An Important Part of Me:
A Dialogue About Difference

SOFIA LICO
WENDY LUTTRELL
Graduate Center of the City University of New York

This article is an experiment in writing about and across differences; it seeks to open up dialogue between adults and young people in childhood and youth studies research. The coauthors, Sofia[1] and Wendy, met through Wendy's longitudinal research project, which explores the roles that gender, race, and immigrant status play in how young people represent themselves and their social worlds. In this article, Sofia and Wendy exchange their understandings of Sofia's immigration experiences, and how her identity has changed from age ten to fifteen as she has navigated her bicultural and bilingual worlds.

Introductions

Sofia

I came to the United States from Albania in 2000, at the age of four, with my parents and sister. All of my cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents are still in Albania. In sixth grade I took this photograph in answer to the question, "What matters to you most?"

Here's what I said about my photograph then:

> I took a picture of the Albanian flag because it represents our country. It is an important part of me because it represents my culture, and it is like sort of being different from everyone else, and I like that because I don't really want to be the same as everyone else.

I was asked how my culture makes me different, and I said, "Because of the way I look or talk or the way I think of things."

Now I am fifteen, and there are ways that I have changed, but at my core I still appreciate being from Albania and being different. Knowing another language and being from some place not many people in my school are from

Sofia, age 11

does make me stand out. In this paper I reflect on what makes me different, how I have changed, and what I have learned while researching and writing with Wendy.

Wendy

I met Sofia in 2005 through my longitudinal research project, *Children Framing Childhoods.*[2] She was ten years old—a seemingly shy fifth-grader who spoke in a whispering, lyrical voice. As with several other children in the project, I learned about Sofia's journey to the United States as she explained photographs she took of school, family, and community life. The following year, I was struck by how Sofia's voice had grown stronger; I no longer had to strain to hear her. Almost a third of the photographs she took that year referenced her home country, Albania, and she regaled the interviewer with tenderhearted stories about growing up there and about the family members she missed. In her sixth-grade exit interview, I asked Sofia how she would describe herself. I smiled when she said, "forgetful," and asked if there was anything else. "I'm proud of my culture," she answered, and she then described the differences between life in Albania and life in the United States.

> Most of the people from my culture are orthodox, so we do things the old-fashioned way, really. We don't use a lot of technology. People mostly walk instead of driving cars. And, instead of texting, they just talk. They don't really use a phone as much as Americans do.

As I listened to Sofia shift from "we" to "they" when referring to Albanians, while not yet explicitly aligning herself with Americans, I wondered aloud, "So, does that mean you would describe yourself as Albanian or American?" "Well, half and half, really," she replied.

After our interview, I lingered over this exchange, realizing that my question was wrongheaded. Despite my desire to learn how Sofia understood herself and her experiences of immigration, my question was more or less a request for her to place herself into fixed identity categories. My question reflected the very terms of debate that I sought to trouble through my research. I had set out to explore how *she* was making sense of and navigating her way between two cultural contexts, and instead I was asking her to claim a cultural affiliation and identification.[3]

I should have known better, especially as a scholar of critical childhood studies who seeks to recognize and better understand young people in their own

right—not simply as passive recipients of adult socialization or acculturation but as active meaning makers. In this field of research, the adult researcher strives to work *with* rather than *on* or *about* children and youth.[4] But, in my experience, child-centered research is far harder to do in practice than in theory, especially when it comes to jointly analyzing data and writing up the lessons learned. Writing this paper *with* Sofia about how she and I understand her changing identity is an effort to better meld the theory and practice of critical childhood studies.

Through *Children Framing Childhoods*, I had the privilege of working with a diverse group of thirty-four ten-year-old children; now in my *Looking Back* project, I have the rare opportunity of following up with twenty-six of them who are now high school students. As I have reconnected with the young people—revisiting photographs they took as children and speaking about how their lives have changed—new layers of meaning regarding the relationships between their self-representations and identities have emerged. This was definitely true for Sofia, who had so much to say about her childhood past in light of her teenage present—including her declaration that she had become an "all-out American teenager."

Sofia and Wendy

This joint paper is about how Sofia has changed as a person, not only because she has grown older but also because she has done so at the intersection of two languages and cultures. It is an experiment in writing across our respective differences (generational, educational, and cultural, to name a few) while writing about "difference" as it relates to Sofia's understanding of her identity over time.

Our collaboration was initially sparked by the *Harvard Educational Review* call for proposals on the topic of immigration. The editors were interested in "bringing multiple voices and perspectives of researchers, practitioners, families, and students in conversation." Wendy asked Sofia if she wanted to contribute to such an issue. We read through the materials, and Sofia suggested that we write a piece together rather than Sofia submitting her "story" and Wendy submitting a "research article." Neither of us anticipated just how much of a challenge this would be and how long it would take.

To start, Sofia selected some photographs she had taken during the fifth and sixth grades that she believed best represented herself at the time. Then she wrote about how she thought she had changed. Wendy reread what Sofia had said about her photographs when she first took them and then compared this with what Sofia said now, at age fifteen. We each wrote up our thoughts and exchanged our respective sections. We then met after school one day to have a discussion about our reactions to each other's writing. Forty minutes flew by quickly, and we learned that the building was closing early, so we climbed into Wendy's red Volvo station wagon to continue our conversation. We didn't finish. This proved to be the first of several sessions in which we

drafted, organized, reorganized, and edited the piece. But it was during that first meeting in the Volvo that we began to discuss how we define ourselves in dialogue with different "voices"—the meanings, expectations, and orientations of others. This would become central to our collaborative analysis, and we share the concept in more detail below, following a brief description of the overarching research project design.

Children Framing Childhoods and Looking Back

Wendy

I designed the *Children Framing Childhoods* and *Looking Back* projects to feature young people's own knowledge and experiences of immigration, school-family relationships, and identities. I was interested in analyzing the young people's photography and video-making as both a "window on their worlds" and a "window on their identities" (Yates, 2010, p. 283). As a longtime ethnographic researcher, I was curious to see what specific activities, relationships, and values would be made visible through the young people's self-representations, and I wanted to consider what role, if any, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and immigrant status might play in the young people's self-representations over time. My main focus was to trace the ways that the youth would use their photographs and videos to accomplish certain goals—for example, to negotiate cultural belonging, to seek social status or solidarity with others, to memorialize the past, or to present an aspirational self.

The project was initiated in 2003 at a school in Worcester, Massachusetts.[5] Worcester has been home to diverse and shifting groups of immigrants, and the school reflects this historic pattern. It serves immigrant families from a range of nations including Albania, Iran, Kenya, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Vietnam. Of the 370 students enrolled when the research began, 92 percent were eligible for free and reduced school lunch; 37 percent were White, 10 percent were Black, 18 percent were Asian, and 35 percent were Hispanic.[6]

I adapted principles of Photovoice, a method of inquiry that puts cameras in the hands of people who have been misrepresented and who have been left out of policy decision making about matters that concern their daily lives (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997) and combined this with photo-elicitation interviews (PEI) as a means of learning more about the intentions, meanings, and contexts that shaped the young people's picture taking.[7]

The principal, technology teacher, and fifth-grade teachers at the school selected participants for the study.[8] The students were given disposable analog cameras with twenty-seven exposures, and four days in which to photograph their school, families, and life in their community. Beyond very basic instructions about using the camera and a discussion (with role playing) about the ethics of picture taking—focusing on issues of intrusion, embarrassment, and consent—participants were left to their own devices with as little adult guid-

ance as possible.[9] They were asked to "imagine you have a cousin your age that is moving to town and coming to your school. Take pictures of the school, your family, and your community that will help him/her know what to expect."

Within a week of having taken their photographs, the children were interviewed about their images. This was the first of multiple *audiencing* opportunities (Luttrell, 2010) that they had to reflect on the images they took, to talk about what was important about their pictures, and to speak about whether there were any photographs they wished they could have taken, but didn't or couldn't. They were asked to select five photographs that best represented themselves and that they wished to make public. These interviews were audio- and video-recorded and transcribed.

In a second audiencing session, the children took part in a small focus group of participating children to discuss what they noticed about each other's five favorite photographs. These conversations were also recorded so that members of the research team could later listen to how the children spoke to each other about social and cultural differences and how they used categories—including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and class—to describe themselves and others. About a month later, the children were shown an edited video clip of themselves talking about their five favorite photographs. The children had multiple reactions to seeing themselves on video—covering their eyes at points, laughing, and asking, "Do I really sound like that?" Finally, the children met to curate a public exhibition of their photographs and videos. Designing and displaying their own and each other's work for a broad audience generated an altogether different kind of dialogue among the children about what makes a "good" exhibition picture and what information about their lives they wished to convey. The purpose of these multiple audiencing sessions was threefold: (1) to be able to trace how the young people *used* their images for different purposes across all these different contexts; (2) to afford them maximum editorial authority over which pictures would be used to represent them to a public audience; and (3) to maximize their assent in the research process (Luttrell, 2010; Luttrell, Restler, & Fontaine, forthcoming).

In sixth grade, the participants were asked if they wished to continue in the project.[10] All agreed, except for two participants who had moved to other schools and therefore could not continue. This time the children were asked to take pictures of the people, places, and things that "mattered most" to them.

In this past year, 2010–2011, I contacted twenty-four of the original thirty-four participants and asked them to reflect on their childhoods by looking back on their fifth- and sixth-grade photographs. I met with participants at their various high schools, and we discussed what had most changed in their lives.[11] Twenty-two participants then agreed to continue by taking photographs and later videos to document their contemporary life-worlds. Mirroring the early procedures, multiple audiencing sessions of the photographs and videos were held—this time making use of digital media as well as face-to-face screenings.

All of this visual material is being organized into an online anthology of the young people's self-representations that will be used in teacher professional development in order to challenge flat and stereotypical views of children growing up in diverse, low-income communities and to teach visual research methodologies.

Sofia

I was really surprised when Wendy contacted me. I couldn't believe she found me and returned like she had promised. We looked at all fifty-four of my photographs. I remembered some of them, but others made me wonder, "What was I thinking?"

I knew very little about the project when I was first selected. Then I really got into it and learned how to use a camera. I thought the images I took would be a direct way to show people about me. To be honest, I don't remember what I wanted to show people back in fifth and sixth grade. But this time I knew I wanted to display my friends and what I do outside of school because these are the important parts of me. What I do outside of school shows my interests, and my friendships are part of how I am seen by others, and how I am labeled.

I now realize how pictures can come across so differently, and people don't always see what I want to show them. I was looking at my photographs from my point of view, but other people wanted to tell me what they saw in my pictures. For example, I had a friend take a picture of two friends and me using our bodies to spell out a word. Others looking at the photo thought it was just meant to be a silly picture. But I meant it to show my friendships with two girls on the cross-country team. This activity was our way of encouraging each other and keeping each other distracted from thinking that we might stop running. It was also our way of bringing spirit to the team.

Sharing Theories of Identity

Wendy

When we first met to talk about writing this piece, Sofia said the following:

> I am an immigrant, but it is weird to refer to yourself like that because it seems like people use that as such a negative word. That's why I'm not an immigrant. I'm a foreigner. I say "foreigner" because it doesn't sound as bad. A foreigner sounds classy, whereas as an immigrant, is like, "you are not allowed here, you don't belong in this country, blah, blah, blah." A foreigner is like, you come from somewhere else. That's it.

When I listened to Sofia refuse the label of immigrant, I was taken with the urgency in her voice. She didn't just say the words above, she *dramatized* them, changing the register of her voice and using direct speech—"you are not allowed here, you don't belong in this country"—as if she was being rep-

rimanded by a U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service agent. I heard Sofia's words as being in dialogue with the political controversy about immigration in the United States, both taking up and rejecting the voice of those with power to define her citizenship status. That she chose to name herself a "foreigner" and not an "immigrant" was striking to me. First and foremost, it highlighted the ever present, demanding task of answering to others' negative judgments that so many young people must contend with. And Sofia's choice of responses indicated the powerful role that race, class, and citizenship status play in how she answered back. To defend her claim to belonging in this country, Sofia was using a label that she understood to add value and distinction ("classiness") to her identity. Whether she was aware of it or not, Sofia could use this label because of her relative advantage within the hierarchical order of immigrant status—as documented, from eastern Europe, and White. Yet, the language of "foreignness" has its own history, and among some communities of speakers, calling someone a "foreigner" is used to exclude, if not "other," them. I assumed Sofia was unfamiliar with this meaning of "foreigner" and remember wondering from what contexts and communities of speakers she was borrowing the term—friends, family members, school? Sofia's search to position herself within larger discourses about immigration, social differences, and distinctions put me in the mind of Mikhail Bakhtin (1982), the influential Russian literary theorist whose work explores how we define ourselves in response to multiple "voices," or external perspectives that surround us.[12] Identifying the voices woven into Sofia's descriptions of being different and how these have changed over time became my way of engaging and interpreting what she had to say about her photographs.

As our first meeting approached, when we would share what we had written, I remember wondering how Sofia would receive my interpretations and what kind of dialogue it would spark. As we sat in the car, me in the driver's seat and Sofia in the passenger's seat (both literally and figuratively speaking), I noticed her eyes fix on the reference to Bakhtin. She turned and asked me about him and to explain his theory. Feeling self-conscious, I began my explanation and worried that it would not make sense to her.

I explained how, according to Bakhtin (1982), we spend our lives trying to answer the question, "Who am I?" Our answer to this question is influenced by many things outside of our control, including words that other people use and ideas that they have about us that don't necessarily fit how we see ourselves or want to be seen. Like when you say you are a foreigner, not an immigrant, you are recognizing that there are negative meanings and feelings that surround that label. To formulate your own label you have to reference all the many different perspectives that you've heard expressed in the news, at school, with friends, and at home where you have heard immigration being discussed.

Our identities are formed by multiple and sometimes competing images and voices about who we are, how we should look and feel, what we should want for ourselves, who we should associate with, and so forth. When we strive

to make our own meanings and take our own actions, we engage with other's words, intentions, ideas, and political and religious views. Bakhtin calls this "ideological becoming." Still, these perspectives are not all equal in their effect on us. Some of them, what Bakhtin calls "authoritative discourses" have more power, like laws about who can marry whom, or in school's standardized measures of intelligence or ability that shape our education and view of ourselves as smart (or not). Some discourses are so subtle we don't even think twice about them, like when we first meet a baby and we ask if it is a boy or a girl because it orients our ways of perceiving and even behaving with the child. There are so many ways that we are addressed by and have to answer back to the world around us and when we answer back, we reference and draw upon the images, ideas, and words that surround us, especially those we are most exposed to. We listen to and redescribe in our own words, often without consciously knowing it, the voices of actual people we know, whether they are our friends, or authority figures, or family members. And we also reference the cultural images and voices that speak to us, like advertisements, movies, magazines, and music lyrics. These are the resources we use to help us answer the ever-present question, who am I?

Sofia, nodding her head as if in agreement, said:

> It's so true, and definitely music lyrics, they have a huge impact on life, especially when you are a teenager. Like if you have one of those really bad days, someone has been rude to you or you have one of those days when you feel bad and you don't know why. If you feel like your friends are changing and leaving you, or anything from being happy to being totally depressed, there's a song out there for that. So music helps, so much.

And so it happened that Bakhtin's concept of multiple voices that populate inner dialogues about ourselves in relation to others became something of a shared vocabulary between us. We agreed to try to maximize our own dialogues, and to reference and redescribe all the many texts and voices in the project —including Sofia's photographic images, interviews, and writings as well as Wendy's research and interview questions, writings, and understandings of educational and sociological literature. We would try to preserve our distinctive voices (including Sofia's ten-to-twelve-year-old and her current fifteen-year-old voices) and allow space for readers to consider for themselves where and from what position they enter our dialogue about immigration, education, identity, and personal change.[13]

"The Value of Where I'm From"

Sofia

In sixth grade I took this picture of my hometown. Here is what I said about it at the time:

Sofia, age 11

If it wasn't for my mom entering the lottery [we wouldn't be here], because in Albania we have to win the lottery to apply for a green card and a passport. My mom did that, and she won it. She and my dad decided to come here for a better life because Albania was having a hard time then. They didn't have that much money and people were poor, and they didn't know where to go and what to do. My parents thought it would be a better life for me and my sister to come here, and I am really grateful for them doing that. When I was really little I remember the moment when I would see the people in Albania, they would be walking around with no shoes, ripped pants and sweatshirts, and I would feel sorry for them. And it would make me just want to cry because they kicked people out of their jobs. My mom owned a bakery, and they told her that she had to leave because they had to sell it to someone else. And I was really upset about that. I was mad because I used to love going to that bakery and just smelling the warm air; it was so nice. It was my place to relax, and I loved it there.

I also took a series of pictures of Albania that were on my computer. They were pictures of sights in Albania that you can visit. I told the interviewer, "I wanted to show that Albania is a beautiful and interesting place to go to. It's nice to visit there once in a while."

Looking back, I think that being born in a different country and spending the first four years of my life there has had a greater effect on me than I realized. I have seen what life is like in a country that is not all high and mighty. Being born in Albania and having visited a couple of times makes me realize how much Americans take for granted. I'm not just talking about having a car or a nice TV, but rather the simple things, such as having hot water to bathe with. Before actually having to heat water on a stove so I could shower during my visits to Albania, I always expected to have hot water. It was during these trips that I realized that I expect too much. When I was younger, I didn't know that I was taking things for granted. Now I know what I should be grateful for. And I have realized that I have been given many great opportunities, more than I would have if I were in Albania.

Wendy

When Sofia tells her story at age eleven about coming to America, I hear more than the standard script about immigration as a search for opportunity and a

better life. I also hear Sofia's distress and compassion about the poverty she witnessed and awareness that she and her family could have suffered hardship and economic injustice were it not for her mother's luck of the draw. Her sensory memories of warm air and relaxation speak of her attachment to her home place that continues to this day. Her desire to show her hometown as beautiful and interesting is restated, in slightly different terms, when she reviews the photograph again at age fifteen and remarks, "Ah, my hometown is so pretty. I wouldn't want to live there; I'm used to America. But it's really nice there. I wanted people to see that. There is a horrible economy there, but to visit is pretty fine." It would seem that the issue for Sofia is not, "Where do I belong?" ["I'm used to America"], but that "there is value in where I am from," as if she is answering back to those who might not hold her county in high esteem. As Sofia reflects on her migration to America (a "high and mighty" country), she speaks in a moral voice about the importance of gratitude and not taking things for granted rather than, for example, a consumer voice about all that America affords her.

I hear Sofia negotiating her identity in skillful ways—speaking around the edges of American and Albanian identity categories and instead focusing on the *conditions* and *status* of each country and what she finds of value in both. In a context of having to defend one's immigrant status—where Sofia is aware that others could negatively judge her—it strikes me that she is authoring an alternative, "transnational" (Smith, 2006) identity as someone who has traveled between two countries. And what makes her "different" from Americans is her "take-nothing-for-granted" attitude and sense of gratitude.

As another example, in fifth grade Sofia took a photograph of clothes in her closet and said, "Some people don't even have one piece of clothing and I have all of these, so I'm really grateful for that." At fifteen, she distinguishes herself from others who might not realize what is afforded them, and this sensibility seems anchored in her transnational experience. "My experiences overseas showed me something that not most people get. I know how much we do take for granted here, and anytime I start to take things for granted, I just think back to being in Albania."

Her thinking back to being in Albania was catalyzed by photos of family she took in the sixth grade as traces of a past time of family unity and participation in extended webs of care.

> My grandpa, when my mom and dad were at work, he used to be the one to take care of me, and I love him for that. When I was a little child, I remember, we were walking out in the park one day and we took little lilies. And, I remember that we used to go on the roof to put pink lilies in water, and leave them there for about two hours. And then we would use that juice for pink lemonade. It would be so good.

In seeing this photograph again, Sofia said she still craves the taste of that pink lemonade—a taste that cannot be found anywhere here in America. And in

Sofia, age 11

considering whether there are any opportunities she has lost by migrating to the United States, she wrote, "Being here makes it hard for me to have a family, or to be close to them. So I have learned to be close to my friends. After all, beside my father, mother and sister, my friends are all I have here in America."

Speaking Different Languages and Cultures

Sofia

To my parents, the fact that I was only four when I left Albania is no excuse for not knowing the culture or language. Although I now see that knowing a second language is an advantage, when I first moved here it felt more like a burden. I had to learn English while only being able to talk Albanian at home. That was a lot of pressure to put on a five-year-old child. Yet I broke through it, learned English, and can still speak Albanian fluently. If I wasn't forced to speak Albanian at home for years, chances are I would have forgotten most of it. I have grown up around American culture, so it's like second nature to me, whereas my born culture is something I have to work at knowing.

Wendy

That Sofia has to "work at knowing" her "born culture" speaks back to contemporary educational discourses that lump all immigrant youth together under labels such as "English language learners" (ELLS) or as "Limited English proficient" (LEPs). Such labels highlight only one side of young people's emergent bilingual and bicultural experiences, and tend to focus more on what these speakers don't have than on their linguistic strengths. The demands placed on immigrant youth growing up in a bilingual world, as well as the abilities they develop to communicate across their worlds, could be better rec-

ognized and appreciated by educators as researchers García (2009, 2010) and Orellana (2009) have argued. Whether it is the work of translating for adult family members, serving as language brokers and mediators, or creating new meanings by using diverse linguistic repertoires, there is much to be gained from language practices of immigrant youth.

Regrettably, it is the salience of "judging" voices that echoes through Sofia's description of her language experiences at school. When she first arrived from Albania, she was the subject of torment. It was a short period of duress—two months, as she remembered it in fifth grade.

> *S:* People didn't really know that I couldn't speak English. So, when they would talk to me I wouldn't answer back. I didn't understand what they were saying. So, they thought I was rude. And, I had really short hair, so some people used to make fun of me and call me a boy.
>
> *W:* How did you feel?
>
> *S:* I felt sad because people shouldn't judge other people by how they look on the outside, but on how they are on the inside, how their attitude is, how they act, who they are.

At the end of sixth grade, Sofia returned to this theme when explaining her experiences of being a newcomer to the school.

> I noticed people making judgments about other people without even knowing them, which they still do today, which I don't think is right. I first get to know a person, and then if I don't like them, I leave them alone. And, I don't really make judgments about them.

In both examples, I am struck by how Sofia is making sense of her experience in moral terms, and is arguing for a more inclusive ways of interacting with others around difference. Yet, this dimension of bilingual and bicultural self and identity formation is given so little attention.

Sofia

Those days of being made fun of are mostly a blur. I couldn't speak with them. I didn't know how. But they were in elementary school, and they didn't exactly grasp the concept that I didn't know how. So, "okay, then, don't be my friend." It's funny, because back then, in elementary school, everybody was from America, from Worcester, lived their whole lives there, and I come here to high school where it is more mixed.[14] So here I'm not so much different because people are from all over the place, like Central America, South America. And there are five people here from Albania, so I don't feel so different anymore. Everybody speaks different languages—Spanish, Vietnamese. And then there's English, and then there's Albanian. It feels good to be different because this small group of people can understand what you say.

Wendy

It is clear to me that Sofia's dialogue with difference is embedded in distinct school worlds and in peer group relationships. Her identity as an Albanian and English speaker also encompasses multiple emotional layers, including anxiety as well as comfort. She has felt a "burden," "pressure," and negative judgment as a child and is now feeling her language and cultural identity is a source of affiliation with other Albanian students that will serve her well in the future. Again, what strikes me is her capacity to hold shifting perspectives on her difference at the same time. She is at once "not so different" because "everybody speaks different languages," and yet at the same time, her "difference" feels "good."

All-Out American Teenager

Sofia

Of all the photographs we looked at together, we spent the longest time on this picture. I laughed when I saw it and remembered it was one of the first gifts I received after arriving in America. I said:

> Oh my god. I do not have this, or it is broken now. The pink on the radio and all the book covers really pops out in this picture and shows how I was such a girl. I was really into Barbie doll things. And my parents always bought me something pink. And when I got to sixth grade I got so tired of it because I was growing up and it's like, "I need my own style now!" So I changed my love to purple.

Sofia, age 11

I have changed so much since then. I am no longer the quiet one who didn't really talk much. Now I have broken out of that shell and have really put myself out there, in a good sense. I spent two years, my freshman and sophomore years, doing so. And I've become athletic. I was never athletic before, in grade school.

Wendy and I talked about all the ways I've changed because of my age and all the drama of high school—too much drama. A lot of boys have asked me out. But I'm just not the type to date, I guess. Because it will take me a while; I have to be friends with a boy, get to know him for a year, then maybe. I'm not the type of girl

that sees a random boy and goes up and talks to him. I don't flirt, go out, then freak out two months later, and move on to the next person.

What is difficult is that my parents are different from me. But I understand why. They are old-fashioned Albanians, whereas I am more American because I grew up here. So we have not totally different values but mostly different beliefs. My parents tell me, "You shouldn't be hanging out with boys, or whatever." They think things will happen, but I reassure her, "Mom, he's just my friend." And she's like, "Okay, watch out." She's very, very protective and thinks everyone will do something. But it is the way she grew up. Overseas, guys are that way, but here not as many are. Sometimes it is difficult because we clash; we don't really mesh well because I want to go with my friends, and my dad is like, "No! You go out with your friends too much." In their eyes I do, but in my eyes I don't, because I see how other people do things and I compare it to them. They don't really compare it to anything, just what is in their heads.

It seems that in the years since we last talked about my Albanian culture, I have changed because I have gotten to know both cultures. I have grown into an all-out American teenager.

Wendy

I delighted in our conversation and Sofia's animated expression of the world of teenagehood—its styles, social conduct, the types who populate this world, and the drama it engenders. So much of what Sofia spoke about resonated with much that has been written about the pitting of "good" girls against "bad" girls and the power of romance to reposition what could be subversive in young women's challenges to gender power relations through academic achievement, sports, and female friendships (McRobbie, 2011; Tolman, 2002; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2002). Similarly, her ongoing dialogue with her parents and her quiet negotiations (aided by her sister) of the clash between American and Albanian ways echoed what has been written in the literature about intergenerational conflicts that are often exacerbated by migration and parental fears that their children will forget about their roots and cherished values (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou,1997**).** Still, such readings of her expressions of identity cannot adequately convey Sofia's agency, the joie de vivre she communicates as she grows out of her shell and into multiple cultural worlds—Albania, America, teenagehood, female friendships, and heterosexual romance. She continues to explore and interpret these worlds through multiple voices.

Toward Collaborative Seeing: Wendy

Working with Sofia has made me more attuned to how children and young people choose, refuse, and are persuaded to enter into particular dialogues

about identity, social differences, and distinctions. For Sofia, these are inter-weaving dialogues about her immigration status, cultural belonging, economic injustice, classiness, linguistic limitations and strengths, moral judgments, styles of femininity, and the gendered dynamics of teenagehood. Attending to the varied dialogues young people take up matters because it forces us as educators to think more deeply about how some young people can shift in and out of different identities while others get fixed by the representations of more powerful others. Studying these processes is important at the classroom level and in real time, evidenced in the exemplary work of Wortham (2005) about how social and learner identities get "thickened" and made stronger through classroom interactions. Equally important is studying these processes through young people's self-representations and over time, as I have done here and elsewhere (Luttrell, 2003).

I have found that participatory photography and video can be useful in examining these processes, and I have written elsewhere about its advantages and limitations (Luttrell, 2010; Luttrell, Dorsey, Hayden, & Shalaby, 2011; Luttrell et al., forthcoming). Vital to this process is providing multiple opportunities for young people to produce, interpret, circulate, exhibit, and analyze their own and each other's self-representations. To appreciate what is seen (and not seen) in these representations, young people and adult researchers and educators must take the time and effort to consider and preserve multi-layered interpretations and the exercise of multiple voices as young people and adults interact and respond to each other—what I am calling *collaborative seeing*. To borrow the language of photography/optics, a key premise of the practice of collaborative seeing is to open up the shutter on meaning making as a dynamic, dialogic, and relational process. This requires numerous viewing opportunities in different contexts, with different audiences, and over time (Luttrell, 2010).

Collaborative seeing can also enable young people, researchers, teachers, and outside viewers to get glimpses into each other's ways of seeing, bringing into clearer focus each other's assumptions, projections, and distortions. My initial way of seeing and hearing Sofia through the lens of acculturation—did she view herself as Albanian or as American?—is a good example.

In the current context of standardized, high-stakes educational practices and policies, the educational lens through which children and young people are seen has become ever so narrowly focused on performance, and we are missing the additional promise of schooling as a space to engage, wrestle with, and critique dialogues about "difference" (El Haj, 2006). The space and time allotted in schools to do more than teach for the test is ever-shrinking. This means that the insights, assets, and capacities of children and youth like Sofia—who are growing up in multilingual worlds, traveling between countries and cultures, forging transnational identities, engaging varied dialogues of difference, and seeking solidarity across differences—are being neglected.

Toward Unity: Sofia

When I last did this project in elementary school, I wasn't really united with any of my friends. When we were young, we didn't know much about who we were; we just knew what we had and that we were headed for middle school. Now I feel as if my friends and I know who we are and how to express ourselves, and because of that we slowly have become unified; we are like family. That doesn't mean we don't argue or fight. But we talk about everything as if we are sisters, giving each other advice, listening when needed, and sharing what we truly feel.

I took this picture to show all of us together create one thing—a star. Our hands and feet symbolize all of us in that star. It may be one thing, but inside it there are four of us. It's like being from two different cultures: you spend so much time with both that eventually they become one in you.

My experiences in high school have taught me that not everything is about what you have. In grade school, the more you had, the better you dressed, the cooler you were. People would fawn over what you had, giving them every reason to want to be your best friend. As I grew up, I began to realize that nobody will fawn over what you have now, so all you have left is who you are.

Sofia, age 15

Notes

1. *Sofia*'s name has been changed to protect her identity.
2. For a full explanation of this project, see http://www.wendyluttrell.com.
3. I have been influenced by the important work of Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008), and how the authors describe first-generation immigrant students' abilities to "float between" identities (p. 307) and to skillfully negotiate social worlds as part of what determines their school achievement. See also Coll and Marks (2009); Ngo and Lee (2007); Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001). Yet, and still, the kinds of self and identity-making questions that I am interested in understanding from young people's points of view over time are not the focus of these works.
4. See Devine (2009); Hallett and Prout (2003); James and Prout (1997); Mayall (1994); Orellana (2009); Orellana, Thorn, Chee, and Lam (2001); Qvortrup (1994); and Thorne (1993, 2001).
5. I gained access to the school through my involvement in developing a course entitled "Thinking Like an Educator" at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

6. These are the labels and percentages provided by the school. They do not publish records of immigrant status of the children. Students are eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch in schools if their family income is at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line. In the United States, the percentage of students in a school receiving free and reduced-priced lunches is an indicator of the socioeconomic status of a school.

7. See Clark (1999), Clark-Ibanez (2004), Collier (1967), Harper (2002), Orellana (1999), Rasmussen (1999), and Schwartz (1989).

8. Students were selected according to the following three criteria: (1) racial, ethnic, and economic diversity, making sure to include students from the two largest immigrants groups (i.e., Asia and Latin/South America); (2) both boys and girls; and (3) a range of academic performance levels. All the children spoke English fluently, with the exception of one child from Iran who was learning English during her first year in the project.

9. Unlike photography projects that have provided children tutorials on picture taking, I didn't design the project with the view of children as "apprentices of adult photographers" (Sharples, Davison, Thomas, & Rudman, 2003, p. 330). I did not encourage the children to produce a particular kind of image and instead believed there is merit in projects that seek to preserve and understand whatever meanings children might give to their images if they were listened to with care and in systematic ways.

10. As was recommended by others, the children were given multiple opportunities to opt in to the project as well as to opt out to minimize feelings of forced compliance within the school setting (Alderson, 1995; Valentine, 1999). A discussion about ethics and the dilemmas of consent in school-based projects is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is a topic well worth mentioning. See David, Edwards, and Alldred (2001), Morrow and Richards (1996); Thomas and O'Kane (1998); Valentine (1999); White, Bushin, Carpena-Méndez, and Ní Laoire (2010).

11. See Luttrell et al. (forthcoming) for more discussion of the *Looking Back* project.

12. For example, see Brown's (1998) study of girl's identity; and Bhatia (2002), Hermans (2001, 2006), and Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) for their use of Bakhtin to elaborate on the notion of dialogic selves and identities in global contexts. These concepts have also been used in literacy and mathematics research. See Ball and Freedman (2004), Boaler and Greeno (2000), and Luttrell and Parker (2001), who draw on the work of anthropologists Holland, Lashicotte, Skinner, and Cain (2001) regarding identity and agency.

13. Admittedly, this is Wendy's version of the story, but while Sofia might describe it differently, she agreed that it "sounds right."

14. In actuality, both schools are equally "mixed" with cultural and linguistic diversity, but Sofia's exposure to the diversity in each school was more limited in elementary school to her grade level and classroom.

References

Alderson, P. (1995). *Listening to children: Children, ethics and social research.* Ilford, UK: Barnardo's.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1982). *The dialogic imagination.* M. Holquist, (Ed.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Ball, A., & Freedman, S. (2004). *Bakhtinian perspectives on language, literacy, and learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bhatia, S. (2002). Acculturation, dialogical voices and the construction of diasporic self. *Theory Psychology, 12*(1), 55–77.

Boaler, J., & Greeno, J. G. (2000). Identity, agency, and knowing in mathematics worlds. In J. Boaler (Ed.), *Multiple perspectives on mathematics teaching and learning* (pp. 171–200). New York: Ablex.

Brown, L. M. (1998). *Raising their voices: The politics of girls' anger.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Clark, C. D. (1999). The autodriven interview: A photographic viewfinder into children's experiences. *Visual Sociology, 14,* 1-2, 39–50.

Clark-Ibanez, M. (2004). Framing the social world with photo-elicitation interviews. *The American Behavioral Scientist, 47*(12), 1507–1527.

Coll, C. G., & Marks, A. K. (2009). *Immigrant stories: Ethnicity and academics in middle childhood.* London: Oxford University Press.

Collier, J. (1967). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

David, M., Edwards, R., & Alldred, P. (2001). Children and school-based research: "Informed consent" or "educated consent?" *British Educational Research Journal, 27*(3), 347–365.

Devine, D. (2009). Mobilizing capitals? Migrant children's negotiations of their everyday lives in schools. *British Journal of Sociology, 30*(5), 521–535.

El Haj, A. T. (2006). *Elusive justice: Wrestling with difference and educational equity in everyday practice.* New York: Routledge Press.

García, O. (2009). *Bilingualism and education in the 21st century: A global perspective.* West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell.

García, O. (2010). Languaging and ethnifying. In J. A. Fishman & O. García (Eds). *Handbook of language and ethnic identity* (pp. 519–521). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hallett, C., & Prout, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Hearing the voices of children.* London: Routledge Falmer.

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies, 17*(1), 13–26.

Hermans, H. (2001). Mixing and moving cultures require a dialogical self: Commentary on Bhatia and Ram. *Human Development, 4*(1), 24–28.

Hermans, H. (2006). The self as a theater of voices: Disorganization and reorganization of a position repertoire. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 19*(3), 147–169.

Hermans, H., & Dimaggio, G. (2007). Self, identity and globalization in times of uncertainty: A dialogic analysis. *Review of General Psychology, 11*(1), 31–61.

Holland, D., Lashicotte, W. L., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (2001). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

James, A., & Prout, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge Falmer Press.

Luttrell, W. (2003). *Pregnant bodies, fertile minds: Gender, race and the schooling of pregnant teens.* New York: Routledge Press.

Luttrell, W. (2010). "A camera is a big responsibility": A lens for analyzing children's visual voices. *Visual Studies, 25*(3), 224–237.

Luttrell, W., Dorsey, J., Hayden, J., & Shalaby, C. (2011). Transnational childhoods and youth media: Seeing with and learning from immigrant children's photography. In J. Fisherkeller (Ed.), *International perspectives on youth media: Cultures of production and education* (pp. 192–208). New York: Peter Lang.

Luttrell, W., & Parker, C. (2001). High school students' literacy practices and identities, and the figured world of school. *Journal of Research in Reading, 24*(3), 235–247.

Luttrell, W., Restler, V., & Fontaine, C. (forthcoming). Youth video-making: Selves and identities in dialogue. In E. J. Milne, C. Mitchell, & N. de Lange (Eds.), *Participatory video handbook.* Latham, MD: AltaMira Press

Mayall, B. (1994). *Children's childhoods: Observed and experienced.* London: Falmer Press.

McRobbie, A. (2011). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change.* London: Sage.

Morrow, V., & Richards, M. (1996). The ethics of social research with children: An overview. *Children and Society, 10*(2), 90–105.

Ngo, B., & Lee, S. (2007). Complicating the image of model minority success: A review of Southeast Asian American education. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(4), 415–453.

Orellana, M. F. (1999). Space and place in an urban landscape: Learning from children's views of their social world. *Visual Sociology, 14*(1–2), 3–89.

Orellana, M. F. (2009). *Translating childhoods: Immigrant youth, language and culture.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Orellana, M., Thorne, B., Chee A., & Lam, W. S. (2001). Transnational childhoods: The participation of children in processes of family migration. *Social Problems, 48*(4), 573–592.

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (1996). *Immigrant America: A portrait.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Qvortrup, J. (1994). Childhood matters: An introduction. In J. Qvortrup, J. Bardy, M. Sgritta, G. & H. Wintersberger (Eds.), *Childhood matters: Social theory, practices and politics* (pp. 1–24). Aldershot, UK: Avebury Press.

Rasmussen, K. (1999). Employing photography and photos in research on childhood. *Dansk Sociology, 10*(1), 63–78.

Schwartz, D. (1989). Visual ethnography: Using photography in qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology, 12*(2), 119–153.

Sharples, M., Davison, L., Thomas, G., & Rudman, P. (2003). Children as photographers: An analysis of children's photographic behaviour and intentions at three age levels. *Visual Communications, 2*(3), 303–330.

Strack, R. W., Magill, C., & McDonagh, K. (2004). Engaging youth through photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice, 5*(1), 49–58.

Smith, R. (2006). *Mexican New York: Transnational lives of new immigrants.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. (2001). *Children of immigration.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Suárez-Orozco, C., Suárez-Orozco, M., & Todorova, I. (2008). *Learning a new land: Immigrant students in American society.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Thomas, N., & O'Kane, C. (1998). The ethics of participatory research with children. *Children and Society, 12*, 336–348.

Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Thorne, B. (2001). Pick up time at Oakdale Elementary School: work and family from the vantage points of children. In R. Hertz & N. Marshall (Eds.), *Working families: The transformation of the American home* (pp. 354–376). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tolman, D. (2002). *Dilemmas of desire: Teenage girls talk about sexuality.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Valentine, G. (1999). Being seen and heard? The ethical complexities of working with children and young people at home and at school. *Ethics, Place and Environment, 2*(2), 141–155.

Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H., & Melody, J. (2002). *Growing up girl: Psychosocial explorations of gender and class.* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

Wang, C. (1999). Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. *Journal of Women's Health, 8*(2), 185–192.

Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education and Behavior, 24*(3), 369–387.

White, A., Bushin, N., Carpena-Méndez, F., & Ní Laoire, C. (2010). Using visual methodologies to explore contemporary Irish childhoods. *Qualitative Research, 10*(2), 1–16.

Wortham, S. (2005). *Learning identity: The joint emergence of social identification and academic learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yates, L. L. (2010). The story they want to tell, and the visual story as evidence: Young people, research authority and research purposes in the education and health domains. *Visual Studies, 25*(3), 280–291.

Zhou, M. (1997). Growing up American: The challenge confronting immigrant children and the children of immigrants. *Annual Review of Sociology, 23*, 63–95.