Gaze Interrupted: Speaking Back to Stigma with Visual Research

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INTRODUCTION

Foucault's analysis of surveillance and the disciplinary force of the gaze has inspired a generation of scholars (ourselves included) to examine how ideas about power and subordination get under young people's skin and inside their hearts. The 'inspecting gaze' as he describes it, is expressed through institutionalized arrangements, practices and discourses through which our 'very eyesight [is] pressed into service as a mode of social control' (Wexler, 2000, 5). But there is another side to how young people see, look back, confront, and create new images. This chapter engages the resistive politics of what Mirzoeff (2011) calls, 'counter-visualities',[1] images created by and with youth that interrupt, reverse, or reimagine the gaze. Organized in three sections – each describing a distinct visual research study with youth and youth workers – our chapter offers examples and insights into particular visual methodologies and the 'elbow room' (Rosen,

2012) that art-making provides for moving within, reimagining and resisting stigmatizing labels.

The projects we discuss span twenty years of research, three American cities, diverse educational contexts and distinct participant populations. What draws our work together is a shared commitment to resistive politics, practices and research that interrupts hegemonic gazes. We have an enduring interest in educational settings where dominant gazes are enacted and resisted by various groups of marginalized and stigmatized learners and sometimes teachers. Across the three studies, we take up the critical visual methodology of 'collaborative seeing' as a reflexive and flexible frame for ethically engaging visual work. Collaborative seeing outlines a systematic approach to visual research, analyzing images at their sites of production, content, viewing and circulation, and a commitment to making sense of images with youth, over time and in multiple relational groupings. This approach is designed

to preserve the multiple meanings present in young people's images – meanings in flux, fleeting meanings toward transformation. As a practice, collaborative seeing appreciates the limits of what we as researchers can know about young people's images, experiences and life-worlds, and advocates youth (or participant) involvement at each stage, so that young people are able to be producers, interpreters, circulators, exhibitors and social analysts of their own and each other's representations (Luttrell, 2010). In the images and studies we discuss, the tools of collaborative seeing make space to contend with dominant narratives and hegemonic visualities, to resist them but also to dialogue with them, try them on, talk with and talk back. In each project, when given the opportunity to visually represent themselves, participants were able to scrutinize 'inspecting gazes' and to open up complex, layered, counter-hegemonic ways of seeing themselves and others.

1: THE ROOTS OF COLLABORATIVE SEEING

Twenty-five years ago, before visual research with young people had gained popularity, I (Wendy Luttrell) began an ethnographic study in an alternative public school program for pregnant teens in a south-eastern city of the United States, the Piedmont Program for Pregnant Teens (PPPT).[2] I was interested in what led the 'girls'[3] to attend this program, and how they understood and resisted the stigmatizing label of and racialized public debate about teenage pregnancy (Luttrell, 2003).

Stereotypic and flat representations of pregnant teenagers dominated the media. Within the public imaginary, a pregnant teenager was black, urban and poor. Associated with this image was a public narrative (which continues to this day) – she is more than likely herself the daughter of a teenage mother; she

is probably failing in school, has low self-esteem and no aspirations. Public rhetoric pathologized and stigmatized young women's sexuality and pregnancy, casting doubts on her motivations and abilities to mother in the first place. In short, the teenage pregnant self was told and seen as a 'problem'. Within schools, despite Title IX legislation protecting their rights, pregnant girls were objects/targets of institutional surveillance, punishment and shaming.

Knowing that the girls could not step outside the 'stigma wars' and inspecting gaze, that they had to engage these ways of being seen one way or another – whether rejecting, bending, revising, accepting, or defending themselves against dominant images – aroused my interest in critical visual methodologies. I wanted to provide an opportunity for them to not only *respond* to images that others held of them, but to *create* images of their own making and meaning.[4] So, in addition to immersing myself in traditional ethnographic observations in classrooms, eating lunch with the girls, sitting in on parent-teacher conferences, driving the girls on field trips, to their homes and clinic appointments, interviewing teachers and school officials, and reviewing school documents, I designed a series of arts-based activities (theatre and collage) as opportunities/venues for the girls to speak about their experiences, individually and in small groups.[5] These activity sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed so that I could systematically trace the questions the girls asked and free-associations they made about their own and each other's images (without my prompting), and record their insights and debates about the dilemmas of self-representation.

Working with images and art-making offered particular affordances, especially when trying to access experiences and evoke emotions that may be more easily 'seeable' than 'sayable'. As philosopher Suzanne Langer wrote, the arts 'objectify the life of a feeling' (1953: 374). This affective potency comes from the experiential capacity of

art, the ability to bring audiences in, arouse emotions, and galvanize alternative ways of seeing.

One of the art activities I designed was a self-portrait collage (accompanied by a written text), all of which were later collected into a collaborative handmade book.[6] This activity served two purposes. On the individual level, the self portrait activity allowed for the girls to place themselves in time and place, and to symbolize or evoke feelings about the pregnant body. After each girl finished her self-portrait, a group conversation was held in which I asked both the 'artist'/image-maker and her 'viewers' what they saw.[7] Engaging with each other's self-portraits made room for collective debate and insight, especially about the gap between how they imagined themselves and how they felt they were being objectified and stigmatized by others, as the following example illustrates.

Tara's Self-Portrait

Tara was the tallest and most full-bodied girl among her classmates. She spoke with a deep, commanding voice. She earned the respect of her classmates through her poetry writing, which she often shared in class sessions. When I met Tara she was living with her maternal aunt because she had recently lost her mother. Her father had died in a car accident when she was a child, and her mother had died of cancer. She spoke openly about her grief during the collage activity. Tara described what had happened when her aunt had learned of her pregnancy as she made her self-portrait:

> My aunt cried and cried when she found out I was pregnant. She just couldn't stop crying. My aunt is overly sensitive and emotional; my mother used to say that about her, that she was too soft for the world. Anyway, if my mother was alive I wouldn't be having the baby. You know, how when a family member dies and you get pregnant as a way to deal with it? My mother died in November and I got pregnant in November so I needed to keep the baby (*it is April*). I always wanted to have a baby,

but not so soon, and since my mother isn't alive I went ahead and decided to have it. You know she (*her mother*) told me not to cry at her funeral, so I didn't cry. I didn't cry except on my birthday. I can't cry.

> *Why can't you cry?* demanded Shadra. Tara avoided answering and said, My half-sister cries all the time and my half-brother, well he's crazy.

> *But you might feel better if you could cry*, offered Kaela.

> Yeah, that's what my counsellor says. But I need to get on with my life. I can't be crying all the time, and besides, there's always somebody worse off than you, you can't spend your life feeling sorry for yourself.

Tara selected a dark blue sheet of construction paper for her background, saying, 'This won't take long. I know just what to make to show how I feel.' From a piece of bright purplish-red paste paper, Tara cut a large round ball, which she pasted in the center of the page. 'Finished', she announced. 'I'll do the writing now and maybe a poem later.' Here is what she wrote:

> This picture represents the way I feel. I feel like a big, heavy ball that can't move. I can't pick up things – I can't do what I usually would do, like go out. People look at me as if they've never been feeling like this before. I have nothing to say to them as long as they say nothing to me. The reason for my purple color is because I feel independent. I'm going to have to be independent because nobody is going to do anything for me.

Tara's image embodies, among other things, her feelings about her changing body. Echoing the sentiments of most of the girls, she spoke as if her body was betraying her or was at least a separate entity from herself – big, heavy, motion-less, keeping her from being able to do what she used to do – 'like go out.'

Tara's piece and the conversation it sparked exemplifies the complexities of the 'counter-visualities' that the girls created. Tara's self-representation as a purple ball highlights the way she navigates the inspecting gaze, how she is tugged between the way she is objectified by others, her own self-perception, and the emotions that are mobilized as a result.

As Tara read her piece out loud she spoke with great force about being the object of others' judgments. She raised her voice as she said, 'People look at me as if they've never been feeling like this before.' Tara's them-me formulation ('I have nothing to say to them as long as they say nothing to me') suggests pain, defensiveness, confrontation and perhaps resilience in the face of public ridicule. In light of the conversation about her mother's death that surrounded the making of her portrait, I also see Tara's purple ball reflecting a bounded or toughened sense of self that she has had to develop to cope with unspeakable grief and hardship – her 'you can't be crying all the time' stance toward the world.

But it is the girls' reaction to Tara's picture that drew out the resistive possibilities as they reflect on their bodies as objects of discipline and surveillance. Shadra complimented Tara on her written text, 'It sounds just like you'. But, 'We aren't going to have a big purple circle sitting on a page in the middle of the book. It doesn't look finished', Shadra stated firmly. Ebony disagreed, 'Well, if that is how Tara feels, we can't expect her to change it. Besides, she's talking about feeling like everyone's looking at her, just like in the picture where we're just looking at the ball'. 'That's my picture – if you don't like it, you can change it yourself', Tara said defiantly, shaking her head and shrugging her shoulders.

A heated debate followed and the PPPT girls were split over what should be done. Given the disparaging image of pregnant teenagers in the larger world, what would viewers think about Tara from her picture? How might they judge her? Those who argued that viewers 'might make some wrong assumptions about Tara, like that she is lazy or doesn't care' finally convinced the others. Tara reluctantly agreed to let Shadra add some 'scenery' (Figure 33.1).

Tara's purple ball served as a counter-visuality – a twist on the stigmatized pregnant body that allowed the girls to see and
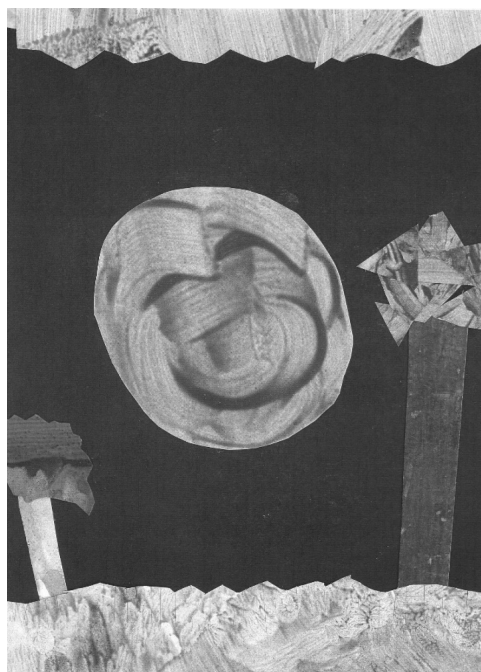

Figure 33.1   Tara's purple ball with 'scenery'

counter-act a dominant narrative about them. Through their image making, the girls were telling about their lives from multiple vantage points: *within* the images; *around* the images as they engaged in making them; and *during* audiencing sessions (when they viewed their own and each other's completed images). A resistive practice of seeing meant preserving all of the meanings and vantage points, including the tensions between how the girls imagined being seen and judged, how they saw themselves, and how they wished to be seen.

2: GIVING KIDS CAMERAS AND INTERSECTING GAZES

In 2003, I (Wendy Luttrell) began a research project with a similar goal of de-centering stigmatizing, blaming and deficit-oriented perspectives about young people growing up in working-class communities of

color, including immigrants. This project – Children Framing Childhood (CFC) and its follow-up Looking Back – put cameras in the hands of children attending a local public elementary school in Worcester, MA, serving a racially and ethnically diverse population. Thirty-six children, who represented the diversity of the school were given disposable cameras with 27 exposures and four days to photograph their everyday lives. After the pictures were developed, either I or a research assistant interviewed each child to talk about their images, why they had taken them and which photographs they wanted to show their peers, teachers and a larger public. Then we met in small groups with the children as they discussed each other's photos. Unlike other types of photo-voice/photo elicitation projects, this design not only allowed for multiple opportunities and different contexts for the children to attach meaning to their pictures, but also opened a window into particular ways that the children used their photographs to make identity claims, or vie for status or dignity.[8] This process was followed again when the children were 12, and then again at ages 16 and 18, except that as teenagers, they were given both still and video cameras. The research has generated an extensive audio-visual archive: 2,036 photographs; 65 hours of video- and audio-taped individual and small group interviews; and 18 video diaries produced by a sub-set of participants from ages 16 to 18.

I turned to using photography and video for several reasons, but especially because of my interest in the invisible and undervalued work associated with family, school and community life that sustains and reproduces inequality (DeVault, 2014). The mobility and portability of the camera offered entry into different emotional and geographical spaces of children's life-worlds – into homes, schools, and communities – a chance to see, if only in brief glimpses, through their eyes. Having already learned the power of images to convey what may be seeable, but

not easily sayable, I was anticipating that photography and video would allow special insight into the choreography of everyday life and the children's evolving identities. At the same time, I was acutely aware that, 'The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled', as visual theorist John Berger wrote (1972, p. 7). Thus, I designed a more systematic practice of tracing the complex life of these images – their production, content, viewing and circulation – that is *collaborative seeing* (Fontaine & Luttrell, 2015; Luttrell, 2010, 2016).[9]

Collaborative seeing combines an epistemological stance that complicates the notion of a singular 'child's' voice or 'eyesight'; a set of methodological protocols and ethical practices;[10] and an analytic process which aims to address the structural imbalances of power embedded in adult-child research relationships. Collaborative seeing is committed to preserving the multiplicity of meanings that are co-constructed between researcher and researched, and fueled by the questions: *Whose way of seeing is this? In what context? With what degree of power, authority or control? Toward what purpose? And with what consequences?*

Invited to take pictures of 'what matters most', at ages 10 and 12, the children's images centered largely on home life, with 668 photos of home, 432 of school and 149 of community.[11] In one sense the preponderance of images about family life (people, interiors and exteriors of homes, personal belongings and cherished objects) suggests that the children embraced the prescription that 'cameras go with family life', reflecting what is said to be the earliest use of photography – the establishment of the 'family album' (Sontag, 1977: 8, cited in Luttrell, 2010). But through the collaborative seeing process, a fuller sense of the young people's intentions emerged. They were using their cameras to claim pride in, and the value of, their homes and upbringings against their perception that others might judge them as lacking.

Kendra's Pictures

Two-thirds of Kendra's pictures at age ten are taken of her home, family members and personal belongings, which makes a powerful statement about what she chooses to be identified with, what she wishes to commemorate, and what might be beyond expressing in words. Kendra took two photographs of the exterior of her residence in Terrace Gardens, a public housing complex behind the school. In her individual interview, Kendra explained that she took these photographs because it is where she 'belongs' and 'feels respect'. These connections between belonging and respect are telling, signaling not only the concept but also the politics of belonging. In one sense Kendra's claim to her '*homeplace*' (bell hooks)[12] is an emotional (or even ontological) attachment; it is about feeling 'at home' in a 'safe' space (Ignatieff, 2001, cited in Yuval-Davis, 2011), comfortable, rooted, and among friends. In another sense, her *homeplace* is a badge of pride and dignity.[13] To appreciate this claim means acknowledging that the politics of belonging involve judgment about and in some cases policing of who and who does not belong. Such judgments are accomplished through the construction of stigmatizing boundaries and groupings of people, whether according to origin, 'race', place of birth, language, culture, religion, or shared value systems, to name a few.

Terrace Gardens, where Kendra and a third of the youth participants lived, is one of three public housing projects in Worcester designed after World War II for returning veterans. In 2003, when the project began, Terrace Gardens was in need of repair and had been targeted for capital improvements for several years, but because of cutbacks in state budgets none of the improvements had been completed. A concentration of wage-poor families of color, deteriorating facilities, an educational opportunity gap (the high school drop-out rate of residents is double the city average), and city-wide perceptions of the buildings as crime ridden, presents a potent, stigmatized image of life in Terrace Gardens. Children, like Kendra, who lived there, used their cameras to navigate this axis of social and racial difference (showing that they 'belong' and have dignity). Their photographs and the dialogue that takes place around them work both as tools to negotiate belonging and as counter-visualities, challenging the view of public housing as stigmatized.

During the small group session of six children looking through each other's photographs, Allison picks up the photograph Kendra has taken of stuffed animals, which she has neatly displayed on her bed (Figure 33.2). Allison exclaims that she, too, has Tigger. Kendra was grinning from ear to ear, as this was the photograph she had chosen as one of her five 'favorites' to share with her peers. Kendra said Allison was welcome to bring her Tigger to come play at her house after school. Allison said, 'But my mother won't let me go to Terrace Gardens. She says it isn't safe'. Kendra responded swiftly and matter-of-factly, 'That's not true; it is the safest place that I have lived', and grabbed the photograph from Allison's hand as if protecting her cherished possessions. Allison embraced this response just as quickly, saying, 'Good, then I will tell my mom that I can come to your house'.

Both girls' conversational agility to transcend the negative perception of Terrace Gardens is noteworthy. Allison's view, spoken through her mother's voice, is a commonly held perspective among white, Worcester residents. Allison's family lived in a 'three decker' building across from the school. 'Three decker' light-framed wooden apartment buildings are common throughout New England, built during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to house large numbers of immigrants coming to work in factory mills. Allison, who is white, lived with her family of five on one floor, her grandparents lived on another floor, and her mother's sister's family lived on the third floor. Allison's extended

Figure 33.2   Kendra's 'Tigger'

family had resided in the 'three decker' building for all of her life. Kendra's family, who are African American, had moved five times in search of affordable housing. Terrace Gardens was the third public housing unit in which her family of four had lived. This was one among many exchanges between the children where pictures of personal belongings – stuffed animals, games, toys, brand-name clothing – served as a means for them to both uphold and reject social differences between themselves and their peers (Buckingham, 2011; Pugh, 2009). Kendra refutes the construction of her home as unsafe, and Allison is prepared to challenge the stigmatizing boundaries. They also both avoid the sting and scorn of difference, with Tigger serving as the shared token of value and social glue of belonging.

This was not the only way that the children navigated social differences as they examined each other's photographs. One child living in Terrace Gardens expressed envy upon seeing her peer's home, 'I wish I lived here – whose house is this?' and others highlighted expensive objects like computers and televisions to counter the social stigma around public housing. In a culture that equates belonging with

possessions, and being cared for with specific kinds of housing, consumer items and experiences, then dignity is not available to all, and this means that some young people have to work harder than others to achieve it. Using the critical visual methodology of *collaborative seeing* to trace and lift up competing ways of seeing in different contexts also made the politics of belonging more visible. The young people's efforts to re-direct 'inspecting gazes' about their *homeplaces*, even if momentary and fleeting, evidenced their consciousness and complex reactions to being stigmatized.

A final example illustrates the grip of deficit and stigmatizing ways of seeing. Kendra handed her camera to her brother (with whom she and her sister share a bedroom) to take the picture shown in Figure 33.3. It is a photograph she selected as her favorite one to share with a public audience, perhaps because it provides the most intimate glimpse of how she dwells within her *homeplace*. Kendra's account of this photograph during her one-on-one interview featured her most preferred activity – 'reading. I love to read.' She refers to this photograph as another image where she 'feels respect'. She becomes animated

Figure 33.3   Kendra's bedroom

when telling the plot of the book. *Sitting Pretty, True Blue* is a complex story about the demands of a teenage social world organized around shared values and longings – about being athletic, cool, savvy, popular, older than your years (but not an adult), blond ('strawberry blond doesn't count'), and most importantly 'not poor'. It is a story of three teenage girl friends and the possible betrayal of the main character, Sam, who has made a new friend who is wealthy and 'very snobby'. The drama of *Sitting Pretty, True Blue* parallels the drama among the children in their conversations with each other about their photographs, circling around freighted relationships and desires to belong that uphold, reject and circumvent social differences. In the story, as in the way participants spoke of the images they took of their *homeplaces* and belongings, the characters expressed less concern about going without consumer goods or fancy experiences, than about being *shut out* of the social worlds in which young people travel.

Meanwhile, discussions of this image as it circulated among adults were anchored around a different set of readings. I have used

the audio-visual archive as a tool for teacher professional development and to train emerging researchers in visual methods. During these audiencing sessions, I invite teachers to look closely at selected images, taking time to notice where they fix their eyes and any questions that come up, before grouping the images into categories of their choosing. Only after this activity are viewers invited to see video clips of the children speaking about their images. Upon hearing what the children have to say, there is a moment of reckoning – surprise, self-satisfaction (for 'getting it right') or embarrassment and guilt for making 'wrong' assumptions. Through this process I have learned just how much the children's frameworks of belonging and care – a central finding of the project – go unseen by a predominantly white, middle-class audience.

Teachers looking at Kendra's bedroom image see 'disorder', 'clutter', 'a lot of stuff', in a 'small, cramped space'.[14] Still others notice the signs of close living – the mattresses on the floor, the bedding, the piling of boxes and storage units, and what looks like a blue curtain dividing the space, suspecting

this might be temporary housing or that the family has doubled-up in another household. Whereas a few viewers see 'comfort', most see signs of precarious living. Noting that the child holds a book in her hands, an indicator of 'literacy', many infer its value to the child photographer. Seeing that the television is on, some viewers wonder whether the television is an ever-present backdrop in the room (understood to be less than desirable). Others wonder whether the child can concentrate; or whether she is posing and not really reading but wishing to present herself as such because it is a school project.

The goal of collaborative seeing as a resistive practice for adults working with youth is to invite reflexivity – prompting viewers to notice their identifications with and projections onto the children's images. After hearing Kendra speak about this photograph as a setting where she feels respect, one teacher remarked, 'I just couldn't see past the messiness and the storehouse of stuff. Then again, I wouldn't want someone looking into my son's bedroom before I tidied it up, who knows what they might think.' Coming to terms with the force of hegemonic gazes means engaging adults in new ways of seeing that allow them to reflect on and question assumptions they hold about the young people with whom they work. Collaborative seeing offers an approach that is iterative and dialogic, meant to pry open curiosity rather than judgment. This resistive practice takes practice, for, whoever we are, our eyesight and understanding is always partial.

3: LESSONS FROM TEACHER-ACTIVISTS

My (Victoria Restler) project also engages adults to make, make sense of, and reimagine stigmatizing images of low-wealth youth of color.[15] In 2014, I worked with a group of ten New York City public high school 'teacher-activists',[16] all affiliated with a local social-justice teacher collective. I was interested in

how teachers were managing and making sense of new evaluation policies (which link teacher ratings to student standardized test scores and observations), and the increasingly visual dynamics of school accountability marked by the massive documentation of student and teacher data, the visualization (through graphs, charts and infographics) and publication of this data online and in the media, and video surveillance of schools, among other tactics. The neoliberal educational regime of power has narrowed the lenses through which students (and consequently their teachers) are seen. Contemporary policies and discourses visualize students and teachers through a series of circumscribed and highly racialized performance measures, standardized and overly instrumental definitions of children's achievement. And in the US context, these policies join with 'zero tolerance'[17] disciplinary protocols that criminalize a new range of student activity and conspire to intensify the inspecting gaze upon students of color. This project sought to pry open these narrow lenses through multimodal arts-based research and a collaborative seeing approach. In group workshops, individual interviews and digital spaces we engaged the practice of collaborative seeing to analyze and critique popular media, remix images on an online platform and create new representations of teaching work, students and school life.

Here I want to focus in on two teacher images that decenter the disciplinary gaze and reject dominant, deficit-based lenses on their students. The photo-collages were made by Michelle, a white teacher in her early thirties who favored vintage glasses and sweater vests. She was midway through her fifth year of teaching when she took the pictures, a near-veteran in a field where 50% of US public school teachers leave the profession in their first five years. Michelle teaches at an urban school I call Bronx Humanities, a place whose mission – to educate students who have struggled at traditional schools – she was passionate about. Called by different

names – 'second chance schools', 'transfer' or 'alternative schools', Bronx Humanities is one of ten institutions in the borough designed to support students who have dropped out of school, been pushed out, or struggled in other ways. The statistics on Bronx Humanities tell a story of intersecting challenges – 98% of the student body are youth of color, 85% receive free lunches (a marker of poverty in American schools), and only 20% of Humanities' students graduate in four years compared with a 69% city-wide average. Additionally, many of these students face the compounding stigma of having dropped out (Fine, 1991; Silva, 2016) and the condescending label of being 'over-age and under-credited' an official classification that frames students in deficit terms, broadcasting school failures. These are not, however, the stories that Michelle tells about her teaching work, her students or the school community. In the images and narratives that follow, Michelle eschews stereotypical framings, instead painting a picture of her students as social, fun, curious and reflective.

After a workshop where we had discussed teachers' invisible work, our group decided to find or make images about their own invisible and unrecognized labor and share them online (on a password-protected social media platform called VoiceThread). Michelle posted two photographs, initially without the yellow bands of collaged text, and at first, I wasn't quite sure what to make of them. The first image depicts a semi-circle of five girls sitting around a square of hard black plastic tables (Figure 33.4). The space has all the trappings of an urban American public high school – a row of clunky desktop computers, an empty media cart slightly askew at the far wall, border-trimmed bulletin boards posted on the closet doors, and a large white washbasin sink at the back of the room. However, the girls are not engaged in schoolwork. Instead, the table is dotted with backpacks, makeup bags and an assortment of small glass bottles of different colored fingernail polish. Of the five girls, three black and two Latina, only one meets the eye of the camera, smiling and holding up the newly painted turquoise nails of her left hand. The others are all busy painting, fingers curled around bottle-top brushes, looking down at hands resting on the table, thumbs angled just so.

When I saw the image on our shared social media site, my first thought, given our prior discussion of teachers' invisible work, was that the photo was meant to explain the time
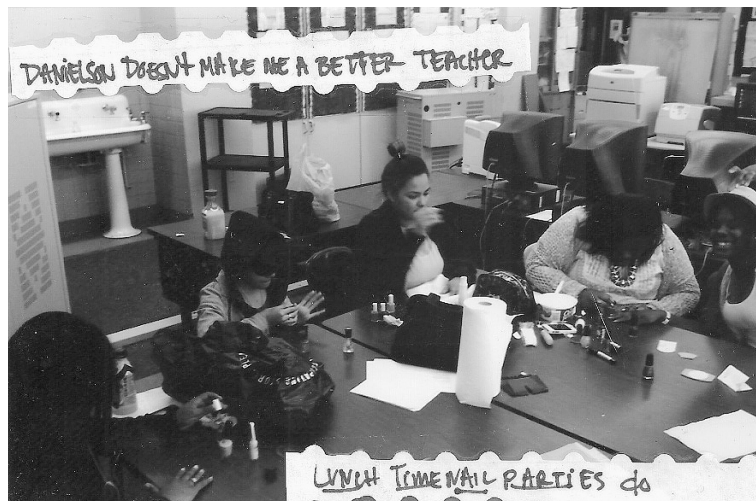

Figure 33.4   Nail parties

(and perhaps cost in the form of polish) that Michelle spends with her students outside of class. I could also see how this photograph might be interpreted as evidence against the young women, proof under the inspecting gaze of neoliberal evaluators that the girls are 'lazy' or 'don't care', as Tara's peers at the PPPT feared she might be judged. Perhaps especially at a 'second chance' school, I imagined outsiders might see these students as squandering 'the chance', as unserious girls who care more about their nails than their grades. When Michelle added in the text, 'Danielson [a shorthand for the new teacher evaluation policy] doesn't make me a better teacher, lunch time nail parties do', I saw the image anew as a kind of badge of teacher pride. Maybe this showed that she was a 'cool teacher', one that students wanted to spend time with during their lunch hour, and also that this part of her practice was not counted within 'Danielson', the extensive teacher observation rubric, a set of standards which frame the evaluator's eye and enforce the disciplinary gaze.

Other teachers saw it somewhat differently. When we viewed the photos during a group audiencing session, Phoebe talked about the educative role of this kind of time and attention.

> Nail parties are just one of those examples of an activity that kids actually sort of get something out of. Any social situation where they can interact on a human level that has nothing to do with – everything to do with the educational process, and nothing to do with data.

For Phoebe, nail parties – as representative of activities that foster social interaction – are not a supplement or add-on to teacher work and student learning, but rather form its core. Phoebe distinguishes between 'the educational process' and 'data', a kind of code word for quantitative high-stakes student and teacher evaluation. Her interpretation reframes the representation 'nail parties' as valuable teacher work, claiming the image as a form of resistance to narrow, official conceptions of what counts in teaching practice. For Phoebe,

this group of girls around the table, talking and painting nails is what teaching and learning looks like.

Michelle, for her part, had another take. I spoke about the image with her in a small group interview with Betty and Sarah, two other teachers from her school. Scanning through a stack of her photos and drawings, she held this one up and smiled. 'Yeah. I think this is about the fun things', she said. 'The community building you do. Not during class. You kind of don't even want the administration to come in and see it. You kind of don't want someone to notice you did it.' Betty chimed in, asking sarcastically, 'Right, like, where's the rubric?'[18] And Michelle responded, shaking her head, 'Not even. I just sort of want this special time with my kids.' Here Michelle draws our attention to the picture as evidence of 'special time', narrating the photograph as 'fun' and as a space for 'community building' with her students. In this way, she helps us (as the audience for her image) to see the faces and forms in the photograph as 'kids', as silly and youthful. Dumas and Nelson (2016) write about the state-sanctioned murders of Black American boys, Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice, and theorize the implausibility and impossibility of Black childhoods, mapping a pattern that persists since American slavery of the social adultification of Black children. Michelle's image and narrative serve as 'counter-visuality' to the dominant representations of these young women of color as already grown, or 'wise beyond their years' – characterizations that facilitate the cultural reading of their culpability as social problems, failing and dangerous (a danger that is necessarily not child-like). By saying that she doesn't 'even want the administration to come in and see it', she rejects the conception of her own teacher-work as something to be calculated or verified from the outside, while she refuses to treat (or see) the girls only as subjects to be disciplined. Michelle's disregard for this stigmatizing storyline and her narrative positioning of her 'kids' as youthful and fun, brings

viewers into other ways of seeing her teaching labor and her students – as joyful and as part of a caring classroom community.

Insights, Wherever they Occur

The second image in this series (Figure 33.5) depicts a close-up shot of desktop graffiti – a short phrase scrawled in ball-point pen on a mustardy laminate desk, set against a ground of speckled beige linoleum floor tile. Like the first image, this photograph draws on the unmistakable visual grammar of American public high schools – the desk with its oblong divot for pens, the stretched blue-green reflections of molded florescent light bouncing off the plasticky surfaces, and the desktop doodles just below the center of the frame. The writing on the desk reads, 'We are so hard headed when we in LOVE!' And Michelle's collaged captioning declares, 'Danielson doesn't make me a better teacher, desktop graffiti does'. Like the nail parties

Figure 33.5   Desktop graffiti

photo, this collage calls up ideas of teens behaving badly – using incorrect grammar, shrugging off school work, not paying attention in class—and subverts it, claiming these activities as evidence of learning, thoughtfulness and relational teacher work. These student marks record the defacing of school property, the kind of violation that might exact harsh punishment in the criminalized, 'zero tolerance' climate of school discipline. But in the case of Michelle's 'counter-visuality' they serve to document her own good teaching and the goodness of her Black and Brown students. When we spoke about the image, she said, 'I just love that instead of drawing obscene photos, somebody wrote "We are so hard headed when we are in love"'. Michelle looks past the act of pen on desk to the content of the phrase, comparing it to the kinds of graffiti we might expect teens to write – like curse words or obscene doodles. In contrast to these expectations, to the flattened representations of low-wealth teens in popular culture, this image and Michelle's narrative draw our eyes to the rich inner lives of teenagers. Further, as she claims in the caption, her attention to and support for this kind of reflective practice, serve as evidence of her own good teaching.

Some teachers read different messages into Michelle's collage. As Nisha said of the image with a wry smile, 'Well, I'm a prudish Indian chick, so I'm not a fan of desktop graffiti'. Rebecca too acknowledged the perspective of teachers or administrators who might be upset at a student damaging school materials, but nonetheless, appreciated the desktop drawing as a site of learning and reflection. She commented:

> Forget that it's destroying public property. I think as a teacher you kind of appreciate these insights, wherever they occur, so even if it's in the context of your kid carving out part of a desk that was just bought that year, it's still like, 'Okay'. Also you appreciate it because you understand what it feels like to go through it [falling in love], and the idea that bearing witness, even in sort of a removed way to that moment, is so much more important than this desk.

Rebecca saw the image as evidence of learning, suggesting that as a teacher she appreciates this kind of discovery in any form. She also engaged the image as a way of connecting with the student – coming together around the shared and very human experience of falling in love – what she described as 'the abandon that you feel when you really sort of fall for someone'. This image and the layered teacher interpretations contextualize what might be seen at first glance as the bad behavior of bad kids – 'badness' which is presumed and enforced unevenly along racial lines[19] – and reframes it as testimony to learning, thoughtfulness and good teaching. The counter-visuality of Michelle's collage and interpretation alongside Rebecca's analysis, sidesteps stigmatizing images of historically marginalized youth, while they upend the quantified, instrumentalized portrayals of students (and teachers) as a collection of scores and percentages.

Michelle's images and the narratives that she and fellow teacher-activists exchanged, tell stories about teacher identities, school work and urban youth that are not often promoted within educational discourse. As a white woman teaching at a predominantly Black and Latinx transfer school, Michelle rejects categorizations of her students as failing, at-risk or unreachable. Likewise, she refuses to locate herself in the popular narrative of martyr figure or white savior, further disrupting racialized regimes of power. Her representations subvert these interlocking stereotypes, twisting popular perceptions to present a slice of young people's social worlds, school communities and interior lives that is complex, multi-layered and full of humanity.

CONCLUSION: GAZE INTERRUPTED

We have argued that images and art-making offer particular affordances in qualitative research with and about youth. Making and talking about images can open up space for a different kind of entry into young people's social and emotional worlds, draw researchers' eyes to other frames of view, or make visual and palpable things that are difficult to express in words alone. But it's not enough to roll out the drawing paper or simply 'give kids cameras'. Through the practice of collaborative seeing, we advocate for visual research that lifts up the invisible elements of the inspecting gaze for investigation, revision and refusal.

As critical as youth participation is in making and making sense of images by and about them, we also wish to underscore the value of bringing youth workers, teachers and other adult participants and perspectives into youth spaces of resistive practice. The disciplinary gaze that Foucault describes is dialectical, taking shape in a series of multi-directional interactions between looker, looked-at and selves. It is important to probe this gaze from different vantage points to better understand the back and forth systems of surveillance, catalyze reflexivity and further challenge stigmatizing images of young people. As Wendy shows in the case of Kendra's bedroom photograph, sharing young people's words and images with teachers can prompt them to take note of and challenge the assumptions they hold about their students' *homeplaces* and values. And as Victoria illustrates with Michelle's photo-collages, teachers' angles of vision on their students are not uniform or monolithic. Michelle's images disrupt popular narratives about teacher-student relationships – especially those between white teachers and teens of color in urban environments – and serve as testament to the playful, healing, justice-minded work that teacher-activists and youth workers carry out (Ginwright, 2016). With this chapter we have shown through our own work how the practice of collaborative seeing can take shape across a range of informal and educational settings and powerfully engage both youth and adult populations. We hope this flexible frame for partnering with diverse groups

in the making and interpretation of visual research serves the aims of youth workers and researchers working to disrupt stigmatizing policies, practices and public visual and media discourse. The project of decentering deficit-oriented perspectives about historically-marginalized youth of color, immigrant youth, pregnant teens and high school dropouts is a formidable one. We must engage teachers, caregivers, researchers, informal educators and youth workers, alongside youth themselves, to promote reflexivity in the service of disrupting, circumventing and countering the gaze.

Notes

1   Mirzoeff takes up the relations of power and sight through his theories of visuality and counter-visuality. He defines visuality as the means by which authority is sutured to power. Visuality is the way that authority envisions itself and gains and maintains power by constructing and legitimating its own worldview as natural. Counter-visuality therefore, is a kind of rebuff, a refusal to accept visuality's claims to truth, neutrality and authority. We use the term 'counter-visuality' with these meanings in mind to signify a visual companion to the idea of the counter-narrative, images that twist, reject and reframe dominant visualities.

2   All names are pseudonyms.

3   I use the term girls because this is how they referenced themselves and preferred to be called.

4   And for me to re-present what I learned about this process meant that I too had to wrestle with how these hegemonic depictions shaped what I paid attention to and how I interpreted the girls' selves, identities and experiences.

5   See Luttrell (2003) for discussion of these and how I selected the particular forms of visual representation.

6   Robert Shreefter, a book artist, inspired this activity and taught the girls how to make hand-made paste-paper to use in their self-portrait collages and how to bind the colored Xerox-copies of each self-portrait into a collaborative book form. See Lutrell (2003) for more details.

7   See Luttrell (2003) for the set of questions I asked of each girl and of the viewers (e.g. what do you notice about this picture; what's going on in it; and so forth), and how the girls came to mimic this process after a while.

8   Luttrell (2010, 2016) has written elsewhere about the affordances and limitations of 'giving kids cameras' research. See Clark-Ibanez (2004), Burke (2005), Clark (1999) Luttrell and Chalfen (2010), Mitchell (2011), Orellana (1999), Yates (2010), Kaplan (2013) and Thompson (2008) for examples.

9   Collaborative seeing builds on Rose's (2007) concept of intertextual analysis.

10   See Luttrell (2010) for a discussion of ethical procedures, including the importance of on-going rather than one-off consent when working with images.

11   See Luttrell (2010) for the prompts for picture taking that were used at ages 10 and 12.

12   *Homeplace* is a term coined by bell hooks to acknowledge home not as property, but as places where truly all that matters in life take place – the warmth and comfort of shelter; the feeding of our bodies; the nourishing of our souls' (1990: 383).

13   Feeling 'at home' isn't necessarily a positive feeling, as Yuval-Davis notes, and can also lead to a sense of anger, resentment, shame and indignation (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 10).

14   These are direct quotes from viewers across a range of teacher professional development workshops and teacher-education courses.

15   In this piece we use labels such as 'low wealth', 'historically marginalized', and 'poor and working class' to describe young people who have limited financial resources. And yet, in conducting research that seeks to disrupt the stigma these youth face, we realize that these terms are themselves stigmatizing. A primary objective of this piece is to write against labels and offer new, more complex angles of vision onto the images and worlds of these young people. We need new, better words for describing and contextualizing interlocking systems of prejudice, racism and poverty.

16   I use the term 'teacher-activist' following Ginwright (2016) to signal the blurred boundaries between the participants' work as both teachers and activists.

17   The phrase 'zero tolerance' refers to a movement in school discipline beginning in the late 1980s in the United States that mandates specific and harsh punishments for the violation of school rules, including minor infractions like 'insubordination'. The rigidity of these policies, elevated penalties and increasing involvement of law enforcement carried out across a biased system that targets youth of color, has contributed to the formation of a 'school-to-prison pipeline' that pushes students out of school and into the criminal justice system.

18 Betty's use of the term 'rubric' references the Danielson Framework, which consisted in 2014 of a 20+-page checklist of educator skills and practices that were used to observe and evaluate teachers.

19 The disproportionate rates of disciplinary punishment of Black and Latino boys have been well documented (Ferguson, 2000; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Krueger, 2009; Wallace et al., 2008; Wald & Losen, 2003). In New York City during the 2013–14 school year, out of the 53,504 total school suspensions, only 6.7% were given to white students; while out of the 393 arrests, a mere 5.3% were white set against a figure of 14% total Department of Education enrollment (NYCLU, 2014).

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