced assumptions onto them that they didn't create or perhaps desire for themselves.

*Do I Have to be Who You Say or What the Text Says that I Am?*³

Just as structures and categories are put into place to simplify the world, people do things, say things, and change things that disrupt the categories, causing the categorization to shift and change and perhaps fall apart. While music, books, people, and places are compartmentalized and defined by commonalities in order to fit within particular classification systems, the naming system of categorization becomes fuzzy and less clear when looking across rather than at it. People pilfer bits and pieces from various bounded groupings, combining these tidbits into new constructions, ideas, and uses that no longer fit the categories from which the items were supposedly taken. So, music that once borrowed from techno-culture, politically inspired folk music, and traditional rock became something different in form from all three of these separate structures.

This scavenger hunt disrupts and unsettles the seemingly bounded categories, breaking up the naming system while constructing new ways to use the objects that no longer fit within the category from which it has been taken. Thinking shifts and changes. Movement keeps categories from becoming staid and from gathering dust. The shifts, the nonlinearity, are powerful means for constructing new, different meaning and uses of texts. When people look across categories, or when they take only parts of categories for their own reasons, the categories as they have been produced no longer work in the same ways because they've been influenced by other groupings. Returning to the example of music inspired by techno, political folk, and traditional rock, alternative music eventually

became of the amalgam of the three. But it wasn't until a critical mass had been reached with artists borrowing freely from these other genres that alternative became a new formation.

In thinking about the categories of adolescents, popular culture, and literacy, just as they are organized and determined to be parts of particular structures, they are shifted, changed, and disrupted so that they don't always fit so neatly into the slots.

Just how these seven adolescents living in Australia and the United States use popular culture as part of their literacy lives to be particular people and to form new ways to become someone different from the category into which they are fitted is what this study is all about. What is presented in this study does not track or document what the popular culture texts mean to the adolescents who use them. Instead, the following chapters examine three issues: (1) how adolescents are named, structured, and situated in particular ways, as particular people based upon categorizations of adolescence and on the adolescents' interests in popular culture, (2) how adolescents use popular culture not only to perpetuate categories that have named them, but also to push against and sometimes to temporarily knock down those categories that force them into being particular people with particular identities, and (3) how adolescents shape new ideas, categories, and understandings through the tensions of being produced as particular people and of constructing ways of being someone different.

The following chapters highlight how adolescents used popular culture in their everyday lives. Chapters 2 through 5 open with a map to illustrate how the adolescents

³ See pages 273-276 for further discussion of texts

who are highlighted in the chapter used popular culture in their everyday lives. The maps are visual representations of the data analyzed within each chapter and serve as pictorial overviews of the adolescents' uses of popular culture that are discussed in each chapter. These maps are rhizomes—they work like anthills in that they grow in all directions and show the surface appearance and subterranean flows of adolescents' lives involving popular culture. They serve as documented snapshots of the 10-week period of time that I spent following the adolescents around and learning about their uses of popular culture. The red lines illustrate the complexities of adolescents' lives as they are named as particular people based upon particular categories and assumptions that other people work off of regarding adolescents' popular culture. The orange lines also show how adolescents use popular culture to push against these categories that name them and attempt to define them as certain people in order to form new creations or different creations of themselves.

Chapters 2 through 5 document how popular culture plays out adolescents' lives. In Chapter 2, categories name and produce Timony at school as a particular kind of person based upon his popular culture interests. Timony shows how he uses popular culture interests developed outside of school to construct a new way of being that exceeds the confines of the identities that define him in school. In Chapter 3 Tommy and A's uses of Japanese animé, computers, and Australian sport illustrate how their interests in popular culture produce them as particular people within friendship groups, and how they use popular culture to construct different notions of themselves within their peer groups. L'il J and Amanda are central to Chapter 4. This chapter examines their uses of texts such as rap, hip-hop, dancing and popular series books to question stereotypes about

girls/women that often make up the critique of these kinds of texts. Chapter 5 documents how young adolescents use popular culture texts to align themselves with a particular group identity and to renegotiate their own identity within the group with those same texts. In this chapter Tee and Rosa use popular culture related to their lives as Christians to define themselves as particular kinds of people and to push against being defined only with that identity. Then, Chapter 6 pulls together the work of Chapters 2-5 and makes a case for rethinking adolescence as an age period, adolescents as consumers of popular culture, and literacies involving popular culture. Chapter 7 outlines the theories that frame this study, the methods employed for data collection, and the methodology for data analysis. Finally, in the Appendix, I answer several questions about theory and research that have arisen about this study from discussions with adolescents, researchers, parents, teachers, and friends.

Limitations

This study is limited by four factors. First, the interpretations of the data are limited by my own analyses, which are influenced by the categories that have defined me and have affected my own understanding of the world around me. Researchers with different experiences with popular culture, adolescents, and literacies might well perceive things differently. Secondly, this study is built upon subjective self-report data collected from adolescents, their friends, parents, and teachers. Self-report data have been critiqued in the past for being inaccurate. But because this study addresses audience's perceptions and uses of texts in the study of adolescents themselves, implementing self-report data was the best way to find out about their own uses of popular culture. Third, because I focused this research on adolescents, this study downplays an emphasis on adults and

their uses of popular culture. Finally, this study reports on a 10-week exploration of the lives of seven adolescents. Though they are quite different from one another and represent a diverse group, the findings from this study are not generalizable to all 12- and 13-year-olds.

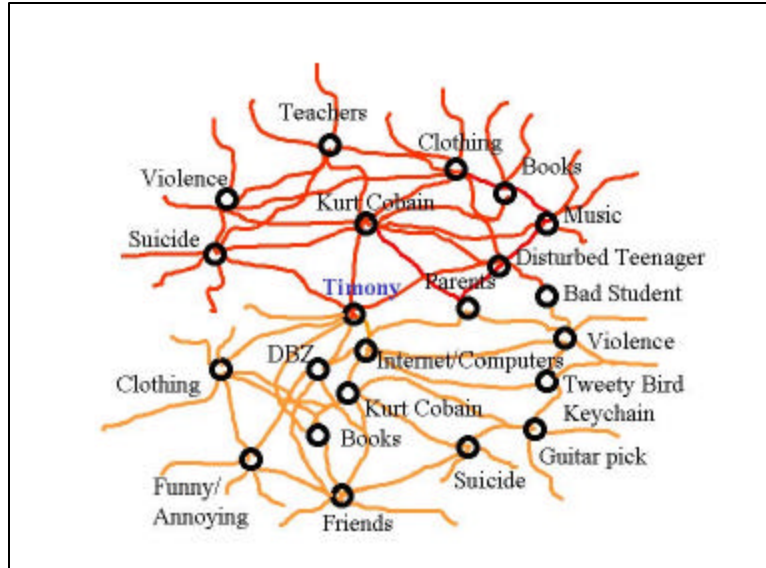
Importance of the Study

This study holds relevance for the ways that adolescents, popular culture, and literacy are defined and categorized. Others have documented how influential popular culture is in adolescents' lives and how media produce texts that make adolescents into particular sorts of people. This study, however, approaches these ideas differently, beginning with the adolescents themselves. It examines how adolescents are not only produced as particular sorts of people in texts but also how they construct themselves using popular culture in different ways—in ways that often remain overlooked because of the heavy emphasis that media and production have on adolescents today and because of the categorizations placed on adolescents. This study also assists in rethinking categories of adolescence and popular culture as situated within the larger context of contemporary literacies.

CHAPTER 2:

POPULAR CULTURE AND PUSHING AGAINST

A REBELLIOUS TEEN IDENTITY



Oftentimes people are categorized based upon external factors that mark them as being particular sorts of people. Categories such as nationality, age, gender, race, and ethnicity are examples of categories that produce identities for naming people and for organizing ways of thinking about people. These categories group people and attempt to stabilize their identities. Popular culture is also a marker that produces particular ways of being such that people make assumptions about a person's identity based upon the person's readily apparent popular culture interests. For example, the clothes that people wear, the language that they use, the books they choose to read, all mark people as having identities that converge with certain interests and not others.

Adolescents are no exception to this production of identity based upon their popular culture interests. And while adolescents use popular culture to be identified as a particular sort of person, they also use their popular culture interests to push against those and other categories and assumptions that attempt to stabilize their identities and to produce them as particular types of people. Such was the case with Timony whose popular culture interests produced problematic identities for him and assumptions about him at Hancock Middle School. (These identities are highlighted in red in the map at the beginning of the chapter.) But Timony also used his popular culture interests both in- and out-of-school to label others as particular sorts of people and to push against those categories and assumptions that produced him within certain categories and with certain identities. (Timony's uses of popular culture to undo those identities are highlighted in orange on the map at the beginning of the chapter.)

At first glance, the most apparent and traditional categories defined Timony with identities as a particular person. For Timony, these categories—these identities that defined him both in- and out-of-school and that he accepted—included being male, adolescent, White, eighth-grader, and student. These categories marked him in ways that he assumed as part of his day-to-day life.

Yet, popular culture interests also marked him as a particular kind of person. When I first met him, he was wearing a t-shirt with Kurt Cobain, the lead singer of *Nirvana*, on the chest. I immediately categorized him as someone interested in grunge music and perhaps alternative music. And, later, through discussions with him, both online and in person, I learned that this popular culture interest in Kurt Cobain was indicative of an identity that he liked and used. As he explained, he chose his pseudonym,

Simon Fair Timony (a.k.a. SFT and Timony) based upon his reading of *Who Killed Kurt Cobain? The Mysterious Death of an Icon*, a biography of Kurt Cobain.

From: oxkurtcobainxo
 To: mchagood
 Date: Tuesday, October 17, 2000 8:48 PM
 Subject: answers

Hey,
 This kid [Simon Fair Timony], he's 10-years-old and the lead singer of this weird little band called "The Stinky Puffs". I heard about him because he wrote a song called "I love you anyway" about Kurt Cobain committing suicide and performed it with Krist Novoselic (bass guitar for *nirvana*) and Dave Grohl (drummer of *Nirvana*). I got the song off Napster. It was weird cause only one person had the song. Now two, I guess :0)...It's a (excuse me, but, for lack of a better word...) cute song!!!!" You need to hear it!" ...Oh yeah, if you don't have Napster, GET IT! Second off, if you do, or when you do, get that Stinky Puffs song. The artist would be "Stinky Puffs", but don't put in the title of the song, cause the person that has the song changed the title.

Later, The other Timony

Timony knew all about Kurt Cobain, owned all four of the *Nirvana* albums, had downloaded several hard-to-find *Nirvana* songs from Napster, and had read several books about the band and about Kurt Cobain. As someone who'd followed the band for a couple of years, he didn't appreciate the recent popularity that *Nirvana* had found among his peers at school. For a stint during seventh grade *Nirvana* became popular with other kids. "It's like this," he remarked matter-of-factly. "I just think that people should genuinely like something, not just to be an imposter because other people like it. Everyone thought that *Nirvana* was cool last year, and they just started listening to it, and they didn't even really like it. It annoys me to no end. I was just pissed about the *Nirvana* thing because kids were just trying to follow Alex and Will because they are popular. But those kids [who follow Alex and Will] didn't really like *Nirvana*. It was like fake worshipping or something. And now they've moved onto something else."

Timony and I shared interests in both the alternative music scene in the United States and computer/technologies, which became a central part of our time together. He introduced me to Napster, and often in the evenings we'd email back and forth about music that we liked.

From: oxkurtcobainxo
 To: mchagood
 Date: Wednesday, October 18, 2000 4:10 PM
 Subject: music

Hey,

I'm into grunge (a kind of punk rock/rock genre), rock, and certain types of poppish songs. I really like *nirvana*, *pearl jam*, *r.e.m.*, *fuel*, and the *red hot chili peppers*. those are my main bands. X is the only radio station i listen to. And you?

From: mchagood
 To: oxkurtcobainxo
 Date: Wednesday, October 18, 2000 9: 47 P.M.
 Subject: Re: music

Me? I like *pj*, *rem*, *rhcp*, too, as well as *lenny kravitz*, the *gd*, *dmb*, *phish*, *stp*, and *soul asylum*. I also follow several lesser known bands from my days living out in wyoming: *little women* (the jerry joseph band), *widespread panic*, the *connells*, *big head todd and the monsters*, *fountains of wayne*. And I keep up with other bands like *wilco* and the *jayhawks*. I really like *beck* and *izzy stradlin*, too. And have, within the last year, become pretty keen on different rap artists: *eve* and *lauryl hill* in particular. Then again, I also like some old stuff: *Hot Tuna*, *Little Feat*, I guess the *gd* would go here as well, *dylan*, old *Rolling Stones*, and yes, the *Allman Bros*.

From: oxkurtcobainxo
 To: mchagood
 Date: Thursday, October 19, 2000 3:40 PM
 Subject: Re: music

Yeh, add *The Doors*, *Widespread Panic*, *Bob Marley*, and *Pylon* to my list....*Soul Asylums* cool!! There awesome. I didn't think you listened to that kind of stuff, but, your only in college. It's not like you only listen to the *Allman brothers* or anything. Oh yeah! I listened to them on a fieldtrip the other day!

At 13-years-old Simon Fair Timony was almost six-feet tall, standing a good eight or so inches taller than the three or four friends he met up with in the cafeteria everyday for lunch. His brown, shaggy hair fell over his small, wire-rimmed glasses, and in the world of cartoons he reminded me of a bigger, broader Shaggy from *Scooby Doo* as he shuffled around with his hands crammed into his jeans pockets barely picking up his feet to move. At least once a day, he pulled on the front of his hair to measure the length in relation to his nose. To him, the longer his hair, the better.

Framed pictures from years past of Little League baseball and soccer adorned the shelves of Timony's bedroom, amidst mounds of books stacked haphazardly on top of a bureau, video games, and stereo equipment. And across his room, Timony had created a wall of favorite items that he had posted above his bed—a large posters of *Nirvana*, a running book list of desired books to read (some scratched off because he'd already read them), and computer printed drawings he had made of *Dragonball Z* characters.



In his sports' team photos Timony could be found on the back row with a big smile on his face and a short, bowl haircut. He was one of several boys on an all male,

and predominantly European American team. Sitting on the floor in his bedroom one afternoon, he picked up one of the photographs and reminisced about those years. “I used to play sports all the time. I was really good at baseball, like except for some reason I think I was afraid of the ball with the pitching machine. I could hit the ball if someone threw it to me, but I saw someone get hit in the head [by the machine], so I got scared. But I don’t like to exercise or play sports at school. It doesn’t make any sense,” he said while rubbing his stomach. “I don’t understand that Nike slogan—‘No pain. No gain.’ My slogan is ‘No pain. No pain.’”

This statement often seemed to be Timony’s *modus operandi*, at least at school. In that context the texts he used seemed to signal a lack of interest in most academic fare. His routine attire consisted of a big t-shirt and a pair of JNCO jeans, and either a pair of Nike sneakers with a hole in the left toe covered with a bit of black duct tape or a pair of black sandals with Velcro stays. He boasted that he exerted little energy for school sports, and he never once dressed out for P.E. class this year. He marveled at his accomplishment, saying “I am proud of that for some reason! I know I am going to fail P.E. this six-weeks, but it’s just an exploratory class, so it doesn’t really matter to me.”

Timony’s teachers noted that he was incredibly intelligent, but unmotivated. His language arts teacher quickly pointed out that he read on a Grade 14 equivalency, and his interests and comprehension of topics exceeded most teachers’ expectations, but he put forth little effort. His teachers consistently described him as “lazy” and “an underachiever.” His language arts teacher compared him to Abraham Lincoln. In an interview, she said, “He’s probably a genius. He’s definitely the brightest kid in the whole school, but he doesn’t apply himself. He’s failing most of his classes.” She

explained that Timony was a nuisance to others. “He reads books in two days that are assigned for whole class reading to be done over two weeks,” and then, “he ruins class discussions because he already knows what’s going to happen.”

Talking to Timony about reading pleasures, he said, “I love reading, so I’ll read just about anything, but it’s not considered popular culture at school. Kids at Hancock hate to read. [I think that] silent reading is the best part of the whole school day, even though it is a forced activity. Well, it’s the best unless it’s a day when we go to the computer lab. Then, I’d say the computer lab part is best.” To be sure, Timony was rarely without a book, which was most often stashed into one of the enormous hip pockets of one of three pairs of JNCOs when he wasn’t reading before class and frequently during class, hiding his own book inside an open textbook or notebook held close to his chest. It was difficult to pinpoint a favorite genre because his reading interests varied greatly. A sampling of his book choices included Stephen King’s, *The Dark Tower*, several books from the religious series, *Left Behind*, *Html for Duummies*, *Who Killed Kurt Cobain? The Mysterious Death of an Icon*, two special issues about musicians Jerry Garcia and Kurt Cobain from *RollingStone*, both of whom Timony esteemed for their musical and lyrical accomplishments, and an occasional sci fi book such as *Ender’s Game*.

On any given day, Timony could be spotted amongst a crowd as he frequently dressed in one of an array of colorful and attention-grabbing t-shirts. Sometimes he donned a bright orange shirt with the white and green painted face of an Oompa Loompa, or a neon green t-shirt with *Blink 182* written across the front in blue, or other dark-colored tees with silk-screen-printed pictures—a shot of *Nirvana* playing in a grunge bar

in Seattle or a close-up picture of Kurt Cobain eyes wide and mouth open as if screaming. Whenever he wore this shirt he amused other students as he played his trombone in band class and moved his stomach around, making Kurt Cobain's mouth move as if singing. But Timony's favorite t-shirt worn about every fourth day, was black, and in bold white letters across the chest was printed, "I hear voices and they don't like you!"

Though he might be seen amongst a group of teenagers, he didn't see himself as someone with a lot of friends or as someone into what was considered popular culture. When I asked him about himself, he said, "Yeah, I hang out with a few people, but I'm not really popular. The main reason anyone talks to me is because I am funny, and I can make people laugh. That's just fine with me. I'd rather not hang out with too many people at school." To Timony, school was a place to pass the time and to try to stay out of trouble.

Unlike his life at school, where Timony kept mostly to himself and adhered to a "No pain, no gain" mantra, his afternoons were filled with a different world—online activities—talking with virtual friends, building *Dragonball Z* websites, answering emails, engaging in Instant Messaging conversations with online friends, and downloading music from Napster on his family's computer. On the web, Timony could enjoy his popular culture interests with others like himself. Characterizing his after-school experiences, he wrote in an email, "Whenever i get home and am not on the internet, or watching DBZ at 5:00, then i'm just listening to music and/or playing it on my guitar. But mostly i am working on my website." Timony spent hours creating banners and new entrances, taking pictures of *DBZ* characters on a digital camera and uploading them as jpg pictures onto his site, writing daily updates about his site, monitoring the

daily number of hits his site received, and upgrading other site information (biographies of the *Dragonball Z* characters, recruiting affiliates, answering emails, advertising his site for possible hosting on other sites). During the 10 weeks we hung out together he was associated with 15 *Dragonball Z* websites and monitored between 15 and 20 email accounts.

The Internet was a world where Timony was free to roam and explore. Without the school restrictions of Cyber Patrol, which limited his online access, he skillfully navigated a multitude of sites and found a niche for himself. Unlike in school, he found people online who shared similar interests, and he wanted opportunities to develop those interests with them. Soon after we became acquainted, he told me to sign up for IM so that we could communicate online and real-time. Late one night as I was working, an unexpected IM box appeared on my computer screen, which began a lengthy conversation about the importance of being part of an online community.

CCgokuCC (Timony's IM name [a character from the Japanese anim  series *Dragonball Z*, but masked for anonymity]): you there?

Martha (that's me): yo

CCgokuCC: i just joined the staff of this new site!!!!

Martha: waz that?

CCgokuCC: www.superiordbz.com. [this is masked for anonymity]

CCgokuCC: im known as Mr.K for Kurt (Kurt Cobain). its growing really fast. gets about 200 hits a day.

Martha: i thought you were at another site....?

CCgokuCC: i am. still doin' bio stuff for them. now im in control of the dbz page mainly [on this new site]. i basically have diplomatic power over it.

Martha: so it's like a job?

CCgokuCC: i do whatever i feel. it's really awesome.

Martha: sounds like a lot of work and responsibility.

CCgokuCC: im going to put some video clips up this week. thatll improve our hits even more!!! And ill get more emails...

Martha: yikes! do you need more emails?!! seems like youre super busy already...

CCgokuCC: yeah, you always need more emails...☺ thats how you learn about other things. ya know—help each other out when youre stuck. stuff like that.

Hanging out with Timony after school, I learned how important his life on the Internet had become. One afternoon we headed to the public library so that Timony could upload several pictures he had saved on a zip file to one of the websites he maintained. Timony preferred to upload information onto his site at the public library or on the computer at my house because the connections were faster than for the computer at his house. As he toggled back and forth between uploading his information and checking out other people's websites, I wondered aloud about his interest in online friendships.

"I don't know, really," he said in earnest. "It just makes me feel special. Like it's really cool to have people like come from all over the place to see my site....and I feel like, 'Damn! That's totally awesome!' Yeah, so then if I keep adding new stuff, then people will keep coming to my site. And, I have to check my email. I love email. I check my email a lot because a lot of people will email, asking me what I'm going to put up on the site or needing some help with something. Then, I'll just email them back. It's cool. The Internet is an awesome way to meet people."

“But, how’s it different from school? Like meeting people and learning stuff?” I pushed him.

Continuing his work, he responded immediately. “At school, I do just enough work to get by. I mean, most of it doesn’t really apply to my life, so I just endure it...I like math and language arts okay. But everything else doesn’t make any sense. I think that as long as I am dealing with computers I am okay. I’ve researched it, and I’m going to go to online school when I am like 16, and I can get a job. It’s \$175 a month for a class, and my parents won’t pay for that. So I am just going to get a job and pay for it because it will be cool, and I will be able to learn, and I won’t have to go anywhere...I don’t like school, and generally it’s too many stupid people and teachers. If I go to online school I can’t be getting into trouble for like talking too much or reading something too fast. Then, when I am 16, I can just go and drive to lunch and go get a Burger King sandwich. That would be so superior.”

Over time, as Timony showed me, the Internet was a freeing place for him where he could assist and learn from other online users. On a daily basis, Timony added information to the multiple websites on which he was affiliated—changing layout designs, adding new anim  information about DBZ, creating pictures and banners. He especially enjoyed helping others on the development of their websites, often posting tutorials on how to work in html code or giving advice for troubleshooting when something technologically went wrong. This posting to one of his websites was indicative of the work he did to assist others.

Ya like? Saturday, December 16, 2000 at 9: 06 AM by Mr. K
Becoming a brother site: Okay, this is a damn good deal for you newbie webmasters!

What I will do is make you a button, splash pic, and a top banner for your site. I'll also help you with any html problems. And if necessary, I'll get you a layout (although it's a tedious process). What the hell do I have to do, you may ask? Have a site with a lot of content, and...Link me. That's right, link me! Just put me under a section entitled "Brother Sites" or "Hosted by". Just e-mail me and I'll start helping ya! (It'd be better if you already had us linked when I look at your site).

Timony felt free on the Internet to construct a way of being that pushed against age categories that imposed identities on him as less knowledgeable or less competent, such as the identities of student and adolescent produced for him at school. Speaking about learning in school, Timony said, "Teachers think you have to treat them really, really, really well because I guess they are, they think they are, bothering to teach you something, and so you should pay attention and stuff. It's just that they don't let us say crap....I don't know. They think that we are just kids so we aren't going to know anything. So they are that much superior. It's just dumb, that's all. I mean, I don't really know them, so I can't really judge them. I guess I just don't really think that they know much about kids, about like what we like and stuff. That doesn't matter to them."

Interestingly, the popular culture texts of Timony's life—at least those that he brought to school with him—actually were noticed by his teachers. They were aware that Timony was an avid reader and enjoyed reading a variety of texts. But they were concerned about the identities he was learning from texts and the behaviors he exhibited in school. Some of the texts identified by teachers as part of Timony's life at school

related to his choice of print-based texts read during a 20-minute, school-wide, daily silent reading period and to his choice of attire.

Timony's teachers were delighted that he read often for pleasure, and they did not want to disrupt his interest in reading. Beyond their observations that Timony was bright and that he loved to read, however, Timony's teachers speculated that he had "a very dark side" and that he "might be in some way disturbed." Timony's choice of t-shirts gave the teachers a glimpse into a problematic and troubling adolescent identity based upon his popular culture interests. The teachers read Timony's t-shirts as emblematic of larger societal issues with teenagers. Discussing Timony with me, his math teacher commented, "he is in a typical sort of rebellion pattern or whatever against society, and I know that the Columbine thing scared everybody." And his language arts teacher ruminated, "I don't know that there is anybody more affected by Columbine than the kids. I think that the teachers, of course, were all shaken by the experience, and the media glamorized everything....In the wake of Columbine, we have to be aware of kids like Timony."

It is commonly thought that people—kids in particular—learn how to act and behave, dress and think, according to what they are exposed to with popular culture. As kids read texts, they learn about their identities from the identities produced in the texts—no matter if the text is a print text such as a novel, a visual text like clothing in a fashion magazine or attire worn to school, a spoken text such as subcultural slang, or a digital text like a webpage. And because adolescents are kids, often times adults think that adolescents need to be protected from the identities that are produced in popular culture texts that adolescents like. For many adults, they don't want adolescents to emulate the

images in popular culture that perpetuate negative attitudes or stereotypical rebellious behavior.

Timony's choice of t-shirts combined with his seemingly unkempt appearance and his lackadaisical approach to academics genuinely worried his eighth-grade teachers. When he chose to complete assignments, they fretted over his choice of topics. For example, he chose to do a biography project on Kurt Cobain for a combined language arts and social studies activity. In a two-page, typed essay he wrote: "Kurt Cobain is a god. He was the best guitarist and song writer that recently lived, and he changed grunge rock forever. His music is really deep. Some of it won't make sense because there are a lot of metaphors that run together that you have to figure out....People think he committed suicide but I think he was murdered." (He then described in detail the conspiracy theory outlined by Halperin in *Who Killed Kurt Cobain? The Mysterious Death of an Icon*.) The language arts teacher explained that as teachers they supported students to "become who they are" by teaching them to "absorb texts to the best of their ability and to make sure that they accomplish the certain skill based learning they are supposed to do." Worrying about what Timony learned from the texts he read, the teacher commented after reading his essay, "it was disturbing to read about his fixation on a man who committed suicide."

Timony's text selections vexed his teachers. They read him as having an uncompromising attitude to remain both complacent and unruly at school, and this became cause for alarm among them. As a matter of fact, minor grade-level infractions such as disruptive behavior or incessant talking caused him to spend 15 days of a six-week period in In-School Suspension (ISS). Timony was well aware of the way that the

teachers saw him, and at one point he tried to recruit my help, communicating with me over email.

To: mchagood
 From: oxkurtcobainxo
 Date: Thursday, October 19, 2000, 8.49 P.M.
 Subject: help!

hey, in band mr. allen gave me a silent lunch, so i have iss AGAIN! thats why im trying to get you to watch him, because i didnt deserve that silent lunch. i hate that guy! He just hates me, I know this because everyone in the room is always talking or laughing yet he never does jack to them.....when i got home, i did my history homework, after watching *dragonball z*. then i talked to my parents about Mr. Allen being stupid. we got into a pretty big fight. it was annoying the crap out of me. i tried to get my point across, but dad didn't seem to understand me. we both basically kept saying the same thing over and over, and we basically ended up not very far from where we started. it ended up that i e-mailed you asking if you would check up on him whenever you were in there. i hope you can [help me], but whatever... its now 8:00. i'll probably just play some music.
 anyway, well, c-ya later, simon fair timony

At school, Timony's actions and comments often landed him in trouble. One such example of these infractions occurred during math class. As class began, the teacher asked Alex, a friend of Timony's who sat near him in the class, what was in Alex's mouth.

"It's a guitar pick," Alex mumbled, trying to remove the object and to respond simultaneously.

Timony threw his hands in the air and yelled, "No! It's a weapon! UUGGH! Careful! Careful! Alex has a weapon!"

The teacher stood up quickly from the chair and inquired again, "What is it?" Alex began to laugh. Spitting the guitar pick out, Alex held it up and shouted between chortles while looking at Timony, "NO! It's a guitar pick. See!" Alex thrust the guitar pick out in hand for the teacher to see.

Timony remarked, "Careful! Everyone be careful!"

The teacher ignored Timony and told Alex to put the object away. As Alex put the pick in a jean's pocket, Timony declared, "Careful with it when you do that. It might go off!"

The teacher looked sternly at Timony and gave him a silent lunch (a punishment whereby he had to eat lunch silently in a room separate from the cafeteria) for "disruptive behavior," which later resulted in time spent in ISS. Timony didn't protest. He actually found the whole incident funny and chuckled with Alex as they left the room at the end of the class period.

The teachers defined Timony through a stabilization of the identities they thought were produced in behavior as a result of the texts he used at school. Attributing particular meanings to texts such as his attire, his book choices, and self-selected topics about a grunge band and a lead singer who supposedly committed suicide, the teachers were concerned about the power the text had over Timony and on the identity he learned from reading these texts. The texts Timony used and his recurring time spent in In-School Suspension continuously produced an identity for Timony as a *bad student*.

The teachers at Hancock may very well have had reason to be concerned about Timony given the current school culture related to violence. At every entrance to the school were multiple posted signs such as "Drug free, weapon free zone" and "These premises are under camera surveillance," calling attention to the need for students, teachers, and visitors to be aware of the school policies. Furthermore, the school had implemented several practices in an attempt to provide a safe and secure learning environment. Cameras surveilled the hallways, and the video was piped into several large-screen televisions in the main office of the school. Students were expected to wear

a school identification card around their necks and “to keep them on their person at all times.” To maintain safety in the building, the students were to remain outside of school or in the gym before the first bell every morning. Then, they were led through the hallways and directed to their lockers where they were told to stow all bags, backpacks, and coats for the remainder of the school day. Officer Johnson, a full-time police officer employed at the school, patrolled the halls and the cafeteria “to keep the peace” and to “watch the kids to make sure they don’t get into any trouble” as he told me. Between classes, he meandered the halls, talking to the kids and joking as the students moved to their next class, “Lock ‘em up, in your cells, close the doors!”

Certainly concerns about violence in the school were not unwarranted, even though Hancock was awarded a national honor for School Excellence during the time that I was hanging out with the kids. Actually, several incidents had occurred both nationally and locally worth mentioning that perhaps affected the teachers’ readings of the texts and exacerbated perceptions of the identities that produced Timony as a *bad student* or *disturbed teenager*.

First, the teachers were concerned about students at the school who seemed to resemble in any way students who had been perpetrators of acts of violence at other schools or in their own school. The tragic events of Littleton, Colorado, that had occurred two years previously, weighed heavily on their minds. They were apprehensive about students who seemed angry or who exhibited anti-social behavior, and they kept a watchful eye on groups of students who seemed to be “developing rebellious attitudes.” As one teacher noted, “kids today are in a rebellious stage, and teachers need to be attentive to that rebellious stage because [we] are uncertain about what it means to the

kids. If rebellious behavior is left unattended, then teachers don't feel like they're safe and aren't doing their jobs, so we address it promptly with silent lunch."

The teachers read Timony's choice of t-shirts and books as an identity reminiscent of depictions of disturbed teenagers who mimicked destructive identities learned from popular culture texts. They were genuinely concerned about Timony's well-being and about the well-being of other students. As good teachers, they were attentive to and troubled by adolescents' exposure to valorized rebellion apparent in adolescent popular culture. Their concern about rebellious and violent popular culture made them wary of what Timony learned from text and reflected in his identity at school, and their wariness translated into immediate action—silent lunch and In-School Suspension.

Second, Hancock had also had its share and scare of violence that the teachers had recently dealt with. For example, during the previous school year, Anthony, a White, male, eighth-grade student had been expelled from the school for threatening to blow up the principal's car and to kill the principal. And, while Timony was in eighth grade, a bomb threat caused a school-wide evacuation. Wanting to avoid violent behavior among current eighth-grade students, the teachers were quick to attribute negative meaning to the texts that Timony used and to his actions, but they were also quick to conjure among themselves and to me that his behavior was a "stage" or "phase that he is going through."

And, third, at the beginning of the academic year, area schools had implemented a zero-tolerance policy in order to reduce the number of violent-related episodes on campuses, much in response to a rash of reported violent events involving adolescents that had occurred across the United States in the previous two years. As part of this policy, a list of particular items such as guns, knives, chains, swords, ice picks, and pellet

guns was generated and defined as weapons unsuitable to bring to school. Given the school policy in place and the school climate related to violence, Timony's commentary that Alex's guitar pick was a weapon seemed improper to the math teacher. The teacher thought his remarks further signaled a disturbed and problematic identity, an identity that did not take seriously the policies in effect.

Timony's teachers concerned themselves with what they thought were the influences that the texts had on Timony, but they didn't consider what Timony thought of those texts or how Timony used those texts for his own purposes to push against the categories that defined him and his identity at school. Timony was well aware that his choices of and uses of texts produced particular and contradictory identities of *avid reader*, *bad student*, and *disturbed teenager*, but he argued that the popular culture texts he used didn't have anything to do with being rebellious or subversive in order to be a bad student or to be seen by others as disturbed. He used popular culture texts to push against those identities and to construct another way of life for himself.

To Timony, the t-shirts he wore to school and the books he chose to read had no inherent and stable meaning. Speaking to this issue, Timony exclaimed, "The shirt doesn't mean anything! It's just that I will wear just about anything that attracts attention. But that doesn't mean anything. I mean, I think attention is good....I try to act weird, not to be mean, but to be funny. Like the shirt I wear that says 'I hear voices and they don't like you,' that shirt is awesome because kids will ask me like what I hear. And I think that's funny! It doesn't mean that I really don't like people. Now that's weird!"

Timony thought that people misunderstood his interest in Kurt Cobain because they attached meaning from his present interests to his past actions. "Ask anybody in the

eighth grade,” he said. “I used to get into a trouble a lot in sixth grade....And, it worries people, like my mom and [my language arts teacher and my band teacher] that I like identify with Kurt Cobain and that kind of stuff because he killed himself. It makes people think that I want to do that to myself, and it makes me really mad....People are screwed up....Just because [Kurt Cobain] um ended up like that doesn’t mean I am going to....Because I mean I just can’t. I sometimes like can identify with what he is singing about but that doesn’t mean I am going to kill myself....He was like having serious problems with his life.” Timony, no doubt, understood that the fatalistic and negative identities attributed to Kurt Cobain were transferred onto him. But he disputed the identity of *disturbed teenager* or *bad student* because of his interest in Kurt Cobain.

Timony was sent to ISS for four days for his comment that the guitar pick was a weapon. He said that he didn’t care about going to ISS because at least there people would leave him alone, and he could just sit in the classroom and read whatever he liked. Knowing that he spent most of his time in ISS reading books, I brought to him a sci fi book (*Ender’s Game*) the next morning. I dropped it for him at the ISS building. He met me at the door, and when I gave it to him, he replied, “Thanks. Jay was supposed to bring the next book in the [*Left Behind*] series, but he doesn’t know where he put his. I looked for the book in the library, and it’s not there.” He skimmed over the back of the book and gave me a nod. “Yeah, now I have something to read.”

I took him home after school when Timony was released from ISS. While walking to my car I asked him if he felt like he was a bad student. Shuffling along, he opened the car door and slumped down in the seat. At first he was silent, and stared out the window. He seemed bummed out. As I started the car, I asked, “So now you’re

finished with ISS. That's good isn't it?" Timony said, "Yeah, I guess. I finished *Ender's Game* today. That book is awesome. At least I don't get in trouble there." Then he got quiet again. We rode in silence. As we pulled up into his driveway, he said, "I don't think that I'm bad now. I have an identity as a troublemaker...I'm just—I guess I'd say I'm mischievous. I just talk too much and try to make people laugh. I'm just the annoying class clown. That's all I ever do. It's just that I get into trouble because [the teachers] are thinking of me when I used to get into trouble at school in sixth grade for fighting and stuff like that. But I don't do that anymore. I just kinda keep to myself and ignore those people."

In keeping to himself at school, Timony did a lot of reading and used popular culture in ways that his teacher and parents didn't know what to make or to think of his interests. Few if any people bothered to ask him about it. Some kids knew about his website creation. It wasn't uncommon for kids to pass him in the hallway and to tell him that one of his websites was cool. Yet no adults seemed to focus in on Timony's out of school engagement within a larger online community who looked to Timony for assistance in their creations of websites. Assumptions loomed large, and Timony was frustrated.

Timony's parody of the guitar pick being a weapon illustrates how identities produced Timony in one way at school, while his out of school interests in popular culture allowed him to push back on those identities. Two days before the guitar pick incident in math class, the story of a sixth-grade student in another middle school attracted national media attention because the girl was suspended for 10 days for bringing to school a 9³/₄inch plastic Tweety Bird key chain attached to her wallet. School officials

reported that the key chain violated the school district's zero-tolerance policy on weapons. Timony was aware of this incident, having read reports about it on the Internet and having discussed the obscurity of the ruling with his friends during lunch at school. He had also read about another middle school student who had been suspended from school for asking his teacher if the chain he carried could be considered a weapon. (Neither of these local and national current events was discussed in Timony's classes at school.)

Timony's parody of the guitar pick and of the varying meaning attributed to it illustrates how he actively pushed against categories that assumed that adolescents were deviant and rebellious. Timony's teacher read Timony's commentary in a way that further produced an identity of a *bad student* or *disturbed teenager*, but Timony had positioned himself outside of those identities, trying only to make a point and to call attention to the ambiguity of the meaning of a text—a guitar pick—in relation to the Tweety Bird key chain incident. In this way, Timony transformed these identities, going against the determined identity of student and trying to illustrate how inequitable it was that adults named and defined texts all around him, including texts that were important to him (Kurt Cobain, clothing, books, and music).

Two other incidents related to violence further complicate Timony's stance. First, on a subsequent day and in a different class, the teacher gave the students knives to use for smoothing blocks of plaster for sculpting in art class. While handing out the tools to be used for carving, the teacher reminded the students that knives were tools, but they were also weapons. Timony listened and didn't say anything, and he used the knife during class as directed by the teacher. As we walked to his next class, I queried Timony

about the teacher's lecture. "The teacher was right." He replied. "I mean, it could be a weapon, and you could kill somebody with it." He went on. "I mean you always have to be careful. It is kind of ridiculous. Sometimes, like if teachers see something like rubber bands or paperclips that kids have, then they are like 'This is considered a weapon from now on, and you will be suspended or expelled from now on if you bring it to school again.' It's just funny because it is just a stinkin' office supply, and teachers make it into something bad. I mean, it can be serious and all, but a guitar pick? I just said it really to be funny and make a point. If a key chain can be a weapon and a knife can be a tool, why can't a guitar pick be a weapon?"

At the same time Timony connected the discussion about the weapons and the ambiguous meaning of them to Anthony's expulsion from school. He said, "There was a kid here last year. He was a wacko. I mean you don't joke about killing people. You know, I mean, people joke about killing people, but you can like say, 'I'm going to kill you' like you're just joking, but he wasn't joking. He was really, really violent. So it's a good thing that he was sent to alternative school." Though some teachers worried that Timony's identity as a *bad student* was reminiscent of Anthony's identity, Timony positioned himself outside of and different from that identity.

Timony was adept at accepting and refusing categories that identified him and made assumptions about him based upon his popular culture interests. And though he acknowledged the meanings that others ascribed to texts, his own uses of popular culture attempted to push against those identities that positioned him as adolescent, less knowledgeable, and deviant. He tried often to use his popular culture interests to push against those assumptions that categorized him and to create new identities and categories

where he could be knowledgeable and could speak up without getting into trouble. At the same time he understood quite well that, to his teachers and parents, his popular culture interests unsettled them.

The teachers defined Timony based upon assumptions about the texts he used at school and the categories that produced him and made him recognizable as a particular person. Attributing particular meanings to the texts in Timony's life, the teachers were concerned about the power the text had over Timony to influence him to act in particular ways. To the teachers, Timony was identified as a "bad student." None of his teachers attributed any of Timony's free-choice texts as appropriate for school. None of his teachers saw his uses of popular culture as a push against the categories that defined him as a bad or disturbed student. Timony, on the other hand, aptly understood that the popular culture texts he used perpetuated the very same identity that teachers perceived as threatening.

By connecting his knowledge of current events related to the girl's suspension for bringing a Tweety Bird key chain to school to his commentary about Alex's guitar pick, Timony exhibited a different way of being, pushing against stabilization of the meaning of weapons and of an identity that adolescents are violent. At the same time, Timony acknowledged that adolescents are capable of being violent, citing Anthony as an example and exhibiting an acknowledgement of identity categorizing.

At the often tenuous intersection of sometimes discrete and sometimes overlapping categories and assumptions, readers take up different stances. By looking across the ways that popular culture texts produced identities for Timony and the ways that Timony pushed back on those identities, what becomes more apparent is the

instability of the identities to keep him positioned as a particular person: a *disturbed teenager* or a *bad student*. Re-examining Timony and the events related to violence exemplifies how his uses of texts kept notions of himself ever-changing and sometimes conflicting.

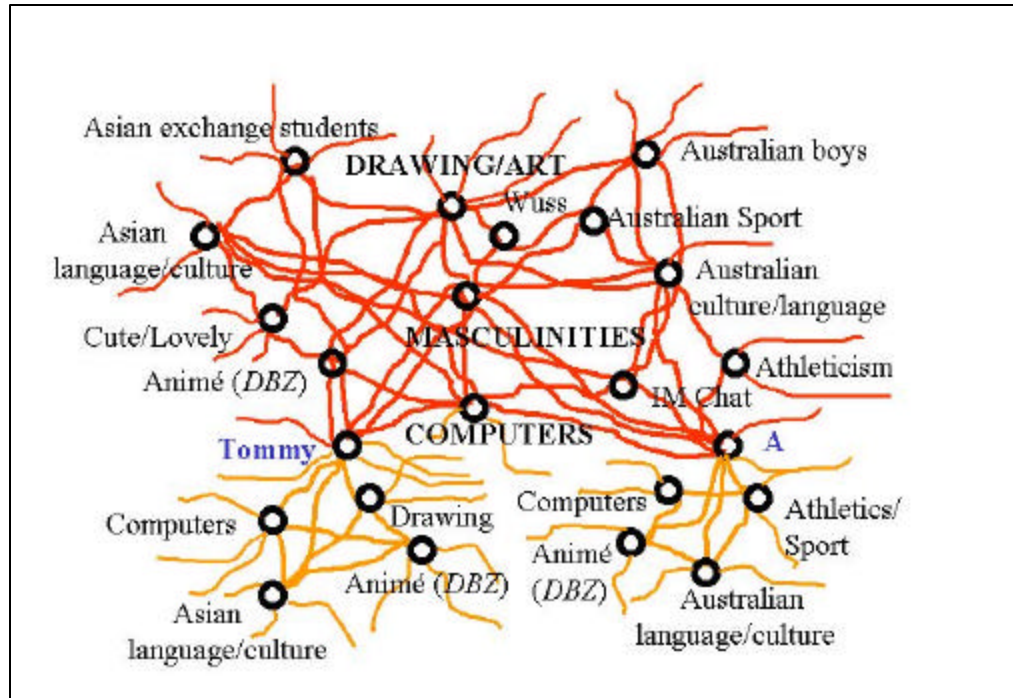
In school Timony accepted the identities given to him while also trying to push against them. To Timony, texts meant nothing in particular (e.g., the meaning of his t-shirts), and therefore text could mean anything (e.g., if a key chain can be a weapon, why can't a guitar pick be one?). In this way, Timony illustrated the complexity of movement across categories, sometimes erratic, sometimes fluid, which allowed him to push against the forces that named him and categorized him as a particular kind of person.

Timony's own uses of texts showed how his readings constantly changed the text and himself in an attempt to move outside of identities that produced him as a particular person. He tried to push away any identity that produced him as bad, or like Anthony, and he called attention to the school's practices of producing particular identities in texts, such as naming all key chains as weapons. These activities became outlets for Timony to create new ways of being—not to be bad or rebellious. The trouble, however, with Timony's activities is that his efforts went unnoticed by the adults as an attempt to undo being labeled as a particular kind of person, of having a particular identity. Within the context of school Timony was most importantly considered a student who was in a particular phase or stage in life—that of being an adolescent. From this student identity, he was expected to know less about the world and about subject matter than his teachers and to act accordingly. These identities predominated and held firm, as did the identity of being a disturbed teenager and a bad student, and adult interpretations of Timony's

actions only further exacerbated the popularized identity of a rebellious teenager that often landed Timony in trouble at school.

CHAPTER 3:

READING PLEASURES: BODIES, BOYS, AND POPULAR CULTURE



Popular culture is, for sure, associated with pleasures, as Tommy, A, Amanda, Tee, Rosa, L'il J, and Timony told me and showed me over and over again. But the word pleasure said in the same sentence with adolescents and popular culture often causes adults to bristle! When pleasure *is* discussed and seen as appropriate, it is most often associated with intellectual pursuits of the mind, of the sheer enjoyment of getting lost in a good book, or of the aesthetic appreciation of developing rational sensibilities through reading books. Adolescents' reading pleasures often conjure up images of youngsters curled up on a sofa engrossed in thick novels and oblivious to the world around them or

depicted in scenes of adolescents reading together in a cozy book nook, sharing books or magazines, smiling, perhaps pointing to illustrations. And reading for pleasure often only counts in school during silent reading time if adolescents are reading print-based texts. Rarely, however, are adolescents' reading pleasures connected to non-print texts—things like movies, Japanese animé, and sports—and to uses of texts that move beyond print-based reading.

Adolescents' pleasures are most often acknowledged and used to promote reading of school-sanctioned texts. In this way, reading printed texts pairs with pleasure. It's not uncommon to see photographs or posters of musicians and movie stars who are popular among adolescents advertising the pleasures that print-based reading has to offer. Posters adorn my office in the Reading Education Department at the University of Georgia, reminding me that stars who are considered cool and associated with pleasures from their music or movies promote the idea that reading books, as a product, is cool and pleasurable too. The band members of *R.E.M.*, for example, sit amidst several books with prominently displayed spines strategically placed in clear view for reading the titles. Works by authors such as Flannery O'Connor, Oscar Wilde, and Max Schulman, for example, are the exemplars included in this poster to advertise pleasures to be found in text reading. I also have taped to my office door a poster of Jake Lloyd, the teenage star in *Star Wars: Episode I, The Phantom Menace*, reclined in a rowboat reading *Ender's Game* (one of the sci fi books from a series written about Ender, a gifted student, which Timony and I both tremendously liked). The bottom of the poster says, "Get caught reading!" Hmmm, I wonder...Get caught reading what? Is my viewing of the poster

considered reading? What pleasures are produced and constructed from getting caught reading something other than a book?

Posters advertising the intellectual pleasures that reading books have to offer are often the artwork that decorate the walls of libraries and schools. One such poster hung in the Kehara State High School Media Center. Beneath a detailed illustration of a far-away and imaginary land filled with cartoonish Japanese anim  creatures with big eyes and tiny bodies was the caption, “Read: Fantasize new worlds!” Jenna and Taryn, the media specialists at Kehara, promoted reading, both in the texts that they provided for check-out and the way that the Media Center was laid out. The Media Center was often packed with students before school, during morning tea, or at lunch. There, the students spent time reading books and magazines, talking with friends at several large round tables, and surfing the Internet. Students at Kehara were encouraged to engage their minds with a bit of text to obtain that sense of pleasure. Taryn noted that students most often frequented the Media Center during lunch so that they could work on projects and read. “The Internet has made it so that kids read more books,” she said. “It has linked them to information about good books related to their subject area studies.”

But what if fantasizing new worlds for reading extends beyond the cerebral pleasures stimulated from getting lost in a good book? What if young people’s reading pleasures seep out of the realm of printed texts deemed appropriate for intellectual pleasures (e.g., reading Edgar Allan Poe or even the newest literary genius, J.K. Rowling) and into the realm of pleasures created from visual texts of the popular—sports, computer media, and Asian anim , for instance? And, what happens when adolescents’ reading

habits actualize rather than fantasize worlds where pleasure manifests itself in using popular culture to read bodies?

The phrase *reading texts* is all too often only associated with reading the printed word. However, images, such as television, posters, clothing, and even people, act as texts that are read, interpreted, and used everyday. When television is viewed, audiences read the images to make sense of them. When I read the poster of Jake Lloyd, I read not only the words but also the image of him relaxing in the rowboat. And when people are with one another, they read each other's bodies. People read bodies when in conversation in order to try to understand what others are saying nonverbally. Bodies are also read in relation to popular culture—in the clothing people choose to wear, the language they use, and the gestures and actions they convey non-verbal communication. Bodies, like print-based books, are texts that are read, and people often find pleasure in reading one another's bodies. Tommy and A were two such boys whose uses of popular culture included not only reading print-based texts for intellectual pleasure, but also using their understandings of popular culture to produce and construct readings of bodies. (The map at the beginning of the chapter illustrates how others read Tommy and A as depicted in the connections of the red lines and how Tommy and A used popular culture to push against and to create new and different ways of reading themselves and their bodies using popular culture, as shown with the orange lines.)

Mere appearance alone gave no glimpse that these two boys were anything alike. More likely, they seemed like the odd couple. A immigrated to Australia, having lived the first 10 years of his life in a small fishing village in China. During two years of primary school (Grades 6 and 7) and one year of high school (Grade 8) in Australian

public schools, A honed his English skills and learned how to fit into Australian culture. When I met him, he considered himself bilingual in Chinese and English, and wanted to be a part of the study in order to practice his English and to “make friends with someone from America.” At the same time, A was apprehensive about participating in the study because as he said, “I don’t know if I can represent an Australian identity.” In short, he understood that he was an outsider from another place, and he wanted to be clear that he thought that his interests might differ from other kids who had grown up living in Australia.

A was a tall 13-year-old. His straight, black hair was cut short, and it stood up in different places on his head. His dark brown eyes and furled brow often lightened up and relaxed when he grinned and laughed. A spent most of his afternoons alone after school while his parents worked at the local university where his mother was a doctoral student in chemistry and his father ran computer analyses for the Engineering Department. Usually A’s afternoons consisted of doing homework, playing sport at a local park, and surfing the Internet on an old laptop computer that his parents had bought for him. On the Internet, he mostly read junk email that he received from listservs he joined and chatted with strangers on yahoo teen chat. He felt that these activities helped him to improve his English.

Once a week A also delivered a neighborhood newspaper, and was saving his money to pay for a trip to China to see the friends and family he left behind. (He had saved 900 Australian dollars when I met him.) A enjoyed school, and he prided himself on being a hard-working student. On Saturdays, he attended Chinese School, and he

hosted a Chinese student, He Wei, for two weeks through an exchange program at Kehara.

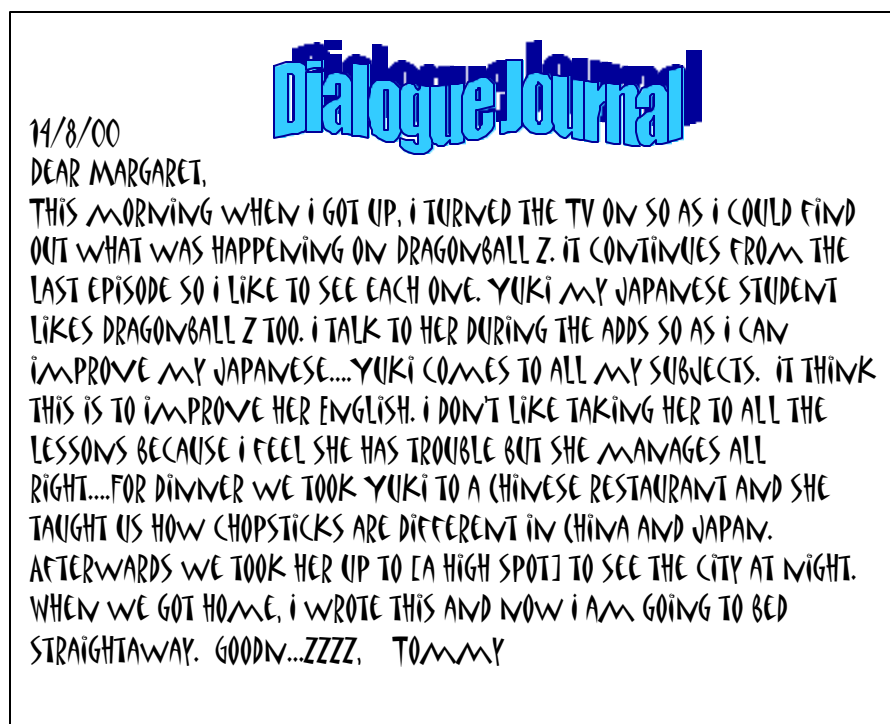
A was also well liked at Kehara. As a big, muscular boy, he was a talented athlete, excelling in track and Australian football. He also liked computers, computer games, and chatting online, and he described himself as “funny, strong, and happy.”

Tommy seemed the opposite of A. Born in Australia, Tommy was of English descent. His father had been a high school maths teacher, and he wrote the currently adopted Grade 8 maths text used at Kehara. Tommy’s father had left education and begun working for the Ministry of Transportation, and his mother worked part time as a cosmetic consultant so that she could have flexible hours to be at home in the afternoon with Tommy and his younger brother, Richie. Tommy was quite small and skinny at 12-years-old, with long, straight blonde hair and blue eyes. His pale, white skin burned easily, even during the middle of an Australian winter. Like A, Tommy valued school and worked diligently to continue his successes as a good student. He described himself as “sensitive, caring, and thoughtful.”

Tommy’s afternoons were booked with extracurriculars—playing trumpet in the school orchestra, taking golf lessons, playing soccer. When he wasn’t at coordinated activities, he spent time at home, playing on the computer, drawing Japanese-inspired animé, and designing a *Dragonball Z (DBZ)* website. Tommy’s interests in Japanese popular culture had begun sometime before he learned about *DBZ*. As he explained, “At my primary school I was really into *Pokémon*, and I knew about it six months before everyone else. I collected everything—the cards, the games, the figurines. But it just got too popular, and too many people liked it. And it got too commercialized, and that is why

I stopped liking it because I prefer something that is a bit more to yourself. So I stopped playing the game. Then I found *Dragonball Z*, which is much better because the whole school isn't talking about it, but a few people like it."

Tommy was monolingual in English, but he was learning Japanese so that he could watch and understand *DBZ* cartoons in Japanese and go to Japan on a student-exchange program through Kehara. He was one of four Grade 8 students at Kehara who hosted an exchange student from Japan. Yuki, a tall and thin Japanese girl, spent two weeks living with Tommy and his family and attending Tommy's classes at Kehara. Tommy enjoyed Yuki's company because they shared interests in Asian culture and Japanese animé.



Tommy and A had attended different primary schools, so they didn't meet until they both enrolled as Grade 8 students at Kehara. Assignment to the same form, which

aligned their course schedules so that they had all their classes together, and mutual interests resulted in a friendship that began on the first day of school. Recalling their first meeting, Tommy said, “Yeah, I thought [A] looked like Chinese or Japanese or something. I thought he was Chinese, but I thought...well um *Dragonball Z* is Japanese and Chinese, and well, it is mainly Japanese. But in China I thought he might know of it, so then I thought we could start up a conversation.”

Although A knew all about *DBZ*, he actually didn’t share Tommy’s pleasures in the anim . The *Dragonball* anim  series originated in 1982 in Japan, and A had already seen all the sagas (*Dragonball*, *GT*, and *Z*) in China before moving to Australia. The series had only recently aired in Australia. *Dragonball Z* and all the paraphernalia that went with it was a waste of time and money, A insisted. As he explained, “It isn’t too interesting anymore. I’ve seen all of them, and yeah it’s boring. I can’t be bothered with that. Kids love it for a period, and then it goes away. It’s like *Pok mon*. Everyone loved it when they came out...One year kids have 100 of the cards, and then one year later they just have none left, so it’s not trendy anymore. It’s just too expensive, and I have other things to learn.”

A and Tommy didn’t share pleasures in *Dragonball Z*, but they did share an interest in computer games, information technology, and sports. And, each one admired something about the other’s prowess in one of these areas. A, for example, was a well-respected athlete among the students at Kehara, and was known for his running abilities and strength. He often represented Kehara at local athletics carnival competitions with other schools, and he consistently was among the top five competitors. A loved sport and was naturally agile. He explained, “I play every kind of Australian sport like rugby

league, AFL [Australian Football League], soccer. Well, every country can play soccer. I can play, um, soccer and cricket. But I did not play that in China. There's no such thing like cricket in China." For A, playing sport in Australia was popular culture and a way for him to be accepted by the other Australian boys in his class because they recognized his talents. "I am pretty good, like at running. In AFL, you need fast people. So I can do it like the other boys. In like rugby league, you need stronger people. I'm pretty strong. So I can play that too." Often, his dialogue journals focused on his interests in computers and his engagement in sports-related events.

From: Aacrazycat
 To: mhagood
 Sent: Monday, July 24, 2000 9:15 P.M.
 Subject: this is A

Hi Margaret:

I will tell you what I do after school:
 After I have done my home works, the time is left to me. Sometimes I read a book but mostly I am on the computer. I am really good at computers, especially at computer games. I think I have finished about 30 big games, e.g. Age of Empires, KKND, Simcity 2000, Red Alert, and a lot more...I like to [go] on the Internet because I want to meet lots of friends in the chatroom. And sometimes I play sport at the park by my house. I was a champion in my primary school. I won everything except two things so I am really good at sport. That is all!!! Cheers, A

Tommy also liked sport, especially soccer and Australian football (footie). He wanted to play with A and the other boys during pick-up games at morning tea or lunch, but they often made fun of Tommy for his petite size and diminutive features. The other boys regularly prohibited him from entering their games, and though A didn't get involved when the other boys acted this way toward Tommy, he certainly didn't

encourage Tommy to play either. The teachers at Kehara worried about Tommy, saying that other, bigger boys picked on him “because he is small and has an effeminate face.”

More often than not, Tommy was excluded from the footie game and left the oval to hang out with a group of Asian boys who played handball and talked about *Dragonball Z*, computer graphics related to artwork and design, and Asian culture. Though Tommy and A rarely spent time together on the oval playing sport, they did hang out together in the morning before classes began, during morning tea, and sometimes after school to play on and to talk about computers. The two boys had formed a partnership to play a computer-simulated game of the Australian Stock Exchange that had been instituted for high school students, and they were competing to win \$1000. Sometimes their conversations about computers also included their research on stocks they thought prudent to buy.

Tommy had access to state-of-the-art computer technology at home, too. He owned a Pentium desktop computer, a scanner, a color printer, a Nintendo 64, and a Play Station, and several expensive computer software games—none of which A had at home. With access to this equipment, Tommy had taught himself how to use various software programs. He also had begun to create his own *DBZ* web page, which A didn’t know how to make and had asked Tommy to teach him.

Each boy had something that the other one wanted. Tommy wanted to be good at sports like A and to be accepted into the group with the other boys. And A wanted Tommy to teach him how to make a webpage.

One afternoon, A and Tommy wanted to go to Mcers (McDonalds) after school to get a sundae and talk. While the three of us sat outside near the brightly painted jungle

gym eating caramel and chocolate sundaes, the two boys began to discuss what made them friends.

“We both really like computers,” noted Tommy.

“Yeah,” A piped in. “Tommy has really good equipment.”

“Yeah, and we also like are pretty sporty. We both really like soccer,” Tommy said, and then turned to A. “You do like soccer, don’t you A?”

A shrugged his shoulders, and Tommy continued. “And we like to play football, and also...”

“But Tommy,” A interjected, “but sometimes other people don’t want Tommy to play because...”

“Nobody thinks I’m any good at anything on the oval,” Tommy finished A’s sentence. “But it’s actually,” he paused, “I may not be good at it, but they should at least give me a chance.”

I looked back and forth between Tommy and A. They both fell silent suddenly. “They won’t let you play?” I directed my question to Tommy.

Tommy sat forward in his seat and put down his sundae. “Yeah, sometimes they don’t like let me play, like they go, ‘Oh you got Tommy on your team?’ So like they aren’t very nice to me.”

A glanced over at Tommy and then at me, but he didn’t say anything. “And do you have, do you have the same thing going on, A?” I asked.

Before A could say anything, Tommy quickly responded, “No, A’s popular. Everyone likes A. He is like really good at everything. He’s really good in sports. He is really good like at touch, like running; he’s really fast, and he’s good at soccer and

everything.” He nodded at A, and then went on. “I’m good at soccer; I can be good at soccer, but some of the guys have something against me. Like I say, as soon as I walked up, I went to give A something for ASX [the stock broker online game they’re playing as partners], and they were playing soccer, and I knew that they weren’t going to let me play as soon as I walked out. Tim said, ‘No, Tommy, you aren’t playing,’ and he doesn’t even turn to me. He just knows that I’m there, and I just go, ‘Yeah right,’ and I just walk, and I go back, but it’s sort of like it’s pretty mean. That day I wasn’t even going to stay.” He paused and then picked up his sundae again and began eating.

“Yeah,” A replied, “They are really into sport. Maybe I’ll talk to Tommy about it, but if I say something to them they will pick on me.”

Turning to face A, Tommy said, “Yeah, but they could listen to you, too,”

“They won’t listen to me,” A countered immediately.

But Tommy persisted. “Yeah they could. They could listen to you. They would listen to you. You’re big.” Stopping a moment to think, Tommy then suggested, “They would listen to you if you say, ‘Ah, why don’t you let him play, or something.’ Then, they might, they might listen to me. They wouldn’t make me leave or anything. They wouldn’t say, ‘No, you aren’t playing.’” Tommy looked at A and waited.

A thought for a moment and then said matter-of-factly, “Tommy, you have to grow taller. No one will be calling...”

Tommy interrupted, saying “I know I’ll have a growth spurt, and then everyone will say, ‘Hey, you come over here!’ Then, I’ll go and talk with them.” Tommy sat back in his seat and laughed.

A laughed too, and reasoned to me, “I think all the problems are because Tommy is so little.”

“But why should anyone care about being small or big?” I asked. I wasn’t following.

“They don’t care about that. Like it’s about play,” A explained. “Tommy can’t, he can’t like run as fast as me and even other people. He’s not strong yet.”

“Yeah, and when I am big, then I’ll catch the ball,” Tommy laughed sarcastically. “Gosh, the world would be chaotic if I caught the ball. What would become of the world if I caught the ball?”

A looked to Tommy, but didn’t say anything.

Tommy paused. “Why then everyone would say, ‘Tommy, you caught the ball. Good on ya!’”

And they both fell out laughing uncontrollably.

In the realm of A’s and Tommy’s interests in sports that they deemed popular culture, they realized that bodies were important and that boys read each others bodies and attributed certain features to their bodies related to their understanding of proper identities for successful play in athletics. To be sure, A’s body and his general athletic abilities fit the Australian male, athletic identities that these boys—and their peers for that matter—held for playing sport on the oval. Tommy’s body, on the other hand, was compared to the proper body size and identity for playing sport, and the reading of his body type didn’t fit into what was considered acceptable. In order for Tommy to play sport with the other boys, he must become big and strong. At first, Tommy disputed A’s rationale and even tried to seek A’s assistance to speak to the other boys on Tommy’s

behalf. But once A explained that the other boys wouldn't pay attention to him and that Tommy's performance had much to do with his height and strength, Tommy agreed. Tommy then began to fantasize future encounters where his body fit the proper athletic identity, and others would recruit him to play sport.

Tommy would like to play sport with the others, but he allowed himself to be produced by identities and images made popular within the arena of masculinities and sports. He at first tried to negate the idea that boys have to have a particular kind of body and identity to play sport; indeed, he even solicited A's assistance to get the other boys to see him differently. But sensing that the assumed identity was too strong and that A wasn't going to stick up for him, Tommy quickly bought into A's logic. This practice of excluding Tommy from playing sport with the other boys made sense to both Tommy and A, even though they both thought the other boys were unkind in their exclusion of Tommy. They both felt that they couldn't directly push against the identities accepted to play sport on the oval. Ultimately, both Tommy and A allowed the others to produce identities onto them based upon their readings of the body and to determine who was to be included or excluded from play.

The other Grade 8 boys at Kehara further produced Tommy's identity as effeminate because of his other popular culture interests. At Kehara, Tommy won several High Achievement Awards for his artwork, and teachers recognized him as a talented artist. But the other boys consistently picked on him because he liked *Dragonball Z* and art, and many of the athletic boys often took advantage of his small stature and tried to push onto him a particular gendered identity. One day when A was absent from school, Tommy sat at a table talking with Allan (Tommy and A's Taiwanese friend who was also

interested in *DBZ* and computers) before a social studies lesson began. Tommy twirled his metal pencil case around in circles on the tabletop as they talked. The *Dragonball Z* characters and the kanji that Tommy had painted atop the pencil case blurred into a swirl of colors with each spin he gave it.

Simon, a boy who regularly teased Tommy and prohibited him from playing footie during morning tea, overheard their conversation about their recent picks of good *Dragonball Z* websites. Simon walked over to the table where Tommy and Allan sat. He pulled up a chair behind Tommy, and sat down so that Tommy was boxed in—the table in front of him and Simon’s chair behind him. Tommy continued talking with Allan, ignoring Simon. Then Simon grabbed the back of Tommy’s chair and tipped it back so that Tommy’s head arched and nearly touched the floor. “People who like *DBZ* are wussies,” he sneered.

Tommy looked up at Simon and replied calmly, “Then you are calling Allan a wuss.”

Allan didn’t say anything.

Simon pulled up on the chair, and then let it go. Tommy teetered on the seat for a moment and then caught his balance so that the chair righted itself and all four legs hit the floor simultaneously. He smiled closed-mouthed directly at Simon, seemingly pleased with his balancing act.

“Why do you like it, Tommy?” Simon continued his bullying. “It’s like Chinese stuff.”

“No, it’s not!” Tommy retorted. “It’s cool!” he said, and turned back to the table.

Simon yelled across the room to the other boys, “Tommy’s hosting a Japanese girl! That will work just fine for him. He is going to show her all his *Dragonball Zed* stuff.”

Tommy looked at me and grinned. “Those guys are so immature!” he remarked, shaking his head.

“Does it bother you?” I asked.

Tommy looked at his watch. “No, it just takes up too much time,” he said, and then resumed his conversation with Allan. Allan had remained silent throughout the episode.

Over and over again, the Australian boys hassled Tommy, ostracizing him from playing sport and teasing him about his interests in *Dragonball Z*. Tommy’s interest in *Dragonball Z* coalesced with his interests in art. One afternoon at his house, he showed me a bulletin board of his own anim  creations that he drew by hand, scanned, and then printed from a color printer attached to his computer.



Looking at the corkboard, he said, “I love, I really love drawing. I really appreciate the pictures that anim  artists draw because I know how hard they are. Like when they fight, I like that because the drawing is really, really good. It’s actually quite amazing how they draw them. It’s interesting how the story sort of continues on and on and on, and people get more powerful. I mean when I draw one, I’m drawing it from another thing. I’m copying it. But when they do drawing they are just doing it out of their heads, and it just looks so realistic. If you have a look at [the characters’] hair and their faces, they are really small and sort of detailed and all the shadowing makes them look really good. It takes me a really long time to draw one picture let alone thousands and thousands per show.”

Tommy actually spent a lot of his free time outside of school developing his interests in artwork. One Sunday, he wrote:

20/08/00

Dear Margaret

Today when I got up this morning it was about 9:00 and everyone was up except for mum. We had breakfast at half past and had scrambled eggs. Then I watched Business Sunday until it finished at about 10:30 which is when I started watching the show A Wash with Colours. This is a show about water colour painting which I enjoy watching because I like to draw and would like to paint in the future. The artist showed how to mix paints for a watercolour. Next up I watched a show Shabby Chic which is about a lady who designs rooms so they look stylish (chic) using some shabby materials. It went well with A Wash with Colours....and as you know, I like art stuff.

Dialogue Journal
Dialogue Journal

The following week during art class, Tommy used what he had learned from the television shows in his own design work at school. He was working on a landscape picture of a tree, and when the teacher passed him in the classroom Tommy asked, “Do you ever watch *A Wash with Colours*?”

The teacher stopped next to him and replied, “No, I’ve never seen it.”

Going back to his painting, Tommy continued as his teacher looked over his shoulder. “It’s on the Lifestyle channel, and it’s an Irish man who is an artist. He tells you what to do to make a watercolor painting. He says that 90% is mixing colors and 10% is drawing. I watched this weekend, and I learned all this stuff about drawing and mixing paint. He used a picture he had taken to paint a landscape.”

“I don’t know it,” the teacher said. “I’ll have to have a look for it.”

Haskell and Stephen, two boys who often made fun of Tommy during art class, listened to Tommy’s discussion with the teacher. When she walked away, Haskell yelled out, “Yeah, Tommy, you would know about that show. You wimp!” Tommy didn’t respond. The teacher didn’t either. Tommy just continued drawing.

The following week the Chinese exchange students that A and Allan were to host arrived for a two week visit. He Wei and Lim attended all of A’s, Allan’s, and Tommy’s classes. He Wei spoke a little English, but he mostly communicated through A. During the two weeks, when A went down to play footie on the oval during morning tea and lunch, He Wei hung out with Allan, Lim, Tommy, and a few other boys who spent their free time together discussing Japanese animé. While Tommy hung out with the Chinese students, he found that their shared interests in Japanese animé produced a different identity for him—one that contradicted the

demeaning identity that the boys on the oval produced for him. This different identity production of Tommy's body began in his dialogue journal entry one day after school.

dialogue journal

30/08/00

Dear Margaret
today when I left the house and got to school neither A or Allan were there yet until we all went into the library for form and A told me that he had a Chinese student who is really good at English and Allan also had a student who he didn't really tell me much about. But I got to meet them both when we had SOSE [social studies] and Haskell was making fun of A's student. when the lesson ended He Wei [A's student] said that he thought I was lovely (Haskell absolutely cracked up). Then He Wei said that he wanted to take a photo of me after class. It turned out that we didn't have enough time to take a photo so I went straight to Jap.... Goodnight, Tommy

During the next several days, two other incidents occurred that pushed against Tommy's own understanding of identity that the Australian boys had produced for him. Tommy found that the Chinese students liked him. He explained in detail another incident that he didn't understand and that pushed against his own perceptions of language use and identities.

"After He Wei wanted to take my picture, there was Quin Ma, a Chinese girl, and

she wanted to meet me,” Tommy said, recalling the incident. “She thought, I think it might have been because, well, she asked me if she could be my big sister—if I wanted a big sister. And she said that I could have one, that she could be mine. But also, He Wei said to her that I was cute, and Allan said, ‘He Wei just said I was cute,’ and I thought that didn’t sound too good coming from a male student.” Tommy thought for a moment and then continued on. “But I don’t think he really, I don’t think he understood the way that we use...I mean, if I said that another boy was cute, everyone would say that I’m a bit queer. But he didn’t really realize that, I don’t think. Well, it was really funny!” he exclaimed. “I laughed, but I said, ‘Hey, that’s not funny!’ And Allan said, ‘It’s true. That is what He Wei said.’ But then A said that the Chinese people think I am cute because I am so little, like an animé character.”

Unlike before when A refused to take up for Tommy with the Australian boys on the oval so that Tommy could play sport, in this case he felt confident to assist Tommy and to help Tommy see that having a small body and small features was perceived as cute and good. A used his own knowledge of Japanese animé and of Chinese culture to validate the Chinese students’ production of a new identity for Tommy. In this context with Asian students and Tommy, A felt confident that all would listen and believe what he said, whereas A didn’t feel comfortable when thinking about defending Tommy on the oval to the other Australian boys. In this situation, rather than saying “They won’t listen to me” as he argued previously with Tommy, A felt assured of himself to help Tommy out.

The following week another incident occurred where Tommy’s body was characterized in relation to popular culture. Allan and Lim, A and He Wei, and Tommy

sat at a rectangular table together during art. None of the boys talked to each other, as each was engrossed in a project. A, Allan, and Tommy had drawings to complete that needed to be submitted to the art teacher at the end of the lesson, and each was determined to finish. While these boys picked up the art materials they needed, the teacher gave Lim and He Wei large pieces of white paper and asked A and Allan to translate for her that they could draw whatever they'd like during next the 50 minutes.

All the boys settled in and began working, each on his own project. With the exception of a few students who sat discussing their own work at different tables the room was silent. About halfway through the lesson, Lim handed Tommy his drawing. Drawn in bold black paint strokes that took up most of the paper was an anim  caricature of a boy's face. The face was small with petite features and straight long hair. Tommy was written diagonally in the right corner in block letters. And in the background around his name was sketched an interwoven heart and a clover. Tommy studied it for a minute and smiled.

"This is quite nice. Thank you," he said to Lim.

Tommy put the drawing down next to his own watercolor painting he was finishing. A reached across the desk and grabbed the picture. He glanced at it and laughed, and turned around in his chair to show a couple of girls who also laughed.

"Tommy, you'd be lucky to look like that picture," Sarah commented sarcastically.

Tommy continued painting, and didn't look up.

A took a paintbrush and quickly painted a black moustache and whiskers and red horns on the caricature, and then handed it back to Tommy. The small caricature now looked less like Tommy and more like a grinning devil.

Tommy picked it up and said, “Hey, thanks A! Why did you have to go and wreck it? It was quite nice! I could have used it!”

Tommy crossed out his name on the paper and wrote A on top of the X on top of his own name. He gave it back to A. Allan grabbed it and laughed, and then A grabbed it back, looked at it, smiled, and tore the picture into tiny pieces.

In this episode, A and Tommy were not only surrounded by the Chinese students (as before) but also by Australian students. When A saw that the Chinese students produced Tommy as a Japanese anim  character, he seemed to make fun of it, showing it to the girls behind him and getting them to rib Tommy, too. A seemed to want to produce Tommy through the same small and effeminate body that the Australian boys produced for him on the oval. But then, when Sarah commented that Tommy might “be lucky to look like that picture,” A seemed to think that the girls thought the drawing was flattering, and so A changed it, adding the moustache and the horns so it no longer looked like Tommy at all.

At first Tommy liked the drawing and seemed appreciative to have it. He didn’t at all seemed disturbed by the heart that surrounded his name or the fact that Lim—a male student—had drawn a picture of him. But once A changed it so that it no longer seemed to resemble Tommy’s likeness, Tommy saw no use for it himself. He decided that the devil was more in keeping with A’s actions, and Tommy changed the name on the artwork from his own to A.

Tommy and A continuously produced identities for one another through their adding to the picture. With each change made, the caricature morphed into something that was finally unrecognizable as either A or Tommy. It seemed that when A ripped the paper into shreds and the two boys laughed, then the identity production standoff between them ceased.

Tommy's interests in popular culture—sport, Japanese animé, and computers—worked together to produce identity for Tommy and for Tommy to construct his own notions of himself. His friends and his own uses of texts revealed an intricate illustration of the pleasures adolescents have in their uses of the body and popular culture. In many ways the popular culture texts produced a particular way of being for these boys, and they used stereotypical texts of masculinity to define who they should be. If they were to like sport, they needed to be strong, muscular, and fast. Because Tommy's body didn't fit this build, other Grade 8 boys consistently produced an identity for him as an outsider. Furthermore, Tommy's interest in art and drawing and its relation to *Dragonball Z* alienated him from the group of boys that played footie as they produced an effeminate identity for him.

Yet Tommy was confronted with conflicting readings and uses of his body in different contexts. In one situation, he became accustomed to his identity being produced as a wimp and a wuss because of his small stature. However, the Chinese students' reactions to Tommy and to his petite size were quite different. Both male and female Chinese students seem enamored of Tommy, thinking that his petite figure and features were masculine attributes similar to those produced in Japanese animé.

Tommy was unsure what to do with the Chinese students' perceptions of physique that challenged commonly held assumptions of terminology such as *lovely* and *cute* and that contradicted his understanding of identity that boys had to be big and athletic and strong. Lim's drawing of Tommy (inclusive of the heart), He Wei's desire to take Tommy's picture, and descriptions of Tommy as *lovely* and *cute* caused Tommy to rethink his own perceptions of how others read his body to determine an identity for him. Unlike on the oval where strength and body size determined acceptance into a particular group of boys, an identity produced from a small body frame as part of Japanese anim  was not only acceptable but also favorable to the Chinese students.

Tommy's own interests in popular culture brought about the challenges of perceptions of himself through his understanding of language used to describe and construct an identity of being a certain kind of boy. Being *little*, *lovely*, and *small* were complimentary terms not derogatory ones, causing Tommy to reread himself. As in the previous example, it took A's input and explanation that Tommy seemed like an anim  character for Tommy to grasp a new way of being that pushed against notions of boyhood he had learned about from the Australian boys on the oval.

Several weeks later, after the Chinese students had left, Tommy had an opportunity to construct his own way of being, both pushing against and using the identities that marked him as a wuss. One morning the students stood outside waiting for the art teacher to come and open the door for them. Several boys began pushing against each other, and soon Haskell, Simon, and Pat encircled Tommy and shoved up against him. Tommy crossed his arms over his chest and bounced back and forth off of them, like the little metal ball in a pinball machine. He laughed as they taunted him, calling him a

wussie and a wimp. Tommy replied, “When you push me, you like it. *You’re* the one trying to fancy *me*.” A got pushed into the circle as the circle pushed into him. A pushed on Tommy and said, “Tommy, get off me!” and Tommy pushed back, saying “You stop pushing me!” They laughed as the other boys pushed them around.

Tommy, having been produced with contradictory identities by the Australian and Chinese students, had fun with this rough-housing that the boys participated in. He was able to throw the identities back onto the Australian boys who perceived his diminutive size as despicable. A, being big and strong, wasn’t teased at all by the Australian boys. But interestingly, A, like the other Australian boys picked on Tommy in this incident, telling Tommy to get off of him.

Once in art, Tommy began working on a Buddha sculpture that he had shaped out of clay. During class, Haskell passed by him and stopped to examine the Buddha. “That’s cool!” he remarked.

“Thanks.”

Overhearing Haskell’s comment, Simon walked over, and said, “Yeah, is it strong enough to take a punch?” He hit the clay lightly with his hand.

Tommy jumped up from his seat and said, “Stop! Get away, Simon. You are going to wreck it.”

“Calm down Tommy!” Simon laughed as he walked away. “You are freaking out. You little wimp.”

Pat, who was seated at an adjacent table, chimed in. “Yeah, Tommy, you little freak.”

Tommy stood guard over his sculpture and said, “Shut up you guys.”

Haskell walked away from Tommy and over to Simon and Pat. “Tommy isn’t a freak. Leave him alone.”

Tommy and A looked at each other and smiled.

As we left the art room, Tommy, A, and I crossed the open field on our way to their computer class.

“What happened in there during class with those other boys?” I asked.

“I don’t know really,” Tommy said.

“But I thought they were so mean,” I said, trying to defend Tommy.

“Those boys aren’t too bad,” Tommy said. “They don’t really mean anything by it. I have become used to it.”

“Really?” I was stunned by Tommy’s response.

“Yeah, they’re just mucking around really,” added A.

“So Haskell normally takes up for you like that?” I asked Tommy.

“Well, no,” replied Tommy. “That’s new.”

Though A and Tommy walked to their next class together, A didn’t get involved in the banter between Tommy and the other boys during art class, even though he sat next to Tommy and was Tommy’s friend. Perhaps Haskell took up for Tommy because Tommy had taken up for himself when the boys pushed him around before art. Perhaps Haskell didn’t like Tommy’s come-back, a first for Tommy, and Haskell didn’t know what to do with Tommy’s questioning of Haskell’s desire to push him around.

No matter what Haskell’s motives for sticking up for Tommy, no doubt A didn’t say anything until after class. As a Chinese student, the Australian boys accepted A on the oval because of his agility. He expected that these boys would make fun of him if he

tried to take up for Tommy in that context, and he also seemed to understand that he didn't need to confront any of these boys, as he was an outsider and was just trying to fit in.

The following week, I talked with Tommy again about this incident while he surfed on the Internet at his house for *Dragonball Z* pictures that he could copy and add to his website.

“So what's up with Haskell?” I asked. “Are you guys friends now?”

Tommy sat for a while and toggled back and forth among four *DBZ* websites. He was comparing pictures to see which ones he thought were the best to add to his own site. Finally, Tommy responded.

“Ah, Haskell, he is a bit of a ratbag, I think. He pushes me around because I'm short, well, because I am little. Like if I was regular height he wouldn't even go near me. You know, A is strong. Nobody picks on A because he is so big and muscly. But Haskell just isn't sort of, he isn't really, he is all right to have as your hunch man who will stop someone. He will say, ‘Are you picking on my little friend Tommy?’ and that is all right by me if he does that. But when he teases me, I know that it is not anything. But he is not really the sort of person that I would become friends with. He has got a, a different way of thinking. A and I sort of have the same sort of thing because we want to do well at school, but Haskell doesn't really care, and he doesn't know too much. I mean, he might, but he doesn't really show it that much.... Yeah, I mean we get along. I'm not really friends with him, but we get along.”

Looking back across the various popular culture and identities that produced Tommy and A, it's also important to examine how they used popular culture and their

bodies in contradictory ways. Tommy used his body to negate the identities that the other boys attempted to pigeonhole him into while A used his body as best he could to fit in with these boys.

By having learned from his experiences with the Chinese-exchange students that challenged his perceptions of language and the meaning of his body, Tommy used his diminutive stature both as maintenance of the status quo (small and in need of protection) and to dispute the status quo (pushing back on the bullies). On one hand, being small, and a wussie in need of help—as he was categorized by some of the Australian boys—seemed all right to Tommy. Tommy was happy to allow Haskell, though a ratbag, to be his hunch man, to take up for him when others threatened his safety. At the same time, Tommy didn't seem to mind being pushed around by a circle of larger boys. He didn't try to get out of the circle nor did he ask them to stop their behavior or to leave him alone. He actually laughed as they shoved him around. In this portion of the incident Tommy used his body to push against the category that gave him the identity of wuss or wimp and challenged these other boys' perceptions of him. As they tried to force an identity onto him as small, weak, and effeminate, he attempted to push against without denying those categories by defending himself and those categorizations to these boys. Tommy was able simultaneously to retain and to renegotiate his identity as small and effeminate.

As the boys read Tommy's physicality and his interests in art and *Dragonball Z* as a wussie interest, they positioned him outside and against the norm of boyhood masculinity that they tried to perpetuate as acceptable. A, on the other hand, didn't espouse Japanese animé, and he often stated as much. Without the affiliation to Asian

popular culture, A more readily fit in by using his body to link himself to the other Australian boys through sport.

But the Chinese exchange students interpreted Tommy's popular culture interests and body in a completely different way than the Australian boys did. Rather than seeing him as inferior, He Wei, Lim, and Quin Ma explained that Tommy was both lovely and cute. And when no other Australian students were around, A agreed with this identity production of Tommy's body. But as soon as other Australian students were involved, A was quick to poke fun at Tommy's size, too.

From these identities produced for him, Tommy then constructed his own ways to negotiate a new space and identity for himself. Parodying what the Australian boys said about him and throwing it back upon them was pleasurable to Tommy. For A, who was just trying to fit into each context, he remained as reserved as possible.

During our final meeting and interview, Tommy gave me two photographs that were part of the photos that he took for his documentary. Describing the pictures he said, "These are popular culture texts in my life." The first photograph he had taken of himself holding one of his Japanese animé figurines and a drawing that he had copied from a picture, scanned into his computer, and printed.

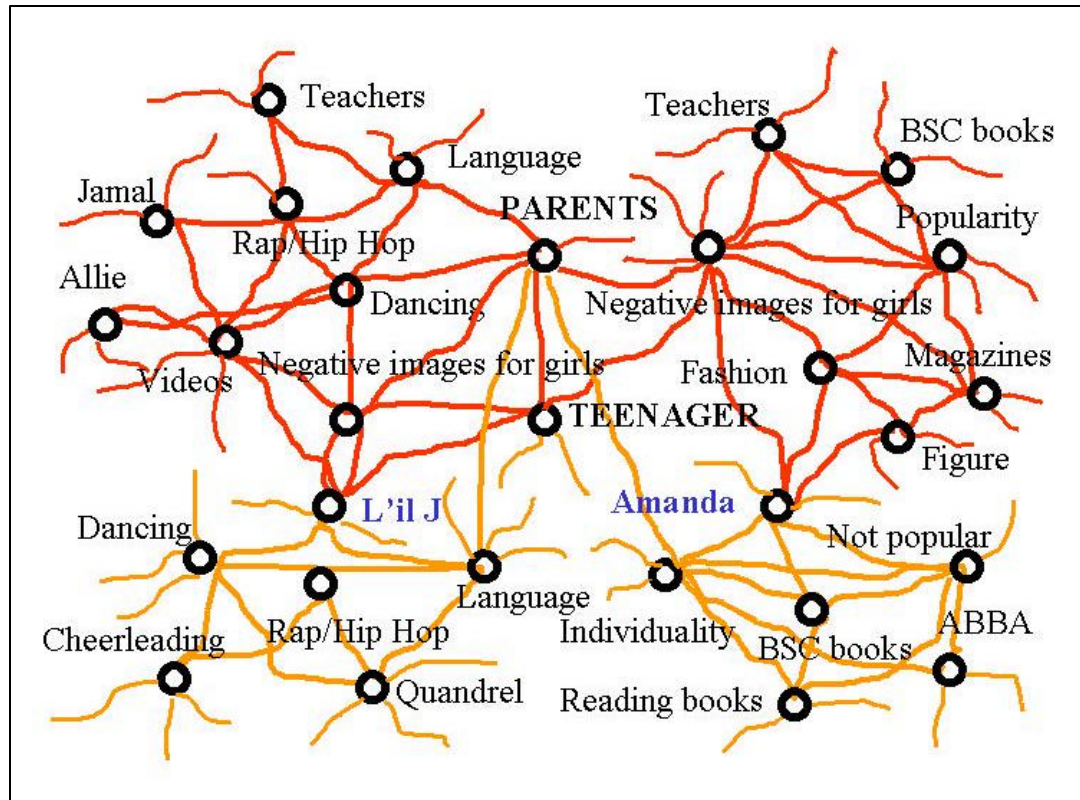


The second picture was a print out of a collage of *DBZ* anim  characters. This picture he later added to his website that he dedicated to *Dragonball Z*.



Looking at the pictures he said, “I took this picture because it is a bit like the picture that Lim drew, don’t ya think?”

CHAPTER 4:
POPULAR CULTURE AND GIRL POWER:
RENEGOTIATING FEMININITY



The world of adolescents, popular culture, and pleasures is often viewed in negative terms because adolescents are thought to be duped into consuming hook, line, and sinker what media produce for them as popular culture. Adults and adolescents, too, frequently draw conclusions about texts' meanings based upon their own readings and understandings of popular culture. Then, as readers, they think that others read and interpret texts similarly. Adolescents' interests in popular culture might be disconcerting

for adults because adults feel that images represented in popular culture influence adolescents' decision-making more so than their own adult input. Adults' concerns stem from views that texts adolescents like are emblematic of identities they'd prefer children not emulate.

Rap and hip-hop music and culture and girls' series books are two areas of popular culture frequently viewed in negative terms. These two areas of texts have been controversial over the past 20 years because of the seemingly stereotypical and often negative interpretations of the portrayal of women in them. While I hung out with the adolescents in Australia and the United States, people commonly critiqued both kinds of texts. Talking about rap music and adolescence, Jake Johnson, the police officer employed at Hancock sarcastically said, "You think parents or teachers are influential? Huh. It's these rappers that are influential, talking about killing cops and beating women. It has a negative impact on kids." And the head librarian at Kehara didn't think that girls growing up at the turn of a new century should read *Babysitters' Club* series (BSC) books. "They promote the wrong images," Taryn declared. But for Amanda, the *Babysitters' Club* series, and for L'il J, rap and hip-hop music, served different means and purposes as uses of popular culture. Rather than learn to be submissive girls from these texts, they used texts to assert their independence.

These two girls couldn't have differed more from one another. Neither knew the other, and their popular culture interests didn't overlap, at least not in the kinds of texts they liked and used. But their text interests produced the same sorts of gendered identities for them from others (as shown through the red lines in the map at the beginning of the

chapter), and they used texts similarly to push against structures that defined them in particular ways (illustrated by the orange lines on the map).

At school Amanda was fairly quiet. She excelled academically, and she took school seriously because she saw it as a preparation for her future. During morning tea and lunch, she hung out with a group of seven girls, none of whom saw themselves as part of the popular crowd of Grade 8 students at Kehara. When Amanda spent time with these girls, she became more of an onlooker than center of the action. She didn't say much and kept more to herself; often she sat and talked with me rather than to the other girls.

Amanda didn't consider herself popular at school because her own interests differed from those she perceived as being popular among students at Kehara. One afternoon while we walked the eight blocks from the bus stop to her house after school, she explained how she felt. "You see, you can kind of tell if people are popular because they have the perfect figure, and they always have the latest fashion in clothes and all that cool stuff." She pulled her straight, long red hair back from her face and tucked it behind her ears. "And then there are unpopular people like me and my friends. We don't always have the newest clothes, and maybe we haven't got the perfect looks and figure... Yeah, look at me... I don't have either of those things. But sometimes the unpopular people are the smartest. I don't see why that is, because smart people should be admired for their brains. I think it's so unfair."

Amanda realized that her peers at school didn't share her literacy interests, which included listening to passé bands like *Abba* and reading *Babysitters' Club* series books. She frequently noted differences she perceived between her own popular culture interests

and theirs. Amanda loved reading, but she explicitly stated that her reading interests entailed particular sorts of texts and topics and not others. “Yeah, I like to read, and I read a lot. But I don’t read those teenybopper magazines like *Dolly* or *Girlfriend*,” she explained to me one evening after her friends spent the entire lunch period looking at back issues of *Dolly* that one of the girls brought that day to school. “I don’t like to read about how to be beautiful. Those are really popular with a lot of girls, but I think they’re really dull because all they want is for you to think that you need to be like them in the magazines. So I am not going to spend money on a magazine I am not interested in. Actually they are like *BOR-ING*. They don’t have anything in them that I’d actually like. I don’t like reading stories about fashion tips and beauty supplies and stuff like that.”

Popular teenage girl magazines didn’t appeal to Amanda’s interests or pleasures. She saw these sorts of texts as produced for girls so that girls could learn how to act, dress, and behave in particular ways. She stated proudly that she didn’t like fashion or makeup and that she didn’t follow the popular trends like other girls. Amanda critiqued teenage girls whom she saw as lured into reading teen girl magazines. “I think sometimes girls get sucked into something from like a magazine,” she explained. “But, you see, I don’t always go for the new fashions. I prefer not to go to shops and pay a lot of money. I prefer to look for the really good bargains. Like I love junk shops and really cheap shops and all that kind of stuff. And I like going into second-hand shops because they’re not into the trends, and you never know what you are going to find. That’s what makes it popular with me.”

Amanda’s attitude about teenage magazines extended to her own appearance too. Repeatedly she noted that she had no desire to dress according to fashion advertised as en

vogue. True to her word, Amanda often criticized others who were “into the latest fashions,” and she even looked at the school uniform as an opportunity to challenge the school-created fashions. “I like it that we have to wear uniforms to school,” she reasoned one morning when she looked around and saw all the other students wearing pine green and black uniforms like her own. “Then you don’t have to worry about what you wear to school and what people think of you. But the uniforms are a rip off. I mean, I don’t buy the uniform brand names from the school shop. I bought my school pants from the Salvation Army for \$10, and I bought my skirt at Crazy Clarks for, oh I don’t know, \$6.00. And I definitely *DON’T* wear sporty shoes like Nike or Lynx. I only will buy what is cheap.” She lifted her leg and pointed to her sneaker. “These shoes don’t even have a name. I got these at Big W for something like \$9.95.” Similar to her critique of teen magazines that made available particular identities in advertisements and articles, she had no interest in taking part in the school-mandated clothing trends. She refused to pay the school store prices in order to have the right garments in order to fit in.

Amanda didn’t harp on or feel jaded about not being popular. Aside from her circle of friends, she obviously wasn’t well accepted by her peers at school. Amanda’s teachers noticed differences between Amanda and other Grade 8 girls. Across her subject areas that included English, maths, science, Japanese, keyboarding, health and physical education, and social studies, her teachers described her as “studious” and “an academic kind of girl.” She received glowing reviews alongside her high academic marks, but the Grade 8 teachers speculated that she didn’t seem to fit in with others. One teacher commented that she thought that Amanda got along well with adults. But she thought Amanda chatted more with adults because Amanda didn’t feel comfortable around other

students. She noted that Amanda often hung back after class and asked the teacher questions so that she didn't have to walk to her next class with her classmates.

Amanda criticized fashion and trends that she thought were produced for teenagers. Whether in popular magazines or clothing made popular for purchase at the school store, Amanda refused to succumb to what others deemed fashionable. Though always well groomed, she wore the same pair of pants and shoes to school everyday, and she didn't partake in trends to carry fashionable satchels or certain pencil cases or to wear hairclips, jewelry, or makeup. To her, someone else produced these trends and accessories and then targeted teenagers, and she didn't want any part of it.

Nothing like Amanda, at least in apparent popular culture interests, L'il J saw herself as popular among her African American friends at Hancock. She was a firecracker—full of energy and willing to talk to just about anyone about just about anything. She especially liked rap and hip-hop and music videos. L'il J felt that her acceptance at school among different African American, White, and Latino students was due in part to her ability to talk with them about their music tastes and pleasures. She called herself L'il J after other African American rap artists such as *Lil' Kim*, *Lil' Wayne*, and *Lil' Bow Wow*. "L'il M," (the nickname she gave me) she said, "I need to keep up with what my associates are doing. They're watching BET, MTV, VH1, The Box, and some of 'em even like the Country Music Channel [24-hour music video channels]. I can't watch that one for too long. Girl, I don't really like that music. But it's always good to know."

L'il J also kept a pulse on the fashion trends by attending to what VJs wore on VH1 and BET. She made sure that she dressed in the latest duds for school. Tommy Hilfiger, Old Navy, Nike, Reebok—everyday she looked like a walking advertisement for popular clothing lines. To her, clothing was important, and dressing “appropriately” was essential for school. That meant that she need not only have on the proper attire, but she also had to have her nails and hair done.

Though L'il J put stock into appearance and clothing, her purchasing habits mirrored Amanda's. A savvy shopper, L'il J kept a look out for good bargains. She only shopped at outlet malls or on sale racks where she could find a deal. And when she told others about her purchases, she consistently noted the price, marveling at her ability not to spend much money.

Adolescents and adults alike agreed on L'il J's knowledge about the comings and goings of life at Hancock. Seeing me with L'il J, the physical education teacher came over one morning and said, “You are hanging out with the right girl. She's a talker, and she loves adult attention. She knows everything about everybody. If any teacher really wanted to know what's going on at the school, they'd ask her.” But other teachers didn't relate their feelings about L'il J in such positive terms. L'il J's language arts teacher more tentatively and negatively viewed L'il J's worldliness. “She's at a critical place and could go either way, and the alternatives don't look too good,” she commented. Her band teacher echoed these sentiments, summing up his feelings best in his comment, “She has a lot of potential, but she chooses not to use it.” L'il J's academic performance as shown on her report card was less than stellar. She argued that she didn't see any connection between what she learned in school and her life outside of school.

To the teachers, L'il J exuded behaviors they didn't exactly know how to channel. Her uses of rap and hip-hop culture, which she worked seamlessly into her exchanges with her peers, didn't go over so well with her teachers. She got in trouble in classes for using hip-hop language—for calling teachers “shuga” and “whodi,” terms frequently used between VJs or in songs played on BET and MTV. Teachers reprimanded her for emulating dance moves in the eighth grade halls that she had seen on music videos. In fact, like Timony, L'il J frequented In-School Suspension for her uses of rap and hip-hop culture just as regularly as she attended classes. That didn't bother her though. In the small group setting of 10 to 12 students in the ISS classroom she developed a good relationship with the ISS teacher, and she had more opportunities than in her classes to talk to other students. After spending six days in ISS L'il J remarked, “ISS is fine with me because I'll be chillin' in there with my friends, and I'll be talkin' to Mr. Masconi. He's all right. He'll help me with my work and talk to me about music and stuff like that.”

Teachers at both Kehara and Hancock noted that both girls enjoyed adult attention and spending time with adults. Yet their rationales for Amanda and L'il J's behaviors differed. Teachers at Kehara worried that Amanda preferred to be with adults because she seemed different from her peers. Based upon appearance alone, they noticed that she wasn't “into all the trends.” They valued Amanda's academic prowess, but they wished her interests blended in better with the other Grade 8 girls. Because Amanda wasn't into all the trends, she stood out to the teachers as nerdy, and made it less likely, they thought, that she'd find acceptance in her own age group among peers.

L'il J's teacher had a different reaction to her popular culture interests. Like the teachers at Kehara, they noticed how L'il J used texts, but they didn't at all like that her uses seemed to cross boundaries between peers and authority figures. L'il J's actions and language seemed too heavily influenced by popular culture, and the teachers assumed that her uses of popular culture were wholly inappropriate. As an adolescent, in a critical place, L'il J's text uses troubled her teachers. So while Amanda's popular culture interests didn't clash with academic pursuits, teachers worried that she didn't fit in well with peers. And though L'il J's popular culture interests afforded her all sorts of friendships, those texts were seen as deterrents to academic success.

Although Amanda wasn't keen on popular magazines and fashion liked by others at Kehara, she was very much taken with the Babysitters' Club books series. Ann Martin, the author, began the series in 1986 and centered the story around four White, middle class American girls—Kristy, Claudia, Mary Ann, and Stacey. The foursome founded a club, which later became a booming babysitting business. Amanda was well aware that these books weren't considered popular at Kehara. One morning during tea, we went to the Media Center so that she could check out the BSC selection. Perusing the aisles, she found eight books, all of them she'd already read. "People these days, well not Grade 8 anyway, they don't like the Babysitters' Club," she remarked, a bit disgusted by the available titles. "I don't know why, maybe because of the title. But I think it's mostly because people my age don't like to read. It's not considered cool."

Her peers' seeming lack of interest to read books perplexed her. "Yeah, I've spoken to heaps of people, and they say they only read if they have to," she said. "And I

think that is really sad because reading is really cool. There are hardly any good novels at our high school library. Reading would probably be more popular if there were a bigger selection. But really people only read if they have to for assignments or something.”

Amanda was right about the lack of Babysitters’ Club books kept at the school library. She understood that the books had little appeal to high school audiences, but she speculated that this was due to the fact that people her own age don’t enjoy reading books. Taryn, the head librarian at Kehara, also noted that this series wasn’t popular with Grade 8 students. On a later date, she searched the Media Center’s database and found 10 titles. She said, “Books like Babysitters’ Club have run their course. Kids don’t really like them once they get to high school, so we don’t really keep many in stock. They are really not so good for girls, I don’t think anyway, because it doesn’t seem that the girls learn to be very independent, like on their own.”

Amanda spent the majority of her time outside-of-school with her mother, her 8-year-old sister, Mimi, and Cory, her next-door neighbor. Her father, Mark, joined “the girls” on the weekends when he wasn’t working as a salesman and installer of security systems. Amanda split her time between hanging out with her family and playing video games with Cory. It was among her family and friends outside-of-school that she cultivated her popular culture interests that she didn’t think fit in well with her peers.

Amanda didn’t care that others at the high school didn’t read these books. She reasoned that she’d just find them from other places because so many books were in the series. She explained, “there are over a over 150 Babysitters’ Club books, and heaps and heaps of the special series books, like the mysteries, super specials, and what not, but because the school doesn’t supply them, I’ve got to collect them on my own.” Amanda

exhausted the holding of books at her neighborhood public library, having read all 35 listed. Then, one weekend, she hit a goldmine.

From: Nancy [Amanda's mum's account]
 To: Margaret
 Sent: Sunday, July 30, 2000 9:45 P.M.
 Subject: ~!@#\$\$%^Saturday & Sunday*&^%\$#@!

Dear Margaret,
 On Saturday I went to a whole heap of garage sales with my family. It was great because I got Millions (not literally) of books for \$2.00 at one place. Then I got a whole stack that I had to balance with my chin and pay only with a smile at another place!!! So far I have only read one and that was a Baby-sitters club super special called "Baby-sitters on board" The girls went on a cruise and ended up with a mystery they have to solve. And who knows what else!! I CAN'T WAIT to show you my newest book collections! I think I got about 30 new BSC titles. CU Later, Amanda :-))))))

The following week when I visited her house, she took me immediately to her newly painted bright purple bedroom and had me sit on the lower bunk of her bed. There already displayed on the floor, arrayed with the covers showing, was her pile of second-hand BSC books.



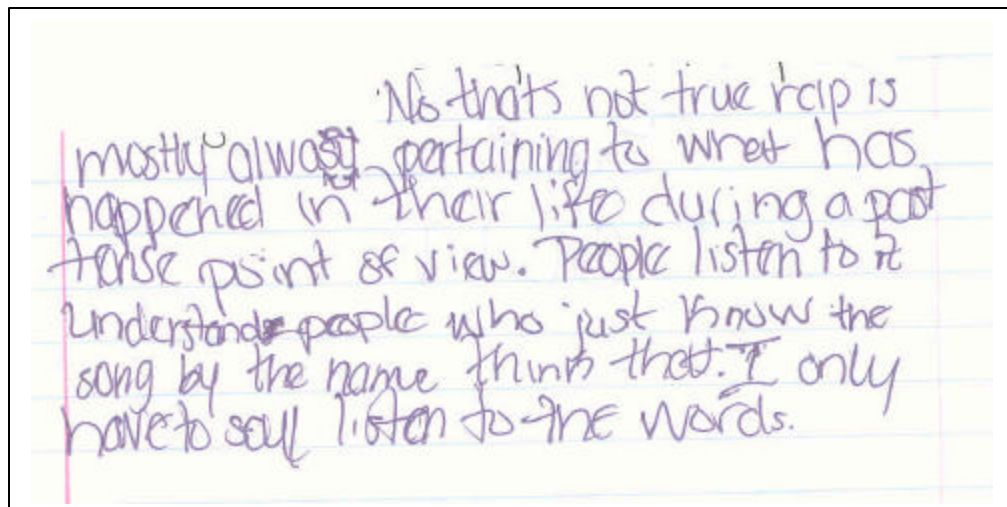
Amanda picked up her pink transparent blow-up chair that she kept under the window near her closet and moved it next to the pile. Then, for the next hour she proceeded to introduce me to each book. Holding them up, one by one, she read the title aloud and showed me the cover. When she finished going through the books, I asked her why she wanted me to see all of them. She shrugged her shoulders and said, “I don’t want to be made fun of. I know that no one else really likes these books [at school]. Well, Kim does, too, but anyway it’s fun to share it with you.”

Amanda wanted to share her interests with others, but she didn’t want anyone to make fun of her in the process. She knew the BSC books weren’t valued by her peers or by the library at Kehara. So she kept those interests to herself and only shared them with adults outside of school. She didn’t want to discuss magazines and fashion, that was what the girls at school talked about. And though she labeled *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* as popular culture for other girls, she explained that BSC books were popular culture to her.

L’il J’s popular culture interests moved from context to context, and her interests in music and language that she showed at school mimicked those same practices outside of school. At home she spent considerable amounts of time watching music videos. Describing her afternoon schedule she said, “On any day, the best place to find me after 4:00 is in my bedroom talking to my boyfriend [on the phone] and watching music videos, ow! Girl, you learn a lot from them! I know the songs and the dances and all about the people from *Places in the Crib*. Go on and ask me anything about rap or hip-hop and maybe about R&B, and I can answer it.” Sometimes L’il J went to the public library after school with her friends and checked out music videos using streaming video

on the Internet. She particularly liked African American artists such as *Destiny's Child*, *Ja Rule*, *Lil' Bow Wow*, *Nelly*, *Eve*, *Juvenile*, *Erykah Badu*, *Outkast*, *Ludacris*, *Janet Jackson*, *Mystikal*, and the *Hot Boys*. From her habit of watching music videos at home and reading about musical artists on websites when she was at the library, she was well informed about the newest albums releases, artists and song titles, and how well an album sold. She often spent time talking with friends about music, and she continuously reminded herself (and me) that she needed "to teach me" about rap and hip-hop music.

She filled her dialogue journal with discussions about music in her life, music videos she watched, and descriptions of phone conversations had with friends. Other than her affinity for contemporary rap and hip-hop, L'il J also sang in a youth choir at a local Baptist church. I often responded to her entries about music, as I shared many of the same interests. But I also tried to connect societal critiques of rap to her readings and uses of texts. One day, I gave her an article about *Mystikal* that was printed in the back of *Newsweek* magazine. The article explained that *Mystikal*, a newcomer to the rap scene, was known for singing both gospel and rap, and that he was going to have trouble because lots of new rap music is only about sex, money, and violence. In her reply about the article she wrote:



No that's not true rap is mostly always pertaining to what has happened in their life during a past tense point of view. People listen to it understand people who just know the song by the name think that. I only have to soul listen to the words.

L'il J felt strongly that she understood rap and hip-hop music and language and that people who didn't know it and only formed cursory understandings of it based on song titles couldn't adequately make judgments about the genre. To L'il J, readers needed to get inside the text to make some sense of it and had to have some sort of experience with it to see other ways to interpret it. To L'il J, words were important, especially related to hip-hop language, but her language use seemed to get her in trouble.

Language use wasn't the only aspect of rap and hip-hop culture that others critiqued in L'il J's text uses. Some of L'il J's peers thought that aspects of hip-hop dancing produced inappropriate and demeaning images of girls. One afternoon, L'il J and I went to the public library where several of her girlfriends hung out after school. When we arrived, L'il J went straight over to the help desk and signed up to use a computer with Internet access. Needing no assistance, she pulled up the Janet Jackson video that had just been released earlier in the month. She put on a set of headphones, watched the video, and sang along. When the song finished, L'il J scanned the area of library where her friends usually sat. She saw several of her African American girlfriends congregated around a table and decided to go over and check in with them.

The girls were talking about cheerleading tryouts that were to be held the following week at Hancock. L'il J sat down at the table and listened to the conversation for a few minutes. Allie, the co-captain of the squad, recruited the other girls to try out.

"There needs to be 12 cheerleaders," Allie explained, "and now there are only seven because some girls decided to do other things. So we need five more girls for the basketball season."

"Girl, you know I want to try out!" exclaimed L'il J.

Other girls agreed with L'il J.

Allie went on to say that being a cheerleader was fun but that it was also a lot of work.

L'il J hopped out of her chair and replied, "You won't need to teach me nothin' because I already know all the cheers!" She then quietly demonstrated a Hancock cheer and added a hip motion that she had seen performed on music videos.

Janaye watched L'il J move around, smiled, and then piped in, "Oh yeah, L'il J. You know it, girl!"

L'il J sat down and slapped high fives with Janaye. "Girl, we could be sooo good!" she crowed, and a couple of other girls laughed.

Looking toward Allie, she said, "You put us on as cheerleaders, and we are going to put some soul into it!"

"That's right!" agreed Janaye.

Allie eyed L'il J and said with all gravity and authority in her voice, "We ain't doing all of that. We ain't no ho cheerleaders!" She looked directly at L'il J who looked back at Allie and smiled. "I'm serious now," continued Allie. "Don't you think we'll be doing all that now!"

"Y'all be gettin' on my nerves," L'il J responded. "Y'all just too loud, and y'all don't have any fun. We'll change all that, yo!"

"I don't make the decisions. You're going to have to try out for cheerleader all on your own, girlfriend!" Allie shot back.

“Girl, don’t you know it! Then we’ll really have some fun!” L’il J walked over and put an arm around Allie’s shoulder. “Don’t you worry, shuga! L’il J knows how to spice up life!”

“All I know is that I ain’t gonna do no ho dancing!”

“That ain’t ho dancing!” said L’il J, referring to the hip motion. “It’s tight!”

Later on as I drove her home, we talked as she switched between rock and rap stations on the radio.

“Why did Allie say that your dance moves were bad?” I asked.

“Because that’s what she thought,” L’il J said indifferently. “She’s just thinkin’ about the videos and thinkin’ that I was dancin’ like the videos.”

Confused by her response, I didn’t know what to say. “Weren’t you dancing like the videos?” I asked.

“Yeah, but I wasn’t being a ho. I was just dancing just to have fun. I wasn’t tryin’ to be nasty.”

“But Allie thought you were being nasty!” I replied.

“That girl don’t know if I’m being nasty or not. I was just dancing for cheerleading. It didn’t mean that I was being nasty. That’s what my daddy says too.”

Amanda and L’il J realized that texts appealed to different groups of people and that people read texts differently. To Amanda, BSC books weren’t popular with most girls her age, so she chose not to discuss these interests with others at school. L’il J knew the critiques of rap as seen in her dialogue entry and in her response that Allie thought her dance moves indicated “being nasty.” L’il J reasoned that people who thought that

rap music only involved sex, violence, and money didn't understand the genre and consequently misread how she used the texts in her language and actions. Both Amanda and L'il J found that their own purposes and uses of texts didn't necessarily match up with others' readings and understandings of the texts.

L'il J and Amanda's interests in popular culture concerned both girls' parents. The parents related popular culture to their daughters' lives within the stage of adolescence. They gave much thought to what they conceptualized as the meaning of texts that ultimately taught their adolescent daughters how to talk, act, and dress, and they worried about what their adolescent daughters learned from texts that they liked.

Both L'il J and her parents were aware that her language use related to popular culture interests, though notable for making friends at school, often landed her at odds with teachers. Sherry and Rob marveled at their daughter's gift of the gab. Late one evening, the three of us sat in their family room, talking about L'il J's affinity for rap and hip-hop. L'il J said she had homework to do, so she went to her bedroom, which was adjacent to the living room. She left her door ajar, and lay on her bed doing math problems and watching BET on the TV.

Sherry and Rob both described themselves as "the quiet types" and said that they were both much more reserved than L'il J. They didn't know how or where L'il J learned to be so forthcoming. Sherry shook her head and said, "Rob and I aren't that loud or bold."

"Sometimes L'il J's mouth gets her in trouble at school," Rob agreed, and then added, "She knows so much, but a lot of times she makes the teacher not like her because

she runs her mouth with words we don't know and talks too much about what she knows. But she is one person I'm not worried about. She's got a good head on her shoulders."

Sherry understood that L'il J used language in new ways. She said, "Sometimes I don't know what they're saying on the TV." She went on and agreed with L'il J's teachers. "You know, a lot of people say videos are bad, but kids don't see it as real. But kids do take that stuff from the video and use it on the street; like they start talking in a language we don't know. Sometimes parents don't want to know about it, and teachers don't want to teach kids about that. But then again, adults don't want to talk about it with kids either."

At that point, L'il J yelled from her bedroom, "That's right. I have to be the rap teacher sometimes, tellin' my mama what the word is!"

"See, she knows a lot!" Rob said. Sherry and Rob agreed that they didn't necessarily like the videos L'il J watched, not only because of the language that they had difficulty understanding, but also because of the content. They both worked fulltime, and L'il J regularly stayed at home with one of her two older brothers or a neighbor who occasionally came over. Sherry said, "She comes in the door, switches the TV to Channel 18 [BET], calls a friend, and that's it. She'll do that for the rest of the night. We try to monitor her, but it's hard to do because we both work. But she's a good kid, and now that she's a teenager, we just have to trust that she'll make good decisions."

Rob agreed, and then added that he didn't like the videos L'il J watched because he said that they "sent out the wrong messages for girls."

Overhearing her father's comment, L'il J stuck her head into the living room and acknowledged his critique. "My dad, he thinks those videos are nasty. He'll be yellin' to

me in my room,” she said quickly. She mimicked her father’s low and husky voice, “L’il J, you watch those all the time. Turn off that video channel!” She laughed and argued, “But I think they’re good! My daddy thinks that their bad for girls, but I watch them and learn new dance moves so that I can get the groove on. I like to dance with them.”

Amanda shared many popular culture interests with her mother. They both loved music, though different genres and bands, and were interested in computers and technology. Whenever I was at their house, both the stereo and the family computer were on. Nancy was into the rock group *Status Quo* and had constructed a website that documented her 20 year friendship with this band that had taken her all over the world to see them perform. She also played the electric guitar and frequently hosted jam sessions with local musicians at their house on the weekend. Amanda liked these sessions because she got to hang out with the adult band members.

If Amanda didn’t like the music that her mom played, then she’d go to her bedroom and turn on her “RCC” (radio/cassette/cd player), as Amanda called it, so that she could listen to her own music. Amanda received her RCC as a gift from her parents for her 13th birthday. When she showed it to me, she remarked, “It is my pride and joy!” She kept the card that her parents gave her next to her RCC on top of her bureau. Teddy bears decorated the cover of the card, and inside was a note written in her mother’s neat penmanship:

“To dear Amanda,

You are now a teenager and we hope you have lots of fun and enjoy this era of your life. Love, Mummy& Daddy”

According to Nancy, turning 13 signaled a new time of life for Amanda that was greatly intertwined with the period of adolescence and popular culture. One sunny, winter afternoon we sat on the sofa in the lounge room of their home. Nancy had prepared hot tea with milk and honey, coffee, and Tim Tams for afternoon tea. The stereo was set on FM104 (the local rock station that Nancy liked) and played in the background during our conversation that meandered between Amanda's popular culture interests and our own interests in music as adults and when we were adolescents.

Nancy related her own adolescent experiences to this time in Amanda's life. "I think it is a very important era in her life from the point of view that a lot of what she will experience in her teenage years will have a lot to do with who she becomes as an adult," she said. "I know that from my point of view it did, so that is what I was saying to her [in the card], that I hope she enjoys this era, the teenage years, and to experience a lot of things...She is no longer a child. Well she is, she is still a child, but she is going into that stage of becoming a young woman, and she is going to be exposed to more, and the responsibilities are more... You see, what she reads, what she listens to, what she hears, what she is learning at school, how she is using all that is definitely important. She is at a point in her life that she can use it wrongly, or learn the wrong things, or can see the wrong things, read the wrong things, not so much that what she sees, hears, or reads is wrong, but how she interprets it, what she does with it. That is what is important."

Nancy respected Amanda's interests in popular culture, saying that she didn't censor what Amanda saw, or read, or listened to, for that matter. Like Lil J's parents, she didn't feel that she needed to protect Amanda, but she thought that since Amanda had entered adolescence they should discuss aspects of popular culture. Amanda's acceptance

within a larger crowd was less important to Nancy than developing Amanda's individuality. On several occasions, Nancy told Amanda, "Be who you are. Don't be influenced by any friends or any trends or because somebody tells you something is cool. Don't do it because they say it is cool."

"You know, at this stage I suppose a lot of kids go through this very wild and rebellious stage, and start to develop in perhaps a direction that is undesirable from a parent's point of view," she noted. Then, taking a sip of coffee and a drag on her cigarette, she explained, "With a few of Amanda's friends I can already see it happening, and so, yeah, I think what she is exposed to and everything is important....I think each kid absorbs what they want to absorb from what they learn, see, and hear, and I guess it is down to what they choose to do with it."

Sherry and Rob had a similar take on L'il J's interests in popular culture, especially in relation to rap and hip-hop music. They didn't want L'il J to learn the wrong things from rap and hip-hop, but because L'il J liked those texts, they wanted her to understand what was going on in the videos. "It's alright for her to know about [what's going on in rap and hip-hop music]," said Sherry. "Kids today are exposed much more to the facts of life....She should know about it because it's everywhere on the TV and movies and the music she likes. But the problem is how they present it on the video isn't appropriate. They show it the wrong way. The lyrics go with the dancing part, and then some of the video makes sex seem like it's okay. It's really confusing, because some of it's okay, and some of it is not. I talk to her about sex and all that. I teach her that she has to have an open mind, take it all in, and make good decisions in situations that are bad.

We can't always be there. So, she's got to learn on her own that all that little sweet talk isn't just sweet talk. She needs to know the difference."

Nancy, Sherry, and Rob wanted the best for their daughters. These parents saw their daughters within a stage of adolescence and in need of understanding how texts produce identities for girls. All three of the parents connected adolescence to popular culture and, like the girls' teachers, worried about the ways that Amanda and L'il J read and used texts. The parents believed that in the stage of adolescence, the girls had greater exposure to popular culture and that the ways that the girls absorbed texts affected how they'd become adults. Though they trusted their daughters and didn't think they needed to protect them from particular sorts of texts, they did want their daughters to know that texts held meanings, that texts could be used "wrongly," and that adolescents might learn the wrong things from texts. Both sets of parents also realized that that they had strong daughters as exhibited in L'il J's assertive language and Amanda's sense of individuality. Yet they both worried about their daughters, wanting the girls to know the differences between text meanings and how texts get used.

Amanda and I had spent lots of time together talking about Babysitters' Club books and her interest in them. As she explained, few girls her age read them, so she liked to talk with me about them. After she showed me the group of books in her bedroom, I sent her an email about Taryn's comment that BSC books weren't good for girls to read because they portrayed stereotypical images of girls and promoted traditional gender roles. Usually Amanda was quick to respond, but this email remained

unanswered. One afternoon, several weeks later, we sat in her purple bedroom, and I asked her about it.

“Did you get the email that I sent about the Babysitters’ Club?”

Amanda didn’t respond.

“You know,” I continued, “ the email where I asked what you thought about some people who said that Babysitter’s Club books aren’t ...”

Amanda interrupted. “When did you send that one?”

“Oh, a while ago. Do you remember that?”

“Probably,” she replied.

“Yeah, I just said that there are some people who say that Babysitter’s Club books are ...

“Bad?” Amanda finished my sentence.

“I don’t remember saying that they were bad,” I said, “but more like they promote stereotypical images of girls who aren’t assertive and don’t stand up for themselves.”

“Well, no. I don’t think that at all. With the Babysitter’s Club, they don’t always do girly thing. Like art, would you consider that a girly subject?”

“No,” I said.

“Well, Claudia who is the Vice President of the club, she is absolutely fascinated with art. She paints, she sculpts, she does clay work, and she does everything.

And...Kristy, she is the President of the club. She loves baseball. That is her favorite thing. She has her own baseball team called the Crushers, and baseball is what I would consider more of a boy’s game because you have softball for girls and baseball for boys, even though baseball is played by both. And baseball, as a coach, you usually think of a

man, and Kristy is the coach, too....And, Abby, another one of the girls, her favorite thing is soccer, and she loves to run, and um, she is very sporty like Kristy, and she co-coaches the Crushers. So that's not girly, necessarily. And then you have Jessie, but she is kind of girlish but not really....She is a very good ballet dancer. And when most people think of ballet they think, oh girl, pink tutus, and all that, but they forget to think of things like *Riverdance*. Have you seen *Riverdance*?" Amanda asked me.

"No, I've not seen it, but I know what it is," I said.

Amanda went on. "Well, yeah, and who was the main person in that? A man. So that is dancing, and then most of the crew were men in that dance too. So I don't think that the Babysitters' Club is really about stereotypical girl stuff. I see it about lots of girls doing different things.

"Okay, I think I understand," I said. "So when someone says that these books promote stereotypical images of girls that only ever stay at home, and all they ever care about is, um, having a boyfriend, and caring for children, and they don't want to have jobs on their own and be assertive and things like that, what do you make of that?"

"Like in one of the books, its called *Stacey and the Mystery of the Mall*, all the girls get jobs....They had jobs....and they all loved their jobs. Stacey was working at a toy store, Kristy was working for Mall Security, Claudia was working at an artist's shop, Mary Anne was working at a place called Critters, an animal supply shop, but they don't see animals, they just carry the supplies. Jessie was working at the movie theatre, Mallory was working at a book store, and Abby, well, she wasn't in the book then....And they all had jobs, and they all loved it....So that's not stereotypical at all."

She paused. Then she said, “I mean, yeah, girls working? If people think that BSC books are bad for girls, then I think that is a category *they* put on them. I just don’t see it as that. I’m a girl, and I am damn proud of it! It’s not like I read them, and they tell me how to act and stuff. That’s stupid...As I’ve told you before, when I am an adult, I want to be a computer consultant like my uncle. He makes heaps and heaps of money, and he flies all over the world. I want to have a career like that...That’s what girls do now.”

In early December, I attended a band recital with L’il J one evening at Hancock. L’il J played in the flute section, and at the end of each song, she winked at me when the audience applauded. After the recital, L’il J and I were about to leave, and she realized that she left her bag in the cafeteria. I waited for her at the entrance to the school while she went back to retrieve it. Students from the school mulled around, talking amongst themselves and with parents who had attended the recital. L’il J came running down the hall to catch up with me, and saw Quandrel, one of her male friends in the sixth grade. She stopped to say hello. They talked for a minute, and then Jamal, an eighth grade boy passed her, said something over his shoulder to her. L’il J turned around and took off running after him. She was screaming.

A few minutes later, she reappeared. She was visibly angry, and she asked me to take her home.

L’il J got in the car, put on her seatbelt, and said, “I need to turn on the radio.”

“What happened back there?” I asked.

“Let me find V103 first.”

Once she was situated in the car and we were headed toward her house, she recounted what happened.

“I was playing around with Quandrel, L’il M. He’s that sixth grade boy you saw, and he’s really small for his age. You know, he’s like my little brother! So, whenever we see each other I say, ‘Hey shorty! You my big hoochie’ to him, and he laughs and says it back to me. But Jamal came over, you saw that. And he was listening to something that was none of his business and that little boy [Jamal], he said it straight up to me.”

“What? What did he say to you?”

“He said, ‘You my little hoochie!’”

And I turned around and told him to shut up. And Jamal yelled, ‘You shut up! I was just playin’ with you!’ So, Lil’ M, you saw it, I went off on him!”

“What did you say?” I asked.

“I told him about himself. I said, ‘No, you weren’t playin’! You always messin’ with everybody else!’ That’s when I took off after him.

“I don’t think that’s funny at all, and that little boy ain’t going to play with me. I ain’t no toy. Just because I am little and cute, he thinks that can get at me. I just need to take off these boots so I can run, and I will wail on him. See, he don’t talk to no boys like that. He thinks he can get away with it too...he ain’t gonna go off on me.

“I went off on him! He was running, and I didn’t catch him, but you know, you shouldn’t go messin’ with me. That’s when I said, ‘I might be small and cute, but I ain’t always sweet! I will wail on you if you don’t watch out, so don’t go messin’ with me!’”

“How was he messing with you?” I asked.

“Ooh! It makes me so mad!” she said. “People always think I am so small and cute and nice, and I’m just doin’ my dancin’ and talkin,’ and I’m going to show him! That little boy is going to get it! He can’t push me around and tell me who I am!”

We pulled up at her house while she was still fuming. “Will you give me my music, L’il M?” she asked nicely. “I got to get me my cds out of your car and get inside! Ooh, I am so mad I can’t go to sleep! I just need to listen to some music, so I can calm down.”

I helped her gather the *Outkast* and *Nelly* cds that she had in my car.

Once she had all of her things, she hopped out of the car and turned to me and said, “Bye shuga! I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Amanda and L’il J realized that texts didn’t have a single, stable meaning, and they knew that others might read texts differently and in contradictory ways to their own readings and uses of popular culture. In their readings of BSC books and hip-hop language L’il J and Amanda stabilized text uses long enough to construct notions of themselves that pushed against others’ readings and understandings of the texts that produced gendered identities for these two girls. In their uses of BSC books and rap and hip-hop, they asserted themselves as strong girls, using texts to assist in their development. They also didn’t want others to define them or categorize them solely by meanings that others produced of the texts. As Amanda explained, “If people think that BSC books are bad for girls, then I think that is a category *they* put on them.” She used the characters of the BSC books as examples of young female industrious entrepreneurs, not of stereotypical, traditional girls. Likewise, L’il J realized that her own uses of hip

hop might seem contradictory to others' readings of her uses of texts. Just because she was small and cute and nice, didn't give Jamal the right to define her and to push her around, she explained. She understood that Jamal used the word *hoochie* differently from her own use, but she refused to allow him to define her in a nasty way.

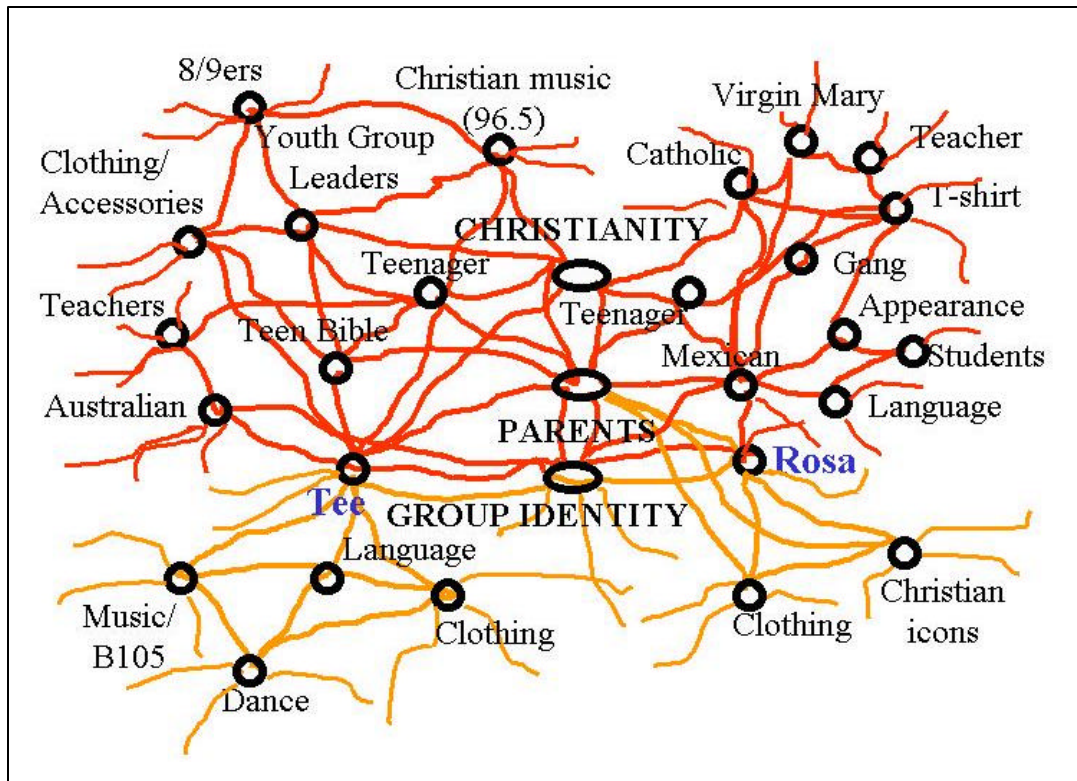
Adolescents and their adults are often stuck between a rock and a hard place when it comes to views on popular culture. Adults often think that they know what texts mean and how adolescents use them. However, as Amanda and L'il J illustrated in their uses of texts, adults and adolescents define texts and uses differently. Teachers at Kehara and Hancock read the girls' text choices as troubling. Amanda's lack of interest in group-defined popular culture caused teachers to worry about Amanda's social skills. Using ideas of what they thought constituted popular culture produced an identity for Amanda as a nerd based upon her appearance, and their concerns about BSC books portraying stereotypical notions of femininity went unrealized in Amanda's own uses of texts. L'il J's uses of rap and hip-hop music, language, and gestures also seemed inappropriate to the teachers at Hancock. The teachers read L'il J by physical appearance and thought her language use unacceptable. Their understandings of the meanings of the texts she used produced an identity that repeatedly got her in trouble.

Both girls' parents were aware of their daughters' popular culture interests and were concerned enough about those interests to discuss these matters with their teens. These parents' concerns stemmed from the girls' entrance into adolescence and how the parents perceived popular culture to be an influential factor during that time period of life.

Amanda and L'il J's decision-making did seem to make a difference in the ways that they used the popular culture in their lives. Both girls illustrated in their own uses of texts that reading is a site of a conflict dependent upon who is reading, what is being read, and how it is being used. These girls were aware of media's production of texts to produce certain identities of girls. Amanda didn't read teenage magazines because she thought that they only advertised particular ways for girls to learn how to act, dress, and behave. L'il J didn't think that rap and hip-hop language and dancing were bad when she used it and was able to give her own interpretation of the texts (in the cheerleading, with her parents, with Quandrel). But when she felt that the same hip-hop language she used with Quandrel was used differently by Jamal, she said his language and actions toward her were inappropriate. To both girls what was important was the ability to use the texts as they saw fit. They both used the very texts that potentially produced them in stereotypical and negative ways to push against those identities. Rather than take up what they perceived to be female identities they didn't desire for themselves, they constructed their own ways of being girls from the texts they used and liked. It was only through reading and discussing uses of texts with adults such as their parents or with me or with their peers that any sort of textual use could be interpreted and categorical understandings of identities produced by rap, hip-hop, and girls' series books could be challenged. The girls pushed hard in their discussions with others to have their own reading and uses of texts recognized as different from what was perceived by others to have been produced for them as readers. As L'il J and Amanda demonstrated, reading, uses, and text interpretations depend on who is granted the capacity to construct themselves through popular culture.

CHAPTER 5:

STRONG BELIEFS: CHRISTIANITY AND POPULAR CULTURE



Popular culture is mostly associated with images and lifestyles that media produce for adolescents' pleasures. Conceived of in negative terms, images of sex, drugs, bodies, violence, and alcohol portrayed in movies, television shows, fashion magazines, or on the Internet usually come to mind when thinking of adolescents' popular culture interests. Though often left unrecognized and unaddressed, popular culture and pleasures also include a world of images and lifestyles associated with religious lives. And just as

adolescents use and affiliate themselves with popular culture of the secular world, similar goods and services are available for adolescents in the spiritual world.

This chapter opens with a map illustrating how Tee and Rosa—two adolescent girls—are produced with identities based upon their group affiliation with religious life (represented by red lines), and how they both accept and push against these identities while trying to maintain their places within the group (depicted with orange lines). Both girls show how adolescents use religious texts to remain affiliated with a group, while they simultaneously use texts to counter assumptions about their identities within the group.

Rosa and Tee, though having never met, were both young adolescents whose uses of popular culture affiliated them with particular Christian identities in their in- and out-of-school lives as young adolescents. Both girls were part of religious families, and both had immigrated to new countries when they were five-years-old. Tee's maternal grandparents were Christian missionaries on the Solomon Islands before moving their family to New Zealand, where Tee was born. When she was five, her sister Rachel was seven, and her brother Matthew was three, her parents moved the entire family to a small town in Queensland, Australia so that they could attend a two-year bible college. Tee's family liked Australia so much that they decided to stay rather than to return to New Zealand as her parents originally had planned to do when they had finished their studies at the bible college.

Tee's overall transition to a new country was relatively easy, at least as far as she recalled. She explained that Australia was just like New Zealand "except Australia's hotter and it doesn't get any snow, and Australians talk a bit differently than Kiwis."

Thursdays, attended youth group (called 8/9ers) on Fridays, played in and umpired netball games and tournaments on Saturdays, and went to church on Sundays. Also, on Wednesdays, a group of youth leaders from the church came to Kehara State High School during lunch and hosted a Christian-based program called Student Focus. The group met informally in an empty classroom in the Grade 8 wing at Kehara. Tee regularly attended this program with her friends, and often asked me to join them. When she described the program, she said, “It’s really fun. You play games and stuff, and then they talk about God.”

Rosa was the middle of three children, too. When she was five, and her older brother, Mario, was seven, her parents moved them, along with their infant brother Jesus, from Mexico City to the Southern United States “to live a better life,” her father explained. Over eight years, Rosa’s family had to learn a new way of living, a new language, and a different culture. Rosa’s mother never learned to speak English, but the rest of the family had become bi-lingual. Juan, Rosa’s father, explained that the transition hadn’t been difficult for the children because they made friends easily and learned English in school. Besides their children’s educations, Juan and Helena felt that raising their children as “Mexican Catholic” in the United States was most important. For them, this process included membership at Santa Maria Catholic Church. This church was in a neighboring city and about a 35-minute commute from their home. Juan and Helena thought it was important to join that particular community because the church catered to the needs of a growing Spanish-speaking group of Catholics.

Rosa’s parents had recently divorced, but Juan and Helena worked it out between them that one of them took the children to church on Sundays. So, Rosa and her brothers

and usually her mother attended a weekly mass that was celebrated in Spanish, and then they went out to eat with their Spanish-speaking friends from the community. Rosa liked Santa Maria and had made a couple of friends there, but because it was so far away from her apartment she was only involved on Sundays. “I have a couple of friends there and stuff,” she said. “My mom and my brothers have friends there too. We go to mass, and then we eat together and come home.”

At Hancock there wasn’t a comparable religiously affiliated program like Student Focus for Rosa to attend. Actually, though religion was central to Rosa’s life, it was more an aspect of her life as a Mexican, which as I learned over time didn’t relate well to her experiences at school.

When I met the two girls, they each told me in so many words that they hated to read. Neither one considered reading print-based texts to be popular culture at all, but this changed for Tee when she bought her own bible. As part of their morning routine before school, Tee’s family read portions of the bible during breakfast. Tee usually used a “kiddie bible” that had lots of pictures in it, but she hated it because the stories were “too babyish.” She had seen other friends at her youth group with teen bibles, and she wanted one because “it has study points for teenagers in it.” Her mother said it was silly to buy another bible because the family had several around the house. But when Tee received \$20 from her grandmother for her birthday, she went the next day and purchased a *Teen Devotional Bible*.

Soon after Tee bought her bible, she invited me over to her house. She dumped her yellow school satchel at her bedroom door and headed to the kitchen for a snack. She quickly made a glass of Milo and grabbed a slice of cheese, and then she took me to the

bedroom that she shared with Rachel. There next to her bottom bunk on a nightstand was her brand new *Teen Devotional Bible*. She picked it up from the table, and we sat on the floor where she proceeded to show me how it was set up.

“See,” she said, showing me the bright multi-colored cover, “I love my *Teen Devotional Bible*. Like it’s the bible. It isn’t written by teens, but this part is.” She let the bible fall open. “I mean all bibles pretty much say the same thing,” she said while turning the pages, “Except this one has special little things for teens.” She stopped flipping the pages, and said excitedly, “Oh right. Here it is!”

“See Margaret,” she put the book in my lap and pointed to different sections of a double-page spread. “It has different parts, like Extreme Faith stuff, which is just a big paragraph, and it has these Guys and Girls sections, where it talks about going out with people and things. And it has other sections about Worship and Emotions and Self Image.”

“So how is it different reading than the kiddie bible you have?” I asked.

“Well, it is just really helpful reading for teenagers because these little stories make it fun to read....And then at the back here it has special things for me. First, it has my special little dictionary so I can look up words, like heaven.” She took the book back and flipped to the end.

“Here’s heaven,” she pointed to the entry. “And it says all the verses and pages and where the word shows up in the bible. And then there’s this section. This is actually the best part.” She showed me a page that listed all the books of the bible with a small box adjacent to each title.

“When I read a section, then I tick it off. See, I ticked off Genesis because I already read it, so it helps because I am going to read the whole bible.”

“Really?” I asked. “I thought you hated reading!”

“I do normally. But this is really fun because it’s the bible, and I already know the stories, and then it has this new bit that is kinda for teenagers today. So that makes it heaps of fun.”

Rosa didn’t like reading at all, not even the bible. “I hate reading. I’m not really interested in most the books at school. Like if I ...just read the first chapter and I don’t like it, I won’t read more. I’ll just leave it there. I say that on the whole three years in middle school I read almost 20 books, well, not even 20 books.”

“Well, what about magazines?” I asked.

“Sometimes I’ll flick through them, but I don’t like them either.”

“Aren’t there magazines in the Media Center that you could read and check out?”

“No, not really. I don’t like the magazines at school, and you can’t check them out. I don’t like the Media Center either. You can’t talk there, and I only go there when Mrs. Mayeaux [the English teacher] makes me.”

“What about the bible?” I asked.

“Nah, my mom reads the bible, but I don’t ever read it. It’s boring. I only listen to the stories when I go to church.”

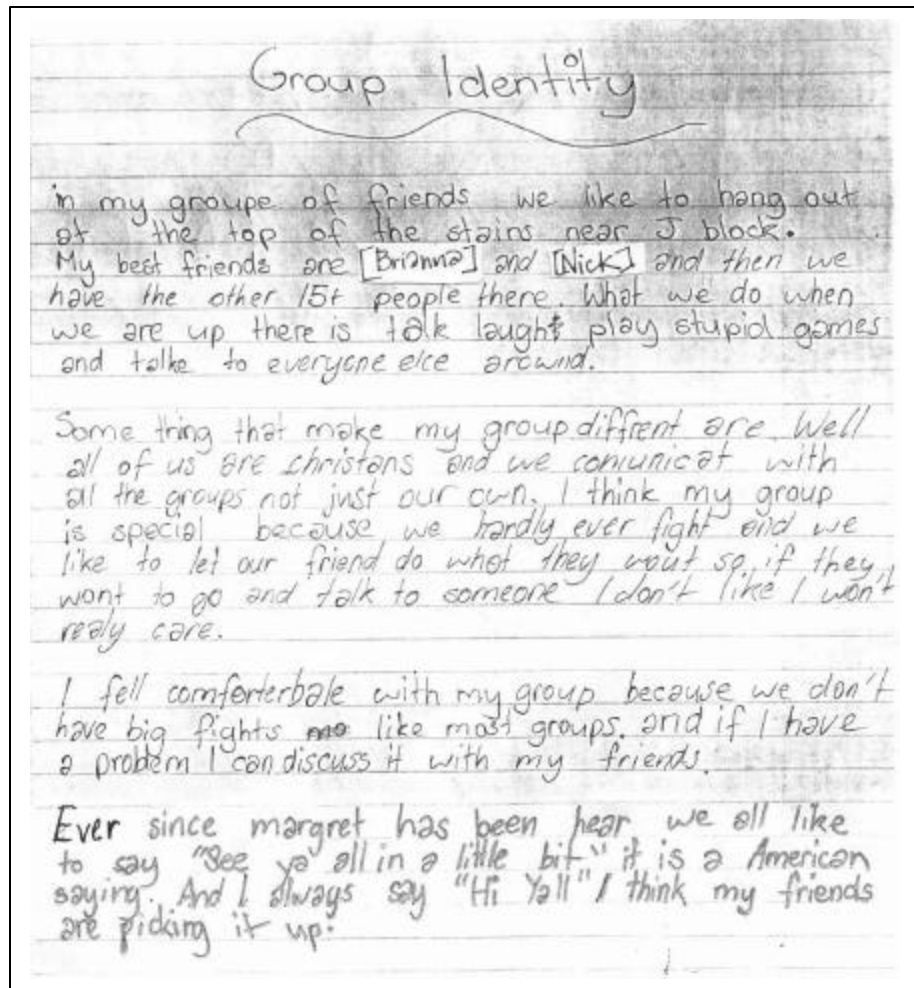
“You write lots of notes,” I said. “Do you ever reread those?”

“Nope. I read them, and then I keep them, some of them, in a special place because I don’t want people to see them,” she said. “But I don’t go back and reread them.”

While neither Rosa nor Tee expressed interest in reading, Tee had recently begun to like reading her *Teen Devotional Bible* because she liked the parts that related to being a teenager. When she had to use the “kiddie bible,” Tee didn’t like reading at all. It was only after she found a bible that related to her needs and issues that she thought were important as a teenager did she become interested, not only in reading stories or the teenage sections, but actually she wanted to attempt to read the whole bible. Rosa, on the other hand, saw no relation between reading print-based texts and her life, either in- or out-of-school. Reading and writing notes that she and her friend wrote were the extent of the print-based reading that she enjoyed doing. Although Tee’s and Rosa’s interests in popular culture as Christianity seemed similar, their group affiliation that connected them with Christianity was perceived quite differently in their in and out-of-school lives.

Tee was a thin, athletic, and outspoken 13-year-old. She was quite well-liked by other students at Kehara, which surprised her and her parents. Tee described herself “as a loner” when she was in primary school because many of her beliefs and interests involving Christianity clashed with what seemed acceptable with her peers. She said that often she’d come home from school in tears at the end of the school day because the other children had been mean to her. She didn’t think much would change for her once she began high school. But things did change, and actually Tee’s entrance into Grade 8 at Kehara afforded her access to a larger circle of friends who shared similar interests in Christianity. Her mother, Sandra, said, “It’s not that she’s different now to when she was in primary school. I just think high school is so much bigger, and there is such a variety of kids to mix with that it doesn’t matter.”

In Grade 8, Tee had found a group of friends with whom she shared interests in Christianity. In English class, she wrote an essay about Group Identity that described how her group affiliation worked.



Tee used her interests in Christianity to be part of this group identity. And aspects of what Tee deemed popular culture became a part of group affiliation. For instance, one morning Tee ran up to me at 8:15 as I was walking up the stairs into the Grade 8 wing at Kehara. "Margaret! I've been looking for you this morning!" She squealed and thrust her left hand up into my face. "Look what Trina bought for me from America!" At first I

thought she was trying to call my attention to the neon-green fingernail polish she was wearing.

“Wow! Your polish came from the U.S.?” I marveled, inspecting her neatly manicured fingernails.

“No, silly! Look at this!” she pointed to her thin arm. Snugly fastened around her freckled wrist was a thin, royal blue piece of cloth held together with a small silver buckle. In large white letters was stamped W.S.F.J. across the band.

“Oh, what’s this? I’ve never seen one like this before.” I said, studying the letters on the wristband.

“It stands for ‘We shine for Jesus.’ All of my friends have these bracelets. Wasn’t that nice of Trina to bring it to me? And it’s a new one. It’s not like the other ones— W.W.J.D., [What would Jesus do?] or F.R.O.G., [Fully relying on God] or even P.U.S.H. [Pray until something happens].”

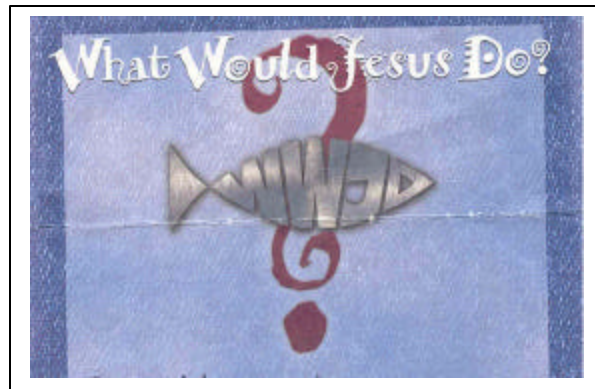
“I’ve only seen the W.W.J.D. bracelets,” I replied.

“This one is brand new, and no one has it! I’ve got to go and show it to Nick before form!” she exclaimed and ran off in search of her friend.

Because the students at Kehara wore uniforms, they used various accessories to personalize what seemed like a homogeneous sea of green and black school skirts and pants and matching green-flecked Kehara golf-style shirts. Often this meant searching for ways to stand out or to blend in. Kids’ affiliations in groups included wearing funky hair clips or certain joggers, decorating the cover of notebooks with well-liked movie stars, or carrying particular satchels, backpacks, or pencil cases, which in some way signaled

membership with a group of peers. And having something new like a hard-to-find Christian bracelet was always exciting.

Among Tee's group of friends, incorporating paraphernalia like Tee's W.S.F.J. bracelet or other Christian jewelry such as crosses or silver rings with fish on them into their attire was a way to identify themselves as a Christian group. Tee and her friends also used stationery with Christian logos like this one when they wrote notes to one another.



And Tee had even figured out a way to sign her name on school assignments and notes such that “the Jesus fish” symbol was entwined in her letter formation.

School was certainly a place where Tee felt comfortable sharing her Christian faith, both in the clothing she wore and the discussions she had. The Christian group of 15 or so boys and girls that she hung out with during morning tea and lunch spent a lot of time discussing aspects of Christianity. Exploring how their lives as Christians fit into other areas of their teenage life was the most central topic. Not only did Tee and her friends attend Student Focus at Kehara, but they also attended 8/9ers together, the Friday afternoon youth group at Kehara Baptist Church. Grade 8 and 9 students from all over the city came to this weekly activity.

Like Tee, Rosa felt that Christianity—and specifically Catholicism—was central to her life. However, her interests in Catholicism that related to her group affiliation with three other Mexican girls at Hancock didn't seem to fit in at all with school, and she had more difficulty than Tee did to work her popular culture interests into school that reflected her religious beliefs. In October, soon after I first met her, I picked her up at her apartment complex one day after school because she wanted to go to the mall. She was waiting on the balcony when I arrived. Seeing my car pull into the parking lot, she came bounding down the black steel stairs from the second story. She was wearing a pair of khaki bell-bottom *Pipes* jeans that she had worn that day to school. But she had changed from a short-sleeved red t-shirt with an Old Navy logo on it into a short-sleeved white t-shirt with the Virgin Mary in a blue, flowing robe silk-screened on the chest. She hopped into my car and pulled off a light-blue clip that was attached to one of the straps of her black backpack that she always carried with her. She combed her waist-length black hair away from her face with the teeth of the clip.

“Hey, I like your shirt!” I remarked as we headed out of the parking lot.

“Thanks! I got this shirt at church. All the kids who were there got the shirt because it was a special day for Maria.” She wove her hair into a thick, long braid as she talked.

“It's very pretty.”

“I like it. I think she looks like an angel with these stars around her head. It's for when she goes to heaven,” Rosa explained.

“Oh! Did you get it on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary in August?” I asked.

She rummaged through her backpack. “Yeah. How’dya know that?” she asked and then pulled out a brown rubber band from her pack and quickly wound it around the end of her braid.

“I’m Catholic, too.”

“Oh! You know what?” she said, looking at me. “I wore it to school, and the teacher made me turn it inside out because we aren’t supposed to wear religious stuff to school.”

“Really? When did that happen?” I asked.

“Sometime in September.” She affixed the clip back onto one of the straps of her bag.

“But can’t kids wear religious clothing to school?” I asked.

“I don’t know. I had to go to the office, and they just made me turn it the other way. Like [the teachers] think that the t-shirt has to do with being in a gang. I still wear it to school. Well, sometimes I wear it, but I’ll just wear it under—you know my grey jacket? I’ll just wear it under that, and then I’ll zip it up.”

Both Kehara and Hancock were public schools, so a separation of church and state prevailed. And though religion was not something that was taught or discussed in either school within the curriculum or by classroom teachers, it was more obvious and readily accepted at Kehara than at Hancock. At Kehara, students participated in extracurricular activities such as Student Focus that occurred on school property but were not school-sponsored activities. Hancock didn’t have a comparable program. Perhaps this is why Rosa felt that her own interests in Christianity and in Catholicism were squelched at school, while Tee openly used school as a place to express her religious beliefs.

Whereas Tee used Christianity to connect with her peers and was seen by her teachers as “into all the trends,” Rosa’s popular culture interests kept her feeling like an outsider at school. Because she had to turn the t-shirt inside out, she surmised that the teachers thought that her t-shirt was in some way gang related.

This incident at school affected how Rosa viewed wearing other religious articles of clothing that she owned. At her apartment one afternoon, Rosa pulled out a t-shirt from her bureau to show me. On the front was a depiction of the crucifixion of Christ. She said that her mother bought for her at a church fundraiser. I asked her if she ever wore it to school. “No, I don’t want the teachers to tell me that people might feel bad about it or they might not like it because there was blood on him. Maybe it just looks too violent. I don’t know.” Protecting her own feelings and assuming that she knew how teachers would read her shirt and react at school, Rosa decided to keep that shirt to herself and not to wear it to school.

Actually all sorts of Catholic paraphernalia adorned the tidy, four-room apartment that Rosa shared with her mother and brothers. A well-worn maroon colored bible always sat on the table in the living room. Rosa said that it belonged to her mother, but Rosa never read it. And framed on the wall were Rosa and Mario’s first communion certificates from Santa Maria Catholic Church. In Rosa’s bedroom, which was covered with all sorts of stuffed animals and teddy bears and hats, was a framed picture of the Virgin Mary that hung over her bed. Surrounding the picture were photographs of her and her brothers.



Rosa proudly showed the picture to me one afternoon after school. She took me to her room and jumped onto her bed, pointed to the picture, and sat quietly for a moment. As I studied it, she related it to her life as a Mexican and to her Catholic beliefs. “Most people who are Mexican that I know have one of those hanging somewhere in their house,” she said. “And, most people keep them in their house because Mother Mary takes care of them so that nothing happens to them.”

“Oh, I see,” I said. “I really like this picture.”

“And that is why there are pictures of me and Mario and Jesus, too. She is watching us.”

The t-shirt Rosa wore resembled the image of the Madonna that she kept in her room. Without directly relating the two, Rosa pointed out how the Virgin Mary was important in her life. Her interest in the Virgin Mary had nothing at all to do with gang-related activity as she said her teachers suspected the t-shirt meant. Instead, for Rosa, the t-shirt had more to do with a Mexican identity that related to her interest in Catholicism.

To Rosa, school wasn’t a welcoming place where she felt comfortable sharing her popular culture interests that related to her Mexican and Catholic beliefs. She became

protective of what was important to her, keeping her faith away from school or actively seeking to keep it under wraps, as when she wore her t-shirt with the Virgin Mary on the chest covered by her grey jacket. Though not made to wear uniforms at Hancock, she thought that her own interests in popular culture related to her Mexican identity and to Catholicism weren't accepted by those who were not Spanish speakers. On numerous occasions, Rosa commented about the injustices she perceived at school that were directed toward her group affiliation as a Mexican and Catholic. She talked at length about it when we were at her apartment or at the mall, her two favorite places to go as soon as the school day was over.

"I think that school is worn down," she said about Hancock one early evening as we sat in her living room on the sofa. "It is old, cold, and boring. I don't like what we learn either because it isn't very important to my life."

"Like why isn't it important to your life?" I asked.

Raising her voice a bit, she said, "[Hancock] is racist, and Spanish-speaking kids aren't treated as good as the other kids....People don't give the Spanish kids much chance because they don't think that we understand or like we can't speak good English...Some kids are always telling Spanish kids to go back to Mexico."

Rosa only hung out with three other Spanish-speaking eighth grade girls at Hancock. Other students who weren't part of Rosa's circle of friends often asked her questions about "being Mexican." For example, in the lunch line one day, an African American boy who was standing next to her told her that she was beautiful and then asked if she was Indian. Rosa laughed and said, "No way boy! I am Mexican!" To which he replied, "Stop kiddin' me!" And on another day, during art class, Felicity, a white girl

whom Rosa didn't know well and who sat across from Rosa at a worktable, said, "You are too white to be Mexican. What did you do?"

Rosa was outlining the phrase "Te Amo" in blue paint on the roof of birdhouse she had built and had painted yellow. She didn't answer.

"Seriously, what did you do?" Felicity persisted.

Rosa didn't look up, but said, "I am what I am. I don't have to explain anything to you." She spent the last 20 minutes of class painting, and she didn't talk to anyone.

No doubt categorical assumptions produced Rosa with a particular Mexican identity at school. These assumptions—based upon aspects of Rosa's popular culture interests—produced a Mexican identity that included gang relations to visual images of the Virgin Mary and assumptions about Rosa's skin color. These categories marked Rosa in ways that didn't at all match up with her own uses of popular culture to construct her own understanding of herself as Mexican girl. Perhaps her feelings of being misunderstood at school kept her from engaging with other students more often. Instead, Rosa kept her circle tight, initiating discussions only with the other Spanish-speaking students.

Unlike Tee, whose move to another country didn't seem to affect her lifestyle or her popular culture interests, Rosa's life was different. She was reserved in school. She did what she had to do to get along in her classes, and despite the fact that she had strong critiques of the school and of the people, she did what adults asked of her. Her language arts teacher described her as "the typical Latina girl. She's smarter than she lets on," she said. "I know that she knows the answers to questions, but she won't talk in front of a group." Speaking later about these perceptions, Rosa replied, "Yeah, in classes I am

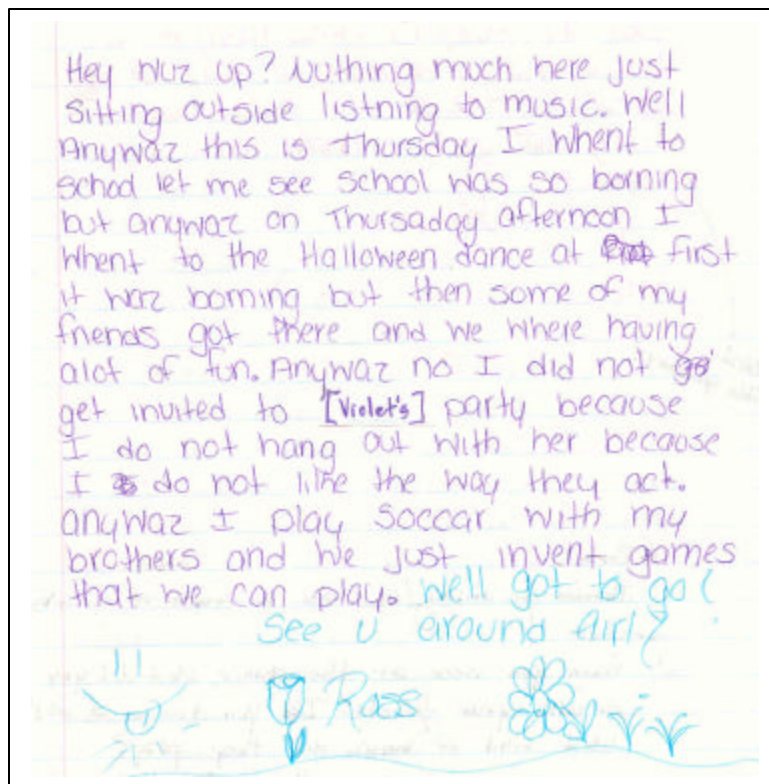
quiet. Even if I know the answer to the question that the teacher asks, I say I don't know, or I answer the question with a low voice and the teacher can't hear me. But outside of classes, like when I am with my friends or I am at home, I just talk all the time! I can't stop talking! See, I love to talk!"

Sure enough, Rosa had much to say outside of school, but she remained reserved in classes. Usually she only spoke up when asked by a teacher to translate information into Spanish for a male student with limited English proficiency that had recently transferred to Hancock from South America. When Sergio arrived, Rosa's class schedule changed. The teachers told her the change occurred so that she could help Sergio with his English. Rosa resented having to change her schedule and to do this work. She felt that the only time being Mexican was appreciated was when she could help out a teacher with language issues. As soon as she could get into the hallway or off school property, she openly vented her frustrations. "Ooooh," she declared one day when we left her reading class where she had obediently spent the entire period translating for Sergio the teacher's directions and an excerpt from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "[The teachers] just get on my nerves. It bothers me because they tell me what I can say, and then they are telling you what you can wear and can't wear to school, and it's like they're telling me that I can't think what I want to think."

Rosa was proud of her Spanish language, of Catholicism, and of her Mexican culture, but she felt that people at Hancock defined her according to these categories in ways that she didn't like. To Rosa, it seemed that language and clothing and religious beliefs were all tied up together. And across all three of these areas, she felt ostracized at school by people who were not like herself. Although students at Hancock seemed to

have more freedom than the students at Kehara to “bring their individuality to school” in that students weren’t required to wear a uniform, Rosa nevertheless felt that her popular culture interests were not valued or recognized as important. She thought that the teachers and Non-Mexican students at the school didn’t understand or attempt to understand her. Whereas Tee had found a place in-school that matched her out-of-school popular culture interests, Rosa felt that her own interests weren’t valued.

Just as Tee and Rosa used icons of Christianity that were produced for them to assert particular identities of themselves to others, they also used clothing to read other people at school, and they attributed others’ beliefs and actions to the ways that they dressed. Rosa wrote in her dialogue journal entry from October 27, 2000:



Rosa’s decisions about not liking the way that other students like Violet acted were often based upon her perceptions of how other girls dressed and why they wore certain clothes

to school. This came out one afternoon while we were at the mall looking around in stores. Rosa wanted to go to Clares, Sears, G&G, and JC Penney. In each of these stores, Rosa noted the kinds of clothing that were for sale that different groups of kids wore to school. Seeing a row of midriff shirts, she said, “These are shirts that the preppy girls wear to school.”

“Why the preppy girls?”

“They like to wear clothes that are a little bit tight,” she replied.

“Why?”

“To get the preppy guys to look at them.” She said. “You know how a lot of white girls try to act so pretty at school, and so my friends and I, we just make fun of them because they are just making a fool of themselves, trying to put make-up on to look pretty when they know like if God gave them that face why didn’t they just keep it like that?”

“You think that all white girls are like that? That they all do that at Hancock?”

“No, just the ones—white girls and black girls—trying to act so popular and trying to be popular so that people pay attention to them. So I don’t like hanging around with that kind of people.”

To Rosa, dressing according to what she saw as popular culture determined how people acted. Rosa often compared the differences between the ways that she and her three Mexican girlfriends dressed for school to that of other Non-Mexican students.

“People at Hancock are racist to Mexicans,” she noted. “[Mexican] kids get teased all the time because they don’t really wear fancy clothes to school. We don’t go and try and be someone we are not or something just to impress someone. I only wear fancy clothes to church.”

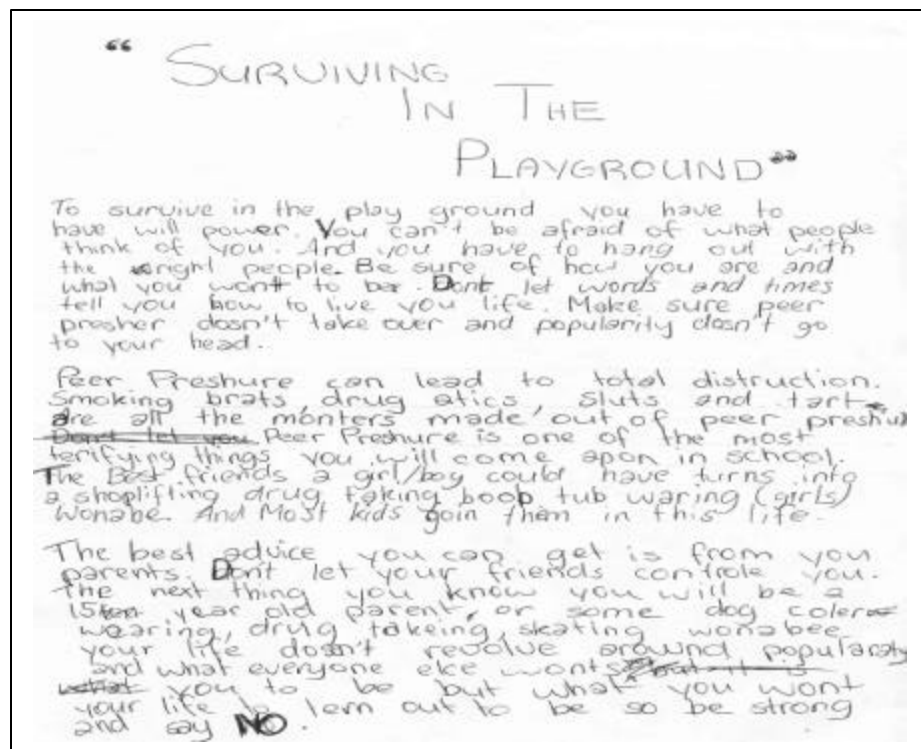
“Do other kids get teased, too?” I asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t get in other people’s business. Sometimes what I don’t like about people at school is that they just try to be somebody that they aren’t. I mean they should be happy for what they have and not try to use all these other things to make them happy so that they’ll have friends.”

“Like what other things?” I asked.

“Like clothes and stuff,” Rosa said. “They just care too much about what other people think of them....I don’t really care what other people think of me!” she said. “I wear what I want to school. Boys or girls aren’t going to tell me what to do.”

Tee, as well, used her own popular culture interests, perceptions, and her past experiences of being ignored by peers in order to categorize and name other people based upon the way they dress. One day in English class, she wrote an essay on peer pressure, describing how she saw identity, dress, and actions to be intertwined.



Later on, Tee and I discussed this idea that people's clothing choices determined their actions. I asked her what she thought of the way she dressed. She said, "I just wear what I want to wear. If I think something looks nice, I want to wear it, not because everyone else is wearing it...But some kids, they'll do anything so that they'll have friends. It's a bit like a wannabe. Oh, what am I trying to say? I guess it's like this—lots of people do different things to make themselves stand out to be accepted," she declared emphatically.

"And do you do that?" I asked.

"Not intentionally. If I do, not intentionally," she replied.

Perhaps Rosa and Tee didn't see themselves as categorizing others according to clothing in the same ways that others categorized them as particular kinds of people. These girls used aspects of Christianity to be recognized as particular kinds of people, yet neither of them thought that their choices of dress had anything to do with their desires to want to be associated with a particular group, to be named as a particular kind of person. For Rosa, wearing religious t-shirts were part of being a Mexican girl and having an affiliation with the Virgin Mary was not only part of her Mexican identity but also part of her Catholic identity. And though Tee said that she didn't dress intentionally to be recognized as a particular kind of person, she did certain things such as wearing the Christian bracelet and buying and reading the *Teen Devotional Bible* to be part of her Christian group of friends. While these girls didn't like being singled out in negative ways according to their dress and actions, they based their judgment of others on these same premises. To Tee and Rosa, to be up with particular trends that contradicted their beliefs was tantamount to wanting to be popular, and being desirous of popularity

connoted all sorts of negative ramifications, which was nothing short of selling out just to be accepted.

But just as these girls were produced as particular kinds of people based upon group affiliations and identities that involved Christianity, they also pushed against their respective group identities that produced them with particular interests. For Rosa, this renegotiation of a Mexican and Catholic identity had to do with expectations of being a Mexican girl, her understanding of Christian icons, and her uses of clothing. Tee's push against a group identity involved music, language, dancing, and clothing.

Rosa prided herself on being a Mexican girl, and she often reasoned that she did certain things because she was Mexican. For example, sometimes we would take Jesus with us to the mall because Rosa said that she looked after her baby brother while her older brother did other things because she was a girl and should babysit. She also enjoyed cooking with her mother, and she didn't want her brothers involved in their forays because she said that it was what Mexican girls do together. And, on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 9), Rosa went with her family to mass at 5:00 A.M. "to sing to Maria because that is what Mexican Catholics do." Rosa, however, wasn't always content with the identity of a Mexican girl that produced her as a particular kind of person. Rather than just accept that identity, she used other aspects of popular culture to construct new ways of being that changed how she saw herself as a Mexican girl and as a Catholic.

In the fall, Hancock hosted a Halloween dance at school. Rosa's parents didn't want her to go to the dance, but she argued with them about it. After this discussion, Rosa was allowed to go to the dance, and she felt like she had made some progress as a 12-

year-old. “Culturally, as a Mexican girl,” she said, “I am not supposed to date until I am 15, and I am not supposed to go to dances until then either. But I talked with my mom and dad about it, and so because I act right, I get a lot of privileges.” In exchange for these privileges to go to dances, she said, “I just can’t skip school; I can’t sneak boys into the house; I can’t sneak out; and I can’t do drugs. If I do any of those things my mom will throw me out of the house. And I *can’t* have sex until I am married.”

Though Rosa often said that certain aspects of her life indicated that she was “Mexican Catholic,” such as her involvement at the Spanish mass at Santa Maria Catholic Church, her attendance at the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, or her signature on her dialogue entries that often included a picture of a rose, she also pushed against particular icons defining her with a Catholic identity. One afternoon, while hanging out at her house, she showed me a crystal, heart-shaped box with a cross on the lid. Seeing the cross, I asked her if it was something religious.

She seemed a bit annoyed when she responded. “Not everything that has a cross has to be religious.” Then she said that she didn’t use it religiously; she kept her notes in the box. “Well sometimes people just like something because other people like it, and sometimes I like it because other people like it, but that doesn’t mean that it tells me what to do.” She went on to say, “Like a cross and those kinds of things. It’s important for lots of people, but it’s not the same to all of them. So, sometimes it just depends.”

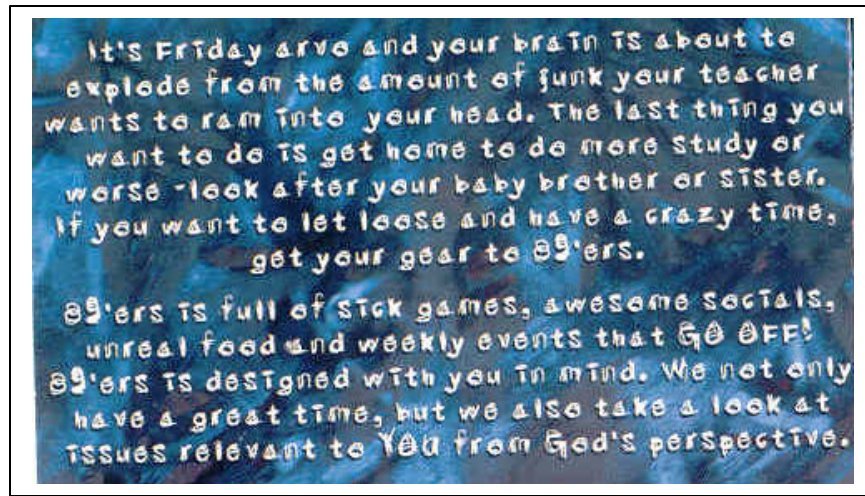
Rosa’s uses of the box with the cross on it had nothing at all to do with any religious affiliation of being Catholic. To her, a cross meant only what people made of it—just like her t-shirt with the Virgin Mary or the crucifix on the front. She didn’t want me to assume that just because she was a “Mexican Catholic” that all religious icons or

symbols defined her as being a particular kind of person or defined her uses of items. She wanted to show me her box where she kept her notes, not a religious aspect of her life. And when I misunderstood her uses of texts, she became annoyed and let me know as much.

Tee also pushed against the Christian identity that produced her as a particular person. On a sunny and warm Friday after school, Tee and four of her boy and girl friends from the Christian group waited for me on the stairs at the entrance to Kehara. When I arrived, the six of us headed to 8/9ers. We walked together the hilly, half-mile jaunt through the neighborhood from Kehara High School to Kehara Baptist Church. About a half-hour later, we arrived at a large contemporary structure, which the kids explained was the church. I followed them, and we headed down a steep hill to a lower-level entrance on the backside of the building. Once inside, the kids dropped their school backpacks and satchels in the foyer and headed toward a large, open room to their left.

Fifty or so kids dressed in uniforms representing different schools were all over the recreation room area, sitting and chatting in groups, playing foosball, table tennis, air hockey, and a number of other games set up around the room. Music of *DC Talk* filled the room from an enormous boombox placed in the middle of the action. Tee took me over and introduced me to Beth and Laudy, two youth group leaders in their early twenties, whom Tee and the other kids often talked about at school. Like Tee and her friends, these youth leaders wore W.W.J. D. bracelets. These women welcomed me into the group and then gave me a tri-fold flyer that described 8/9ers. One side of the flyer showed a close up of a girl's face, as if screaming, with her tongue hanging out to rival

that of Gene Simmons. A second side of the flyer gave the upcoming dates and events that the 8/9ers group had planned. And the third side looked like this:



It seemed that the creators of the 8/9ers targeted adolescents to be a part of the youth group in ways similar to other forms of popular culture in the adolescents' lives. The producers of this brochure appealed to adolescents' desire to have fun and "to have a crazy time" at the church while making school out to be pain because of "the amount of junk" teachers rammed into kids' heads. This sort of text seemed not unlike talk I heard on the radio or saw on local television shows that the adolescents talked about.

Beth, Laudy, Tee, and I sat together on top of a table. Tee kept a watchful eye on the door for the arrival of some of her friends from other schools.

The girls' talk soon turned to music.

"I just bought the newest *DC Talk* album," said Beth.

"Oh yeah," said Laudy. "I like them. They're like *Jars of Clay*."

Tee said, "Yeah, I have that one—'Supernatural.' I also have *M2M* and Britney Spears. You know her Margaret. She's big in America!"

"Yeah she is!" I said.

Beth looked over at Tee and asked, “Do you like her?”

“Yeah, I like her music. She’s good to dance to, but I don’t like how she dresses and acts.”

“Oh,” said Beth. “Tee, what radio station do you listen to?”

“Mostly B105,” Tee answered.

“Do you?” asked Beth. “You *really* like that station?”

Tee’s legs hung off of the table where she sat. She swung them around and thought for a bit. Then she said, “Yeah, I like B105, but I don’t like the crappy talkers. They like to swear a lot, and they talk about sex, and I don’t really like that. When they do that, I change the station and listen to 96.5 [the Christian Family station].”

“Yeah, 96.5 is the *best* station. You should start there!” Beth replied.

Tee said, “But I like the music on B105.”

At this point, Laudy chimed in and said, “If you don’t like the trashy talk, then listen to 96.5.”

“I do listen to it, but I like the music on B105,” Tee responded, and then she jumped off the table and went to play air hockey.

Tee didn’t mention this episode again. But several weeks later a discussion ensued about music between Tee and her Christian friends one day at school during morning tea. Tee sat around in a circle with girls and boys that she hung out with on a concreted area outside the Grade 8 wing of the school. As they ate their snacks, a dispute arose among them about what kinds of music they could or should listen to as Christians.

“I am Christian, but I like Non-Christian music,” Tee said.

Mary looked over at Tee and asked, “What if you only listen to Christian music?”

“Then you miss out on a whole heap of good stuff,” Tee said. “I like the *Vengaboys*, and I used to like *S2S*, but they use baby voices and that bothers me now. But I do like the song ‘Sisters’ that they sing because it reminds me of my sister.”

Mary said, “Well, I’m a Christian so I might as well listen to Christian music.”

Tee didn’t answer. She turned to Adeline and said, “I just made up this really cool dance yesterday. It took me about all day.”

“Yeah, what to?” Adeline asked.

“The *Vengaboys*. I used ‘Skinny Dipping.’ It is a really good song, it is. It says, ‘Take your clothes off. That’s what we love!’”

“Oh, I know that song!” yelled Brianna, and she and Tee and Adeline began to sing the lyrics.

A discussion then ensued about the lyrics of “Skinny Dipping” that Tee wanted to use to create a dance to do for assembly, and several of her friends protested, saying that she couldn’t do that because she was Christian.

Finally, not understanding what the dispute was about, I interjected and asked Tee, “Does being Christian matter to like different kinds of music?”

“No!” Tee said adamantly. “I listen to more Non-Christian music than Christian music. Most Christian music is like ‘All-e-lu-yah! All-e-lu-yah! All-e-lu-yah! All-e-lu-uuuu-yahhhh!’ And it’s not that good.”

“Nah-uh,” argued Mary. “Lots of Christian music is not like that!”

“Yeah...but I think Non-Christian music is better because there are better beats to dance to,” replied Tee.

“But some Christian music is like rock music,” Mary shot back.

“Yeah, that’s true,” said Tee. “You’re right.”

“We have a Christian dance group at our church. It’s like a dance school, and we use Christian music, and it has a good beat,” Mary continued.

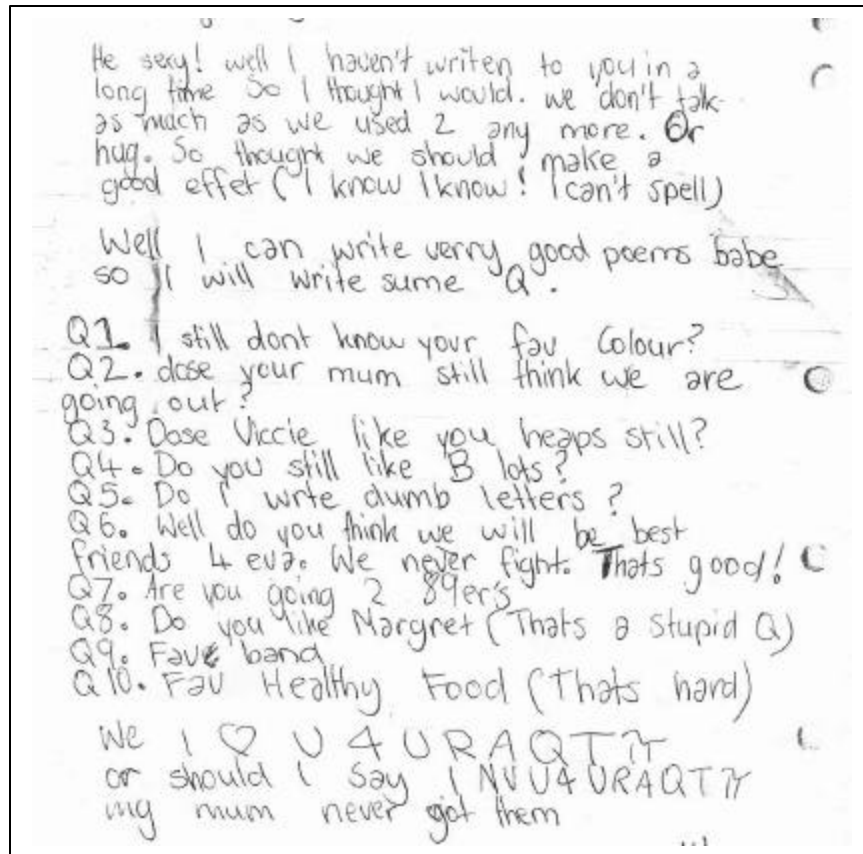
“That’s like *Directions* at [Kehara Baptist Church]. I am going to join that next year when I’m old enough in Grade 9,” added Brianna.

“Yeah, they’re really good,” agreed Tee. “Mary, I just mean to say that I do both. I really like to make dances, and I like Christian music, but sometimes I think it’s better to do dances with Non-Christian music because the music part, like the beat part, is better.”

To Tee, being a Christian was important, but so was music. In the context of 8/9ers, the youth group leaders tried to get Tee to listen primarily to the Christian station, and Mary argued that because she was Christian, she listened to Christian music. But Tee saw things differently. She especially loved dancing, and in the afternoons after school, she’d often spend an hour or two listening to music and choreographing a dance to it. As Tee saw it, she could still be a Christian and listen to radio stations and to cds that weren’t specifically categorized as “Christian.” She didn’t want the group identity to override her own uses of popular culture that extended beyond it. By opening herself up to what she called “Non-Christian” music, she reasoned that she had more listening options and better dancing music.

Tee also used language to push against a particular way of being as a Christian within her group of Christian friends. Tee’s group of friends often wrote notes to one another, either on paper or in the “notes section” of the school-issued diaries. Tee’s

mother didn't particularly like this notewriting practice because Tee often wrote notes to boys, especially to Nick, one of her best friends. One such note Tee gave to Nick said:



Tee showed it to me and asked me if I understood it. I read it through silently, and she said, "No, read it aloud. I want to see something."

So I read it aloud, and when I got to the end, I read, "I love you for you are a..." But I couldn't figure out the ending.

Tee began laughing.

"I don't know this part," I said, and pointed to the QTĐ.

“Oh, that’s just the way we write Cutie Pie!” She mused. “My mum couldn’t figure that out either, and she said I shouldn’t write with signs like that. She doesn’t understand that there’s a different way to spell!”

“Did you show this note to her?” I asked Tee.

“No!” she said, “She wouldn’t care, but she might chuck a spas that I called Nick sexy. She would think it’s bad.”

“Why?”

“Because she would just think that I was being naughty with a boy. I don’t mean it like sexy in that way.”

“What way?” I asked.

“Like sexy body, in *that* way. I mean I just use it. See, it’s different with Nick. He calls me cutie-pie and I call him sexy. We’re *just* friends.”

To Tee, the symbols QTĐ meant something in particular. But the word sexy didn’t mean sexy in a sexual sense, as she speculated that her mother might read and imagine the word to mean. Instead, she used it as a playful and friendly term with her buddy, Nick.

Both Tee’s and Rosa’s parents were involved in their daughters lives and felt similarly about their daughters’ popular culture interests. Sandra, Tee’s mother, and Juan, Rosa’s father, talked at length about how they conceptualized their daughter’s popular culture interests in relation to the groups and identities of which the girls were a part. Sandra explained how she felt about Tee’s interests in popular culture while we visited one morning at the eatery in the local shopping center. “Here’s how Don and I see it: We want [our children] to have a Christian faith, and we want them to go on, but we can’t

force them to have it...So we've have tried very much to make them, to try to help them to choose why they want to believe in God, not just because mum and dad believe in God...I do discuss Christian things very much and relate them to what we call worldly things, so that she can make a choice." Sandra and Don defined worldly things as those aspects of Tee's life and interests that didn't seem to mesh with the family's view of Christianity. This included her interest in music that wasn't Christian and clothing she wanted to wear that seemed out of line with their beliefs.

Although Tee thought her parents were sometimes too overprotective and reactionary, Sandra saw it differently. Unlike her own strict upbringing that kept her from wearing togs or shorts or engaging in activities on Sunday, she wanted to allow her own children more experiences. So when Tee bought a pair of leopard skin pants her mother didn't do anything, though she didn't agree with it. Sandra said, "You know that pair of leopard skin pants she has? I think she likes them because they are tight, and they sit on the hip so if she can get her top short enough she will show off a part of her midriff...I mean that is my perception. She would probably say that I was completely wrong. She would say that I have the wrong concept of why she wore them."

Sandra realized that Tee needed to make some decisions on her own. She didn't agree with Tee's desire to purchase the pants, but she conceptualized Tee's purchase in terms of Christianity. "If you make something an absolute no-no, they want it," Sandra reasoned. "It's like it gives an attraction to it. If you absolutely can't have it, then you have a desire to want it. So, I just, I suppose I think it is better to expose them....I just want them to make the right choices based on what we think at home, what we believe God teaches us, and what they think will be beneficial to them. So I want them to try and

see the bigger picture....You know, so if [Tee] goes and wears these nothing clothes, it's just not necessary, I mean, it is provocative, all these clothes. So I talk to her about it."

Juan, like Sandra, understood that his beliefs in Catholicism might differ from ideas about a female identity and from fashion trends that Rosa liked. Rather than forbid her from wearing particular kinds of clothing, he talked with her about the differences he saw. He compared the past to the present, saying, "See, right now, the fashion is really different than how we used to dress, and they have big jeans and small shirts. I don't think it is any problem. But of course, we also talk about it because trends now, well you have to cover yourself. Sometimes the way they dress, it don't mean anything, but sometimes they don't cover much. You know, you have to think about what other people will think, about how they might think something different."

Juan knew that Rosa had recently bought a shirt at the mall that said "Flirt" across the chest. After Rosa bought it, she told me that her father wouldn't like it, but she said that it was funny and that girls needed to have some fun with what they wore. During our conversation, Juan used Rosa's recent purchase to explain how he felt. He admitted that he didn't like Rosa's Flirt shirt because of what others might think about why she was wearing it. He thought about it for a while and drank his Dunkin' Donut coffee. "Yeah," he finally said. "I've been talking to her about it. And sometimes the way they dress, I don't like it, but what can I do?" Juan felt that he couldn't dictate to his daughter how to dress or act or behave, but he did think that discussing differences was important and contextualizing differences in the perceptions about popular culture in light of their Catholic faith was important. He explained, "[Rosa is] going to do it anyway. You know if I want to keep [her] from doing something, she is going to think about it

anyway...Then, I'll say, let's see this and see how we think about it. I want [her] to know what we think about it at home and then decide for [herself]. So I talk to her. I don't get to see them too much, but I talk to her on the phone every day, and I know she goes to church...too."

Juan felt that he couldn't do anything about the fact that Rosa bought the shirt. But he did feel it was important to talk with her about how it might be read and perceived by others. Like Rosa's speculation that her shirt with Jesus on the chest might be problematic for teachers, he wanted her to know that the Flirt shirt might make people think something about her that went against their Catholic beliefs.

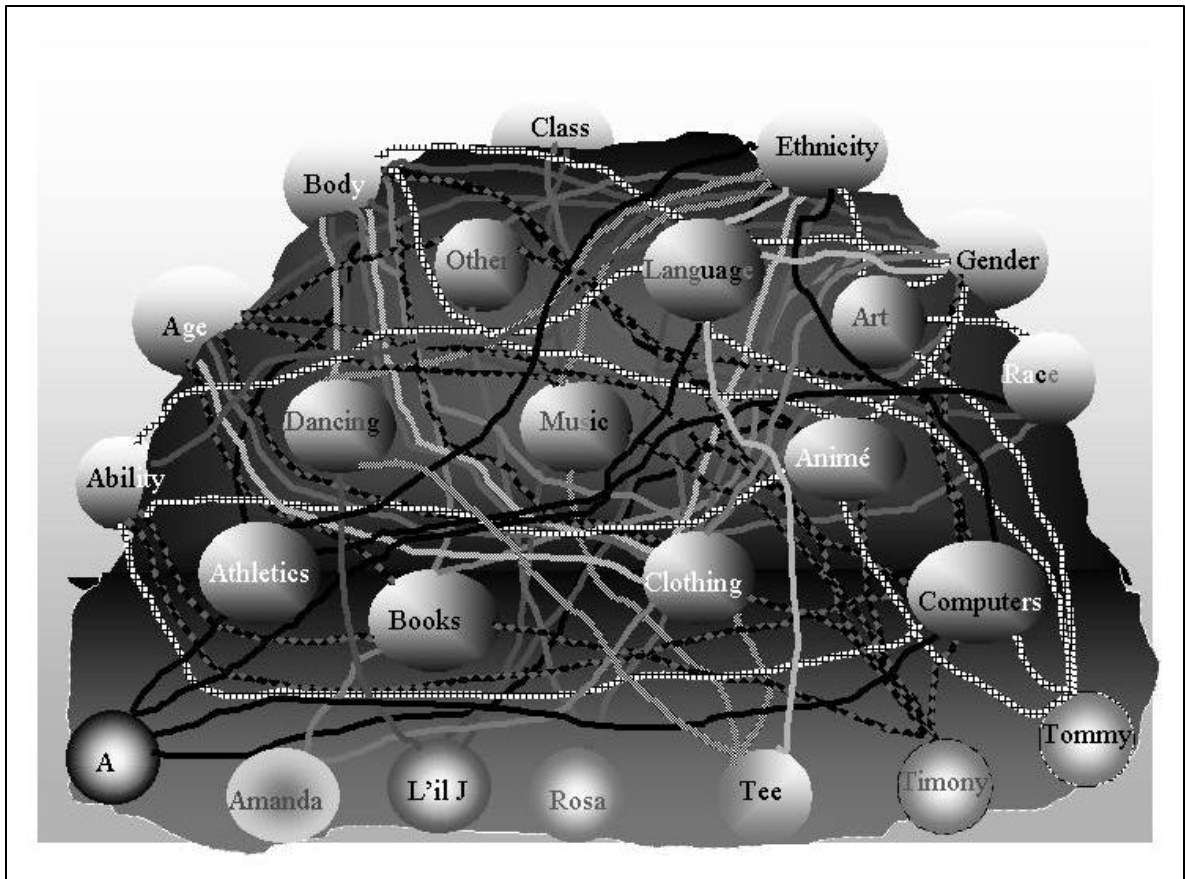
Whereas Sandra felt that she should allow Tee to be exposed to "worldly things" so that Tee could make a choice about how to act, dress, and behave in relation to their Christian beliefs, Juan conceptualized Rosa's exposure to living in the United States. Like Sandra, Juan wanted Rosa to think about what she was doing and how she was doing it in terms of their faith. But he wanted her to think about these things in terms of living in a diverse community. "We have to learn from everybody. I mean it's different ways to do things and different ways to think about things. That's what I want my children to know. Because in the United States it's hard because there are a lot of cultures and people are all different. You got to respect different people, and you got to respect their faith. And if you don't like it, then don't get too close. And that's that. That's just the way it is."

Rosa's and Tee's photos they took for their documentaries illustrated the differences in the ways that they saw popular culture and Christianity in various aspects of their lives. All of the pictures Rosa took were taken either at her house or at the mall.

She said that she wanted to take a picture at her church, but she always forgot to take the camera with her. Of the eight pictures Rosa took, four were taken at home and four were taken at the mall. The 13 pictures Tee shared, on the other hand, were taken at school, at home, and with her friends in different places and illustrated how her popular culture interests crossed several contexts.

Both Rosa and Tee understood how others produced them with particular identities through their uses of texts they deemed popular culture and how the groups used particular kinds of texts. These girls realized that popular culture was produced for them, and they used that popular culture in ways that perpetuated categorical understandings of membership within a group identity. Yet at the same time, these girls used popular culture to push against those categories that defined them with particular group identities.

CHAPTER 6:
A TOUCH OF GREY: RETHINKING ADOLESCENCE,
POPULAR CULTURE, AND LITERACIES



Teachers and parents categorized Tommy, A, Amanda, L'il J, Tee, Rosa, and Timony as adolescents and chalked up their uses of popular culture to that age period. The adults perceived the 12- and 13-year-olds' popular culture uses as acts of subversion, rebellion, or mindless consumption characteristic of the stage or phase of adolescence. The adolescents' text uses framed by these conditions resulted in adults' desires to assist

adolescents in forming safe and secure identities, and popular culture seemed counter to the adults' efforts. Adults described adolescents' uses of popular culture in negative terms, often alluding to it as detrimental to the production and formation of secure identities. Adolescents could use popular culture rightly or wrongly, Amanda's mother noted. Timony's uses of popular culture produced a dark side that disturbed his teachers.

Allusions to popular culture as dark, foreboding, uncertain, and in opposition to developing stable identities abounded. But there's something to be said about and learned from what's seemingly dark. Before adults go running to adolescents' aid to save them from the ills of popular culture that detract from forming secure and stable identities, we might do well to consider how adolescents use popular culture to keep notions of stable identities in play and to reshape identities that they perceive as producing them. Looking at what seems dark and obscure and what seems light and apparent in adolescents' popular culture holds potential for illustrating how adolescents use popular culture constructively as part of their literacy lives.

The figure that opens this chapter represents the relations between adolescents, texts, and structures in this study. The seven adolescents frame the bottom of the figure. The 10 overlapping popular culture interests they used repeatedly during the 10-week period reside in the middle of the drawing between the adolescents and the outside edge of the figure. The upper, outside edge frames the figure and denotes the seven structures that produced identities for the adolescents and that the adolescents attempted to alter.

Chiaroscuro is an artistic technique that attends to areas of an illustration where light and dark meet up and highlights something that might otherwise be overlooked. I applied this technique in my analysis of the data to depict how adolescents use popular

culture in interweaving and complementary ways to negotiate and renegotiate being produced with identities while simultaneously constructing alternative notions of themselves in their uses of popular culture texts. The subtle gradations of light and dark permitted an examination of the adolescents' text uses as a network connecting the adolescents, as they attempted to construct new ways of being, to the structures that produced identities for them.

The maps that opened Chapters 2 through 5 depicted the adolescents' literacies involving popular culture texts. The illustrations showed how others produced them with identity based upon the adolescents' popular culture interests and how the adolescents used texts to push against those identities that they found limiting. Their engagement in pushing against stable or multiple identities is displayed in orange, while the identities that sought to produce them as specific people are shown in red. What isn't illustrated in those maps and what became clearer in the use of chiaroscuro were the overlaps of *texts* that adolescents used and the connections to structures adolescents tried to adjust as a result of their uses of texts. In the figure at the beginning of this chapter, chiaroscuro illustrates how adolescents' engagement of popular culture, which often seemed concealed and underground in Chapters 2 through 5, became a network of light and dark passageways, a web of uses that weren't subterranean at all and that actually pushed against structures (ability, age, body, class, ethnicity [including culture, language, nationality, and religion]) of being located as a particular person with a stable identity.

Chiaroscuro: Seeing with Light and Dark

Chiaroscuro is a technique that was developed throughout the Italian Renaissance. During this period artists experimented with technical forms that moved them away from

painting that lacked complexity and intensity. This technique became popular with renowned artists such as Leonardo de Vinci, Giotto, and Raphael who were inspired by the dimensionality that a multiplicity of colors gave to surfaces to exemplify depth. In their experimentation with chiaroscuro, artists realized that consideration to shifts in color created not only depth but also texture.

The practice of chiaroscuro became a scientific endeavor for some artists. Leonardo de Vinci viewed painting as both an art and a science that mixed theoretical and practical knowledge of design and color. In order for painting to depict proper shadings and various dimensions, artists needed to study the function of light and shadows in their work. This study entailed consideration of areas where light and dark coalesced in either gradations of grey or in extremities of colors so as to bring to attention the less obvious features in the artwork. Artists of the Renaissance found that chiaroscuro enhanced the study of material surfaces such as bodies, as bodies shifted and changed depending on the position relative to available lighting. The combination of the necessary hues, not as a dualism or dichotomy but as complementary, made it feasible to depict and ultimately to perceive depth, texture, and complexity from different perspectives of a two-dimensional design.

Chiaroscuro as a technique caught on quickly among artists and has survived as a useful tool for approximately 600 years. Though it began as a means to enhance visual depictions, chiaroscuro has evolved and changed with artists' work throughout the centuries. Chiaroscuro has been used in contemporary artistic renderings, including anim , photography, painting, film, and fiction writing. Though modified throughout the

ages, chiaroscuro has remained consistent as a tool to depict intricacies and details of artist's work.

For me, chiaroscuro opened up a new way to think about adolescents, popular culture, and literacies. Using chiaroscuro to look across adolescents' uses of popular culture illustrated the subtleties that I might have otherwise missed and forced me to focus on areas where different colors and concepts meet up along edges. Drawing the illustration and studying the chains that linked adolescents to texts and structures as part of chiaroscuro furthered my analysis in three ways. First, chiaroscuro helped me to rethink ideas that popular culture represents a form of mindless engagement. Second, using chiaroscuro showed how adolescents used popular culture to modify structures in their lives that narrowed the identities that produced them. And third, chiaroscuro allowed a further investigation into the different perspectives and tensions between being produced with an identity while simultaneously constructing one's own understanding and uses of texts. Attention to light and dark, not as the elements work separately or dichotomously, but as they function in complementary ways, became a means for rethinking adolescence and adolescents' making of themselves through literacies involving popular culture.

Structures of White Light

People often talk as if they have essential attributes and characteristics that make them particular sorts of people. Structures such as age, ability, body, and ethnicity along with socioeconomic class, gender, and race serve as means for people to develop stable senses of themselves, which are sometimes accepted seamlessly in society. Structures that have been firmly ingrained over time classify people and produce identities that

people recognize in themselves and in others because the identities seem discrete, secure, and apparent. So, for example, structures such as age label people and give them identities by age group, such as adolescents or adults, or by generation like Gen Xers, Millennials, or Boomers. Bodies also label and categorize people: tall, short, thin, African American, Mexican, pubescent, middle age. These descriptors produce identities that people take on as their own. The concept of ability categorizes the body too: the body is sorted as able or unable according to different structural criteria (e.g., Is he athletic? Can she think well?). Even institutions categorize people based upon structures of age and ability. Schools, for example, define identities for people by formal levels of education—student or teacher. Structures also organize people based upon ethnicity, including language, culture, nationality, and religion. Categorizations are endless.

The illustration shows ability, age, body, class, ethnicity, gender, and race as seven structures in a semicircle that enclose other aspects of the illustration, including texts and adolescents. The edges of these structures appear differently. The translucent top edge of each structure opens to the space around it. From a top perspective looking down, the white of the circular structures blends in with the white background contiguous to it. Light against light, these seven structures meld into society. Accepted as structures that name and classify, people use structures to produce identities onto others. When structures produce unquestioned identities, the structures retain their capacity to remain optically transparent.

Within local and across global contexts, people categorized popular culture and produced identities for adolescents based upon their understandings of the structures. For example, people categorized paraphernalia and produced identities for Tee and Rosa as

Christians based on structures of ethnicity (religion) and race. Tommy's interests in *Dragonball Z*, Asian culture, and art produced bodily identities for him as a wuss and weakling by the Australian boys, but as lovely and cute by the Asian exchange students. Adolescents and adults produced identities for L'il J based on her interests in rap, hip-hop, and dancing. These identities were based upon structures of gender, body, and race. Amanda's interests in *Babysitters' Club* books produced an identity for her as a nerd and unpopular by teachers and peers because she wasn't up with the trends. The relevant trends were based on structures of age, gender, and the body that produced identities for Grade 8 girls. A's interests in Australian culture and sport produced him with an athletic identity that was based upon body structures. The athletic Australian boys embraced this identity produced for A, while racial and ethnic structures marked him as an outsider. And Timony's choice of books, music, and clothing, which were part of the grunge scene, produced identities for him as troublesome and problematic because the texts challenged age categories. The seven structures allowed people to categorize texts and to produce identities for the adolescents based upon assumptions about the structures readily accepted in society.

From a downward perspective of the drawing, structures blend in with the light, and the smooth transition between the upper exteriority and outside the circle makes it difficult to determine the structures' upper boundaries. These structures that produced identities for adolescents work as light flowing into light and function invisibly yet luminously, such that many adults' readings of texts produced seemingly apparent identities onto adolescents. Adolescents' uses of popular culture from this downward perspective of the illustration are not realized because they don't reach the lighted side of

the structure. In this way, the adolescents' actions and uses of popular culture remained dark, subversive, and rebellious, imperceptible from the lighted side of the structure. From a downward viewpoint, structures produced readings of popular culture that further ingrained the adolescents categorically. Structures that categorized adolescence as a stage characterized by turmoil and as an age seen as subversive and rebellious only perpetuated these ideas in reading of popular culture and produced identities that named adolescents as such.

Yet adolescents did push against those structures that produced identities for them, but from what perspective are their endeavors recognizable as something other than structural reifications of adolescence? Viewers need to look differently at the structures in the illustration—not at what is light and apparent, but where light and dark coalesce. Attention to the underside of the semicircular structures of age, ability, body, race, class, ethnicity, gender, and race, where light meets up with dark and creates touches of grey, shows a different perspective. From this perspective adolescents used popular culture to destabilize identities that limited their options and constricted them from being recognized as someone else, someone different, someone contradictory to another identity they held. Adolescents attached their popular culture uses to the underside of the structure in their attempts to push against structures and to reshape identity. On the underside of the structure, adolescents' popular culture uses constructed shades of grey in places where dark and light came together.

Shades of Grey: Reshaping Identities by Engaging Lines of Subjectivity

When adolescents explained that they used texts differently than defined by others, they didn't mindlessly consume popular culture; nor were their attempts to use

popular culture necessarily rebellious. Their constructions of selves might be seen as a matter of using texts strategically to destabilize the identities that sought to constrain them and to name them as particular people. It wasn't that the adolescents didn't want to have particular identities or to be recognized with identities at all. Instead, they sought to alter and reshape identities offered to them through structures and popular culture texts when they used texts such as clothing, language, dancing, or anim , among others. This idea of readers' constructing their own senses of self, their own uses of texts, and their own identities from those uses is an enactment of *subjectivity*. Subjectivity is adolescents' uses of popular culture text to avoid being named, sorted, and defined according to larger structures that attempt to stabilize them with particular identities. Subjectivity, as illustrated in the figure, shows the chains that link adolescents, texts, and structures.

Subjectivity as conceptualized within chiaroscuro in this study focuses on readers' *active* engagement of forever trying to open up a structure from the underside that works in relation to structure often viewed as opening only to the light. Though active in their attempts, adolescents' efforts to use subjectivity to recreate staid meanings of texts that attempted to stabilize and to locate them with a singular or particular identity remained on the under and dark side of the structure. From the less apparent side, subjectivity, abutting the underside of structures, shows entranceways, but does little to the side of the structure that remains wholly in the light.

Subjectivity does not replace the idea of identity or identities; nor is it in opposition to structures that produce identities. Instead, subjectivity is the movement between and among identities that occurs as readers draw on texts to shift and situate themselves in relation to various structures. Subjectivity, therefore, is often an effort to

perpetuate a structure, to construct new ways of being, or to modify the structure while still being recognized by the structure. Subjectivity is illustrated in Rosa's attempts to perpetuate a structure that produced an identity for her in her desire to be recognized as a Mexican Catholic, but also not to be stifled with only that identity. Rosa actively used popular culture to enter the structure of ethnicity differently. Not from the side of light against light that produced an identity for her, but from the dark, underside of the structure.

Subjectivity is also manifested in adolescents' attempts to construct new identities, as with Timony's uses of texts to move away from being perceived as a disturbed student or rebellious teenager. Subjectivity is illustrated in Timony's attempts to locate new and different ways to construct himself according to age and ability. His subjectivity connected to the structure of age, not to rebel against age. In his uses of popular culture, he constructed ways to modify and to reshape how he was defined by age. His attempts weren't efforts to subvert the structure but to open up the structure of age that categorized him as an adolescent who was produced with an identity of being incomplete, incompetent, and rebellious.

Subjectivity is further apparent in adolescents' uses of popular culture texts to modify an identity that fashioned them as a particular kind of person. Tommy tried, for example, to use popular culture to adapt an identity that produced him as an outsider and wuss with the Australian boys. In this way, Tommy attempted to adapt an accepted identity of the body from entering the dark side of the structure of the body. In all of these cases, adolescents used popular culture in attempts to forge new entryways into the structures that produced identities for them. They weren't working against those

structures as their uses connected to those structures; instead they wanted and tried to open up the structures from another perspective, using literacy practices involving popular culture.

The meaning of identities produced in texts was contested by the adolescents' subject positions they took up. In this way the adolescents gauged the possibilities of constructing new identities that opened up structures that categorized them. As shown in the illustration, the lines that run from adolescents to texts and then to the structures are indicative of subjectivity and highlight the tensions of betweenness, not as an adolescent with a singular identity but in the transitional state of amending or modifying structures that produce identities. From this dark and less apparent side of overlapping shadows, adolescents used popular culture texts to reach the structures that produce identities for them. But their approaches to the structure remain entries from the dark side and blend into the dark edge of the structure. In this way, adolescents' subjectivity that constructed new identities weren't fully recognized in the light.

Though the illustration shows how subjectivity works between adolescents and structures in the texts adolescents use, subjectivity is only realized *when* adolescents use texts. Even then, subjectivity connects to identity through texts on the dark side of the structure, from the adolescents' perspective. Adolescents' subjectivities ultimately attempted to destabilize the structure to affect the under and dark side of the structure, and they constructed new entryways into the structure. Chiaroscuro was important for looking at adolescents' subjectivity because it is only in relation to the identities that attempted to define them that subjectivity was apparent at all.

White Light Mixing with Shades of Gray: Identity and Subjectivity in Chiaroscuro

Structures of our lives define us and produce identities for us that shape our perceptions of who we see ourselves as being. As an adult, I often thought I understood adolescents' uses of popular culture, but as I learned over and over again, my takes and understandings of their literacy lives involving popular culture were not always the same as theirs. Ultimately, the concept of chiaroscuro allowed me to study how adolescents use popular culture and how identity and subjectivity are terms both needed and useful for understanding adolescents' text uses. By tweaking the concept of chiaroscuro to look at the dark and light areas created by identities and subjectivities I could attend to what I would have otherwise assumed to be irrelevant from my adult perspective of adolescence and popular culture. This visual representation of identity and subjectivity illustrated how adolescents' subjectivity in their uses of popular culture often remains unrecognized because of the stabilized categories that name them as incompetent and inexperienced, popular culture as mindless and unproductive, and literacy as solely the ability to read and write print-based texts.

Adults, like adolescents, are produced with identities based upon structures in society. Adults, defined with identities resulting also from age structures, often think that they know what popular culture texts mean and how texts are used. Therefore, they assume that their own meaning and uses of texts are also those of others. But examining adolescents' text uses as producing identity through structures and constructing subjectivity as a means to unsettle the structure shows a different picture of adolescents, their popular culture, and their literacies. Only looking from a top-down perspective of structures that produce identities and meld in transparently with societal structures

doesn't recognize the constructive work adolescents do with popular culture. Such a view only perpetuates white light on white light, and adults do nothing to unsettle the structure of which they are a part. As an adult, I found that I needed to push against identities that produced me as more knowledgeable about the period of adolescence and about the ins and outs of adolescents' popular culture because I'd experienced both of them as an adolescent myself and am now an adult. Through chiaroscuro, I had to look from another perspective that involved adolescents' knowledge and experience to appreciate what the shaded areas of adolescents' uses of popular culture could potentially do for opening up and adding color to structures.

If adults don't attend to adolescents' subjectivities and to adolescents' uses and constructions of texts, then adults remain bound by structural categories that produce them with particular identities. Forever viewing from the white light, they reproduce categorical understandings without acknowledging how adolescents attempt to change those structures through their uses of popular culture. Adolescents' subjectivity doesn't only act in a subterranean fashion as something subversive and underground. If subjectivity is only seen as something that is dark and seditious, then adolescents' text uses can't be recognized as an attempt to push against and to reshape the structures and identities that define them.

The recognition of adolescents' subjectivities that attempt to construct alternative ways of being forces me to change the ways that I view them in the work that I do with them. From the institutional structure of education where I am a teacher and researcher I am implicitly, but more often explicitly, produced with an identity of being more knowledgeable about the world than adolescent students I work with and teach.

Attending to subjectivities whereby adolescents use texts (popular culture or otherwise) to push against being named with particular identities may go a long way in reshaping researcher and researched and teacher and student relationships. Rather than produce adolescents with identities based upon age and upon assumptions about the popular culture texts in their lives, I see the need to think about ways to learn from them and from their uses of texts that might differ from my own understandings of texts. Thinking about adolescents' uses of texts, not necessarily as forms of rebellion or subversion, but as active constructions of self in relation to identities might assist in opening up the identities of teacher and student that produce us as particular sorts of people, which potentially categorize us and limit who we can be.

Looking at the ways that adolescents push against educationally defined and produced identities using popular culture might provide different insight into shifting and changing learning environments that meet better adolescents' and teachers' learning needs. Considerations of adolescents' uses of texts shouldn't by default be perceived as acts of subversion that reify the production of identities of adolescents as rebellious. Instead, a more constructive view that accounts for adolescents' subjectivities might aid in changing the status quo. The questioning of categories that produce identities might serve as means to begin dialogues for imagining different constructions of selves that are more freeing than identities that produce adults and adolescents as particular people in different settings. These contexts might include, but are not limited to, youth service organizations, after-school educational settings, juvenile justice systems, work/study programs, church-sponsored youth groups, volunteer work, or school. In less formal contexts, considerations of adolescents' uses of texts as they push against particular

identities might play out in places where adolescents seem to congregate and hang out—at public libraries, malls, parks, or popular eateries.

Considerations of adolescents' subjectivities as movements away from staid characterizations of adolescent identities produced over a century ago might assist in forming new and different conceptualizations of adolescents, popular culture, and literacies in the 21st century. Adolescents' subjectivity challenged my understanding of text uses. Media producers (whether writing a book, promoting an album, or designing a website) create texts with particular structures in mind and are attentive to particular identities that others recognize as produced for them as particular sorts of people (e.g., based on age, race, ethnicity, etc.). As adolescents use popular culture, and are produced as particular sorts of people through their association with identities in texts, they actively become part of media production in their textual consumption. But when adolescents use texts they are no longer just consumers; they too are producers, taking on, resisting, or changing these identities through their own self-defined uses. It is in this process of creating their own uses of texts in consumption that adolescents construct for themselves different ways of being.

Certainly the work that adolescents did with popular culture in this study connoted pleasure to them. But their uses of texts also helped me understand better that reading is broader than knowing how to decode words on a printed page. In their uses of texts, adolescents used their bodies to read one another and to be read. A shift toward recognizing bodies as texts and reading as a process of communicating meaning through bodies may also assist in understanding how identity and subjectivity work together as adolescents use popular culture. The study of adolescents' engagement of body as a form

of literate text may also assist in breaking down stable notions of body that produce adolescents with particular biologically defined and hormonally driven identities.

Finally, looking at the ways that popular culture texts work to destabilize categories might assist in rethinking how the category of adolescence defines adolescents and often limits adults' recognition of other identities adolescents construct for themselves. Recognition that adolescents use identity and subjectivity as two concepts constantly and simultaneously might go a long way in rethinking adolescence, texts, and popular culture. Becoming more comfortable with the possibility that meanings and uses of texts simultaneously change and stay the same is a start toward acknowledging and interrogating identity and subjectivity. Through constructed subjectivity acting in relation to produced identities, different conceptualizations of readers' uses of popular culture might be realized in a touch of grey.

CHAPTER 7:

RHIZOMATICS=POP ANALYSIS

Delving into adolescents' popular culture and literacy lives has taken me on a wonderfully fun, sometimes disturbing, but nevertheless intriguing ride to far away places both physically and virtually—by plane to different continents, in books and magazines, through Instant Messaging, in fashion and music, and on websites whose server locations I never knew. Studying Tommy, Amanda, A, Tee, Rosa, L'il J, and Timony's in- and out-of-school lives for 8 to 12 hours a day and interviewing them, their parents, teachers, and friends over a 20-week period produced mounds of data. These mounds filled the spaces of my office—the shelves, the walls, the floor, and the hard drive of my computer. The mounds included observational notes and dialogue journal entries that spilled out of 10 binders; my researcher journal from Australia and the United States that contained preliminary data analyses; a separate notebook filled with typed and handwritten notes from readings of academic journal articles, magazine and newspaper clippings, research studies, book chapters, and website information that connected to the study; a file cabinet filled with 69 interview transcripts of the adolescents, their parents, and teachers; a wall of artifact data, including pictures that the adolescents took for their photo documentaries, notes they wrote to me and to their other friends, printouts from websites, drawings, and excerpts of song lyrics; data analysis charts, and a zip disk filled with email exchanges and instant messages collected over six months.

I imagined these mounds of data like anthills that grow and amass and change shape. The hill's exterior shows multiple entries for access to the inside but gives no markers or signs of the intricate web of tunnels and sharp turns, nooks and crannies left undisclosed on the mound's interior. These mounds—the burrows and shelters for ants—would be a conscientious gardener's nemesis. Anthills look unsightly and misshapen to a meticulous gardener's eye. A manicured, serene, and well-tended garden shouldn't contain pesky, bustling, ever-growing, and chaotic hills that forever remain out of the gardener's control. The fastidious gardener tries to bring the mound to order, unsettled by what is hidden beneath the ground. But with every kick, with every attempt to knock the hill down, to extinguish it with chemicals, to disperse the mass, the underground survives and ants reorganize—changing their movement, evading an invasion, breaking out from all the gardener's useless attempts to rid Eden of the apparent eyesore. Ants are resilient. My office became a garden, and I the gardener, constantly trying to level the anthill, to bring the mound into some sort of gardener's tidy arrangement.

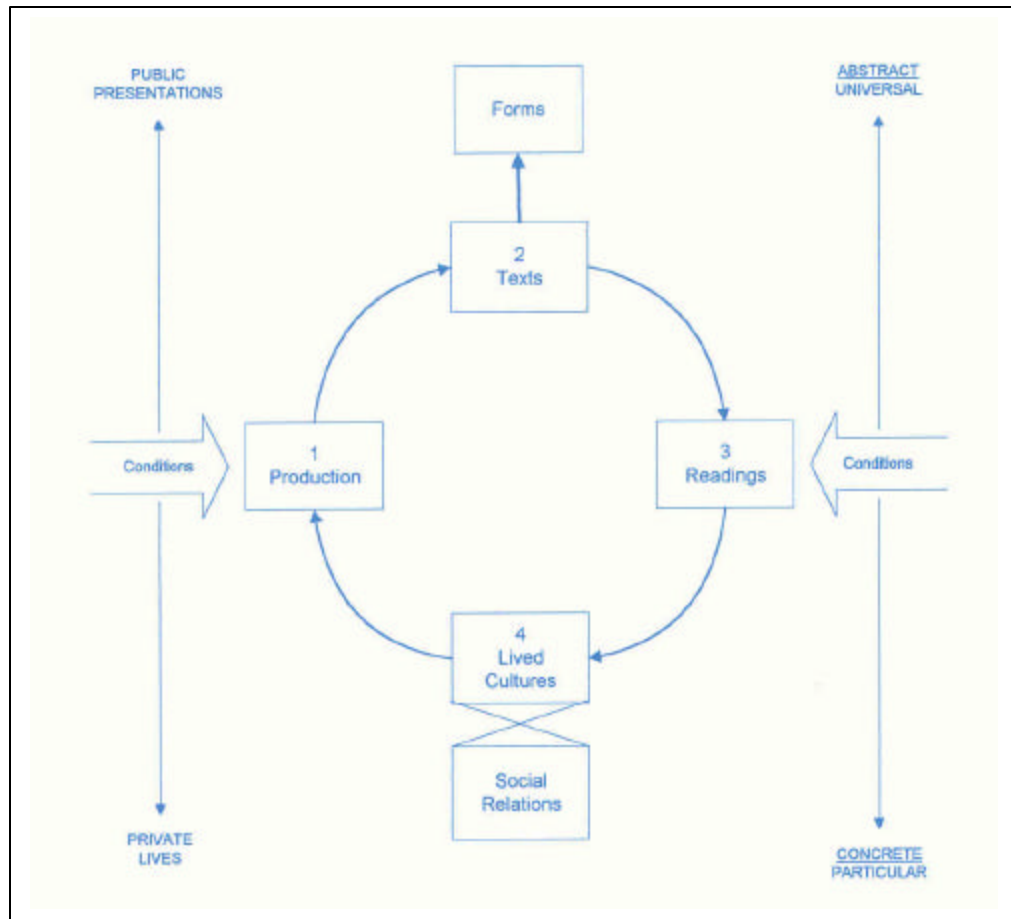
Even with thematic and descriptive data analysis completed, these ever-present anthills formed of data gathered in Australia and the United States needed to be sorted through and analyzed with attention to the complexity of the work that these adolescents did when using popular culture. The gardener in me had the desire to neatly organize the data, to manicure the lawn, which meant doing away with what didn't look appealing in the garden and throwing out what didn't fit in the analysis. But as researcher and writer, as I read and reread the data, I realized that my job couldn't be one of strictly organizing as a structured gardener would. I couldn't merely interpret or translate the surfaces of these anthills into a cohesive text. I couldn't level the mounds. Instead, like the gardener

who learns over time to accept the anthill as a legitimate part of the garden and to see that the mound grows and produces its own uses and improves the lives of the garden plants, my job became one of accepting the mounds of data that wouldn't or couldn't categorize neatly. I had to find a way to analyze and represent the data to show how the anthills' exterior and the interior multiplicities of organization and chaos connected. In short, I needed a way to look at the stabilities and instabilities of adolescents' uses of popular culture where others produced adolescents as particular sorts of people based upon categories and where adolescents also pushed against being named and identified as such.

Rhizomatic cartography became the means for analyzing and representing the multiplicities of identities and subjectivities that adolescents use with popular culture. Looking to the theoretical writing of rhizomes as described by the French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, I worked together the theories that informed this study (poststructuralism and cultural studies) and the mounds of data to examine the exteriority and the interiority of the anthills by answering (1) how adolescents are named, structured, and situated in particular ways, as particular people based upon categorizations of adolescence and on the adolescents' interests in popular culture, (2) how adolescents use popular culture not only to perpetuate categories that have named them, but also to push against and sometimes to temporarily knock down those categories that force them into being particular people with particular identities, and (3) how adolescents shape new ideas, categories, and understandings through the tensions of being produced as particular people and of constructing ways of being someone different.

Theories and Practices¹

Cultural studies and poststructural theories informed the theoretical framework of this study. From cultural studies I borrowed the notion that texts form a circuit of production and consumption.



Production and consumption work together in the circuit through media production of texts and audiences' readings of those texts. From the standpoint of production, media produce popular culture texts that target particular readers' by using particular identities embedded in the texts. Texts produced by media act invisibly but

¹ See pages 227-233 for further discussion of cultural studies, the circuit of production and consumption, and poststructural theory.

powerfully to influence how audiences see themselves as they use and read texts. In this way media recruit readers to be certain sorts of people, to have particular sorts of identities they recognize in themselves, and theories of production in cultural studies look at the ways that media structure and portray identities in texts. This idea of media production of identity forms the exteriority of the anthill. The entryways into the anthill shape the apparent identities that give glimpses to the way that the hill is organized inside.

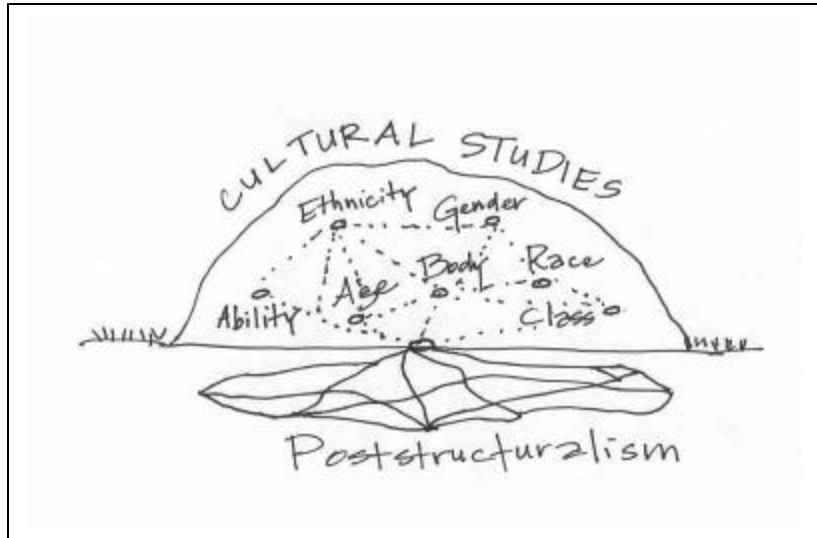
Audience consumption occurs when audiences choose to read and use media-produced texts. But contrary to the belief that media production determines and organizes text use, audiences' own cultural experiences and social relations impact how they perceive and design their own purposes for and uses of the text. Thus, readers become their own producers of text uses. It is here in L'il J, Rosa, Timony, A, Tee, Amanda and Tommy's own readings and uses that poststructural theories of subjectivity also inform this study. Not only is it important to examine how texts produced these adolescents as particular, categorized people, but it is also necessary to examine how the adolescents used texts to accept and to push away categories that defined them as particular sorts of people, as well as how they used texts to shape, modify, and create different identities—through subjectivity.

In the adolescents' pushing against identities they constructed alternative notions of themselves by way of subjectivity. Poststructural theories of subjectivity remain committed to the fact that categories structure lives in ways that produce identities (as in socially constructed understandings of identities based on categories of race or age, for example). But poststructural theories of subjectivity also question and critique the

stabilities of identities and categories that attempt to name and to stabilize notions of people. Poststructural theory allowed me to examine how adolescents use texts in ways to construct their own meanings and uses for texts. In their readings and uses of popular culture, the adolescents accepted, challenged, ignored, or debunked identities of a media produced text and its determined uses. Meaning and text uses, therefore, don't reside within the text that is produced for the reader or in the gardener's viewing and perceptions of the exteriority of the anthill. Texts uses and meanings are instead constantly in movement and dependent upon readers' own desired uses. This idea of readers pushing against meanings that structure their identities and constructing their own uses of popular culture texts created the need to look at the mound of data and the anthill from the interior.

The coupling of theories of cultural studies and poststructuralism permits an examination of the ways that popular culture texts are viewed as a structure in production and how the structure is disrupted in readers' uses of texts. The work of identity and subjectivity occurs in this circuit of production and consumption. In production, identities are produced in texts for audiences; but within consumption, audiences use texts in ways different than others perhaps intended through production. Text uses depend upon readers' perceptions of identity they recognize and their subjectivity. The circuit of production and consumption—the process of readers' identities being produced in texts and readers constructing subjectivity through texts—connect cultural studies and poststructural theories and form the mound of the anthill. Multiple entryways produce the identities of the exteriority of the mound. Readers construct subjectivities in the tensions, the burrowing process to create something new and different from known entryways, a

different way of moving and seeing that pushes against the identities that often remain unnoticed because it seems subterranean. The working of cultural studies and poststructuralism through an adolescent reader in the anthill might look something like this:



*Rhizomatic Cartography*²

Working from these theories of identity production and subjectivity construction, I analyzed the mounds of data for each adolescent according to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic cartography or rhizoanalysis, which they nicknamed *Pop Analysis*. Pop analysis refers to the description that rhizoanalysis is ephemeral and temporal—being only an analysis of short-term memory. This sort of analysis is perhaps best described as an analysis of coming and going, of offshoots and new directions, rather than of starting and finishing. Rhizoanalysis became a means for me to jump into the adolescents' lives that were filled with their readings and uses of popular culture—into their actions and experiences—all of which happened before my arrival into their scene and continued

² See pages 257-261 for further discussion of rhizomatic cartography as a form of data analysis

once I made my exit. That is partially what makes this rhizoanalysis temporal. The analysis is a snippet of the middle of the adolescents' ever-changing uses of popular culture.

This rhizoanalysis is also temporal in that rhizomes are characteristically temporal. Rhizomes grow in all directions, but in no direction in particular. For the gardener, rhizomes are anthills, but they are also tubers that shoot off under the ground while at the same time producing something above ground. They are always in motion, but not necessarily moving in a single direction. Rhizomes shift and change directions, just like the anthill forever moves as the ants change the hill's shape and the entryways as well as the undergrounds burrows and channels and tunnels. A pop analysis doesn't look at a starting to finishing point. It picks up in the middle, looking at what is already going on, when it is happening. According to Deleuze and Guattari the rhizome has certain characteristics, which include six principles.

1. Points on the rhizome need to connect to something else.
2. Rhizomes are heterogeneous not dichotomous.
3. Rhizomes are made up of a multiplicity of lines that extend in all directions.
4. Rhizomes break off, but then they begin again, either where they were before or on a new line.
5. Rhizomes are not models; they have no deep structure.
6. Rhizomes are maps with multiple entryways.

The anthills created from the mounds of data of each adolescent's uses of popular culture eventually became the maps of this study at the beginning of Chapters 2-5. The rhizomes, the anthills that open each chapter, shows the exterior surfaces and multiple

entryways that produce identities for adolescents through the production of popular culture texts and the interior subterranean flows, which consist of the adolescents' construction of subjectivity in their own uses of those texts. The interconnections of exteriority (identities) and interiorities (subjectivity) on the map illustrate the ruptures and tensions of adolescents' uses of popular culture as they accepted produced identities as well as pushed against them. The map of the rhizome attends to the data that depict how adolescents used subjectivity to disrupt identity categories and stabilities that attempted to cement assumptions and categorical understandings of others. I drew these anthills after the conclusion of data collection. The maps are based upon four overlapping and recursive phases of data collection and analysis.

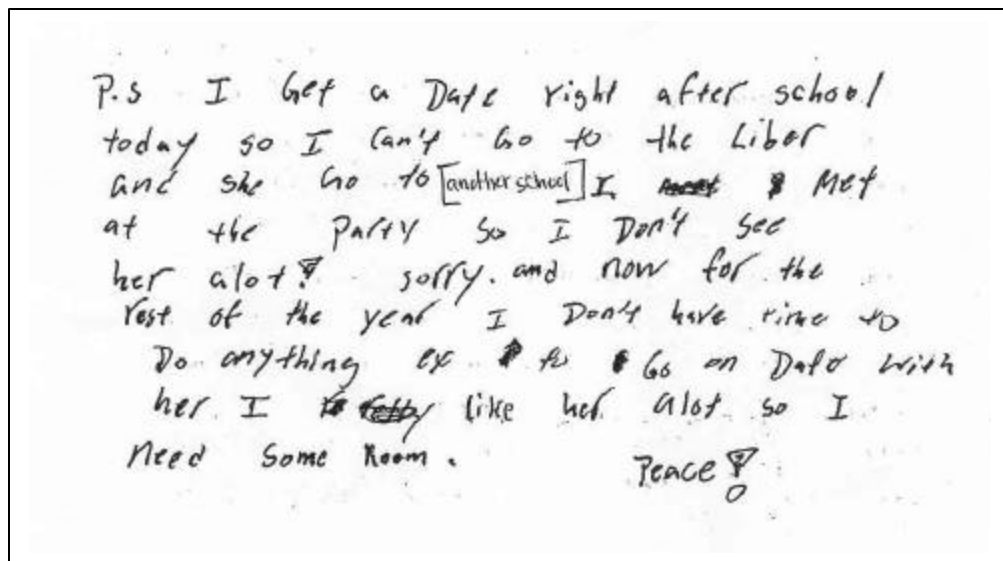
Phase One:

The seven adolescents for this study were chosen using a sampling of the entire eighth grade population at Kehara and Hancock to represent the diversity of identity categories, including race, class, body types, gender, ethnicity, age, and reading ability from each school. The school administration chose eight students from each location based upon these criteria and on the adults' perceptions of the adolescents' ease and interest in talking with adults. In each locale I held a preliminary meeting in an empty classroom with the adolescents identified by the school to determine the adolescents' interests in participation in the study. During these meetings, I explained my own interest in learning how adolescents read and used what they considered popular culture. I also told them that participation in the study entailed being followed around (by me) before, during, and after school; keeping a daily written dialogue journal with me (either in a notebook I provided or over email) that discussed their daily popular culture uses;

participating in five, taped interviews about their popular culture interests; and creating a photo self-representation documentary of their definitions and uses of popular culture taken with instant cameras and 20 exposures of film that I'd provide. They also learned that I'd interview parents and teachers about the adolescents' popular culture interests related to home and school life. Finally, I told them that as a participant in the study they needed to feel comfortable with my tagging along with them and asking them lots of questions. I also explained that if they ever felt uncomfortable or didn't want me around, they could ask me to leave and come back later.

I spent the following week in each school doing preliminary observational work to determine who seemed interested in participating. I sat in on the adolescents' classes, went to the cafeteria, talked with them during morning tea and lunch and between classes. During the observational week, those willing to participate returned signed permission forms. In Australia, 7 of 8 adolescents returned forms. One adolescent girl explained that her parents didn't want her to participate. Also, during the week of observation, several adolescents recruited themselves for the study. For example, whenever Amanda saw me, she came over to talk, and she noted repeatedly that she loved research and thought she could really help me out. Tee also self-recruited, telling me that I "might enjoy [her] life because it is lots of fun" and asking me to come and sit with her friends during morning tea. I chose Amanda and Tee because they readily tried to be a part of the study. A was the only bilingual student in the sample, and he was chosen because he queried me when he returned his permission form if it mattered that he was from China. Of the four students chosen in Australia, Gary, a white Australian boy, dropped out in the second week because he transferred to another school, and Tommy was added.

During the observational week in the United States, six adolescents returned permission forms. L'il J lobbied to be a part of the study, and she asked every day if I had made a decision about who I was going to follow. Rosa said that her mother didn't want her to be a part of the study, so she had to get a neighbor to take her to her father's apartment to sign the form. Her determination to obtain parental permission impressed me, so she was chosen. Timony intrigued me from the start when he asked that I follow him around for his own trial period to see if he'd like being followed. Of the four adolescents chosen in the United States, Ben, an Asian male dropped out in the beginning of the third week of the study. In his dialogue journal he wrote:



P.S I get a Date right after school today so I can't go to the Libar and she go to [another school] I ~~meet~~ Met at the party so I Don't see her alot? sorry. and now for the rest of the year I Don't have time to do anything ex. to go on Date with her I ~~to~~ like her alot so I need some Room.

Peace ☺

Ben didn't seem comfortable participating in the study, and he didn't say much in school. After he dropped out, I worked with the teachers and identified another Asian male to participate. He told me that he would think about it. After the weekend, he said, "I don't want to do the project because I am too lazy, and it is too much work." (This student was enrolled in the Accelerated Language Arts program at Hancock and

supposedly loved reading.) Two other Asian males in the eighth grade were considered, but they were extremely quiet and didn't want to participate either. After having asked six different males in the United States to be a part of the study only Timony accepted.

In each context I kept a calendar of the adolescents' school schedules and after-school activities. Throughout the 10-week period, I hung out with them before, during, and after school five days a week. During each week, I devised a timetable to ensure approximately equal time with each adolescent before school, during classes, between classes, and after school. I scheduled after-school observations in advance, usually by the week. Weekend observations occurred for some participants, but only if an adolescent asked me to attend a particular function (such as netball games, mall shopping, birthday parties, choir practice, youth group gatherings, or library outings). Taped interviews occurred every other week, beginning the third week, and were held at school, in homes, or in public places, depending on the adolescent's schedule. Each adolescent chose the location for the final interview.

During data collection, I took notes in either a palm-sized notebook or in a large notebook depending on the context. I also recorded notes on a hand-held tape recorder. Sometimes the adolescents borrowed the tape recorder and taped themselves and friends talking. Every evening when I arrived home, I typed fieldnotes based off of the handwritten or taped notes, communicated with the adolescents in daily dialogue journals (either in notebooks or over email), and reread my notes from the day, which in total took between 2 and 3 hours a night. These practices became part of the preliminary data analysis in that they informed subsequent observations and the questions that I asked in interviews.

During this phase of descriptive analysis I looked for structures that produced adolescents as particular sorts of people according to race, class, gender, age, ability appearance/body, and ethnicity (including culture, language, nationality, and religion). Over the first several weeks, I organized a chart to look across the adolescents' identities that produced them as particular sorts of people. As I developed the categories, I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews about these identities and the patterns of literate practices that became apparent as I hung out with each of the adolescents.

Phase One: Descriptive Data Analysis of Adolescents living in Australia

	A	Amanda	Tee	Tommy
Societal identities given to them	Male; 13; Athletic; Immigrated to Australia from China at age 10; Speaks and writes in Chinese & English; Working class	Female; 12 (turned 13); Australian; Working class	Female; 13; Athletic; Immigrated to Australia from New Zealand at age 5; White Australian; Christian; Middle class	Male; 12; White Australian; Upper middle class
Popular culture interests	Australian culture (sport, language, dress, utensils, friends) Chinese culture (hosting Chinese student, Chinese school); Computers; Internet chat	Series books (BSC); Pop music; Computers; Video games	Christianity; Dance; Pop music; Clothing/Fashion; Sports	Asian culture (kanji, hosting Japanese exchange student, friends); Computers; Art-Japanese animé (<i>DBZ</i>); Australian sport

Phase One: Descriptive Data Analysis of Adolescents living in the United States

	L'il J	Rosa	Simon Fair Timony
Societal identities given to them	Female; 13; African American; English only; Middle Class	Female; 12; Immigrated to United States from Mexico at age 5; Speaks and writes in Spanish/English; Mexican Catholic; Working Class	Male; 13; European American; Middle Class; English only
Popular culture interests	Music (Rap/Hiphop); Dance; Language use; Gestures; Clothing/ Fashion	Spanish culture (Language, cooking & Catholicism); Fashion/shopping; Music; Writing notes	Books; Music; Computers/Internet; <i>Dragonball Z</i> animé; Web design; T-shirts

Over the course of the study, each adolescent was interviewed five times, their parent(s) twice, and Grade 8 teachers at Kehara and Hancock once or twice. These interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one-and-a-half hours and were conducted in various places (e.g., homes, schools, restaurants, malls, arcades, parties, churches, and sporting events). In each local context, a professional transcriber transcribed all taped interviews verbatim, which were returned to me within 10 days of the interview. I reread all interview transcripts and checked them against the actual tape, making corrections and adding omitted information when necessary. Fieldnotes and interview data helped to locate the ways that others produced identities for the adolescents through the popular culture texts that adolescents used.

Phase Two:

About halfway through data collection in each local context, I began to examine the ways that adolescents used popular culture to push against identities that sought to define them as particular sorts of people. As I gathered data in this phase I added to my analysis the adolescents' uses of texts that caused tensions with the produced identity. In fieldnotes, dialogue journal discussions, and interviews I attended to the ways that the adolescents themselves thought that they used popular culture in their daily lives. As in Phase One, I analyzed data on a daily basis. But during this period, I also began to chart my data analyses on which I added weekly summative notes to locate where tensions arose in adolescents' uses of popular culture.

Phase Two: Tensions with Popular Culture in Australia

	A	Amanda	Tee	Tommy
The production of identities in popular culture	Australian sport; Chinese exchange students; Chinese; Outsider	BSC books; Nerd; Teen; Magazines; Music	Christianity; Music; Bible; Clothing; Youth group; Australian teen	Australian Sport; <i>Dragonball Z</i> ; Art; Asian culture; Outsider
Pushing against identities (Tensions)	Outsider; Asian culture Animé Computers	Stereotypical girl—BSC books; Images of beauty	Non-Christian music; Language; Clothing; Parents	Outsider; Wuss/Weakling/ Effeminate; Cute and Lovely; Australian culture; Animé

Phase Two: Tensions with Popular Culture in the United States

	L'il J	Rosa	Simon Fair Timony
The production of identities in popular culture	Rap/Hip hop; Dancing/Body; Clothing; Language	Mexican; Catholic/Church; Clothing/Icons; Gang/Violence; Spanish Language	Books; Music—Kurt Cobain; T-shirts; Guitar pick/violence
Pushing against identities (Tensions)	Ho dancing; Female Body; Music/Language; Incident with Jamal & Quandrel; Parents	T-shirts; Note box; Dances; Clothing; Parents	T-shirt/Clothing; Key chain incident; Violence/behavior; Internet/DBZ; Parents

At the end of Phase Two and of data collection in each context, the adolescents gave me their photo self-documentaries of their uses of popular culture. During the final interview, they shared the pictures they took and discussed how the pictures served as part of popular culture and literacy in their lives. These pictures were used to look at the ways the adolescents defined and used popular culture themselves across various contexts.

Adolescents' Photo Documentary in Australia

Adolescents	Amanda	A	Tee	Tommy
Total pictures	10	6	13	9
Number of pictures taken At home	6 <u>Bedroom</u> BSC books RCC; CDs Ornament table <u>Lounge Room</u> TV & sister; Family Stereo	5 <u>Bedroom</u> Study area; Musical instruments <u>Lounge Room</u> Video game; Chinese friend; Computer	5 <u>Lounge Room</u> TV; Stereo; CDs	8 <u>Bedroom</u> DBZ artwork; Self with <i>DBZ</i> picture & figure <u>Lounge Room</u> Cats (2) Japanese student (2) Brother

			<u>Outside</u> With Cat; Brother on motorbike	<u>Outside</u> Queenslander house
Number of pictures taken At school	1 <u>Tea/Lunch</u> Friends	1 <u>Homeroom</u> Friends	3 <u>Tea/Lunch</u> Religious kids Friends on oval Self at oval	0
Number of pictures taken Other	3 <u>Holiday</u> Family on Coast	0	5 <u>At parties</u> Home & church with peers and sister	1 <u>Holiday</u> Beach with Asian student

Photo Documentary of Adolescents in the United States

Adolescents	L'il J	Rosa	SFT
Total pictures	6	8	8
Number of pictures taken At home	0	4 <u>Bedroom</u> Cassettes; Teddy bears & Virgin Mary; Church clothes; Black backpack with collection (tapes, stuffed animals, nail polish, notes box)	8 <u>Bedroom</u> Nirvana; <i>DBZ</i> drawings; CDs; Guitar; Stereo; Playstation <u>Living Room</u> TV & family <u>Playroom</u> Computer & sister <u>Kitchen</u> Mother
Number of pictures taken At school	6 <u>In classes</u> Friends/ clothing (3)	0	0

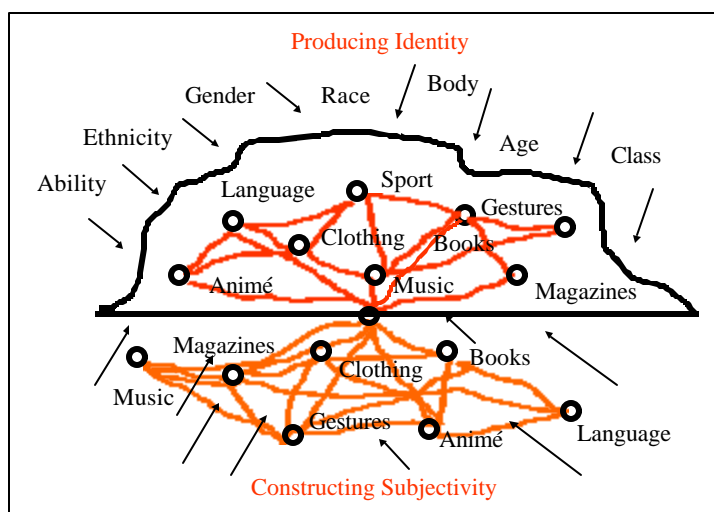
	<u>Between classes</u> Friends/ clothing (3)		
Number of pictures taken	1 <u>After school</u> Football game	4 <u>At the mall</u> ‘Flirt shirt’ Strappy dress	0
Other			

Phase Three:

Phase Three of data analysis began after I finished collecting data. At this point, I examined the data from Phases One and Two and began to make connections between the identity and the tensions in adolescents’ uses of popular culture. During this phase I linked texts that produced adolescents with identities and adolescents’ own uses of texts that often challenged those identities that produced them to observe how these two areas worked in conjunction, which created the illustrations of the anthills. The data analysis from Phase One became the exteriorities of the anthill—these categories formed the multiple entryways that produced particular meaning of popular culture and simultaneously positioned adolescents with particular identities. The tensions found in Phase Two where adolescents used texts to push against identities that sought to name them created the need to acknowledge the adolescents’ subjectivities, which formed the multiplicities of the interiorities of the mound.

In this phase the texts that made up identities produced for adolescents and the texts that adolescents used to construct subjectivity were examined relative to one another by way of the anthill, looking at both its entryways and exteriority as well as the tunnels and interiority. It was only in thinking about and examining the relation between identity and subjectivity—neither as opposite sides that form a dichotomy nor as entities by themselves, but as inseparable components of the system of production and

consumption—that I was then able to analyze the whole map and to appreciate the entire anthill, the mound of data for each adolescent. In this way identity and subjectivity functioned as a pair like nodes on a rhizome, simultaneously antithetical and complementary. Identity and subjectivity worked then in relation to one another, each needing the other in order to be recognized, rather than as oppositional points. The anthills overall began to look like this:



With these maps of adolescents' individual uses of texts that produced them as particular people and from which they constructed notions of selves as subjects, I then looked across the data. In this cross examination, I examined how adolescents used popular culture as part of their literate lives in individual and group ways. Grouping of data became the maps that begin Chapters 2 through 5.

Phase Four:

Last, I studied all the rhizomes of the individual maps to find the local and the global trends that dealt with adolescents, popular culture, and their push against being identified as particular sorts of people. The purpose of this final phase was to classify

how adolescents' subjectivities reshaped identities that they didn't want for themselves in their negotiation of the circuit of production and consumption of popular culture.

When trying to understand the big picture of the workings of identity and subjectivity in this study, to make connections across the rhizomes and across 5,000 miles and two different continents, I immersed myself in readings that took a rhizomatic format. One text led to another, and I found myself reading about the artistic concept of *chiaroscuro* and visiting art museums. Chiaroscuro, which I was first introduced to through readings in poststructural theory, is a technique artists use to add dimension to their work. Originally artists used chiaroscuro to give depth perception to two-dimensional designs by playing with shades of light and dark. The images and their counter images have been used in painting, photography, anim  , film, and pen-and-ink drawings, for example, to call attention to areas in a work that might otherwise remain overlooked. Borrowing this idea of light and dark such that oppositions of the terms are sidestepped in order to in[ter]fluence each other in creative ways became a means to study adolescents' identity and subjectivity in their engagement of popular culture.

Normally, light is usually what people think illuminates...what is seen and understandable. However, it is delving into the crevices, the dark areas, what's underneath what is apparent, and looking at these areas in relation to the light that I came to understand better how identity and subjectivity co-mingle and inhabit the same space in the circuit of production and consumption of popular culture. I implemented the element of chiaroscuro in the representation of data and information in Chapter 6. I organized the data analyses from the maps used in Chapters 2 through 5 into a larger framework to look at the ways that popular culture texts structure people into categories

based upon ability, age, body, class, ethnicity (including culture, language, nationality, and religion), gender, and race. Looking at the identities produced and apparent through text use and within the light (the exteriority of the anthill) along with readers' subjectivity (the chains of connections on the interiority of the anthill) showed where adolescents used popular culture most often to critique, reshape, or push against structures that attempted to produce them as particular people in their literacy practices. From this analysis, I examined how adolescents used texts to alter identities that named them. The purpose of this analysis was to illustrate how adolescents engaged popular culture, not as mindless consumption of texts produced for them with particular meaning, but as their own construction to modify identities, forming new ways of being and destabilizing structures that produced them with certain identities in the process.

Issues of Validity and Trustworthiness

This study was designed with attention to issues of validity and trustworthiness in data collection, participant inclusion of analyses, and theory applicability. Throughout the study, data were cross-examined using multiple participants' input that included corroboration of information and sources gained from cross-referencing observational data, artifacts, and interview data of adolescents, parents, and teachers. Furthermore, the adolescents themselves examined the data and developing analyses at various points and gave feedback. During Phases One and Two, while collecting data, the adolescents read copies of excerpts of the interview transcripts and commented on them. In interviews I discussed with them how I analyzed the data, and they gave feedback on how they understood my interpretation. Then, during Phase Three I sent them each a copy of the

chapter that had been written about them and asked for their responses to my writing and interpretation. Timony and Amanda's responses posted below attest to the temporal nature of the data, adolescents' uses of popular culture, and ever-shifting identities and subjectivity.

From: oxkurtcobainxo
 To: margaret hagood
 Subject: A chapter about you

LOL!!! man, those were good times. reading that, i actually learned a lot about what was going on then, though i wouldn't have changed much of what i did then. hey, it was fun ^_^. reading about the guitar pick thing with [Alex] (i think u had him as Alex in the text) was funny. that was the best class i've ever had in my life, sitting next to him and goofing off. You got pretty much everything right, and it was really good if i can learn stuff from it and i'm the person these events were based around.

i really miss those days of working on my website. it sucked and all, but it was fun. it was kind of a creative release for me, and it was also constructive in a way, since i have become pretty decent with photoshop as a result of all that. the 'community' was really a community then...it has kind of fallen apart as of late, with one of the spearheads of the DBZ (dont like that show anymore, still watch anime though) site area has closed down. it was up for atleast 5 years, and i checked it everyday until the day it closed. not that i really wanted to know the news that much...but it was kind of a ritual. just a schedule i've gotten into. go to slashdot (computer website), go to planetnamek, check my sites, check my email (rarely do that anymore) and go mess with my website.

i think all of the remnants of my site are gone now...even the topsite that i ran called [dbz top 100] (it was insanely popular for whatever reasons) is gone. bah, stupid recession...everything costs too much now. can't afford web hosting.

well anyway, you did a great job, and i'd actually like to thank you for doing that. it really gives me some insight into what i did wrong and what i did right back then. That thing with [the language arts teacher] thinking i was a genius was flattering, ^_^. although everyone thinking i was gonna go on a shooting spree is really funny, albeit disturbing. almost the kind of thing i was going for - scare everyone just enough to freak em out, but not to be thrown into the nuthouse. LaTeR...Timony

From: amanda
 To: mchagood
 Subject: what'd'ya think?

Hey margaret

sorry i took so long to reply but i wanted to be thorough and read it through a couple of times

i thought that when the notes were taken that it was a great analysis of myself but i thought i should let you know that i have changed a bit.

unlike then i am now into trying to look good when i go out and i am beginning to take notice of how i appear in public. i like a LITTLE makeup but there is NO way i am going to plaster my face with all that crap (mind the french). I am going to go to a gym and try to lose my pudge (gut) lol and i am learning piano. I made it into the National [Festival] and we r gonna win. lol. Theres a new guy at school who i think likes me (a first) and i am actually taking part in hpe

well i really gtg now
 so Cya

♥ amanda

While in Australia, I also relied on several peer debriefers' assistance to corroborate and question data: a teacher at Kehara who wasn't part of the study, a doctoral student studying poststructural theory at a local university, and two undergraduates. One of these undergraduates who transcribed the interview tapes from Australia had a 12-year-old sister and often commented about similarities between her sister and Amanda, A, Tee, and Tommy's uses of texts. The other undergraduate, a student of Australian cultural studies at a local university, discussed Australian life and culture with me. All of these debriefers discussed data and interpretations, suggested questions to ask the adolescents, parents, and teachers who were part of the study, and

gave leads about articles and books that I should read about Australia, cultural studies, and poststructural theory.

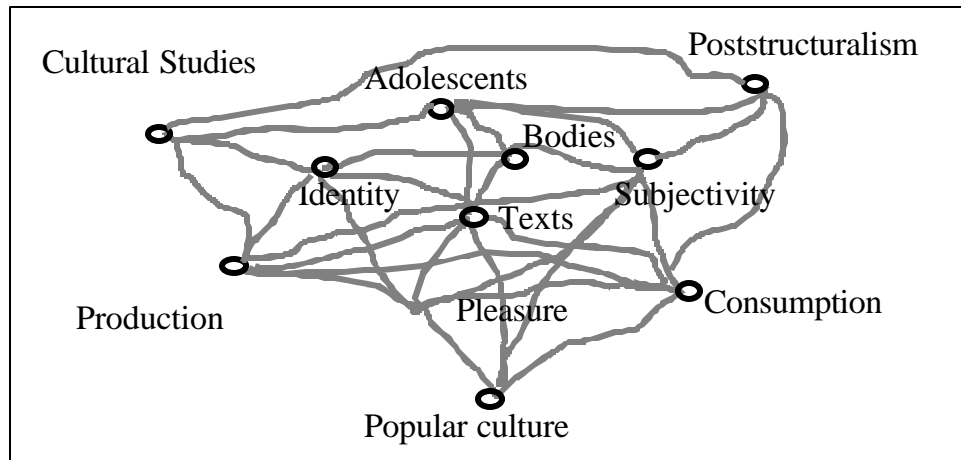
Three writing group members also served as peer debriefers in the United States. While I was in Australia, I sent two of these members email updates about data collection, participants, and preliminary analyses. They made suggestions for further data collection and asked questions about analyses. When I returned to the United States, I met with these two women, plus one other, on a weekly basis during the U.S. portion of data collection. They made suggestions during Phases One and Two for data collection, discussed possible analyses of data that I shared with them from weekly summaries written and from data charts constructed, and suggested readings pertaining to poststructural theory. During Phases Three and Four, they read, made comments, asked questions about interpretations, and recommended data representation ideas on multiple drafts they read of all of the chapters.

From a standpoint of validity, this study also attests to theory applicability. Multiple theories were necessary to develop analyses and to attend to the contradictory and complex data. Trustworthiness may also be evaluated by the amount of time taken to read and review data, to connect data to research and theory, and to get feedback from others. Though the responses and assistance I received from the adolescent participants in this study as well as from others outside the study have been indispensable and informative in developing the ideas represented, I take full responsibility for the interpretations discussed.

APPENDIX
BEHIND THE SCENES:
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Throughout the past two years, I have shared aspects of this study with people within the field of literacy education, including adolescents, parents, teachers, researchers, and academics. I've also discussed this study at length with other people who are more generally interested in literacy, but who are not associated with the field of literacy studies—friends, my husband, family members, and people in business. During discussions with these groups of people, several questions have continually arisen about this study. The questions and answers became the basis of this section.

What follows are questions that I've been asked and the long version of the answers. I tried to include questions that were pertinent to the conceptualization, analysis, and interpretation of data. For the sake of linearity, categorization, and ease of reference, key terms are underlined within each question, and the questions have been alphabetized according to the first key term. Also, after each answer I've listed the most substantive applicable citations and references that informed the work in this study. However, just as the process of naming comes undone at different times, terms as they are defined and structured also come undone if held stable. The rhizome below is an attempt to show how the terms used in this study are multiplicities and connect to one another.



How are you using the term adolescence, and why is the category of adolescents the focus of your study?

The term adolescence is a category that over time has structured the way that young people have been identified and grouped. Adolescence describes a period in life and a demographic while the term adolescents demarks the corresponding age group. Both terms denote that those categorized as such are neither adult nor child. Some who have studied adolescents have explained that the boundaries for such a category are strange and ambiguous at times (e.g., Finders, 1999; Lesko, 2001; Sibley, 1995). The significance for researching this age group is its relation to the ways adolescents use popular culture to accept and to push away identities that name them.

According to Hall (1904), adolescence is a period from ages 12-18. This time is considered one of crisis characterized by “storm and stress.” During this bizarre period that is both biologically and psychologically driven, adolescents are considered to be in a state of *becoming* someone else whereas adulthood presumes that an adult’s identity has coalesced into a state of permanence. Therefore, according to Hall (1900), adolescents need to be given direction so as to move from insecure and unstable ways of being to

development of a stable and cohesive adult identity. This idea about adolescents' insecurities and unstable identities is still prevalent today.

A century later, Lesko (2001) explained that *adolescence* needs to be reconceptualized in terms of social understandings that have defined the term and those characterized by it. She points to Davies (1993) and Walkerdine's (1997) work on the discursive constructions adolescents encounter in which they must navigate being categorized as someone in particular. To reconfigure the identity and category of adolescence, Lesko asserts that

ideas of growth and change must be investigated and not presumed in a priori frameworks such as development or socialization....Rather than the assumption of cumulative and one-way development that is now in place in both science and popular culture, a recursive view of growth and change directs us to look at local contexts and specific actions of young people, without the inherent evaluations of steps, stages, and socialization. (p. 195)

In conjunction with Lesko's (2001) view that the categorization of adolescence needs to be revisited is the fact that adolescents' literacies inclusive of popular culture have also changed the ways that adolescents must be viewed. Sefton-Green (1998) explained that new forms of literacies, inclusive of popular culture, have made it impossible not to revisit divisions between adolescents and adults inasmuch as adolescents are in many ways savvier about the world of media and digital technologies. Accordingly, construction of adolescence bound by age parameters and sandwiched between children who know little and adults who know all seems less feasible in today's society given

adolescents' knowledge of new literacies. Others have echoed this sentiment (Cook, 2000; Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, in press; Katz, 1996; Rushkoff, 1996).

This study looks at the ways that adolescents are categorized within the period of adolescence in their uses of popular culture. It also attends to the ways that they use popular culture as forms of literacy to push against being categorized by various categories considered important in the period of adolescence—such as age and the body.

Cook, D. T. (2000). The other 'child study': Figuring children as consumers in market research, 1910s-1990s. *Sociological Quarterly*, 41, 487-509.

Davies, B. (1993). *Shards of glass*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Finders, M. (1999). Raging hormones: Stories of adolescence and implications for teacher education. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 42, 252-263.

Hagood, M. C., Stevens, L. P., & Reinking, D. (in press). What do THEY have to teach US? Talkin' 'cross generations! In D. E. Alvermann, (Ed.). *Adolescents' literacies in a digital world*. New York: Peter Lang.

Hall, G. S. (1900). Child study and its relation to education. *Forum*, 29, 688-693, 696-702.

Hall, G. S. (1904). *Adolescence: Its psychology and its relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education* (2 vols.). New York: D. Appleton.

Katz, J. (1996, July). The Rights of Kids in the Digital Age. *Wired* 4.07.

http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.07/kids_pr.html Retrieved May 5, 2001.

Lesko, N. (2001). *Act your age! A cultural construction of adolescence*. New York:

Routledge.

Rushkoff, D. (1996). *Playing the future: How kids' culture can teach us to thrive in an*

age of chaos. New York: HarperCollins.

Sibley, D. (1995). *Geographies of exclusion: Society and difference in the West*. New

York: Routledge.

Walkerdine, V. (1997). *Daddy's girl: Young girls and popular culture*. Cambridge, MA:

Harvard University Press.

*If this study is about literacy and popular culture, then what's the point of looking at
bodies, literate bodies, and pleasures?*

A quick glimpse of the history of the literate self might help in situating the need to attend to adolescents and literate bodies as part of literacy and popular culture. Within educational projects related to literacy, the concept of the self is most often categorized as an individual with a singular identity or multiple identities in which the mind trumps the body. This idea that a person has an essence operates from two principles stemming from Descartes's (1596-1650) philosophical statement, "I think, therefore I am." These principles construct the independent and individual self (the mind not the body) in two ways: (1) as the grounding for all knowledge and experience, and (2) as a conscious, thinking, rational being. This singular, autonomous identity created by the philosophers of the Enlightenment period (1500s- late 1700s) continues to be the normative model used in contemporary literacy education for assisting adolescents in their development.

Throughout the 20th century, readers' pleasures in literacy have been theorized both politically and psychologically in terms of intellectual stimulation of the mind, while the body has remained to date as Grosz (1994) noted "a conceptual blindspot" in the Westernized world. As a rational and self-governing being, the individual's existence has been thought to be unaffected by conditions outside of its mind. Thus, the literate self and its pleasures have existed separate from linguistic, gendered, racial, cultural, and historical contexts. The focus on the psychology of the individual mind in literacy education has reinforced the positive valuation of 'mind' at the expense of attending to the body. The body—unruly, disruptive, and in need of the mind's intellect for direction and judgment (especially in relation to the categorization of adolescence)—runs counter to the emphasis placed on the academic stimulation of the mind.

In short, the body often goes unrecognized in its relation to literacy and to the popular culture pleasures associated with texts. Even the work of those interested in readers' literacy practices and pleasures [such as Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1994), or Ang (1982/1985), Carey & Krieling (1974), or Fiske's (1995) work of reception/ audience research based upon uses and gratification theories within cultural and media studies] still highlight pleasures of cognitive experiences. Pleasures of bodily experiences with texts have been held apart.

Furthermore, when pleasures have been associated with the body, they've often been situated within psychology and psychoanalysis, which conceptualize pleasures/desire as response to a perceived lack. This notion of pleasure perpetuates the separation of the mind/body. From these perspectives, intellectual identification and

consciousness of desire are keys for understanding how individuals can overcome bodily pleasures, which are indicative of a weak mind.

More recently, however, researchers influenced by sociological and poststructural theories have scrutinized the insularity of the literate self as solely the mind and have begun to conceptualize the literate self in relation to factors outside of its own mental state—through experiences within society comprised of a network of discourses and material practices that take place through literate bodies (see Davies, 1993; 1994; McRobbie, 1994; Tobin, 2000). hooks' (1994), for example, works from a critical theory perspective and conceptualizes the body by inscriptions of social markers such as gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity and has looked at pleasure as eros through identity categories. Others (see Braidotti, 1994; Probyn, 1992, Turkle, 1995) examine the reconceptualization of the body using technologies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Foucault, 1982/1988) that seek to break down the identity categories that mark the body. In both cases, contexts inscribe bodies as bodies simultaneously inscribe themselves into contexts. Bodies are polymorphous rather than fixed and explore the boundaries of traditional social categorization of a coherent and unified entity defined and regulated by structures that set up dualisms such as male/female, mind/body, and human/machine. The body, therefore, is “not an essence, let alone a biological substance. It has a play of forces, a surface of intensities” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 163).

The literate body differs considerably from the Cartesian notion of the mind/body split. The body from a poststructural standpoint *is* the text of everyday life and is equally as important to the mind. By enacting the body as a text—as a literate body—it becomes not only a product of pleasure, but also the producer of pleasure. The body is a cultural

interweaving and production of context as influenced by factors such as popular culture.

Grosz (1994) explained the import of the body in terms of its inscription:

Not only does what the body takes into itself (diet in the first instance) effect a 'surface inscription' of the body; the body is also inscribed by various forms of adornment. Through exercise and habitual patterns of movement, through negotiation in its environment whether this be rural or urban, and through clothing and makeup, the body is more or less marked, constituted as an appropriate, or as the case may be, an inappropriate body, for its cultural requirements. (p. 142)

Given the body's inscription as a text that has been written on by food and adornment, for example, the body is read. It can't be seen as neutral—a blank slate or an empty page; it is written upon and socially (re)produced and inscribed according to specific practices to which it has been exposed. As Foucault (1977) said, the body is "the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration" (p. 148).

But the body as a text is also an instrument of power (Foucault, 1975/1977; 1982/1988). The body is the materiality—a medium or conduit—on and through which power and pleasure functions. Thus, the body is both acted upon and inscribed by factors determined by society and culture, which gives the body particular identities. But the body acts in its own materiality to accept and to resist those factors and to create its own ways of being. The body is strategic—both passive and active in that norms are imposed on it, norms are also actively sought out, and norms are pushed against and reshaped.

In this sense, the body is a text transformed by culture, interpretations, and representations. The body's mediation occurs within the spiraling relations of pleasure and power. This spiral embodiment is the result of pleasures that exercise the power to both question and assume the incitements of the body in particular ways of being (Foucault, 1978/1990). What is at stake in the body as a social text is the struggle for power to control a materiality that is perceived as dangerous to the body.

The body situated in this way also sees pleasure differently. Rather than conceive of pleasure as a manifestation of a desire that proves lack as in models of psychology and psychoanalysis, pleasures produced by the literate body as a text point to *how* a text is used within a particular context. Through the act of reading as an embodied experience, readers' produce their own bodies as texts. The literate self is, therefore, the literate body, no longer able or desiring to remain stable or to concentrate solely on cerebral matters, but is ever changing and shifting through bodily engagement of texts. Looking to the ways that pleasure works in relation to literate bodies and popular culture enables a more complex understanding of the forms of power that operate as texts are used (Ang, 1996).

Pleasures are what connect and make linkages between texts of popular culture outside the body (the context, language, culture, etc.) and the body as a text. The body is as Braidotti (1994) wrote a "complex interplay of highly constituted social and symbolic forces" (p. 163). Cranny-Francis (1995) explained,

The embodied subject has a different role in our changing society. Instead of maintaining old distinctions and their regulatory definitions, it tactically occupies a range of different positionings that enable it to subvert those remainders and reminders—both institutional and individual—of traditional,

inequitable discourses and social practices. (p. 113)

Pleasures related to the body, then, have to do with accepting and resisting certain identities through uses of the body. Foucault (1976/1978) refers to these pleasures in relation to power as “circular incitements” (p. 45). Pleasures are related to both desiring to be accepted and pushing against those identities that name and categorize bodies in particular ways. It is this interweaving of contradictions that results in pleasure:

The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasures it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting.

(Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 45)

This idea of pleasure and power of acceptance and resistance is also found in Barthes's (1973/1975) work between the working of *plaisir* (pleasure) and *jouissance* (bliss). *Plaisir* refers to that which is recognizable, known, and comfortable and is linked to cultural enjoyment. Like identity, *plaisir* is the pleasure of being recognized and named in societally accepted ways. *Jouissance* refers to the euphoria of release of that identity and of meanings attached to it. Readers' constructions of self that push against the identities that seek to define them constitute *jouissance*.

In this study, the literate body is important to the ways that adolescents name and construct pleasure through their uses of popular culture. Popular culture and categories produce particular identities that adolescents read. But pleasures of the literate body also manifest themselves in adolescents' evasions of bodily identities that mark them in

particular ways. Using clothing, gesture, dance, and language of popular culture, adolescents construct their own portrayals of literate bodies.

Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination* (D. Couling, Trans.). New York: Methuen. (Original work published 1982)

Ang, I. (1996). *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*. New York: Routledge.

Barthes, R. (1975). *The pleasure of the text*. (R. Miller, Trans.). New York: Hill & Wang. (Original work published 1973)

Braidotti, R. (1994). Toward a new nomadism: Feminist Deleuzian tracts; or metaphysics and metabolism. In C. V. Boundas & D. Olkowski (Eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and the theater of philosophy* (pp. 159-186). New York: Routledge.

Carey, J. W., & Krieling, A. L. (1974). Popular culture and uses and gratifications: Notes toward an accommodation. In J. G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communication* (pp. 225-248). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Cranny-Francis, A. (1995). *The body in the text*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Davies, B. (1993). Beyond dualism and towards multiple subjectivities. In L. Christian-Smith (Ed.), *Texts of desire: Essays on fiction, femininity, and schooling* (pp. 145-173). London: Falmer Press.

Davies, B. (1994). *Poststructuralist theory and classroom practice*. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press.

Fiske, J. (1989). *Reading the popular*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). London: Allan Lane. (Original work published 1975)
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Language, counter-memory, practice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: An introduction (Vol. 1)*. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Press. (Original work published 1976)
- Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In L. H. Martin, H. Gutman, & P. H. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault* (pp. 16-49). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press. (Original work published 1982)
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: The use of pleasure (Vol. 2)*. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Press. (Original work published 1984)
- Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Towards a corporeal feminism*. St. Leonards, NSW: Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (1994). *Postmodernism and popular culture*. London: Routledge.
- Probyn, E. (1992). Technologizing the self. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies* (pp. 501-511). New York: Routledge.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1994). The transactional theory of reading and writing. In R.B. Ruddell, M. R. Ruddell, & H. Singer (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (pp. 1057-1092). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Tobin, J. (2000). *"Good guys don't wear hats": Kids talk about the media*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the internet*. New York: Touchstone.

Chiaroscuro is an artistic concept. How are you implementing it methodologically in this study?

I came across the term chiaroscuro rather unexpectedly when reading Barthes's (1973/1975) *The Pleasure of the Text*. In his discussions of *jouissance* and *plaisir*, he says that texts must have shadows. Describing this metaphor, he explained, "the shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of representation, a bit of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds; subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro" (p. 32). Thinking about the adolescents in this study and the shadows formed from the mounds of data I had collected, I turned to others to study how chiaroscuro informs artists' work (Acton, 1997, De Fiore, 1985)

From readings, I learned that chiaroscuro, which was developed in the 15th and 16th centuries, is a tool used by artists to represent complexity in their work (Gardner, 2000; Janson, 2000). Specifically, artists learned how to portray depth by juxtaposing a disparate palette of colors as complementary rather than opposing. Farago (1991) explained that this science of playing with light and dark became most centrally concerned with the artist's manipulation of "visible things like the (material) surfaces of bodies covered by (immaterial) color" (p. 70). This seemed much like my own work of juxtaposing identities and subjectivities in adolescents' uses of popular culture not as opposition but as complimentary.

Using the idea of the rhizome in the working of identity and subjectivity, I created the anthill-like structure that opens Chapter 6. Using chiaroscuro helped me to highlight Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) ideas of exteriorities and interiorities in the working of identity and subjectivity. This representation illustrates how a seemingly chaotic system is not poor in order, but rather rich in formation. Drawing from Ang (1996) who suggested the need for new depictions of audiences' production in their consumption of texts, I tried to represent how identities are forces of order continuously deployed without fully being ordered because adolescents' subjectivities continuously unsettle the boundaries of those identities.

Acton, M. (1997). *Learning to look at paintings*. New York: Routledge.

Ang, I. (1996). *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*. New York: Routledge.

Barthes, R. (1975). *The pleasure of the text*. (R. Miller, Trans.). New York: Hill & Wang.
(Original work published 1973)

Farago, C. J. (1991). Leonardo's color and Chiaroscuro reconsidered: The visual force of painted images. *Art Bulletin*, 73, 63-93.

De Fiore, G. (1985). *Composing and shading your drawings: Studying the techniques of the old masters for working methods and a personal style*. New York: Watson-Guptill.

Gardner, H. (2000). *Gardner's art through the ages* (11th Ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers.

Janson, H. A. (2000). *The history of art* (6th ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.

Cultural studies is so broad. How is it used in this particular study?

Cultural studies has derived from the work of those who began the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, England in 1964. It is an interdisciplinary study that borrows freely and appropriates theories and methodologies from social sciences, humanities, and the arts in order to study the texts and material practices related to everyday living. Often studied as the circuit of production and consumption, cultural studies attends to aspects of text production from media and audience's active consumption of texts. (Consumption is sometimes explained as audience or consumer's own 'production-in-use' [Storey, 1996].) Due to the interdisciplinary nature and multiplicity of approaches to cultural studies, the field of cultural studies is best described as a bricolage. Nelson, Trichler, and Grossberg (1993) noted, "cultural studies draws from whatever fields are necessary to produce the knowledge required for a particular project....the choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked and the questions depend on the context" (p. 2).

Cultural studies is employed in this particular study to examine the study of young adolescents and viewer-reader cultures that form around practices of everyday life (Morris & Frow, 1993; Nile, 2000; Sarder & Van Loon, 1998; Storey, 1996). In particular, this study is concerned with the production of identity and the construction of subjectivity that young adolescents experience and create from engagement with popular culture texts. Popular culture is contested terrain in the ways it is perceived and used (Craven, 1994; Kellner, 1995; Storey, 1998) such that meanings of texts recognized by users differ by individuals and by contexts.

Given the tenuousness between readers' active meaning making of the mediated texts they encounter from media production, theories about individuals' engagement with texts in cultural studies vary. Because constructions of popular culture involve media representations of identities presented in texts, the issue of identity categories surfaces. Various theoretical strands of cultural studies approach identity categories (race, age, gender, ethnicity, class, age, and ability) and individuals' uses of these categories differently.

Cultural studies more heavily influenced by textual analysis, critical theory, semiotics, and structuralism tend to interpret individuals' uses of popular culture as formations of identity or identity construction based on identity categories represented in texts (e.g., Hall, 1996a; 1997; Kellner, 1998; Lusted, 1991). From this perspective what is important is what the text does to the reader. Therefore, it's important to look at the ways that social formations such as identity categories that are considered "structure[s] of dominance" (Hall, 1996b) perpetuate stereotypical identities. Hall (1996b) went on to explain that these structures are important to consider in cultural studies, not as simple and bounded structures, but rather as complex structures "in which it is impossible to reduce one level of practice to another in some easy way" (p. 11). From this theoretical perspective, individuals and groups are thought to self identify with representations of images in texts and form identities from engagement with texts. Production of identity through uses of popular culture texts is thought to be stable for audiences in the determinancy of available identity categories produced in texts.

Other approaches to cultural studies perceive the production of identity categories to limit interpretations of individuals' uses of texts. Unlike cultural studies approaches

that look at formations of the self conceptualized as identity through text production, these approaches to cultural studies investigate audience's own formations of self through text use (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Luke, 2000; Probyn, 1992; Surber, 1998). Audience's subjectivities are considered fragmented and unstable, and identity categories are important in relation to the ways that readers take up certain positions presented in the text. Individuals' interactions with and interpretations of texts become the focus of readers' text use, and researchers study readers' multiple and shifting subjectivities when using texts.

In this particular study, it was important to look at both the structuration of identity as produced for young adolescents in texts *and* young adolescents' own constructions of self in their uses of texts. I needed to draw from both areas because the data from the study showed aspects of both realms of cultural studies in the adolescents' taking-in and stabilizing the uses of texts in particular ways while simultaneously using those texts in other ways that challenged identity categories as structures of dominance. I began to see this study in response to Gilroy's (1996) thinking about identity in that

We can build upon the contributions of cultural studies to dispose of the idea that identity is an absolute and to find the courage necessary to argue that identity formation—even body-coded ethnic and gender identity—is a chaotic process that can have no end. (p. 48)

This production and construction of identity and subjectivity also made it necessary to incorporate into the study the ways in which the data worked with the circuit of production and consumption.

- Buckingham, D., & Sefton-Green, J. (1994). *Cultural studies goes to school: Reading and teaching popular media*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Craven, I. (1994). *Australian popular culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1996). British cultural studies and the pitfalls of identity. In J. Curran, D. Morley, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communications* (pp. 35-49). New York: Arnold.
- Hall, S. (1996a). Introduction: Who needs identity? In S. Hall & P. du Gay, (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (1-17). London: Sage.
- Hall, S. (1996b). Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates. In J. Curran, D. Morley, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communications* (pp. 11-34). New York: Arnold.
- Hall, S. (1997). (Ed.). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage.
- Johnson, R. (1987). What is cultural studies anyway? *Social Text*, 16, 38-80.
- Kellner, D. (1995). *Media culture: Cultural studies, identity and politics, between the modern and the postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- Kellner, D. (1998). Multiple literacies and critical pedagogy in a multicultural society. *Educational Theory*, 48, 103-122.
- Luke, C. (2000). New literacies in teacher education. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43, 424-435.
- Lusted, D. (1991). (Ed.). *The media studies book*. London: Routledge.
- Morris, M. & Frow, J. (1993). *Australian cultural studies: A reader*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Nelson, C., Trichler, P. A., & Grossberg, L. (1993). Cultural studies: An introduction. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies* (pp. 1-16). New York: Routledge.

Nile, R. (2000). (Ed.). *The Australian legend and its discontents*. St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press.

Probyn, E. (1992). Technologizing the self. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies* (pp. 501-511). New York: Routledge.

Sarder, Z., & Van Loon, B. (1998). *Introducing cultural studies*. New York: Totem.

Storey, J. (1996). *Cultural studies and the study of popular culture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Storey, J. (1998). *An introduction to cultural theory and popular culture* (2nd ed.). Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Surber, J. P. (1998). *Culture and critique: An introduction to the critical discourses of cultural studies*. Denver, CO: Westview Press.

Within cultural studies, how is the circuit of production and consumption used as part of the framework of this study?

In *Living Room Wars*, Ang (1996) discussed at length the relation between cultural studies and the circuit of production and consumption. Cultural studies is about “the contradictory, continuous and open-ended social process of the production, circulation, and consumption of meaning...not ‘culture’ defined as a more or less static, bounded and objectified set of ideas, beliefs, and behaviours” (p. 133). Defining the application of the circuit, Johnson (1987) noted that “the circuit is, at one and the same

time, a circuit of capital and its expanded reproduction and a circuit of the production and circulation of subjective forms” (p. 47). Though the circuit looks to be closed in terms of media production acting upon audience consumption, that is not the case. Both are needed in terms of fulfilling how texts are produced and consumed: audiences are thought to act on and to influence their own uses of media produce texts (Curran, Morley, & Walkerdine, 1996; Surber, 1998).

Sefton-Green & Buckingham (1998) cautioned that those working within media and cultural studies need to move away from a notion of production as passivity. Actually, audiences’ uses of popular culture are active, and reflect as Walkerdine (1997) noted both resistant and accepting aspects of identities presented in texts. Thus, audiences may at times look like cultural dupes who passively accept ideologies presented in texts, while at other times they may produce novel and different readings from popular culture texts.

In this particular study, media production highlighted the ways in which adolescents read and used texts in contradictory ways, as if at times the text carried meaning whereas at other times it didn’t. Audiences’ readings (their consumption) illustrated how they constructed notions of themselves in ways where they attached different sorts of uses to texts that perhaps contradicted other aspects of identity that they thought were produced for them as readers.

Ang, I. (1996). *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*.

New York: Routledge.

- Curran, J. Morley, D., & Walkerdine, V. (1996). (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communications*. New York: Arnold.
- Johnson, R. (1987). What is cultural studies anyway? *Social Text*, 16, 38-80.
- Sefton-Green, J. & Buckingham, D. (1998). Digital visions: Children's 'creative' uses of multimedia technologies. In J. Sefton-Green (Ed.), *Digital diversions: Youth culture in the age of multimedia* (pp. 62-83). London: UCL Press.
- Surber, J. P. (1998). *Culture and critique: An introduction to the critical discourses of cultural studies*. Denver, CO: Westview Press.
- Walkerdine, V. (1997). *Daddy's girl: Young girls and popular culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

How is the term identity used in your work?

Traditional definitions associate the term *identity* with the notion of a fixed, independent self who thinks rationally and logically, defines him/herself, and develops a stable sense of self over time (T. Davies, 1997). The concept of identity as part of a modernist human discourse generally refers to stable categories prescribed to people and based on binaries (e.g., young/ old, male/ female; high class/ low class) in order to classify people discretely. Identity, as a stable self by this definition, relates to categorical understandings of self developed and ingrained over time. Gilroy (1996) pointed out that “Identity can be traced back towards its *sources* in the institutional patterning of identification. Spoken and written languages, memory, ritual, and governance have all been shown to be important identity-*producing* mechanisms in the formation and reproduction of imagined community” (p. 40, my emphasis). Categories such as age,

ability, class, gender, race, and ethnicity are examples of identity-producing mechanisms for naming people and for organizing ways of thinking about selves. Such structures affect how people perceive and conceptualize others as well as how they read texts. In this way, popular culture texts are also identity-producing mechanisms. Popular culture is used to categorize people and to produce stabilize notions of identities. Identity, whether it is based on gender or popular culture interests, is “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person,’ in a given context” (Gee, 2000/2001, p. 99), and identities are produced in texts of everyday life.

Identities are also shifting and changing notions of self that are the effect of readers’ uses of texts. Thus, identities need not be stable, but can shift and change through the work of readers’ uses of texts for their own purposes and pleasures. Identity is fragmented rather than holistic, changing across time and space, and multiple rather than singular. The fragmentation of identity occurs according to contextual situations with the possibility of multiple identities playing out in one institutional milieu. The adolescents in this study, for example, held conflicting identities that produced them as different people through their uses of texts.

Media also act as identity-producing mechanisms in their production of popular culture. Readers, who use popular culture, learn how to be a particular kind of person when using particular texts in particular ways (see Hagood, 2000). As posited within critical theory and structuralism, identities, produced and studied in texts, are inherently structurally constructed in relation to identity categories of race, nationality, class, ethnicity, and gender (and, though less often mentioned, to age). Working from the notion that individuals are produced by means of a set of apparatuses within social

practice, identity has been theorized as the product of institutional d/Discourses (Foucault, 1975/1977; Gee, 1996), as the process of interpellation (Althusser, 1971), and as the result of ideology at work (Hall, 1988; 1996a; 1996b). All of these theories, like identity itself, are invisible but powerful structures of governing control that produce identities for readers. These structures recruit readers to be certain sorts of people, to have particular sorts of identities they recognize in themselves. The production of texts acts as an exteriority that shape readers' identities, and as St. Pierre (1997) noted, "It is the outside that folds us into identity, and we can never control the forces of the outside" (p. 367).

Often the terms identity and subjectivity are entrenched in particular theories, and researchers conceive of their work that relates to self in relation to one or the other. In this particular study, I learned over time through adolescents' uses of popular culture that identity and subjectivity are different concepts that work together, not dichotomously but in complementary ways (see later question about the differences between identity and subjectivity, pp. 261-273). As I figured out, incorporating subjectivity into cultural studies addresses the complexity of readers' interactions with popular culture in the circuit of production and consumption. In this way, subjectivity helped to contextualized how young adolescents used popular culture texts as consumers positioned by texts while also positioning themselves in relation to texts.

Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes toward an investigation). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (pp. 127-186). New York: Monthly Review Press.

Davies, B. (1994). *Poststructuralist theory and classroom practice*. Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press.

Davies, T. (1997). *Humanism*. London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). London: Allan Lane. (Original work published 1975)

Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourse* (2nd ed.). London: Taylor & Francis.

Gee, (2000/2001). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. In W. G. Secada (Ed.), *Review of Research in Education* (Vol. 25, pp. 99-125). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Gilroy, P. (1996). British cultural studies and the pitfalls of identity. In J. Curran, D. Morley, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communications* (pp. 35-49). New York: Arnold.

Hagood, M.C. (2000). New times, new millennium, new literacies. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 39, 311-328.

Hall, S. (1988). The rediscovery of "ideology": The return of the repressed in media studies. In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran, & J. Wollacott (Eds.), *Culture, society and the media* (pp. 56-90). Reprint ed. London: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1996a). Introduction: Who needs identity? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1-17). London: Sage.

Hall, S. (1996b). Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates. In J. Curran, D. Morley, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communications* (pp. 11-34). New York: Arnold.

Johnson, R. (1987). What is cultural studies anyway? *Social Text*, 16, 38-80.

St. Pierre, E. A. (1997). Nomadic inquiry in the smooth spaces of the field: A preface.

Qualitative Studies in Education, 10, 365-383.

This study is about literacy. So why did the adolescents take pictures?

Barton (2000) suggested that “One of the best ways for students and others to increase their understanding of literacy is for them to reflect upon their own practices and the everyday practices around them” (p. 167). As others have shown, photography is useful for representing, reconstructing, and reflecting on people’s everyday experiences (Dewdney & Lister, 1986; Tierney, 1997) and for illustrating the “fixity and flux between changing aspects of ourselves and the notion of an immutable identity” (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994, p. 98). To develop a different perspective of young adolescents’ subjectivities and literate practices involving popular culture texts in their everyday lives, each adolescent in this study engaged in a photo self-representation documentary over the 10 weeks. This documentary process was adapted from the work of others who have explored adolescents’ interests in popular culture using visual images (e.g., Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Taylor, 1989).

Using a photo documentary served several purposes. First, it brought together aspects of the adolescents’ practices of consumption and production of texts in their production of their own representations of self-defined popular culture. Second, it provided a means for the adolescents to choose how they represented their definition(s) and uses of popular culture texts. Third, the participants’ own documentations gave another perspective of popular culture that was different from and complementary to the

one I constructed through observations and interviews. Finally, using an adaptation of photo elicitation (Collier & Collier, 1986), the adolescents described their photos in the final taped interview. This interview was guided by images that adolescents brought with them (Harper, 1996) and was cross-referenced with representations of other data (Lister, 1995) that related to popular culture, identity, and subjectivity.

Barton, D. (2000). Researching literacy practices: Learning from activities with teachers and students. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies* (pp. 167-179). London: Routledge.

Buckingham, D., & Sefton-Green, J. (1994). *Cultural studies goes to school: Reading and teaching popular media*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Collier, J., Jr., & Collier, M. (1986). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Dewdney, A., & Lister, M. (1986). Photography, school and youth: The Cockpit Arts project. In S. Bezencenet & P. Corrigan (Eds.), *Photographic practices: Towards a different image* (pp. 29-52). London: Comedia.

Harper, D. (1994). On the authority of the image: Visual methods at the crossroads. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 403-412). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lister, M. (1995). Introduction. In M. Lister (Ed.), *The photographic image in digital culture* (pp. 1-28). New York: Routledge.

Taylor, S. (1989). Empowering girls and young women: The challenge of the gender-inclusive curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 21, 441-456.

Tierney, R. J. (1997). Learning with multiple symbol systems: Possibilities, realities, paradigm shifts and developmental considerations. In J. Flood, S. B. Heath, & D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts* (pp. 286-298). New York: International Reading Association.

What is popular culture, and how did you come up with your use of it in this study?

Although popular culture has been around for centuries (e.g., the works of William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens were originally considered “popular culture” before becoming “high culture”), it has traditionally been relegated to the margins of scholarly study and educational practice. Most often defined as the large-scale acceptance of and pleasure in a particular text mass produced for audience consumption, popular culture texts may include books, movies, music, magazines, the Internet, television, comics, and fashion, for example, that are produced and consumed by industry and audiences. The term *popular culture*, however, is more complicated than quantifiable indicators that determine consumption of texts. Actually, a good deal of controversy exists about popular culture. Different perspectives of the term popular culture as *mass culture*, *folk culture*, and *everyday culture* illustrate how the definition of popular culture has changed over the past 75 years dependent upon people’s perceptions of popular culture and their uses of popular culture texts. These perspectives differ in conceptualizations of control of knowledge, power, and pleasures related to text production and audience consumption of and uses of texts.

When characterized as *mass culture*, popular culture is distinguished from culture for the elite (high, civilized culture) and recognized as culture for the general population (for the masses, the popular, uncivilized culture). Perspectives of popular culture as mass culture assume that media (newspapers, magazines, movie studios, etc.) are monolithic sites of textual production. As a culture produced for the people, readers passively encounter texts. Media are powerful enough to determine the meaning of a text and to demand and to ensure that audiences read and extract meaning from texts in similar ways.

The concept of popular culture as mass culture stems from the work of Horkheimer and Adorno (1972/1999), theorists of the Frankfurt School. They analyzed and critiqued media producers, dubbing them the *culture industry* and accusing the culture industry of the mass-generation of worthless texts. They asserted that mass production of texts and the ensuing consumption of such texts created a popular culture for audiences (especially for adolescents who had plenty of leisure time) that added little to aesthetic values and made people into passive recipients who mindlessly accepted media's implicit messages, which were laden with particular points of view and often thought to perpetuate stereotypes.

This transmission model of text from media production to audience consumption viewed the media as sole proprietors of power who legitimated knowledge that lacked moral seriousness and that socialized people in common ways. Audiences were perceived as insatiable, non-discriminatory consumers because their interpretations of and pleasures in their readings of popular culture seemed always in agreement with the ideologies presented in the text. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972/1999) purported that engagement with popular culture turned audiences into cultural dupes dominated by mass deception.

By pitting popular culture against high culture, these theorists of the Frankfurt School preserved the dichotomy between high and low culture and propagated the belief that texts had some inherent meaning. To these theorists, high culture was associated with complex printed texts that were part of the literary canon—creative, deep, and worthy of audience’s study and critique to ascertain the meaning of the text produced by an author. Mass/ low/ popular culture texts, often in the form of visual or auditory texts, were conversely deemed simple and unproblematic.

Those who espouse the view of mass culture believe popular culture texts to have determined meaning and to be uniform and predictable. Text meaning is uncomplicated and self-evident. Popular culture texts from this view are considered unnecessary for study and require no discussion or critique. Based on stimulus-response “effects” of popular culture on audiences, those following the work of the Frankfurt School theorists blame the “culture industry” for imposing mass culture upon the people and for seducing audiences to read texts in ways that dull audiences’ minds and maintain the social authority and belief systems of dominant classes.

Unlike the top-down model of mass culture that produces popular meaning for the people and delineates texts along class lines, a *folk culture* perspective of popular culture celebrates a bottom-up and authentic popular culture of the people. Begun by British researchers in the 1960s at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in response to conceptions of mass culture as mindless activity, views of popular culture as folk culture acknowledge class divisions between popular and high culture, but assert that different classes, especially the working class, use popular culture to resist dominant views represented in texts.

British cultural theorists (such as Hoggart, 1958; Williams, 1958/1966; Thompson, 1963/1978; and Hall, 1980) popularized the folk culture view of popular culture in their research on working class people's uses of popular culture, and others in Australia, Canada, and the United States took up this perspective. (Others working in sociology and mass communication studies in the United States also studied how audiences used media for their own purposes dependent upon their membership in particular groups [see Lazarsfeld & Kendall, 1960]). These different theorists and researchers emphasized audiences' rather than media's power in textual reading. Furthermore, they illustrated how working class people used popular culture texts in ways that subverted the meaning that other classes made of the texts produced by the culture industry and that critiqued high culture (e.g. uses of language, ways of dressing, readings of romance novels). Like with perceptions of mass culture, a folk cultural view of popular culture continues the ideas that texts have some determined meaning. The view of popular culture as folk culture, however, focuses on meanings audiences create from texts (see Hoggart, 1958; Willis, 1977). Meaning from this perspective lies not in text producers as in the views of mass culture but rather in the audience's interaction with and uses of the text on their own terms, and often in keeping with class perceptions. A folk culture view of popular culture frequently valorizes subcultural groups' active meaning making of texts and their resistance to dominant beliefs/stereotypes presented in texts. Audiences' everyday production practices, which resist monolithic understandings of popular culture texts, are vital to a folk culture view of popular culture.

Knowledge formed from audiences' construction of textual meaning and textual pleasures result from audience's own appropriation of texts. So, contrary to the culture

industry's power in the concept of mass culture that views media as forcing particular readings onto audiences and producing negative effects, popular culture as folk culture views the audience as those who hold power. Audiences use their power to actively produce their own meanings from and uses of texts, not meanings that have been forced onto them by media production. Rather than condemn popular culture as the downfall of society, those working from this perspective acknowledge users' pleasures they create from their own engagement of the texts.

Popular culture is also defined as *everyday culture*. British cultural theorists of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies influenced by postmodern, poststructural, and socio-cultural theories originally developed this perspective in the 1970s and 80s. In the 1990s this perspective of popular culture became important in the research and work in Australia, Canada, France, India, and the United States. As everyday culture, popular culture is all about the study of the culture of everyday life (Craven; 1994; Storey, 1998). Its study involves in-depth examinations of the relations between high and low culture, not privileging one domain over the other. Thus, definitions of popular culture as mass and folk culture are collapsed and become part of the study of popular culture as everyday culture. Texts from this perspective include those that fit into high and low culture categories and those that are print, visual, and auditory. Proponents of popular culture as everyday culture attend to both media production and audience's production of their own uses of texts in their consumption of popular culture. In this way, popular culture texts shape audiences' uses of texts while audiences simultaneously create their own uses of the texts (see Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Buckingham, 1998; Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Hagood, 2001).

Popular culture perceived as everyday culture also situates texts as indeterminate. The polysemic nature of popular culture texts in everyday culture holds that individuals or groups may interpret texts differently and use texts to create knowledge and to derive various pleasures from them. Studying popular culture as everyday culture highlights two areas. First, it calls attention to audiences' negotiation of consumption and their own production of uses in popular culture texts. Second, this view also realizes media's power to attempt to control knowledge through cultural markets and products. Popular culture as everyday culture therefore focuses on the tension between the power to produce textual meaning that audiences read as stable and audiences' power to choose whether or not to give similar or different value, meaning, or uses to the texts and to decide what knowledge they will produce from their own uses and pleasures of the texts.

In this study, adolescents defined and used popular culture as they saw fit. In this way, popular culture was viewed as a form of everyday culture, "the very material of our daily lives, the bricks and mortar of our most commonplace understanding" (Willis, 1977, p. 185). In keeping with findings from other studies of adolescents' uses of media in the United States (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999) and Australia (Russell & Holmes, 1996), the adolescents in this study all aspects of media (e.g., television, music, computers, the Internet, and movies) in their descriptions of popular culture. Adolescents came up with their own definitions and uses of popular culture, and their descriptions of popular culture overlapped in the kinds of texts they chose to use and their documentation of popular culture in their everyday lives. Popular culture ranged from popular press books such as *Left Behind* (LaHaye & Jenkins, 1996), *Lockie Leonard*, *Scumbuster* (Winton, 1999), *Ender's Game* (Card, 1985), and the *Babysitters' Club Series*, to music

(by 98° [2000], *Mary Mary* [2000], *Vengaboys* [2000], *Ja Rule*, *Limp Bizkit*, and *Nirvana*), to fashion, computer use, dancing, anim , and athletics (such as footie and soccer). But no matter how they categorized popular culture (as in music, fashion, books, computer/technology, etc.), all adolescents agreed that popular culture had to do with something that defined as pleasurable. This meant that popular culture might be defined as pleasurable to a large group, but if it wasn't pleasurable to the individual, then the adolescent didn't categorize the text as such.

Alvermann, D. E., Moon, J. S., & Hagood, M. C. (1999). *Popular culture in the classroom: Teaching and researching critical media literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association/ National Reading Conference.

Buckingham, D. (1998). (Ed.). *Teaching popular culture: Beyond radical pedagogy*. London: UCL Press.

Buckingham, D., & Sefton-Green, J. (1994). *Cultural studies goes to school: Reading and teaching popular media*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Card, O. S. (1985). *Ender's game*. New York: T. Doherty.

Craven, I. (1994). (Ed.). *Australian popular culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hagood, M. C. (2001). Media literacies: Varied but distinguishable. In J. Hoffman, D. Schallert, C. Fairbanks, J. Worthy, & B. Maloch (Eds.), *National Reading Conference Yearbook 50* (pp. 248-261). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128-138). London: Hutchinson.

- Hoggart, R. (1958). *The uses of literacy*. London: Penguin
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. (1999). *Dialectic of enlightenment*. (J. Cumming, Trans.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1972)
- LaHaye, T., & Jenkins, J. (1996). *Left behind: A novel of the Earth's last days*. New York: Tyndale House.
- Lazarsfeld, P. F., & Kendall, P. L. (1960). The communications behavior of the average 'American.' In W. Schramm (Ed.), *Mass communications* (pp. 425-437). (2nd ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Limp Bizkit (2000). *Chocolate starfish and the hotdog flavoured water* [CD]. New York: Uni/ Interscope.
- Mary, Mary. (2000). *Thankful* [CD]. New York: Sony Music.
- 98 °. (2000). *Revelation* [CD]. Los Angeles: Universal Records.
- Roberts, D. F., Foehr, U. G., Rideout, V. J., & Brodie, M. (1999). *Kids & media @ the new millennium*. Menlo Park, CA: Author. Retrieved January 19, 2000.
<http://www.kff.org/content/1999/1535/KidsReport%20FINAL.pdf>
- Russell, G. & Holmes, D. (1996). Electronic nomads? Implications of trends in adolescents' use of communication and information technology. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, 12, 130-144. Retrieved March 26, 2001.
<http://cleo.murdoch.edu.au/>
- Storey, J. (1996). *Cultural studies and the study of popular culture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Storey, J. (1998). *An introduction to cultural theory and popular culture* (2nd ed.). Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Thompson, E. P. (1978). *The making of the English working class*. London: Penguin.

(Original work published 1963)

Vengaboys. (2000). *Platinum album* [CD]. London: Strictly rhythm.

Williams, R. (1966). *Culture and society 1780-1950*. London: Penguin. (Original work published 1958)

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Winton, T. (1999). *Lockie Leonard, Scumbuster*. New York: Scribner.

If popular culture is so important to adolescents' literacy lives and to identity and subjectivity, what other work has already been done in the area?

Interview studies conducted in Australia, Canada, England, and the United States have investigated students' self constructions using popular culture texts. Urquhart's (1996) study of 11- and 12-year-old English boys' uses of popular fiction and movies illustrated how boys questioned and implemented understanding of male identity in individual and group ways. She explained that boys used popular culture texts individually to learn "appropriate" masculine identities. Then, they tested their interpretations among peers by emulating what they learned. Similar to findings from other studies on the use of horror texts by boys (Lewis, 1998; Moss, 1993a), Urquhart (1996) argued that through group exploration, boys build solidarity and form what they consider to be acceptable social representations of gender through a group experience of discussing texts.

Several interview studies of girls' literacy practices illustrate how they position themselves in their penchant for reading teen romance novels. Christian-Smith (1993)

examined how 12-15-year-old U.S. girls from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds positioned themselves in relation to characters presented in self-chosen novels. The girls assumed identities similar to those of the stereotypical characters in the novels while at the same time realizing the novels were fantasies and that relationships with others in their lives outside the text did not end as nicely as they did in the romance novels they read. Christian-Smith found that the girls' enjoyment of reading popular romance novels "operated at a distance from these young women's own lives and provided a comfort zone where there were no consequences for taking risks" (p. 53). The girls' pleasures in reading popular culture texts provided outlets for escape from other lives lived.

In a similar observation and interview study, Cherland (1994) examined how 11-year-old Canadian girls constructed gendered identities through their reading of fiction. In reading groups, the girls examined constructs of female identity presented in self-selected texts by juxtaposing their own experiences of being positioned by adults as nurturing and caring females with the experiences of female characters in the books. Often, by questioning their own subjectivity in relation to the identities of female characters in their texts, the girls resisted the meaning of the texts to create book characters who were active agents in their own lives and not passive receivers of prescribed and stereotypical female identities. In this way, they positioned the female characters in the texts in ways they desired to be treated in their own lives.

Unlike the girls in Christian-Smith's (1993) and Cherland's (1994) studies, Willinsky and Hunniford (1993) found in an interview study that 12-year-old Canadian and U.S. girls assumed positions and identities presented in texts that the girls desired to enact in their lives. Like the girls in Finders's (1997) study who seemed to

wholeheartedly take on the identities portrayed in the teen magazines they read, the girls in Willinsky and Hunniford's (1993) study read novels like instructional manuals to learn how to act and handle themselves in romantic relationships.

Oliver (Oliver & Lalik, 2000) worked with three African American and one European American, eighth grade girls in study about literacy and the body. She met with the girls three times a week for 1½ hours at school and discussed issues surrounding popular culture and girls' bodies, including fashion, beauty, and skin/ race. The girls also wrote in journals, which they shared and exchanged with Oliver, and she documented how the girls used their bodies to read others, to attract attention, and to resist "oppressive" representations of the body. Oliver and Lalik (2000) found contradictions in the girls' statements, and ultimately concluded that the girls' resistance to the production of bodies portrayed in texts "oftentimes appeared in subtle, inarticulate, and poorly elaborated forms" (p. 76).

Although these studies as a group illustrate a range of responses young adolescents constructed from engagement with popular culture texts as those readings related to constructs of identity or subjectivity, in the end, the analyses essentialized the ways girls and boys used popular culture. From these studies, girls either assumed or resisted identities presented in the text, and boys seemed to negotiate meaning of texts. Deterministic outcomes often result when research provides data from seemingly homogeneous groups (Buckingham, 1993; Moss, 1993b). Based primarily on interview data gathered separate from observations of uses of the texts, the limited contexts in which these research studies were conducted do not illustrate the complexity of adolescents' identities and subjectivities across contexts.

Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) did, however, complicate the notion of youths' self-constructions when using popular culture. In *Cultural Studies Goes to School*, they investigated the mix of media studies with cultural studies in a high school English class in London. Their case study research on students' magazine creations of the music industry, story writing about masculinities, and photographic representation projects documented the multiple and shifting positioning students encountered in relation to peers, to pleasures in popular culture text, and to teachers. From examples of students' completed assignments, they illustrated how students created contradictory identities in their uses of popular culture texts. For example, the students often constructed themselves in non-essentialist ways during discussions about popular culture but their productions of media texts showed otherwise.

Observational and interview research has also informed our understanding the complexity of youths' shifting self constructions within a singular discourse outside of school. Fisherkeller's (1997) study of television illustrated how U.S. 11- and 12-year-olds chose to watch particular shows that assisted them in constructing possible selves and envisioning alternatives for their future. For example, strong and independent female television characters became girls' role models, showing them how to dress and act and providing them with examples of alternative female life styles. In this way, the adolescents imagined alternative identities that would better their future within the narrow construction of identity they felt within their local community. Like the adolescents in other studies who created selves out of their affinity toward particular characters in texts (Dyson, 1996; Cherland, 1994; Christian-Smith, 1993), Fisherkeller

showed that the adolescents used traits they valued in the television characters they knew were fictitious to create possible selves to cope with difficulties salient to their own lives.

Lewis and Fabos (1999) documented how two U.S. 12-year-old girls positioned themselves when using Instant Messaging (IM), a popular computer program used for real-time chatting on the Internet. The girls used IM to learn how to establish and negotiate a virtual peer network. By tracking and analyzing the flow and form of conversations, they learned appropriate positions to take up in order to become part of the group. The girls changed their conversational styles and tone depending on their perceptions of how to assimilate into the community of users. This active positioning allowed the girls to juggle and manipulate multiple conversations simultaneously and afforded them membership in the group of IM users. The more IM conversation they managed, the more popular they felt themselves to be among the group. Lewis and Fabos (1999) posited that although the girls actively positioned themselves and constructed identities using IM, they were perhaps unaware of the ways the texts positioned them. Without asking the girls how they felt positioned, Lewis and Fabos could only speculate about this matter.

Other studies focusing on audience meaning making of popular culture texts have complicated concepts of reading positions and subjectivity. In a study of 11- and 12-year-old Australian students' readings of traditional and feminist fairy tales taken from an after-school group who met to explore "being gendered," Davies (1993) demonstrated the complexity and sometimes-contradictory nature of students' own subjectivities in their engagement with popular culture texts. Davies poststructural analysis and interpretation showed how students position themselves in diverse ways, offering multiple readings and

interpretations of texts dependent upon their stances. Connecting their readings to possible discourses from which they positioned themselves, Davies showed how readings offer multiple interpretations based on the discursive practices that surround readers' meaningful renderings of texts.

Students' out-of-school literacies related to popular culture have yet to be thoroughly explored. Although these studies are seminal to an understanding of young adolescents' literate activities after-school, all of these studies took place in singular contexts around one particular media form: televisual, computer, or book.

Those who have studied young adolescents' literacy practices related to self-construction across contexts have framed their studies in relation to institutional discourses. Two ethnographic studies employed aspects of Gee's (1996) concept of Discourse as "identity kits" to describe how adolescents use texts in various contexts. Both Knobel's (1999) study of 11- and 12-year-old Australian girls and boys and Finders's (1997) study of comparably aged U.S. girls examined how participants constructed social identities through their engagement in literate practices. Both studies examined how adolescents' social identities changed by context, text, and interaction with others. Like the boys' assumptions of identities with popular culture texts in Urquhart's (1996) study, the adolescents in Knobel's (1999) and Finders's (1997) studies assumed identities according to the social practices they thought relevant to the context and to the identities presented to them in particular Discourses. As acceptable identity categories were fixed and stable by the identities presented in the texts and by the social identities presented and constructed in the Discourses of which students were a part, these two studies demonstrated how the adolescents adopted identities as they moved from

Discourse to Discourse. Although Knobel (1999) and Finders (1997) examined young adolescents' literacies across settings, their studies only touched on their participants' uses of popular culture texts. By each focusing on social identities enacted within Discourses, they illustrated how individuals are constituted by those discourses, but they did not explore youths' own subjectivities or self-positioning in constructing meaning from popular culture texts within those Discourses.

Buckingham, D. (1993). Young people and the media. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Reading audiences* (pp. 1-23). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Buckingham, D., & Sefton-Green, J. (1994). *Cultural studies goes to school: Reading and teaching popular media*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Cherland, M. R. (1994). *Private practices: Girls reading fiction and constructing identity*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Christian-Smith, L. K. (1993). Sweet dreams: Gender and desire in teen romance novels. In L. Christian-Smith (Ed.), *Texts of desire: Essays on fiction, femininity, and schooling* (pp. 45-68). London: Falmer Press.

Dyson, A. H. (1997). *Writing superheroes: Contemporary childhood, popular culture, and classroom literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Davies, B. (1993). *Shards of glass*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Finders, M. J. (1997). *Just girls: Hidden literacies and life in junior high*. New York: Teachers College Press.

FisherKeller, J. (1997). Everyday learning about identities among young adolescents in television culture. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 28, 467-492.

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- Lewis, C., & Fabos, B. (1999, December). *Chatting on-line: Girls' use of chat room literacy*. Paper presented at the National Reading Conference, Orlando, FL.
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- Moss, G. (1993b). Girls tell the teen romance: Four reading histories. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Reading audiences* (pp. 116-134). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Oliver, K., & Lalik, R. (2000). *Bodily knowledge: Learning about equity and justice with adolescent girls*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Urquhart, I. (1996). 'You see all blood come out': popular culture and how boys become men. In M. Hilton (Ed.), *Potent fictions: Children's literacy and the challenge of popular culture* (pp. 150-184). New York: Routledge.
- Willinsky, J., & Hunniford, R. M. (1993). Reading the romance younger: The mirrors and fears of a preparatory literature. In L. Christian-Smith (Ed.), *Texts of desire: Essays on fiction, femininity, and schooling* (pp. 87-105). London: Falmer Press

How does poststructuralism inform this study?

Sturrock (1986) succinctly explained that “Post-Structuralism is a critique of Structuralism conducted from within; that is, it turns certain of structuralism’s arguments against itself and points to certain fundamental inconsistencies in their method which Structuralists have ignored” (p. 137). Coming after structuralism, poststructuralism differs from structuralism in its emphasis on text and on the reader. While structuralism finds truth within texts that produce and signal stable meaning, poststructuralism shifts the focus from what the text produces to what the reader produces with the text (Sarup, 1993). This shift highlights the work that readers do to push against determined and stable meanings of texts.

Poststructural theory influenced this study in four ways: (1) in the consideration of the adolescents as readers to be fragmented and unstable, (2) in the acknowledgement and attention to the multiple, shifting, complex, and conflicting ways readers engage texts in various contexts and with various people dependent upon their purposes, (3) in the examination of texts as indeterminate and without fixed meaning, and (4) in the implementation of categorization as both useful and limiting for work with adolescents, literacies, and popular culture.

Poststructuralism foregrounds the critique of a unified self and normative understandings of determined identity. From this stance, poststructuralist theory acknowledges and attends to identities are in constant movement, knowing that as people are named and categorized, they shift and move, forever changing who they are. Furthermore, unlike structuralism that “sees truth as being ‘behind’ or ‘within’ a text,” post-structuralism attends to “the interaction of the reader and text as a productivity. In

other words, reading has lost its status as a passive consumption of a product” (Sarup, 1993, p. 3).

While remaining committed to the fact that categories exist and structure our lives to produce identities, poststructural theory questions and critiques the stabilities of identities and of identity categories (Weedon, 1997). Furthermore, poststructuralism attempts to provide alternative ways of thinking about concepts that have been set up in binaries (Stronach & MacLure, St. Pierre, 2000). Work within poststructural theory, for example, addresses categories that form binary relationships. For example, researchers interested in adolescents’ literacies have begun to use poststructural theory to problematize adult/adolescent binaries that assume that adults are inherently more knowledgeable and superior based solely on identities derived from chronological age (Hagood, Stevens,& Reinking, in press; Lesko, 2001; Lewis & Finders, in press).

Hagood, M. C., Stevens, L. P., & Reinking, D. (in press). What do THEY have to teach US? Talkin’ ‘cross generations! In D. E. Alvermann, (Ed.). *Adolescents’ literacies in a digital world*. New York: Peter Lang.

Lewis, C., & Finders, M. (in press). Implied Adolescents and Implied Teachers:

A Generation Gap for New Times. In D. E. Alvermann, (Ed.). *Adolescents’ literacies in a digital world*. New York: Peter Lang.

Lesko, N. (2001). *Act your age! A cultural construction of adolescence*. New York: Routledge.

Sarup, M. (1993). *An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism* (2nd ed.). Athens: University of Georgia Press.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13, 477-515.

Stronach, I., & MacLure, M. (1997). *Educational research undone: The postmodern embrace*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Sturrock, J. (1986). *Structuralism*. London: Paladin.

Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

You describe throughout the text the idea that adolescents push against identity. How are you using this phrase?

I am using the phrase push against identity to describe how adolescents work against structures that attempt to produce them as particular sorts of people with particular identities. All of the adolescents in the study were produced with particular identities based upon others' readings of the adolescents' interests in and uses of particular kinds of popular culture. Amanda, for example, was produced with an identity as a nerd and a traditional girl because she liked the Babysitters' Club series, which seemed passé among her peers at school. And though Amanda recognized this identity that labeled her in particular ways, she also used popular culture to push against that identity (see question related to identity on pp. 233-237).

The adolescents' attempts to push against identity, to keep from being named and stabilized within a particular structure, were efforts to open up, to resist, to change, or to challenge the identities and structures that defined them. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, adolescents' uses of texts that pushed against identities that named them often

remained unrecognized by others because of others' own thinking/beliefs about the influence that popular culture had *on* adolescents that perpetuated stabilized and often negative meanings of adolescents' text uses. In their pushing against identities adolescents struggled to be recognized differently as they used texts to construct themselves as others concurrently produced them with identities. In this way, subjectivity was constructed through adolescents' pushing against produced identities. (See also discussion of subjectivity on pp. 262-274).

Rhizomatic cartography is interesting, but I've never heard of it, and I haven't seen it used to analyze data. What is it? Who else has used it? How did it contribute to your analyses, and what were the limitations of using it?

Rhizomatic cartography is built off of Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) theoretical work on the rhizome in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. A rhizome is a figuration, which differs from a metaphor. A figuration is an analytic tool that has been used in work influenced by poststructural theory to move beyond coding and categorizing data in order to redescribe and to represent concepts differently. It is similar to a metaphor in that both are implemented as a way to improve understandings of a concept; yet it is unlike a metaphor in that figurations are new images and attempt to provide freeing ways to think about a concept by attending to the complexity inherent within it. St. Pierre (1997a) discussed the differences between the two, noting "Figurations are not whimsical flights of fancy imagined to distract us from the day-to-day but carefully considered trajectories that send us headlong into the complexity of living realities" (p. 281). These complexities as represented in the figuration of the rhizome need to illustrate

as Braidotti (1994) explained “relational images” in order to form new representations of living realities.

Thus, figurations serve as tools to create new realities instead of charting differently what is already known by using a metaphor. They need to open up data analysis by questioning boundaries of binary thought and by illustrating interpretations that exceed those boundaries (McCoy, 2000). Others have used the figuration of a rhizome and the theoretical idea of rhizoanalysis to examine relational images. For example, St. Pierre (1997b) employed Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980/1987) figuration of the nomad to reconceptualize aspects of qualitative research. As a nomad, she could move across spaces to trouble traditional and taken-for-granted notions of the text and the field. The figuration of a nomadic inquirer opened up ways for St. Pierre to think differently about her ethnographic work and to ask different questions about her research. Jackson (in press) also used the figuration of a rhizome to rethink the concept of *voice* in a new figuration of *rhizovocality* and to look differently at the excessive and transgressive interconnections of voice. Alvermann (2000) used rhizoanalysis a bit differently to reanalyze data from three studies in an effort to conceptualize the connections and ruptures between and among texts. And Grosz (1994) connected the rhizome to her conceptions of feminism to rethink the interconnections between gender and subjectivity.

A rhizome, as a figuration, is more like a map than a tracing, and is characterized by movement between things rather than from a discernable path. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), the rhizome “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences,

and social struggles” (p. 7). The rhizome, as a map, allows for a look at the connections across texts that keep ideas and meaning in motion, never stabilized and always changing.

The rhizome is tuber-like with associations resulting from surface appearances and subterranean flows. It is a conglomeration of middles—a multiplicity of lines extending in all directions that illustrates no beginning and no end. If a part is broken off, then it can start up again at any point and join up with other aspects or form new offshoots. The rhizome, that multiplicity that necessarily is created through an establishment of disparate ideas, changes as it expands its connections of incidents.

Rhizomes are filled with twists and turns, swirls and whorls, that are “not...an essence but rather...an operative function” (Deleuze, 1988/1993, p. 3). The purpose of using rhizomatic cartography in this study was to interrupt the stable and structural versions of identity seen in media production of popular culture and to provide alternative openings for ambiguity to adolescents’ contradictory selves through recognition of subjectivity while simultaneously attending to identity. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980/1987) theoretical description of rhizomatic cartography, I developed the figuration of an anthill based upon their description that ants form rhizomes. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explained “You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed” (p. 9). I examined interconnections of identities and subjectivity in the ways that adolescents implemented subjectivity (the subterranean flows) to disrupt categories and rigid stabilities (the surface appearances) found in socially accepted identities in popular culture using the figuration of an anthill as a rhizome.

The figuration of a rhizome and the use of rhizomatic cartography both opened up and limited the analysis of this study. By using the rhizome to connect identity and subjectivity, I was able to examine contradictory data and to map how adolescents both take on identities and push against them while using the same texts without forming a duality between them. This analysis technique further allowed for the magnification of the interconnections between texts, identities, and subjectivities within and across contexts. The visualization also assisted in illustrating the differences between identity and subjectivity through the rhizomatic figuration.

However, using rhizomatic cartography also had its limitations. Employing this analytic tool was a tricky matter inasmuch as it is a theory that has been only recently shaped into a methodology. As a result, there are few methodological examples of using the theory as a tool for data analysis. And because no two rhizomes are ever alike, none of the methodological examples that I studied looked like my own implementation of rhizomatic cartography. Finally, rhizomes are naturally multiplicitous and can't be overcoded. Given this characteristic, the analysis I used in this study was only partial. The rhizome continues on, forever moving and connecting. The depiction of the rhizome, therefore, only reflects a 10-week moment in time, and the analysis conducted froze all of the movement that has continued since my departure from the daily lives of the adolescents I studied.

Alvermann, D. E. (2000). Researching libraries, literacies, and lives: A rhizoanalysis. In

E. A. St. Pierre & W. Pillow (Eds.), *Working the ruins: Feminist poststructural theory and methods in education* (pp. 114-129). New York: Routledge.

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- Grosz, E. (1994). A million tiny sexes: Feminism and rhizomatics. In C.V. Boundas & D. Olkowski (Eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and the theatre of philosophy* (pp. 187-210). New York: Routledge.
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- St. Pierre, E. A. (1997b). Nomadic inquiry in the smooth spaces of the field: a preface. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10, 365-383.

What is subjectivity, and how does it differ from identity? What’s the need for the distinction in this study?

As Davies (1994) explained “the concept of subjectivity is different from the concept of identity” (p. 3). The concept of identity as part of a modernist human discourse generally refers to stable categories prescribed to people and based on binaries (e.g., young/ old, male/ female; high class/ low class) in order to classify people discretely. These structures and categories “define individual identities and the forms of pleasure derived from them” (Weedon, 1997, p. 109). But just as people are named and categorized with “a constituted sense of identity,” they may also “resist particular interpellations or produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions” that have attempted to name them with particular identities (Weedon, 1997, p. 102). It is this tension between being constituted with certain identities and pushing against particular identities that I am using the term subjectivity. In this study, subjectivity is viewed differently from identity in that identities produced for adolescents in different contexts (such as adolescents, students, wussies, Mexican Catholics) that attempt to define who they can be and can be recognized as are contested by the adolescents themselves in their uses of texts. The process of subjectivity is exemplified in adolescents’ attempts to renegotiate these identities and to open up alternative ways of being. According to Davis (1994), subjectivity

enables us to see the diversity and richness of our experiences of being a person as we find ourselves positioned now one way and now another, inside one set of power relations or another, constituted through one discourse or another, in one context or another. Our subjectivity is in part the result of our life histories of being in the world. (p. 3-4)

Although cultural studies as an interdisciplinary field is committed to theoretical pluralism, some have argued that poststructuralism is not a good fit with approaches to cultural studies that focus on identity categories. Richard Johnson (1987), however, refuted this argument during his directorship of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Studying subjectivity, Johnson (1987) explained, moves cultural studies away from the fixity of text interpretation devoid of context and readers. Subjectivity, in this sense, “is not to be understood by locating it in a universe of meaning or an interactional context of narratives, but in a complex of apparatuses, practices, machinations, and assemblages within which human being has been fabricated, and which presuppose and enjoin particular relations with ourselves” (Rose, 1994, p. 10). In this way, cultural studies projects are concerned with the process of subjectivity in the contestation of identities produced in readers’ uses of popular culture texts. Speaking to the issue of exploring subjectivity and texts using cultural studies Walkerdine (1990) explained,

We can say that text do not simply distort or bias a reality that exists only outside the pages of books—in the ‘real world’—but rather that those practices are real, and in construction of meaning create places for identification and construct subject-positions in the text itself. (p. 89)

The use of subjectivity as *construction* as used in this study is different from others’ notions of subjectivity. E. A. St. Pierre (personal communication, April 22, 2002) noted that according to some poststructural theorists “subjectivity is what is produced and what keeps on getting produced by the discourses and practices within/against which we live.” Because this study is framed by cultural studies theories of production and

consumption and audiences' uses of texts, I am looking at the ways that media produce identities in texts, and the ways that adolescents construct ideas about themselves using texts. In this way, the adolescents in this study saw themselves as produced as particular sorts of people with particular identities, but they also resisted those identities to some degree and in various contexts. St. Pierre and I agree on the term subjectivity in that subjectivity is produced "by accommodating, resisting, opening up the discourses and cultural practices that are always producing us" (St. Pierre, personal communication, April 22, 2002). But the use of the term subjectivity in this study has been conceptualized as adolescents' constructions to push against, resist, change, and challenge the identities produced for or of them.

Incorporating subjectivity into cultural studies addresses the complexity of readers' interactions with texts. Davies (1994) explained that in examinations of subjectivity, we "gain access to the constitutive effects of the discursive practices through which we are all constituted as subjects and through which the world we all live in is made real" (p. 3). Delineations between identity and subjectivity provide a useful framework for thinking about young adolescents' uses of popular culture texts as consumers targeted with particular identities as they are positioned by texts while also positioning themselves in relation to texts. As readings of texts change by the context in which they are read, subjectivity changes as well. Therefore, it is necessary to wrestle with aspects of subjectivity in order to understand better how adolescents use popular culture not only by identities produced through media but also by adolescents' own engagement of texts whereby they construct their own positions relative to the text (Gilroy, 1996; McRobbie, 1995; Walkerdine, 1997).

Subjectivity, as differentiated from a stable identity, attends to the changing positions that subjects negotiate in social interaction (Mansfield, 2000). Attention to subjectivity in literacy focuses on the complex negotiations between readers, as subjects, and texts (whether those texts are auditory, visual, or multimodal), maintaining that readers' identities are produced in texts and readers also construct ideas about themselves as they accept, push against, and/or transform those categories that name them as particular sorts of people.

Subjectivity as used throughout this study does not replace the idea of identity or identities, nor is it in opposition to structures that produce identities. The need for distinction between the two is that they are acting differently—one cannot exist without the other and, therefore, it is important to “complicate the relations between them” (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p. 5). In this particular study, subjectivity is conceptualized as the adolescents' movement between and among identities that have produced them as particular sorts of people through their uses of popular culture. Tommy's recognition of the identities produced of him by the Australian boys as a wimp and wuss and his active resistance of these identities through his use of Japanese animé is an example of the construction of subjectivity. In this way, Tommy is produced with identity and he constructs himself simultaneously as a subject. As a subject, Tommy is, as Martusewicz (1992) described, “constantly shifting, flickering in absence and presence like the constant movement along the signifying chain” (p. 140).

In this study, as adolescents push against particular identities offered to them through media produced texts that try to produce adolescents as particular sorts of people, they position themselves through the construction of subjectivity. The use of subjectivity

in this study, therefore, is often an effect of pushing against identities that seek to limit and to categorize adolescents in particular ways. The conceptualization of adolescents as subjects with subjectivity rather than with named and stable identities that produce them as particular sorts of people opens up possibilities to acknowledge how adolescents attempt to construct new ways of being and new identities. Identity is created out of a desire to put an order to the infinitude of possibilities, and struggles over opening up identity result from adolescents' contestation of the meaning of a text that implicitly or assumedly produces adolescents with a particular identity. Thus, adolescents gauge the construction of new ways of being through their active uses of texts. Subjectivity highlights the tensions of betweenness, not as one identity or another or as multiple identities, but in the transitional state of transforming identities.

The differences between conceptualizations of identity and subjectivity in this study lie often in the emphasis placed on the text to determine readers' identities and uses of texts. From a standpoint of audience research in cultural studies what is important is to consider how the reader perceives and uses a text (Ang, 1996). Unlike the work of identity as conceptualized within structural work influenced by cultural studies, which focuses on the meaning the text produces in particular contexts and on the institutionalized practices that produce particular identities, the work of subjectivity in this study approaches readings differently in two distinct ways. First, from a poststructuralist perspective, texts have no inherent meaning. Spivak (1974) noted, "the text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the 'text' is a preface to the next" (p. xii).

The use of the term subjectivity in this study attends to adolescents' *active* engagement of forever trying to establish themselves through efforts to push away staid meanings in texts that attempt to stabilize and to locate meaning with a singular or particular identity. Such an effort is a movement away from what Taylor (1993) called the monological consciousness of identity and from a conscious effort to understand the identities produced in texts. So, rather than concentrate primarily on the power of a discourse or institutional power to produce identities (as either stable and coherent or as multiple and shifting yet stable and coherent across contexts), the realization of adolescents' subjectivity emphasizes how they as subjects construct themselves. When subjectivity is considered in the act of reading, reading becomes a creative endeavor

because the reader is constantly having to fill in gaps and absences in the text.

This model of the act of reading is in keeping with the post-structuralist figuration of desire as something without satisfaction, continuous, motivating and, ultimately, pleasurable. (Fuery, 1995, p. 72)

Readers, therefore, while being pushed to concede to particular identities, also push back on those identities, continuously shifting and changing, never fully locating themselves once and for all in a particular identity. Foucault (1982/1988) called this process "technologies of the self" and these technologies

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 18)

Similarly, Davies (1999) explained, that readers as subjects have agency in that they have

A sense of oneself as one who can go beyond the given meaning in any one discourse [identity] and forge something new, through a combination of previously unrelated discourses, through the invention of words and concepts that capture a shift in consciousness that is beginning to occur, or through imagining not what is, but what might be. (pp. 66-67)

Second, readers are a bricolage or performance of a mismatched and often-conflicting assembly of discourses and material practices that hold no definite meaning (e.g., see de Castell, 1996; Sefton-Green & Buckingham, 1998; Tobin, 2000). Readers speak themselves into existence and construct themselves using texts as they are *simultaneously* spoken into existence and are produced with certain identities by texts. In this way, a focus on adolescents' subjectivity shifts the emphasis from the study of identities produced in texts to the study of adolescent readers as subjects and to the process of the ways that they construct themselves. So, the study of identity and subjectivity related to Timony, for example, focuses upon both the texts that produced particular identities of student, teacher, guinea pig, avid reader, bad student, or disturbed teenager for him and on his active uses of texts in the contexts of school and at home to construct himself as continuous, ever-shifting, and evolving in process.

The need for distinction between subjectivity and identity relates to the ideas of production and consumption of popular culture. In *Consumer Society*, Baudrillard (1998) explained that individuals seek out their places through their consumption of goods. The individual uses texts (popular culture) to relate to the social order. In this way, consumption is not the end point of the process that began with production of goods and identities, but is a system of exchange. Baudrillard doesn't believe in the reduction of

texts into a transmission model that only produce identities onto consumers. Instead, he asserted that consumers construct their own meaning and uses of texts as they use texts for their own purposes. Studying both identity and subjectivity in production and consumption may “enable a use of the self which neither guarantees itself as an authentic ground nor necessarily rejects the possibility of a ground” (Probyn, 1992, pp. 29-30). Some lament the catch-22 of this obscure proceeding, claiming that whenever something gets named, it is located, delimited, and framed (Shambaugh, 2000). Others note that the process of naming, as fleeting, ephemeral, and difficult as it might be, is necessary. Hall (1996) argued that identities are structures of dominance with particular configurations and structurations that must be studied, but over time these complex structures nevertheless come undone. This study examines how adolescents, popular culture, and literacies are structures that come undone.

This study as framed by cultural studies theories of production and consumption looks at adolescents’ uses of popular culture as they are named as particular people and given particular identities through media production and as they construct their own uses of texts that often negate or question the identities produced in their constructions of who they perceive themselves to be in their consumption of texts. Indeed, interplays between identity and subjectivity are considered in this study when adolescents are named with particular identities based upon their uses of popular culture and when adolescents use popular culture to push against, resist, subvert, challenge, or change those identities. The investigation into being named with particular identities and attempts to open up those identities through different uses of texts illustrate adolescents’ movement between structural and poststructural understandings of identity and subjectivity as adolescents get

stuck between structures that seek to name them as particular people and from which they try to work themselves out of particular categorizations. In this way, adolescents in this study attempt to engage in critiques of essentialism. According to hooks (1991), such acts “challenge notions of universality and static overdetermined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness” and provide opportunities to “open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency” (p. 28).

Williams (1980), a cultural theorist, explained that movement between social formations and historical moments such as modernism and postmodernism is continuous. Therefore, it is possible to locate and isolate features of postmodern culture within modernity and visa versa. Similarly, the movement between identities that seek to name adolescents and their attempts to open up categories that name them is continuous. Therefore, the concept of identity is useful, but it limits us. Foucault (1994/1997) explained,

If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. To be the same is really boring. *We must not exclude identity* [italics added] if people find their pleasure through this identity, but we must not think of this identity as an ethical universal rule. (p. 166)

By examining the undoing of stabilized identities in adolescents’ uses of texts, adolescents are conceptualized differently through the construction of subjectivity. Like Sarup noted (1993), “If subjectivity is less fixed, then space is left for the construction of identities which deviate from the norm. That is, space is left for ‘difference’” (p. 176). In

this sense, adolescents' uses of texts undo traditional understandings of stable identities, meanings of popular culture, and singular forms of literacy. Adolescents in this study use texts in ways that the adolescents are "both the *site* and *subjects* of discursive struggle for their identity" (Weedon, 1997, p. 93).

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Traditionally, text has described something printed in alphabetic code, like a book or a magazine or maybe a website. You seem to use the term text differently. Can you explain how you're using it?

Text in this study is defined broadly and includes any written, visual (images), oral, and auditory representation used by the adolescents I studied. This definition of text that encompasses communicative media and popular culture such as television, the Internet, or music, for example, has been readily accepted and used within the field of media studies and cultural studies research. Until recently, however, this broadened definition of text has been excluded from the field of literacy research (Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, 2000).

Only within the past 10 years has a wider description of text been used in literacy research with respect to adolescent literacy (see Alvermann, in press; Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). This wider conceptualization of text as part of the study of literacies has come to view texts in relation to multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996), to technological media (Leu & Kinzer, 2000; Reinking, McKenna, Labbo, & Kieffer, 1998), to the communicative arts (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997), to readings of multiple sign systems (Hamilton, 2000; Tierney, 1997), and to visual literacies (Messaris, 2001). In short, text within literacy education has come to be conceptualized within a multimedia environment (Adoni, 1995; Alvermann, in press). Discussing differences between a traditional definition of text and literacy and a newer formulation of texts and literacies, Sefton-Green (1998) declared,

Indeed, interacting with a game or other digital texts, from CD-ROMs to online World Wide Web sites, is qualitatively different from the relations between reader and writer in the domain of print literacy....If a fixed relation between writer and reader is the hallmark of the old literacy then an interactive dynamic is at the heart of the new literacies. (p. 10)

It is from these broader understandings of literacies and texts that I have come to use the term *text*. Texts, in this study, certainly included print-based media, but they also include the visual, auditory, and gestural within a broader study of adolescents' literacies.

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