# Studies in Art Education

## On the concept of youth in art education: A review of the literature

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| **Full Title:** | On the concept of youth in art education: A review of the literature |
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| **Abstract:** | In this paper, I analyze how the concept of youth is used in art education scholarship. I review papers from three art education journals that use youth in their titles and/or abstracts. I analyze how the concept of youth frames, produces and buttresses arguments about the role of art education in society and the need for particular approaches to curriculum and instruction. My literature review is organized around four themes: Youth as (1) transition, (2) culture, (3) difference, and (4) image. In presenting these four themes, my aim is to support art education researchers as they extend, refine, clarify, and deepen their analysis in ways that have positive concrete effects on young people through art education. |
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| **Response to Reviewers:** | Reviewer 1:<br>•p. 1, lines 0-21 Clarified sentence re: innocence: “On the one hand, youth can be represented as vulnerable members of society. On the other hand, youth can be represented as social threats.”<br>•p. 2-4: Altered key terms to be more consistent.<br><br>Reviewer 2:<br>•Added several keywords to point to its critical orientation and appeal.<br>•Deleted false claim in opening paragraph and more clearly stated my critical investment in this topic.<br>•Returned to this critical investment in the conclusion.<br>•Removed reference to Indigenous Guarani youth.<br>•Conclusion: I bolstered the conclusion and brought forward my critical perspective on the topic.<br><br>Reviewer 3:<br>•P. 1, line 53: changed wording to “source of social problems” and deleted the remainder of the sentence for clarity.<br>•p. 2 Line 41: Changed “huge” to “considerable.”<br>•p. 2 51-53: Deleted sentence containing "changing the ways of youth" and revised the next sentence for the sake of clarity.<br>•I deleted the last paragraph of the “literature review strategy” and instead, per the reviewers’ suggestion, added a few sentences about how the use of youth is not always as clear-cut as this thematic analysis might suggest.<br>•I did engage with the book, From Child Art to Visual Language of Youth, and found that it does not directly engage with how it is theorizing child art or youth, or provide a history of these topics (or really use this rhetoric in the chapters). So, I’ve modified the paragraph to address this apparent reference to prior literature on child art.<br>•Conclusion: See above. |

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On the concept of youth in art education: A review of the literature

Tyler Denmead
University Lecturer in Arts, Creativity, and Education
University of Cambridge
184 Hills Road
Cambridge, United Kingdom
CB2 8PQ
td287@cam.ac.uk

Manuscript (masked)



## Introduction

Youth is a regularly deployed concept in art education research that is used in a variety of ways. It is important for art education scholars to be clear in their assumptions about youth precisely because the concept is both ambiguous and reflexive. How scholars conceptualize youth helps to frame, produce, and buttress particular arguments that they are making about the role of art education in society. The aim of this literature review then is to illuminate the various ways in which youth is used as a concept in art education scholarship. I want to bring heightened awareness to the varied uses of the concept of youth in art education so that scholars and teachers can extend and deepen their use of the concept in their practice. In particular, I want to draw attention to the ways in which different ideas about youth hail young people to participate in our classrooms and our research in particular ways. As we will see, how youth is framed can have concrete effects on young people, as these different positions influence curriculum, instruction, and research findings in art education.

## Youth: A contested and historically constructed concept

My interest in youth and art education began in the 1990s. At that time, policy attention began to focus on the needs and interests of youth during the non-school hours. Policy briefs zeroed in on how unsupervised youth faced numerous risks to their health and development during the non-school hours (see, for example, Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs, 1992). A crop of "positive youth development" programs emerged which were designed to approach youth in affirmative terms rather than pejorative ones to improve the chances that they would grow up to become healthy and productive members of society (Pittman, 1991). The arts started to be celebrated for their role in contributing to this positive

youth development (Brice-Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998), spawning a field now known as "creative youth development" (see National Guild for Community Arts Education, Massachusetts Cultural Council, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, & Americans for the Arts, 2015).

More often than not, youth is conceptualized as a transitional stage of life between the dependence of childhood and the independence of adulthood. The United Nations, for example, frames youth as those who are between the ages of 15 and 24 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). The various symbolic meanings ascribed to youth, however, begin to illustrate how this concept is contested (Dimitriadis, 2008). On the one hand, youth can be represented as vulnerable members of society. On the other hand, youth can be represented as social threats. Indeed, the concept of youth is useful in buttressing a variety of arguments about social policy and practice because its different meanings can speak so effectively to our emotions as much as our reason.

Youth is both a historically constructed term and a relatively modern invention. In her book *Uncivil Youth,* Soo Ah Kwon (2013) traces how youth became "a special category of concern" during the late nineteenth century. At that time, the United States experienced a considerable inflow of immigrants and urban migrants, as well as rapid growth in manufacturing. With this massive social change, new anxieties emerged over living and working conditions in cities, as well as social deterioration. Social reformers during this era, including Jane Addams, focused on children who were not yet set in their customary ways as adults. For a society in such transition, the theory of these social reformers was that investing in youth was an effective strategy to bend society towards benevolence and social cohesion in the future.

In the twentieth century, youth became subjected to scientific debates about the most

efficient and effective way to transition young people through this turbulent stage of life. In 1904, the psychologist G. Stanley Hall published *Adolescence* (1904), which established this life stage as one of upheaval and turmoil as a result of rapid physical and psychological changes, as well as social yearning for independence and acceptance. This representation of youth, still common today, positions youth as those in need of management and control for contradictory reasons. On the one hand, youth are deemed immature, and yet, on the other hand, they are understood as threats to themselves and others as they experience physical and emotional changes outside their control.

The emergence and classification of youth in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also established norms for this transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Native-born, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, and White males who inherited the requisite capital needed to maintain an upward trajectory towards independence in adulthood became the norm for this transition. Naturalizing and universalizing their transitional life stage has thus served as the basis to ascribe negative value to those whose life trajectories differ from this norm. In other words, privileging youth as a discrete stage of life has always been entangled with the disposition of power and the politics of social identity. Kwon (2013, p. 35), for example, describes how working-class youth, particularly young girls, in Chicago in the late nineteenth century became "special targets of social intervention" based on social anxieties about their health and sexuality. Youth therefore functions in part as a social category that legitimizes how and why different social groups are afforded different advantages, including being regulated and supervised in unequal ways (for further discussion, see "Civilizing youth against delinquency" in Kwon, 2013).

The concept of youth has also always been entangled in capitalism (see "Youth and

capitalism in history" in Sukarieh and Tannock, 2014). As early as the nineteenth century, when American youth moved away from family homesteads to earn money through work in textile factories, youth itself emerged as a commercial marketing category. That is, youth became legible in society as consumers with their own tastes, preferences, and pocket money. Today, youth are often understood as those who delay the transition to adulthood, as well as engage in the critique of norms associated with adulthood, through consuming and producing, appropriating and re-appropriating forms of popular culture including fashion and music (see Hebdige, 1979).

More recently, Sukarieh and Tannock argue that youth has been a useful social category in hollowing out the welfare development state (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2014). They argue that youth has warranted so much policy attention in recent years because it is a useful metaphor for societies in transition. The image of youth signals the destruction of the old and the invention of the new, and that image is associated with notions of individual growth and development. As a result, investing in youth becomes hitched ideologically to the shaping of a society that is comprised of economically independent individuals. We see this pattern emerge in community-based art education where philanthropists and researchers celebrate arts and entrepreneurship models as an answer to young people's social and economic challenges (see, for example, the discussion of the Artists for Humanity program in Brice-Heath and Smyth, 1999). Artwork commissions and t-shirt sales are celebrated for teaching young people valuable skills of entrepreneurship and self-responsibility, while tending to obscure, if not overlook, the fact that entrepreneurship is inadequate to address the structural conditions that produce poverty unevenly in the first place.

This brief discussion shows how youth is a contested, ambiguous, and historically

constructed concept. For art education scholars, we must recognize how the concept of youth is understood, used, and experienced in our field. As we will see, research, curriculum, and instruction in art education can hinge upon the framing of youth, and such theories, whether explicit or not, can become the basis for legitimizing particular approaches to art education and the research findings used to advance those approaches.

## Literature Review Strategy

For this literature review, I set out to analyze how the concept of youth is deployed in the field of art education. However, I needed to establish boundaries to this literature review because, to state the obvious, I could not review all papers in the field that address the topic. To begin, I selected three journals that cater to an American audience given the readership of this journal: *Visual Arts Research, Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education,* and *Studies in Art Education.* I then retrieved 34 papers that use the term "youth" in the title or abstract of these three journals. In reading these papers, I looked for assumptions made about youth and how these assumptions helped the author(s) make their case for legitimizing and improving their approach to art education policy, practice, and/or research. I looked for themes emerging across these papers and identified four: youth as (1) transition, (2) culture, (3) difference, and (4) image, which I discuss below. As is the case with any thematic analysis, these different categories do intersect and overlap, and the authorial use of youth is not as always clear-cut as this analysis might suggest. However, these four themes do provide useful points of connection and departure for readers as they engage with this concept in their professional practice.

## Youth as Transition

Scholars in art education writing about youth tend to agree that this term refers to a life stage, but there is not necessarily agreement when this life stage begins and ends. Duncum (2015), for example, uses youth to refer to both children and adolescents in his discussion of youths' social networking. Karr and Weida (2012) include youth who are between 15 and 24 years old in their study of superhero comic books as frameworks of inclusivity and advocacy for young people with disabilities. Manifold (2009, p. 261) includes nearly 300 fan artists and cosplayers between the ages of 14 and 24 in her study, referring to them as both "adolescents and young adults" (Manifold, 2009, p. 269). In her study of young people's video game play, Stokrocki (2013) includes youth who are between the ages of 15 and 18. Some of this variability, of course, is due to the participants who agreed to participate in each study. But this variability also shows how youth is a "border category" between childhood and adulthood that is not clear-cut (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2014, p. 24). This ambiguity and elasticity arguably gives youth its rhetorical and conceptual strength. Depending on one's argument, authors can emphasize childlike or adultlike characteristics of youth to make their point.

While it is not always clear when youth begins and ends, it is generally understood that young people experience significant physical, social, and emotional changes during this period. While Lowenfeld (1957) framed this transition as a period of crisis, the more common tendency today is to frame this transition in more positive terms. For example, in "Arts Participation as a Context for Youth Purpose" (2015), Malin frames this life stage as a moment in which young people, between the ages of 11 and 21, are developing a sense of purpose. For Malin, in other words, developing a sense of purpose is a marker of a successful transition from childhood to adulthood; becoming an adult means learning to engage in activities that are both personally meaningful and consequential to society. Malin (2015) thus argues that art education can play a

critical role in helping children successfully transition to adulthood by participating in such meaningful activities.

Other scholars view the transition from childhood to adulthood as a period marked by identity formation and social bonding. In “Identity Tableaux,” Lalonde, Castro, and Pariser (2016) investigate how curriculum and instruction focused on mobile media literacy can engage youth and help move them “toward the formation of their authentic and fully realized individual and cultural identities” (p. 53). Lin and Bruce (2013) focus on experiences of “connectedness” for adolescents. In their paper, “Engaging Youth in Underserved Communities Through Digital-Mediated Arts Learning Experiences for Community Inquiry” (2013), Lin and Bruce argue that digital learning can foster social bonds for young people in community-based art education. These papers assume that fully realized identities and social connections, rather than lacking a sense of self and loneliness, are markers of successful adulthood. Art education again is framed as a productive mechanism in this healthy transition.

One paper retrieved through my search with youth in the title is a book review by R. M. Cohen (2015) of Andrea Kárpáti and Emil Gaul’s edited collection, *From Child Art to the Visual Language of Youth: New Models and Tools for Assessment of Learning and Creation in Art Education* (2013). This book review focuses on approaches to assessment in art education, but it does not explicitly state how these new approaches relate to theories of childhood or of youth, or of child art and the visual language of youth. The chapters included in the book also do not appear to address directly these theoretical perspectives. But the book title appears to reference the theoretical approach to child art, for example, put forward by Brent Wilson (1974) who introduced an outline for a theory of child art. Wilson (1974) argued that children’s playful and unsupervised art, often done outside the classroom or the confines of curricular instruction, are

complex engagements with the cultural themes that children encounter in everyday life. New models and tools in art education assessment are promised as a means to engage with this visual complexity produced by both children and youth.

What is clear from this limited selection of papers is that the framing of youth as a transition buttresses the argument that art education has a redeeming role to play in adolescent development. This argument hinges upon normative assumptions about adulthood, including, for example, that adults have a sense of purpose, that they have formed their individual and cultural identities, and that they are not socially isolated or estranged. In other words, growing up is associated with development and progress, and art education is justified based on its contributions to this development and progress.

While I would never want to minimize the fact that young people do develop a new sense of purpose or experience strong social connections through their art making, we should be wary of making normative assumptions about adulthood and we should be wary of assuming that art education is inherently redeeming (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). With these assumptions, the risk is that we focus our attention on those who meet our expectations for this healthy transition to adulthood, and who exemplify our belief in the power of art education, while overlooking, obscuring, and even diminishing those who do not.

In summary, youth can be used as a concept in art education that refers to the biological transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. But there is not agreement on when the period of youth begins and ends. Art educators tend to use the concept of youth as a biological transition to buttress the argument that art education plays a positive role in the healthy development of adolescents. The next approach, youth as culture, is less concerned with how young people grow up and is more concerned with what youth do as youth.

## Youth as Culture

During the past several decades, visual culture art education has been one of the dominant paradigms in art education. When I searched for papers that used the term "youth" in the title or abstract among the three selected journals, the majority of the retrieved papers operated within this paradigm.

Drawing on the field of cultural studies, one of the abiding concerns of visual culture art education is that the field of art education should broaden its study of images beyond fine art to include those found in everyday life (Duncum, 2002). This visual realm, however, is practically endless so art education scholars within this paradigm have wrestled with how to delimit its boundaries. For example, Duncum (2002) makes the distinction between visual images that are communicative and symbolic (e.g., advertisements, paintings, etc.) and functional (e.g., a traffic sign). Additionally, Wilson and Thompson (2007) argue that art educators can turn to the images that children and young people make. They write, "If we art educators were to direct our critical attention to the entire range of human images, then, is there a better place to begin with the images that children are purported to make?" (p. 2).

It should come as no surprise, then, that so many of the papers that were retrieved in my search focused on attempting to understand images made and consumed by youth. Chen (2007) and Manifold (2009) focus on the aesthetics of animé and cosplay. Congdon and King (2002) study the various visual aspects of surfing culture. Duncum (2015) and Ryoo, Lin, and Grauer (2014) turn to digital networking and online video production, and Lalonde et al. (2016) and Richard (2005) focus on the use of pervasive mobile devices. Video games are another area of focus, including Minecraft (Wu, 2016) and Sims 2 (Stokrocki, 2013). Taylor (2007) investigates

the pedagogic affordances of music videos.

These art educators are seeking to understand how youth understand themselves and others through their participation in these quotidian and highly visual cultural practices. For example, in their visual essay on youth filmmaking, Ryoo et al. (2014) argue that they:

> seek to explore the significance of a youth film production as a cultural form. Through the process, youth are enabled to interpret and respond to their lived social spaces with creative agency in constantly evolving media ecologies, to become producers in this increasingly mediated and complex world. (p. 1)

Within this framework, these shared ways of life, marked by creative agency and dynamic media ecologies, are understood distinctively as “youth culture.”

Through focusing their analysis on youth as culture, there is a tendency for art educators to claim that there is a problematic gap between the aesthetic preferences of teachers and those of their students. For example, Congdon and King (2002) draw on the work of Jeffers (1997) to argue that young people have developed a specific aesthetic associated with surfing, but this aesthetic can often be misunderstood. Surfers can quickly become labelled and misunderstood by adults as bad kids, thus functioning in the social imaginary as “folk devils” who are implicated in “moral panics” about societal decline and disintegration (S. Cohen, 2011).

In the papers I retrieved, several art education scholars argue that their scholarship on youth cultures can help to overcome this misunderstanding. As Faucher (2016) puts it, “To diminish this gap and use youth cultural practices meaningfully in the art class, it is first important to better understand them” (p. 58). Through understanding youth’s cultural practices, Faucher (2016) continues, “Art teachers can then be more connected to the symbolic production processes that contribute to the formation and assertion of the individual and collective cultural identity of young people” (p. 68). In other words, by engaging with this scholarship on youth culture, art educators will be better equipped to choose curricular content that speaks to the

existing aesthetic preferences of students, thus making art education classrooms more meaningful and relevant for youth.

Studying the cultural preferences of youth does produce insightful accounts of young people which assist art educators in working more successfully with their students. For example, by studying how and why young people participate in cosplay, Manifold (2009) argues that teachers can learn about the importance of involving “students with complex narrative subject matter and intricate stories about images and artists’ lives” (p. 269). While not limiting themselves to cosplay as subject matter, art teachers might also develop a curriculum that provides “balance between fantasy and the ordinariness of everyday life” (Manifold, 2009, p. 269).

Duncum (2015) adds that studying youth cultures can challenge misperceptions of youth based on a modernist understanding of childhood. In contrast to the notion that children and young people are naturally expressive beings whose artistic practices are at their best when those practices are uncompromised by popular visual culture, Duncum (2015) draws on the work of Brent and Marjorie Wilson (1977) to argue that teachers can teach their students based on the understanding that young people teach themselves through their consumption of popular visual culture—including, for example, copying comic book characters in their drawings.

But if we accept the notion that understanding youth culture is key to improving art education, we must recognize also that the gap between youth culture and school culture is always irresolvable. That is, youth cultures define themselves partly as an oppositional response to the ways in which adults establish norms and practices for young people (Wortham, 2011). As art teachers teach images, visual practices, or ideas that they associate with youth culture, young people are bound to modify their preferences based on their hopes of transgressing these newly

established norms. Youth culture seems inherently committed to reestablishing this gap of irrelevancy and misunderstanding.

As a result, the claim that art educators must understand youth culture appeals to our emotions by producing restless anxiety and fear of fallibility. This claim reminds us as art educators that we can never understand youth culture because it never stands still, always moving in response to our own moves. As a result, the relevancy of our pedagogies is always being jeopardized by this continual lack of understanding. This continual lack of understanding becomes the ongoing basis for studying the latest manifestations of youth cultures. In sum, this rationale produces anxieties and fears about the relevancy of art education while, at the same time, providing answers about youth culture that can momentarily assuage those anxieties and fears.

## Youth as Difference

Several papers retrieved through my search used the term youth to evoke an image of young people who are not considered the norm based on their class, gender, sexuality, ability, indigeneity, immigrant origin, language, place of residence, and so forth. In this case, "youth" serves as a rhetorical alternative to, for example, "young people." The former signifies those who are seen as "disadvantaged," "at-risk," or "marginalized" based on, for example, their race, class, and sexuality, whereas the latter signifies those who benefit from social positions that are deemed by the dominant culture as normal, advantaged, and privileged. More often than not, this norm refers to those who are suburban, middle-class or affluent, straight, and White.

To illustrate, Silverman, Hoepfner, and Hendricks (1969) compare the effectiveness of different art curricula for seventh graders who are "economically impoverished and socially

disadvantaged" (p. 32) in their paper, "Developing and evaluating art curricula for disadvantaged youth." Similarly, Lucas (1973) provides her dissertation abstract for a study that investigates a collaborative model for the preparation of art teachers of "inner city youth." The author selects urban high school students whom are predominantly African-American and Puerto Rican for her study (Lucas, 1973). In "African-American Youth and the Artist's Identity," Charland's (2010) survey research asks how 60 African-American adolescents conceptualize art as a pursuit and "artist" as an identity. Lin and Bruce's (2013) digital mediated arts learning intervention serves low-income young people from Mexican immigrant and second-generation Mexican American families, African-American teenagers, and middle school students from various ethnic and class backgrounds. Rhoades (2012) examines how the use of documentary film can address injustices facing youth who are marginalized for their queer gender and sexual identities.

Several authors refer to youth as "at-risk." Castro, Lalonde, and Pariser (2016, p. 239) focus on the multimedia and mobile artistic production of youth who they describe as "at-risk." These authors define at-risk youth as those who are "dealing with unstable and uncertain social, familial, and educational situations" (2016, p. 239). In their paper, "Art Education and At-Risk Youth" (1996), O'Thearling and Bickley-Green focus on youth who struggle to fit into the mainstream education system; these youth might be referred to in the vernacular as "outsiders."

Knight (2005) uses the rhetoric of youth who are "at-risk" but also cautions against doing so. She argues that the term is often used to represent young people as inferior or deprived because their appearance, language, family structures, and cultural expressions do not conform to those of dominant and middle-class White culture. Knight (2005) encourages art education scholars to focus on the conditions that produce social, political, economic, and physical risks for young people, rather than re-inscribing, for example, racist and classist tropes about young

people by framing them as disadvantaged and deprived.

In one exception to this trend of using youth to signify difference, H. L. Cohen, in his bleak paper, "Art Power: A Proposition" (1968), argues that all young people have been culturally deprived due to the narrowing of curriculum in schools at the expense of the arts. In other words, while youth does signify deprivation in this case, it does not single out young people based on their race, class, gender, sexuality, physical ability, or ability to fit in within mainstream social institutions.

The use of youth to signify difference buttresses several arguments for art educators, particularly those who are committed to equity and social justice. By signaling difference, the use of youth evokes an image of young people whose cultural production has been historically neglected, ignored, and dismissed. Moreover, these youth have been subjected to orientalist forms of research and teaching that produces beliefs and knowledge about "the other" which reinforces the supremacy of the dominant culture (Said, 1978).

The contemporary use of youth therefore evokes research and teaching methodologies, such as "youth-led participatory action research" (see Cammarota & Fine, 2010), whereby youth are understood as those who hold important insights into their own lives and conditions of oppression. With this assumption as a starting point, Rhodes (2012) argues, for example, that art educators must "recognize students' current and potential agency, and create safe spaces to research and strive for social justice" (p. 320). She elaborates on a pedagogy of "critical civic praxis and artivism" that allows youth "to transform from oppressed victims into community-based artists, educational activists, and agents of change" (Rhoades, 2012, p. 320).

This emphasis on youth as community-based artists, educational activists, and agents of change tends to be less concerned with how young people might transition into adulthood or

even how they form social groups through their consumption and appropriation of popular visual culture. Instead, these papers are more concerned with understanding and articulating how art education might provide opportunities for youth to become critical and creative agents in the present. These studies are seeking critical expressions of art education that encourage young people to reflect on the conditions of their oppression and to make an emancipatory imprint on the world as youth.

## Youth as Image

Among the papers that I retrieved through this search, one paper dealt with a conceptualization of youth that differed from the other three themes discussed so far (transition, culture, and difference), although overlaps the most with youth as culture. In her book review of jan jagodzinski's *Youth Fantasies: The Perverse Landscape of the Media* (2004)*,* Smith-Shank (2005) discusses jagodzinkski's treatment of youth as a fantastical image that is being manufactured and projected onto consumers' bodies. In other words, appearing young is a fantasy that compels consumers to purchase health, beauty, fashion, and fitness products and services. The manufacture of youth as an image through the mass media serves capitalism because appearing young is a Sisyphean task. It is inevitable that we look less young as we age. As a result, this unyielding fantasy to appear young motivates ongoing, surface-oriented consumption because this goal can never be satisfied. Moreover, what it means to appear young is always on the move as new technologies such as Botox are introduced, which alter our understanding of what age looks like. This constant manufacturing and consumption contributes to the expansion of what jagodzinski (2004) has called "designer capitalism."

There are obvious overlaps between jagodzinksi's framing of youth as a commodified image and the other authors' framing of youth as culture. After all, Smith-Shank reviews the ways in which jagodzinski analyzes how childhood play has been transformed through designer capitalism into a period in which young people are constantly seeking enjoyment and pleasure through video games and internet participation. This analysis has been a key justification for visual culture art education, which maintains that art education has a strong role to play in helping youth understand how their culture is produced and commodified through mass media (see Duncum, 2002).

But it is worth singling out how framing youth as an image, rather than framing youth as a culture, has different ramifications for art education scholarship. Rather than attempting to understand the aesthetic preferences of youth within the context of popular visual culture, and then seeking to extend young people's understanding and technical skills from there through art education, framing youth as an image invites analysis of how the meanings of appearing youthful are being produced and changing within the context of capitalism. This framing of youth draws attention to how youth as an image functions ideologically in the interest of capital. This analysis arguably expands the boundaries of our field beyond the more traditional framing of art education scholarship, which is concerned with how and why we engage young people in the visual realm through curriculum and instruction. Approaching youth as an image broadens our scope as researchers and teachers to also focus on how youth is produced and consumed visually.

## Conclusion

This snapshot on youth in art education scholarship has pointed to the various ways in which youth is a productive concept for art education research and theory. I have pointed to four

emerging themes in my review of the literature: youth as transition, culture, difference, and image.

With these various meanings, the concept of youth can allow art education scholars to claim the useful and redeeming role that art education can play in the transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Youth can be understood as a somewhat distinctive and autonomous shared way of life, with its own aesthetic preferences formed in opposition to adult norms and expectations and through popular visual culture. Youth can draw attention to young people who are marginalized based on their appearance, class, or social identities, thus pointing to strategies in which art education cultivates critical forms of agency among youth in the present. Youth can also be understood as a commodified image that can be purchased in ways that serve the interests of capital.

Part of the rhetorical strength of youth is precisely the fact that the concept can deploy multiple meanings and thus strengthen various arguments about the role of art education in society. In other words, the concept of youth appears to do a lot of heavy-lifting—whether it is appealing to our desires for justice, heightening our fears about the future of society, reminding us of our moral obligations to the weak and the innocent, sparking our curiosities about new aesthetic forms, or mobilizing our disgust with the surface-level nature of designer capitalism.

Moving forward, it is inevitable that the concept of youth will be invoked and deployed in new ways, in ways that are fit for new times. But I hope this paper illustrates the importance for art education scholars to reflect on the ways in which youth is a reflexive concept. Whether youth is framed as transition, difference, culture, or image, the framing of youth produces and builds upon the arguments being made about the role of art education in the lives of youth and, more broadly, in society. Through considering this reflexivity of youth in their scholarship, art

education researchers can extend, refine, clarify, and deepen their analysis in ways that we do hope will have positive concrete effects on young people themselves.

In particular, this thematic analysis points to the fact that there is nothing natural, fixed, or inherently necessary about how art educators frame youth. Moreover, as teachers and researchers, we speak for and about youth based on positions that are available to us, which are always hitched to aspirations that we establish for the field and that have been established for us. Framing youth as a life stage in between childhood and adulthood is tied to narratives about our aspirations to promote healthy development, and positioning youth as non-normative or marginalized is tied to our aspirations to promote personal emancipation and social justice. These framings of youth often say as much, if not more, about us as they do young people and their expectations for art education, including, most notably, our expectation that art is redeeming, inclusive, emancipatory and so forth—when our own lives as artists, teachers, and researchers has surely proven to us that art is always more complicated than that.

While these stories we tell ourselves about art education, and the ways in which we position young people, do not determine or guarantee how young people will participate in our classrooms and/or our research, they do summon young people to participate with us in ways in ways that we have constructed as permissible and possible, if not desirable. Of course, they might frame their participation in opposition to these subject positions! But this analysis begs the question of what might become of art education if we allowed for new, or at least revised, articulations of what youth means, and, therefore how it might be lived, experienced, and defined? By beginning with this question, greater possibilities for the complexities of life, as young people are living it, might unfold among us.

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