A STUDY OF VISUAL CULTURE
AND ITS IMPACT ON ADOLESCENT IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

In this action research study, I investigate the impact of visual culture on the formation of identity on two classes of high school youths. There are two parts to the study. In the first I explore a unit of instruction presented to a Painting One class at a public high school. The second part of the study is focused on interpretations of the student paintings by a class of Art Foundations students. I present an exploration of critical writings, classroom discussions, student art work and student interpretations.

In part one I began the study by surveying students about ways that visual culture impacts their lives and sense of identity. Their critical writings about an advertisement, favorite childhood toy, T.V. show and clothing were vital to the study as students revealed detailed aspects of visual culture that they relate to on a daily basis. They discussed images of visual culture and the way they feel that people of all ages respond to such things. Students created identity paintings that reflect their personalities and the influences of visual culture upon their self-images. They also wrote about their works’ meanings and interpreted each other’s paintings. In part two a group of Art Foundations students participated in an interpretive session to extract possible meaning from the aforementioned paintings.

In part one, the students responded very positively to this experience. They learned more about themselves in relationship to the world around them. They enjoyed completing the survey and writing critically because they brought up relevant
questions to be addressed about their identities. The painting assignment was the most challenging but rewarding for the students because we discovered similarities as well as differences among some students. The painting students interpreted their own works and those of classmates which showed that the students had grasped ways to express themselves in meaningful ways. In part two I found that students built meaningful interpretations in a communal setting.

This study will be significant for teachers who wish to address issues that arise in popular, visual culture. The study also provides a venue for teaching students to be aware of the way their environments affect who they are. This study will also be of interest to researchers who wish to utilize action research methodology.
Dedicated to my daughter,

Madeline
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A sincere thank you goes out to all of my family for their constant support of my life goals and their prayers that uplift me.
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Art Education
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INTRODUCTION

I became interested in the study of visual culture while taking my first class at The Ohio State University in 2001. At the time I did not realize there was such a field as visual culture studies, nor did I think about the differences of modern and postmodern characteristics of thought. Throughout my studies, I have become more aware of the impact that images of visual culture have on the growth, development, and everyday lives of people. Furthermore, I learned how cultural artifacts, customs and rituals work to form a person’s sense of identity.

In my classes I was required to read works by Kevin Tavin and took a class from him when the opportunity arose. It was at that time that I became convinced that my topic would center on visual culture studies in some form. Having taught middle school for eight years, I was intrigued by the impact visual culture has on children and adolescents. I teach many of those former middle schoolers at the high school level now and it has been a joy to see them grow and change. Likewise, some students have known my daughter since she was a baby and they have enjoyed seeing her grow. My research is influenced by two things. First, the changes I have seen in my students over time. Second, the development of my own daughter as she responds to the world and her cultures.

My young daughter, age 7, is the sweetest, most compassionate, most alive and happiest person I have ever met. She has a wonderful family that encourages her
creativity, self-expression and making of her own choices within proper boundaries. She is not disrespectful or even bossy. Rarely do we, her parents and other caregivers, have to discipline her for improper behavior. I have to say she is a wonderful child however, she sometimes presents challenges. Seeing her grow and develop her own personality has been a joy. I am concerned about both the positive and negative influences of our image-saturated society. Studying visual culture has taught me to be more perceptive and analytical about the messages, images and attitudes that are shown to us every single day. I know we cannot hide my daughter from the “evils” of the world but being aware of media messages and their meanings gives me a sense of power over them. These messages are not all negative but I hope to instill a sense of power and understanding through knowledge to both my child and the students that I teach.

In my research and classes, I have become interested in the writings of Henry Giroux. A particular essay is about the politics of Disney. Giroux says, “Disney wields enormous influence on the cultural life of the nation, especially with regard to the culture of children” (1999, p. 19). Giroux’s work has made me a more critical, reflexive (as Tavin would say) consumer by reading Giroux’s findings about the operations of the Disney corporation and the attitudes presented in its movies regarding roles of women and people of various races. As I watch programs with my seven-year-old I pay more attention to the representation of everything than I ever did before. I watch and wonder how this will affect my daughter’s attitudes and beliefs about herself and the world. I also wonder about my students’ development.
I have known many of my current students since they were in fifth grade. Now they are in high school and struggling with identity, independence and their place in the world. Until three years ago I taught fifth through eighth grade, each year I took pictures of my students to document lessons. Now I have quite a collective “yearbook” of growth that my students love to page through. As my senior girls looked at their pictures from seventh grade art class we laughed together when one remarked, “Wow, remember when we thought we were so hot?” The comments continued about hairstyles, braces, clothes and weight for both the boys and girls. Moments like that keep me aware of the sensitivity these young people feel about their changing selves on their journey to adulthood. Ironically, the high school’s theme for last year’s yearbook was *Identity*. This indicates the importance and relevant focus of study for scholars.

Throughout my daily teaching I hope to provide a classroom environment that allows students to think about, create and develop a positive sense of self through artmaking and discussion. The following study involves my research on the topics of visual culture and identity formation in high school students. I constructed and taught two units of instruction. I designed the first to reveal how visual culture impacts students in a high school painting class. The students made “identity paintings” and interpreted them for a culminating activity. I designed the second unit to teach interpretive strategies to an Art Foundations class in which students were to extract meaning by interpreting the “identity paintings” made by the painting students.
The American experience is something I am fortunate to have known all of my life. This is not to be mistaken as the “American Dream” because a dream is often totally different than actual experience. The freedoms won for Americans, whether native-born or naturalized, are precious and often taken for granted. The Statue of Liberty is a signifier of Freedom for all who come to the United States. It is perceived that this is the feature characteristic of identity for everyone experiencing life in the United States of America. Not all people experience a positive American experience for countless reasons including bias towards race, religion and gender. Other factors include unemployment, homelessness and disease. Living in America does not automatically mean that everyone gets a “fair shake” but it is my understanding that the Statue of Liberty is a sign of hope for the potential to have a quality life.

The United States is an economic leader where the highest standard of living is a goal for many people. A single definition for a high standard of living would be debatable but it directs one to the idea that money, more than values, is needed for high status. According to Otto Bremer (in Bender, 1975), the United States is a business society that has been moving away from traditional “value input sources” such as farm life, religion, community, family and school (pg. 33). He believes that “the operative
values in the management of corporate enterprise tend to become the operative values of the average citizen” (pg. 35). The original publication of Bremer’s article was in 1971 at which time there were already substantial changes occurring within the American values framework: diverse interests and influences of visual culture were becoming much more prevalent in society. The changes we witness are not confined to the United States, but to other countries as well.

With the freedoms provided in the United States there is the potential to make choices from day to day. Sometimes we are presented with information without the option to choose. How do visual images affect our choices? Every day people are bombarded with visual imagery coming from the mass media including television, magazines, billboards, and the Internet. All citizens should question how these images impact people, and how they direct growth and social awareness toward consumerism, especially in the minds of the eighteen and under demographic. The mass media of today, and more specifically, the world of advertising, is the corporate enterprise of which Bremer speaks. There is a correlation of beliefs between Bremer and this statement by Jhally who says that advertising is “shaping values, attitudes and rituals toward the world of commodities” (Jhally, 1990, p. 78). This shaping of values is why scholars are leading a new approach to teaching about visual culture in the art education classroom.

Walker and Chaplin (1997) convey in their book that “Visual Culture Studies is a discipline and visual culture is the object of study” (p. 1). They say that visual culture studies is a new field of research. It may be premature to call it a discipline because it is a hybrid of disciplines, of which they list thirty-four. This view works in conjunction
with Mirzoeff’s definition because he says, “visual culture is more of a tactic than an academic discipline because it embraces so many various studies” (1999, p. 4).

The following question explains the focus of my study: How does visual culture influence identity formation in high school students? Sub questions include: How do images of men and women affect attitudes about gender? How do people display their identities and individualities? What factors should be present for a child to develop a positive self-image? In what ways does advertising affect a person’s goal-setting? How do artists convey identity through their works? What meanings do viewers obtain through the interpretation of identity artworks?

Terms

Identity, as described in Webster’s dictionary, is “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual: individuality.” It is also “sameness of essential or generic character in different instances” (p. 597). Pauly (2003) quotes Hall as saying that “identity is a narrative of the self; it’s the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are” (p. 266).

Advertising: Malcom Barnard explains (in Jenks, 1995) that the word ‘advertising’ comes from the Latin adverto and advertere; ad meaning ‘to’ and vertere meaning ‘turn’ (p. 27). This is about informing someone about something. However, since the end of the nineteenth century the meaning of advertising has been to persuade consumers and create desire (p.34).

Semiotics, derived from Greek ‘semeion’, means ‘sign’ (Walker, Chaplin, 1997, p. 137). In the late nineteenth century, Charles S. Pierce defined sign as something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. This science of signs was
developed by linguists to analyze the spoken and written word in which the signifier is what's seen and the signified is what's meant (Mirzoeff, 1999, p.13).

There are various ways to define visual culture. Duncum quotes Barnard’s definition for what is visual: “anything visual produced, interpreted or created by humans which has, or is given, functional, communicative and or aesthetic intent.” He follows up with a definition for culture, saying there are “signifying systems” of a society which are institutions, objects, practices, values and beliefs (in Duncum, 2001, p. 5). Barnard’s definition is a strong guideline. It is broad enough to encapsulate every visual expression but direct enough to use in a school curriculum. I like the wording in his definition of culture because it provides a way of organizing the subject of visual things. Mirzoeff defines visual culture in a way that it denotes more interactive pleasure and meaning that the consumer seeks. He says the visual culture comes from anything from “oil paint to television to the Internet” (in Duncum, 2001, pg. 5).

Definitions in Duncum’s Defining Visual Culture in Art Education (1999), support and clarify the ways one can look at visual culture. He quotes Wilson as saying that visual culture is like a rhizome, a grasslike structure continually growing in a complex underground system (p. 5). A rhizome has no true beginning or ending but “tubers and shoots” branch out in all directions. Therefore, one cannot trace the true origination. Visual culture is like a rhizome because it is created by input from every conceivable medium. Ideas are recycled and reinvented as they “branch” off of several other sources. Duncum provides a statement by art historians, Bryson, Holly, and Moxey, saying that the study of visual culture provides “contributions to the history of images rather than to a history of art” (p. 4). These images can develop from many
origins and contain various meanings, as they are relevant to art that is not in the museum realm. Bryson, et. al. see visual culture as an ongoing record of circumstances so history can be connected to current events. This is not in disagreement with Wilson’s rhizome theory, but shows a way to connect past histories with the present visual culture.

**Understanding a visual world**

Paul Duncum (2001) explains the way developed countries such as the United States are highly consumerist and are founded on the production of images and the styling of goods. He adds a comment by Guy Debord saying that now there is a shift from having to appearing (p. 2). Situations so prevalent in our society today are that many families are living beyond their means to appear that they have what they cannot afford. In Mirzoeff (1999), Debord coined the phrase “society of the spectacle” in which “individuals are dazzled by the spectacle into a passive existence within mass consumer culture, aspiring only to acquire yet more products” (p. 27). The media projects images of “the good life” that some people believe creates desires and others believe is only reflecting the desires already present in the consumer. These costly desires include anything from homes and cars to clothing, accessories and body modifications. This *neomania*, as Roland Barthes called it in 1957, is the insatiable appetite for new objects of consumption induced...by advertisements (Danesi, 2004, p. 256).

I see a need to investigate the effects of these media influences on people of all ages and especially adolescents. The media is a major artery for delivering images and information to the public and the nature of information and imagery is determined by the few in charge of the companies that are presenting it. In Hamilton and Hamilton (2004),
Brown, Schaffer, Vargas, and Romocki say that Media literacy advocates are arguing this about media literacy:

[It] should be considered a core competency in schools because it requires students to learn and use critical thinking skills to deconstruct and produce media messages and to analyze the contexts in which the media operate.

(p. 257)

Renee Hobbs, a media literacy advocate, and others, have criticized large media companies such as Time-Warner Corp. and Aol.com for limiting the topics, voices, and opinions that appear in the media...participating in a kind of censorship of alternative ideas and voices (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004, p. 263). There are five major corporations that control the mass media according to a recent article in the Columbus Dispatch (August, 2004). These mega billion dollar industries include: General Electric, Time Warner, Viacom, Walt Disney Co., and News Corp. Each of these companies reports revenues between 19 billion and 134 billion in 2003. Hobbs says that youth must be taught how to seek other modes of information and demand more from those who control the “public” airwaves. This implies a need for further investigation of curriculum development if teachers are to integrate this type of study into their plans. The challenge is to figure out how cultural influences affect students and how to teach students to recognize and deal with influences that may lead to unhealthy behaviors.

In Duncum (2001), Malcolm Barnard questions where cultural influences come from and what they do in today’s hi-tech world,

Do cultural producers challenge the established order, remain neutral towards it, or reproduce it? Do audiences passively accept the values
producers seek to convey, negotiate these values, or resist them? In what ways does visual culture produce as well as reproduce a society? (p.8)

Integrating visual culture studies with standardization

In studying visual culture, students can observe, discuss and analyze images they see in their daily experiences. Kevin Tavin (2001, p. 1) clearly explains his opinions for the need of teaching about visual culture: it helps students become “critical citizens” by their developing a political discourse and revealing connections between themselves and the world. The shift towards visual culture studies is necessary to teach students about how to process the cultural narratives they are exposed to daily through images and other personal experiences.

Tavin says that current practices in art education focus on disciplinary hegemony and standardization (2001, p. 130). This standardization is the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) curriculum, which has been widely used since the 1960’s. DBAE concentrates on four disciplines: criticism, studio production, aesthetics, and art history. Tavin feels that students in DBAE are not actively engaged in discussion about other relevant topics regarding culture, politics, and social awareness. He states that DBAE limits exposure to art in the museum realm, commonly Eurocentric. Therefore, in relation to students, it is “outdated, out of touch” with what is meaningful to them. Tavin (2001, p. 135) claims that DBAE is bounded by “right” or wrong answers and students cannot engage in honest critical inquiry as he quotes Kincheloe and Steinberg who call the DBAE approach one that provides “pre-determined truths.” This may be true to some extent. However, I believe that DBAE can be taught without leading students to pre-
determined answers. An art teacher can present a “high art” piece and students can make meaningful interpretations about it, while being critical, reflexive citizens.

Likewise, a vernacular pop-image can also be deconstructed for personal meaning by critical, reflexive students. Tavin speaks of the border dissolve between high and low art, as visual culture is both transdisciplinary and intertextual (Tavin, 2001, p. 3). This interchange is also evident in Krug’s article (2003) that shows a *Vanity Fair* photograph of the pop icon, Madonna, with her first-born child. The headline is “Madonna and Child.” As the reader of the magazine scans this title, it is assumed they envision a portrait of the biblical Madonna with child. With this as his kernel idea, Krug argues that pop culture (the vernacular) has crossed over to high art and back again through text and image. Through uses such as this there are formations of “intertextual collage of contemporary meanings.” Krug asks, “What issues do images such as these produce and how are their meanings read and interpreted” (p. 14). In this viewpoint the study of visual culture is intended for students to realize how one choice affects many people and many future choices.

Pauly (2003) quotes Duncum as saying that visual culture education is not about including shopping mall environments and excluding Manet paintings, but rather asking new questions about both (p. 267). To refute either school of thought would be a disservice to the advances made in art education because they can be used together to strengthen art education for the goal of student understanding and lifelong learning.
CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Critical pedagogy recognizes that popular culture does not shape consciousness and identity through a process of pure domination or propaganda” (Giroux, 1999, et al.).

This statement by Henry Giroux implies the responsibility of a culture to provide a knowledge base for critically looking at semiotics and self. Charles S. Pierce was a semiotician who identified the three most commonly used signifiers (Denasi, 2004, p.26). These are symbol, icon and index. A symbol is a conventional sign that is agreed to stand for something such as \( \text{rose} = \text{love} \). Icon represents something through simulation that looks like what it represents, such as the Madonna and Child. The index points to something. Index indicates a referent as in the pointer index finger and adverbs such a here, there. Footprints in the sand are an index because they point to the cause of what they represent, someone having been there (class lecture notes from Dr. Debbie Smith-Shank, August 2004). If a person can read visual culture as a collection of signifiers (both physical and conceptual) and not definitive traits, then they will realize that visual culture does not shape identity through pure domination. We become who we are by way of various influences similar to Wilson’s rhizome metaphor stated in chapter one.

Impact of the media

I am not sure at what age I realized the intended goals of advertising, whether to
inform or to persuade. As a young child I was taught by my parents to not always believe
what I hear and see on television. The results of persuasion are evident when my bright,
seven-year-old daughter tells me that a certain doll is “popular, because they said so on
t.v.” She follows up to ask what “popular” means, as it must be a good thing after seeing
a particular commercial with her favorite toy. The semiotics of popularity pervade our
homes everyday as we see products and images that make us think we will look and feel
good if we purchase the products. We must ask ourselves about these objects of desire in
terms of what they do mean. What do they symbolize? What is iconic about them?
What do they point to? These questions have provoked me to discover how media and
societal influences might affect young people beyond my study.

In the following review of literature I present some scholarly points of view about
the purpose of advertising and its effects on consumers. I also discuss the issue of
identity development with an emphasis on the female in society. The purpose of my
study is to show how scholars argue for the need for visual culture studies. Then I state
my study’s significance as showing the implementation of how using interpretive
strategies in visual culture studies can benefit students in their learning experiences.

The Media

The media plays a role in the lives of youth. Today is it is estimated that the
average American is exposed to over three thousand advertisements a day (Danesi, 2004,
p. 256). There are questions about the possible link between media portrayals of
unhealthy behaviors such as violence, unprotected sex, and drug use (Brown et.al. in
Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004, p. 240). They argue that the media portrayals may not only
influence these behaviors in youth but also may create perceptions in adults that most youth are violent and deviant.

Historically, the purpose of advertisement was to inform the public of a service or product in an innocent way, not necessarily to persuade. Barnard (in Jenks, 1995) argues that it was in the latter half of the nineteenth century that advertising began its evolution from informing to persuading. Barnard states that this evolution could be due to the Great Depression of 1875-95 when manufacturers looked to advertising to sell their products and get the market under control (p. 30). Barnard quotes Galbraith (1995) as saying that advertising's function is to create desires “to bring into being wants that previously did not exist.” Barnard notes Judith Williamson’s point of view when she says the ads make us feel we are lacking, thus directing us toward false ideals and making people identify with what they consume (p. 33-34). Barnard’s summary is that advertising is meant to be either informative or persuasive, all of it is trying to change a behavior or inflate desire, and is reprehensible to him.

The Body Project is a book by Joan Jacobs Brumberg. It is a collection of girls' and women's diaries from the late 19th century through the present. Brumberg (1997) discovered that before World War I girls rarely mentioned their bodies in their diaries about self-improvement and identity struggles. Internal character was a more important focus at the time (xxi). Caring for others and devotion to school lessons were indicators of identity.

Brumberg cites the Victorian era as a time when females controlled the look of their body image externally through the use of corsets to form and cover the body. Today, elective plastic surgery is an external control that is becoming socially acceptable and
widely used to shape the body into perfection. In the 1920’s girls started restricting food and exercising to slim down as the flat-chested, long legged “flapper” style became popular. This was as a way to internalize control of the body image, brought on by the freedom to show legs and arms as opposed to the style of the small waist, wide hips of the Victorian age (p. 99-100).

Bromberg says “There was a special intensity about breasts [in the 1950’s] because of the attitudes of doctors, mothers, and advertisers, all of whom considered breast development critical to adult female identity and success” (p.99). Today, both male and female bodies are expected to be tight and muscular. Fad diets saturate the media. Bromberg says “It is more problematic for girls, because it is their bodies, not the bodies of boys, that are consistently evaluated, displayed and brutalized” (p. 207).

Today in 2004, however, the bodies of males are under nearly as much scrutiny as girls as seen on reality television shows, most notably, Extreme Makeover.

Barnard’s use of the term reprehensible can be used here because the explicitness of advertising has continued in recent years. Tavin (2002) quotes Sut Jhally as saying that advertisers help create our dreamlife “by translating our desires into our dreams” (p. 39). Media critics question the attitudes and desires being constantly presented. Jean Kilbourne’s video Slim Hopes (1995) has some powerful messages to deliver regarding what she sees as reprehensible advertisements. She believes that advertising has the power to influence the consumer because “There is no aspect more pervasive or more persuasive than advertising.” The problem with advertising is that flawlessness is an ideal and few women have the time, energy and money necessary to look like a magazine model. She says failure to achieve perfect beauty is inevitable because photographs are
airbrushed and different parts of different bodies are pieced together with computer software to make the perfect woman who does not exist. This can cause dangerous consequences for girls whose self-esteem plummets at adolescence. Kilbourne reports that today the average model weighs 23% less than the average female. This “waif” body type is only 5% of all body types. Girls who may be influenced by this begin dieting very young, which can lead to osteoporosis and other health problems. Dieting is a way for the girl to internally control her body by limiting what she puts into it (Brumberg, 1997, p. 99). If she can’t resist food, advertisers tell her to smoke so she won’t want to eat, i.e. Virginia Slims cigarette ads (Kilbourne).

Making girls and women feel anxious about their bodies is a billion-dollar industry. This is evident in women’s and teens’ magazines by the number of weight-loss advertisements placed painfully close to rich recipes. Also, according to Brumberg (1997), the pursuit of perfect skin…transformed into a legitimate health strategy…generating enormous profits for both the cosmetic and drug industries (p. 62). This stemmed from the cultural priorities of middle class mothers who felt that good looks were an important vehicle of social success for their daughters and perfect skin was a critical marker of both moral and physical health (pg. 61-63).

Jhally has a phrase for this infatuation with having things: ‘the commodity image system.’ Even if advertising reflects our desires, the commodity image system is based on a person feeling validated and identified with what one has rather than what one is (1995, p.80). Jhally also discusses what he calls the core issue of how we identify with ourselves—gender. Jhally believes it is unfortunate that all advertisers are using sexuality
as the means for selling to our eroticized world. The iconography of the culture is obsessed with sexuality (p.82).

**Purpose of the study**

Research and implementation of visual culture studies is essential to the overall art curriculum. I agree with Mirzoeff (1999) who says “the gap between the wealth of visual experience in contemporary culture and the ability to analyze that observation marks both the opportunity and the need for visual culture as a field of study” (p. 3). He follows up with the importance of this need when he says “visual images succeed or fail according to the extent that we can interpret them successfully” (p. 13). If images are not appropriately interpreted frustration and misunderstandings ensue. In Duncum (2001) Mitchell’s answer to the question as to why students should be literate in the study of visual culture is that “the point of studying visual culture would be to provide students with a set of critical tools for the investigation of human visuality (p. 8). This statement reaffirms Tavin’s goal that students become critical citizens, which is one of the goals of visual culture studies.

If a person feels the need to “keep up with the Joneses,” they should at least be critical in their decision making. That is, look at what they want and make a decision that is right for their lifestyle, budget and moral values. They should be aware of the difference between WANTS and NEEDS. Tavin says students should be able to exercise power over their own lives as well as question why and how these images shape their experiences. These decisions are not limited to spending habits, but also extend to moral and social values. Society tends to assign identity to a person or group based on what they have or look like. This may or may not be desirable.
“Development is a process, not a goal” (Hamilton & Hamilton, p.5)

Students can make connections through further investigation of social issues such as gender, identity, race and politics. Advertisements are intended to sway our decisions but Tavin (2002) warns that we must be careful not to essentialize individual experiences and that we should bring our own interests, beliefs, histories, and agendas to bear on our relationship with that particular advertisement (p.39). Tavin and Jhally agree that we bring our own experiences, feelings and thoughts into play when seeing advertisements. To say that we are completely manipulated by ads is untrue.

We are attracted to ads that encourage our dreams, fantasies, and interests. Tavin (2002) quotes Jhally as saying advertising “taps into our real emotions and repackages them back to us connected to the world of things”. (p. 39). To reinforce this idea that consumers have original wants and desires, Hamilton & Hamilton (2004) state:

Both heredity and environment influence the natural unfolding of youth developing into adults. People can actively shape their own development through the choices they make and interpretations they place on their experiences (p. 3).

These views are critical and relevant in the study of visual culture because advertisements in particular can manipulate and influence and they are not only telling the consumers what will make them feel good, they are mirroring fantasy- existing wishes of consumers. Integrating the study of visual culture into a DBAE art curriculum can teach students a healthy way to process this information en route to individuality. DBAE does not have to focus solely on Eurocentric or museum-only art. The four domains of aesthetics, production, criticism and history can be adapted to images of
visual culture to provide the flexibility needed to meet the goals of scholars for visual culture studies.

Tavin blends his beliefs with Morgan’s saying “The art classroom can become a site of performativity where popular culture is interpreted through citational practices drawing upon provided cultural signs [and] resignifying them to address the local politics of home” (Tavin, 2001, p.6). As a teacher I intend to impact students by teaching interpretive skills in the classroom. As a parent, I am already dealing with the significance of signs, so my daughter has realistic expectations about her world.

My goal for implementing visual culture studies is to provide a venue to teach students about humanity, sensitivity, compassion, fairness, strength, cooperation and the fallacies of body images presented in media. Moral values and attitudes about the image of self can be addressed through the study of art history, production, criticism and aesthetics. Students will benefit from visual culture studies because they are given the chance to question and reflect on topics such as social issues that need to be addressed and their own place in the world. School is a good place to do this where students have the freedom to speak, discuss, interpret and debate what they see and hear. Another benefit of visual culture studies is that the images and issues that students discuss are easily obtainable and probably of interest to them. Images they are currently seeing in advertisements, music videos, clothing, etc. are fresh in their minds and they often have opinions about these things. Understanding the impact of the signs of their cultures can enrich their understandings of themselves.
Significance of the study

Visual Culture studies is a step toward expanding art curricula. The two schools of thought can work together in making a stronger art education curriculum. DBAE offers a firm foundation for how to see and talk about art, art-making, and learning to appreciate art. The study of Visual Culture is necessary to help students decipher the current impact of the world today, facing head strong into controversial issues and being in touch with how the present modes of stimuli affect theirs and others’ lives. The first part of this study is to have students reflect on their own decisions and possible influences in their lives. I want them to think about their role in who they are becoming as young adults.

Integrating the methods of DBAE and post-modern visual culture in the proper ways can provide richer art experiences for students and promote deeper meaning making about images from everyday experiences as well as from the past. Tavin (2002) and others state that this is the time for new approaches to teaching:

The field of art education has unique opportunity and a pressing responsibility to help students (and teachers) develop critical, reflexive, and meaningful approaches to interpreting, critiquing, and producing images, objects, and artifacts from visual culture. (p.47)

I concur with Rogoff (in Duncum 2001). I believe in cultivating the “curious eye” which implies that everything is not understood or articulated with finite answers (p. 9). Curiosity ambition to search for different solutions. The second part of my study reveals what the curious eye sees as the Art Foundations students interpret student paintings, not
knowing who made them. Having a “mystery” artist is intended to get unbiased interpretations.

In the process of my study I hope to see my students be independent decision-makers, aware of the influences put upon them by a post-modern visual world. I want them to be able to present an idea about themselves that is honest and thoughtful. In my analysis I hope to find deeper reflections in the student paintings and connections to the writings. “Art education students benefit from this process when their lived experiences are integrated into classroom pedagogy and cultural production” (Tavin, 2003, p. 19).

The goal of this study is to find the benefits of such integration of lived experiences and critical pedagogy in the classroom.
Design of the study

This study is based in action research. Hopkins (2002) says action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform (p. 42). I chose action research as the best way to investigate my chosen problem in my classroom. This method provides me the flexibility I need in the classroom setting. In this way I can utilize the data to build a lesson into my curriculum. Robert Rappoport says that action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science (Hopkins, p.43).

My increasing interest and concern for the way that visual culture impacts the formation of social attitudes and identity became the driving force in deciding to create a lesson about these subjects. In my ten-plus years of teaching, I have taught art in grades k-12 at different points in time. The longest part of this was spent in grades 5-8 and for 2 years I taught a high school class as well. Currently I teach full time in a rural district in Franklin County, but it is quickly changing to a suburban school district in Canal Winchester. My high school teaching schedule includes art foundations, drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, art portfolio and independent study. The high school has approximately 800 students, mostly white, but there are also African American, Hispanic, and Asian students.
Social class is quite varied in this district as there are many professionals, business owners, farmers and more recently, low-income persons. The most recent change has been the large influx of chain stores, groceries and restaurants. Historically, this town thrived because the Ohio/Erie Canal provided a reliable source for goods and passengers beginning in September 1831 (CWAHS.com). Agriculture was also a major economic factor in the success of the town. A portion of the current Middle School is the oldest operating school in Ohio, which is a precious part of the town’s heritage. As the town has grown significantly in the past fifteen years, so has the school and the needs to meet expectations for educational quality. With this growth I have also seen more diversity in a small town than I could have ever imagined.

The purpose of this study is to find out how visual culture influences identity formation in high school students. In addressing visual culture in this paper, I will focus on the mass media in many forms. The subject of identity will also be a focus of study. I will conduct the research project with my painting one class in which there are 10 students in grades 10, 11, and 12. There are two boys and eight girls. I have chosen this class for three reasons. First, I feel that a group of older students will provide more thoughtful and honest responses due to their maturity level. Second, this small group of students has already taken the art foundations class so they are expected to have a good working vocabulary of art. They also are expected to have acquired skilled artmaking techniques. Third, the small class size will make data analysis less time consuming, the class discussions can be more personal, and I can work more closely with the students on their individual painting assignments.
Methods of data collection

This action research allows me to use a qualitative triangulation form of data collection. Triangulation is built upon the principle that three legs are better than two. Freeman brings up the point by Marshall and Rossman about data triangulation. It is “the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (1998, p. 96). When there are multiple sources for gathering data, there is less chance for bias and there is a better chance for quality verification of the conclusions. Forms of data collection for this study will be varied. Since identity is not formed by just one thing, but many things, I have prepared several writing prompts to collect information, and in addition, I will audio record discussions. I will also use student artworks with written and verbal interpretations for the study.

Part I

First, the students will complete surveys without prior discussion on the subjects of visual culture or identity (see appendix A) to get answers that are hopefully honest and not too influenced by teacher direction. The purpose of the survey is to see what the students’ opinions are about identity, visual culture and decision making. In following lessons they will complete critical writings in response to prompts (see appendices B-E) which include: a television show, a commercial advertisement, a favorite toy, an article of clothing. The critical writings are aimed at being more specific in identifying the students’ personal likes and experiences within a visual society. Key areas in my conceptual framework may include but will not be limited to the investigation of gender roles, cultural identity, desires, family, peers, commercial products, religion, everyday images, media, and psychology. Some other questions I hope to find answers for include:
What forms of visual culture influence the students' identities? How do art experiences reflect a student's identity? In what ways can students interpret identity in artworks? I will be open to the direction my findings may take if I need to adjust my key questions.

The critical writings will help frame the direction of the class discussions and studio assignment. The class discussions will inevitably occur on a daily basis in class during the students work time, however I will plan two specific discussions. One regarding the students' views on what visual culture is and what we learn from it. Another discussion will center on a PowerPoint presentation I created. I will show images from visual culture and also works by Nikki Lee, a contemporary artist who pushes the concept of stereotyped identities in her work. The students will make concept maps, or webs, of the factors that they feel have contributed to the persons that they are. The students will use these concepts to work out the visual problems they face in creating a work of art about themselves. They may use any or all of the items in the map, but the main idea of the map is to help them to develop project ideas and reflect on their life experiences, relationships, and the visual world in which they live. They should create an artwork that tells about their identity within this world of visual images. The artworks, which are not limited to the use of paint, will then be described and interpreted by classmates.

I will collect the written data in a notebook and I will look for themes that may arise from the responses. I will make comparisons between the writings and class discussions as well as the paintings they create. I will compare these findings with the painting interpretations made by the students.
Part II

My purpose in Part two is to will focus on interpretation by a class of Art Foundations students. These students will interpret the paintings made previously by my painting class. The students will not be aware of who the artists are so as to collect less biased meaning making about the works. I will give the students color prints of the paintings and they will discuss the meanings in small groups. Then the class will discuss together for a communal interpretation of each work. Then I will be able to compare these findings with the data from the painting class in part one.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

I informed my students of their role in this research study and they looked forward to it. They usually ask what the next assignment will be and when I told them it would be a project about them they were enthusiastic.

The first activity for the students was the survey (see appendix A) in which I told the students to answer the questions openly, specifically, and anonymously. They would not be graded on the paper but it was to get them thinking about their views about specific issues and to help me gain a better understanding of their perceptions.

**Significant findings from this survey:**

In order to summarize my findings from the survey, I categorized the major findings and explained their significance according to the descriptions given by the students.

1. *Identity is the way that a person separates herself from others.*

   Separation in this sense means uniqueness, not "outcast." The concept of identity (including body image) is about the way a person views himself or herself, which in turn lets people know how he or she wants to be seen, even though others will form their own opinion about her. Clothing styles, coupled with personality, can display identity.
2. **Stereotyping is a judgment.**

When people are judged based on assumptions, or appearances including skin color and clothing, this is a stereotype. A stereotypical judgment occurs before a person really knows someone and this can be harmful or beneficial, depending on what type of status this assumption provides a person. For instance, social class is defined largely by group association. The students listed various social groups including punks, band people, nerds, and athletes. Students said that people associate with groups that have similar likes and are trustworthy. Some associate with several different groups so they are able to crossover socially. Students who crossover seem to have a better self-concept and also make better personal choices by not allowing themselves to get lost in peer pressures or unhealthy behaviors.

3. **Friends influence spending choices.**

Friends are chosen because of trustworthiness, protection and similar likes. Friends are also most likely to influence spending choices. Parents that a child has friends who are both trustworthy and money savvy if they are the ones that their child is listening to. Next is wants, which reflects an individual’s style and if it fits what is “in” for social style and celebrity fashion. There was concern for what others might think of the purchase. Cost consideration was of little concern to the students.

4. **Parents and close family influence decisions other than direct spending.**

In most answers, the students felt strongly about people in their lives who instill values and take care of them, mostly parents or other caregivers. These role models have influence in the most important decisions of their lives such as college choices, sense of responsibility, work ethic, moral codes and more. They are also influenced by people
they admire including extended family, friends and teachers—because they “work hard,” “they are strong both physically and emotionally” and “do the right things.”

An important finding to note here is that ultimately, the most important things to my students are good friends and strong family connections. Material things are nice to have but a product is not as important as a quality relationship. Jhally (1995) tells about marketing companies that gave a Quality of Life survey, finding similar results. Their survey asks people what makes them happy in life. Consistent results found that people are looking for personal autonomy and control of one’s life, self-esteem, a happy family life, loving relations, and good friendships (p. 79).

5. **Popular stars are not always the favorite.**

When I asked them to name a favorite celebrity that they admire I was surprised when four students wrote “none.” There was a consensus in our discussion when I asked the students to tell me which celebrities have highest popularity and why. Britney Spears was the first one. However, no one claimed to admire Britney Spears even though many teen girls sport her trendy styles and the media is fascinated with her beauty. On the survey they named George Clooney, Vin Carter, the Pope, and Johnny Depp because “they seem to be true to their own sense of self and don’t try to be something they are not.”

6. **Everyone feels like they don’t belong sometimes.**

There are several reasons a person doesn’t “fit in.” It may be by choice as one student said, “I don’t always agree with what others do.” The feeling of being an outcast because of skin color is a reality to one student. Another boy said he doesn’t like many kids his age so he may be consciously dealing with his separateness or identity in
preparation for life in the adult "real world." A person's "comfort zone" is not always tangible.

7. The media presents views of the world that may or may not be accurate.

Here are the messages high school students comprehend from the media.

Skinny is beautiful and you will be happy if you are thin.

Violence and drugs are O.K.

Do what is popular.

Teens are bad and religion has no place in our culture.

The media shows crime and corruption that is happening in our world.

Other opinions I found are that the only convincing advertisements are about food and cars. Half of the class feels that TV and video game violence encourages violent acts.

The other half of the class said that there are additional factors, not just the media, involved with a violent person, such as their environment (including home, parental influence and religion) and sense of responsibility. They believe that consequences of their actions influence what they do or do not do. It is not the media that has a sole hold on a person's actions.

CRITICAL WRITINGS

The critical writing assignments were designed to get the students to reflect on their own past experiences and decisions they make about the present time.

1. Favorite Toy

Students wrote about their favorite childhood toy. One boy liked his special edition Batman and the other liked Legos, and even mentioned that maybe this is why he
likes to build things now. It is difficult to tell if Legos fostered an inherent interest or "taught" him to like construction, however, he was encouraged by family who bought him more Lego sets for birthday and Christmas gifts. It is obvious to me that he loves to construct things because he often has ideas for art projects that involve a large amount of space and various parts to assemble.

Four girls named stuffed animals as their favorite toy, two of which were stuffed bunnies. One of the girls wrote about a *Puppy Surprise* toy that she got for her sixth birthday because she asked for it after seeing it on television. The television advertisement showed that the dog had a pouch with five puppies. Upon receiving it, she was disappointed because hers only had three. She drew a sad face on her writing assignment. The significance of the commodity image system is in effect in marketing strategies as we see toys on television presented in certain ways. Toys may appear to move independently or have extra accessories and little children take what they see on television for face value. When the announcer says, "Accessories not included" the child is unaware and hence disappointed, as may be in the case with *Puppy Surprise*.

Two of the girls as toddlers shared much enthusiasm about their *Barbie* vehicles because they made each feel "grown up." Ironically, each of these girls has had a car wreck and one of them faced serious consequences. One girl loved her *Playdoh* ice cream parlor and grill. She would play with it with her little sister on the porch. Other special qualities about the girls’ toys were special smells in a teddy bear’s ear (cinnamon) and a "cool" *Glowworm*. These are strong memories for the students because each remembers who gave them the toy and the personal contexts in which they recall them. Some of the toys they chose to write about were gender specific. This is not as significant
to my study as the revealing characteristics of each toy with the corresponding student’s current interests.

Jhally (1995) quotes Stephen Kline about the current marketing strategies for kids’ toys. Kline says that imaginative play has become ritualized and less an exploration of personal experiences…...a rearticulation of the fantasy world of market designers (in Jhally, p. 83). I don’t believe this is true in all cases but is of interest in regard to toys for kids. From my student writings I see that each toy provided some avenue for imaginary play. More significantly, the toys appealed to (most) adults in the first place as they were the purchasers. The toys were given to the children by adults and it was assumed that the toys would appeal to the children’s desires.

2. Television advertisements

These students seem to be knowledgeable about the way TV ads and programming convey messages about body image. By reading student comments I felt they proved the point made by Judith Williamson and others that the media makes us feel we are lacking. A female student wrote about a television show, the O.C.:

“Everyone looks the same, size zero. It makes people think that being that small is always beautiful. This can influence identity… because it makes you think your body isn’t good enough.”

The students wrote that advertisements were trying to sell products on the notion that the consumer wants to be like the image. There is conflicting understanding in my class because in some cases the students see a television production like the O.C. and feel bad about herself. In another case the student refuses to believe what she sees as a standard for women. She writes about a commercial for Maybelline lipstick:
"The unusual thing was the model’s lips were rarely shown. The focus of the commercial was on her body. She was dressed in a tight, black, leather outfit with sunglasses, riding through the city on a motorcycle. The worst part was that the lipstick was practically electric purple." This student has noticed the use of objectification in advertising. The female body is used as the commodity through the portrayal of emotions and image. In the student’s opinion the product was shown to be neither of quality nor to have appeal. The students realistically and unanimously said that they don’t believe a product will make them look just like the models, however, they commented that it makes them think about what a product can do for the betterment of themselves. The commodity image system of which Jhally speaks has a very strong presence in the topics brought up by my students.

3. Clothing

Barnard (1996) says that there are two needs fashion fulfills. One is the need for union and the other is the need for isolation (p. 10). He also states that desiring to be different is in highly civilized nations. We live in a high civilized society and the students in this public high school reflect the need for union and also isolation.

Students wrote about their favorite article of clothing, which ranged from flip-flops to blazers. For these students, clothing is important for three main reasons: expressing mood, expressing personality, and getting them to feel a certain way. "My (rock/punk) band shirts represent things I enjoy. I wear them to school or anywhere. They show how tired I am. I just throw something on and people can tell I didn’t put much effort into it." On the flip side, another girl wrote that she wears "blazers all the time because they are fun and different. They make me feel dressy and not sleepy." One
boy wrote about the way Puma clothing represents him because they are “edgy, have cool designs, and they are original. They make me happy.” These writings also showed that comfort was important but the dominating idea was that clothes are extremely important in showing identity on a daily basis as they reflect ephemeral qualities of mood.

4. Television shows

The students wrote about a television show and character they like. They had to write about why they are like the favored character. This was a particularly interesting assignment for me to read. Most of the students chose characters that very closely resemble their own personalities as far as I can tell from my own observations. One girl chose to write about “Meg” from American dreams “because the character is a good example of a typical teen. She’s nice and fun. I can relate to her in many situations.”

One of the boys felt a connection to Wil Smith’s character on The Fresh Prince of Bel Aire. This young man was the only non-Caucasian (Laotian) in the class and said it was hard for him to fit in at school last year as a new student. But, like the Fresh Prince, he quickly made friends. He likes the Fresh Prince because “Wil Smith’s character has a fun personality and is nice and the other kids like his style. He doesn’t get caught up in what people think about him.” Like the character, this student also lives with his aunt and uncle and cares a great deal about his family. Smith’s character is a positive role model for young men. This student relates to the positive views of the Fresh Prince. Having style is important to him but strong family connections are also.

Reality television is a new craze that has swept the interests of many ages of viewers. Since the beginning of television, producers have been creating situations that present scenarios somewhat realistic to those of real life. Now we see real people, non-
actors, revealing portions of their lives in front of the world. Are these realities or pseudo realities? The winning bachelorette from the series *The Bachelor* was a favorite by one of the girls. The student was impressed by the winner, Jessica, from the first episode. Jessica is described as determined, smart, realistic, fun-loving, beautiful and more mature than many other bachelorettes. This student is strong in core academics, arts, and athletics. She stated that she admires and is like Jessica and she described her as a twenty-one year-old law student who is “determined to do her best in school and get the best education possible.” This student was happy when “Jessica was chosen in the end by Jesse (the bachelor) and she deserved it more than anyone else.”

There is a significant yet disturbing truth in the above statement. Jessica was determined to be successful on her own with schooling and career, yet she wanted to be “chosen” as a spouse by a man she recently met. I question the message being sent by this show. Is it about finding true love or doing what is needed to win the prize, or is it about being the prize?

**DISCUSSIONS**

**Number One**

I used the first discussion time to get open responses from the students about what images seemed most popular in the American culture currently and what they discovered about television commercials as a result of the corresponding writing assignment (see appendix C). I asked, “What did you think when you were writing about the advertisement? Did you see things you normally don’t pay attention to as a result of doing the assignment?”
A student answered, "The ideal image. The ad I wrote about was for lipstick but it never seemed to emphasize the product, just her image of beauty." The same was revealed through comments about Abercrombie ads.

"Abercrombie is about clothes but the models weren't covered much. They didn't show detailed information about the clothing, just people parading around. Sex sells."

I asked, "What is this portraying to kids, people of all ages?"

"That clothes should be taken off."

I asked which celebrities they admired most. Most said Britney Spears, however they felt she has become more of an image, as in, not real. Christina Aguleira, they said, "changed from her bad girl image."

I asked, "What constitutes bad?"

They said, "Piercings everywhere in her body, scantily clad. She has always had issues with identity. She changes her looks a lot."

I responded, "Does that mean piercings themselves are bad or people with piercings are bad?"

They said "No, piercings aren't bad". They were putting together the image they saw with the actions and performances of these two superstars who are constantly in the media hype.

I asked, "How do you decide your identity?"

Several students responded, "If you are interested in what other people do that you like."

"What seems popular."
"Little kids think that what is popular is what is normal—even if it is inappropriate like the revealing clothes, tied-up shirts, and thongs."

"Parents have a responsibility but also may be at fault for letting kids dress a certain way. Today's young kids are wearing more revealing clothes than we did... from the early 90's."

I asked, "Does the media influence parents or kids more in this way?"

"Kids."

"Both. Parents want their kids to fit in—not be outsiders."

"Parents may be influenced but they can't live through their kids."

"They want their kids to have it better than they did."

"It is not always bad to want better for your kids but it may not always be good either."

This discussion revealed that images in visual culture influence adults as well as children. The students expressed the way they feel that visual media influence the actions of young children as well as parents. They noticed a difference between their own childhoods and the actions and dress of kids today—a mere ten years later. The students put themselves in a parental role to reveal their knowledge of how parents may treat and influence their children. They stated that parents have a major responsibility in instilling values and responsibility in their kids.

Discussion Number Two

I made a PowerPoint presentation for the second discussion. The focus was to provoke discussion about images from visual culture including current and past
celebrities. In the second part of the discussion I showed the students work by Korean photographer, Nikki Lee.

I started by asking *What is identity?* This was also the first question on the survey. A student said “It is how you view yourself.”

I asked, “How does visual culture influence identity?”

They said, “You compare yourself to other people.”

I showed some images of celebrities that are seen as attractive and popular.

A slide of Johnny Depp provoked comments of him as being rugged and wild. I asked if boys try to be like, look like actors like Depp. The boys responded that they don’t try to be like celebrities in an obvious manner. One of the boys said his friends make fun of him because he looks like Enrique Iglesias. The class thought this was funny and they mentioned that this celebrity had his famous mole removed.

We looked at Britney Spears’ first album cover and I asked the students to comment on what they saw. They said:

“She went from decent to downhill quickly.”

“She crossed the line.”

“She used to be a good little girl image.”

“I wonder what happened to her that year that she changed so drastically.”

“Sex sells.”

I asked, “Is your attitude affected by what you see?”

“Not really. They airbrush all the pictures.” A girl said.

The students mentioned Britney first thing in the group discussion and they are disappointed at the image that she portrays now compared to that of her earlier persona.
One that was more pure, innocent, pretty. Now they say she is going “downhill” by showing so much of her body and doing “bad” things. It was insightful to question if something did ‘happen’ to Spears that year, or is marketing at the helm? These are comments that the girls made. I did not, and regret, not getting the boys to comment on this. They may have felt intimidated by the strong comments of the girls in class.

“At what age is identity formed?” I asked.

“Early teens, 12-13.”

“That’s when you start to notice your likes and dislikes instead of going along with parents and friends.”

They explained that this meant an individual begins to listen to their inner desires more and expresses them. That is when social circles may reconfigure and outer identity is an experiment.

Next we looked at a cartoon of Wonder Woman with Batman and Superman. I hoped to get some discussion about gender roles and how they may affect people’s attitudes. I asked, “What are the poses or attitudes of the characters communicating?”

“The guys are macho but it doesn’t look like she is trying to defend anything.”

“The guys are confident, arrogant.”

Another girl asks, “Why is Wonder Woman wearing ten times less than the guys?” The students giggled but realized this was a good point. When I showed a picture of Linda Carter in the Wonder Woman costume the comments made me realize how different the expectations are for superheroines in today’s world. They said,

“Wow, did she jump around on the stage in that?”

“She is a lot bigger than Britney Spears. Women now try to be more skinny.”
“She has a gym fitness look--all natural.”

“People now are littler because of dieting and working out.” One of the girls followed up this comment with her own beliefs about diet fads by saying, “That is crazy because if God wanted me to be little he’d let me be little.”

From this discussion I realized that in modern society, we are conditioned to believe that all super heroes must be muscular. One can see it in cartoons like Totally Spies, Kim Possible and also the movie series, Lara Croft in Tomb Raider. I was expecting the discussion to spur more comments of gender inequality about the way Wonder Woman was sitting, in a submissive, sexual pose. However, that was not the case. My students were concerned with fitness and outward appearance, comparing this 1970’s star with “smaller” women like Britney Spears.

NIKKI LEE

As part of my study I wanted to incorporate a contemporary artist who addresses the theme of Identity in their work. I wanted the students to see how an artist presents identity issues. This was intended to help provoke thought about stereotyping, body image, how we choose to represent ourselves. I also hoped it would snowball into student ideas for the painting assignment. On the suggestion of Dr. Sydney Walker I looked at the work of Nikki Lee and her photographs about different social groups and their identities and stereotypes. I chose to use this artist in my presentation. I briefly explained Lee's process beforehand. This is something I should not have done because I could have gotten more thoughtful responses if the students did not know about her. Lee researches a group of people and becomes immersed in their social culture by attaining the same social identity. She has snapshots of herself taken while interacting with the
people in the group. The students were amazed at the way Lee could transform herself to fit these identities.

Since we had talked about stereotypes and groups, Lee’s work was intriguing to the students. I told them the titles of her different “projects.” The Punk Project (see figure 3) was easily decided by the students because of the stereotypical dress. The Skater Project was also pinpointed (figure 4). Other projects by Lee were not so easy to decipher. They were instructed to guess the title of The Ohio Project (figure 5). They said “Hillbillies. Trailer trash.” This project brought giggles and shock to the students. They were somewhat offended that they, as Ohioans, would all be categorized in one type of identity—trailer trash. I asked, “Do all Ohioans lift weights and live in trailers?” They emphatically said “No.” However, most students know someone who has similar surroundings that Lee conveys here. Students concluded that these “Ohio” scenes could have been constructed anywhere. The class began sharing personal stories about stereotypes. What was Lee trying to say? The stigma of stereotyping is unfair and hard to overcome. Also, where we are from and what we look like may not present an accurate picture of the person we really are.

The project

My students voiced that they enjoyed this project overall. There was difficulty in getting started with the painting segment and I was sensitive to that struggle. The concept maps were an effective way to get them started in processing their ideas, but didn’t help very much when it came to the actual artmaking. The biggest obstacle was where to begin and what conceptual idea from the map they would emphasize because they were all important. They each wanted to make it a point to NOT dominate their works with cut
and paste magazine pictures and other pre-fabricated ideas of visual culture. I emphasized the use of their own photographs and cultural symbols that have helped them create their value systems and identities, which, according to their writings in all cases, has been influenced by parents close family relationships and teachers. I encouraged them to think about the forms of visual culture we discussed and also the symbols they see everyday. As they processed these ideas and influences, they developed a way to communicate who they are and how they see themselves in the present. They each brought personal experiences and beliefs into their works, as well as a variety of media and painting styles. I found that they made paintings about their personalities and experiences, which in turn reflected something about the post-modern visual culture to which they are a part.

Student interpretations of their paintings

The final class period for this unit of study was used for interpretation and self-reflection (see appendix H). The students were given an excerpt from chapter eight in Terry Barrett’s book Interpreting Art. Barrett says, “To interpret a work of art is to make sense of it” (2003, p. 201-202). This was a strong element in helping the students to realize that one does not have to understand all the aspects of an artist’s intention to get meaning from the work.

The unfortunate thing about this final meeting was that it was late in the school year and the seniors of my class were not required to be in school the last week. I scheduled this final class during an exam period which the seniors either couldn’t get to because they scheduled to work, or forgot. One even said she overslept. Only four of the students were present for the final critique. It was a big mistake to time this project so late
in the semester even though in March and May I was pushing students to get work done for the Ohio Governor’s art competition and our school art show. I collected the self-interpretations from absent students but this group did not get to participate in the final interpretive activity.

One of the best things about my job is to see the various artistic solutions born from the same question that I pose to a group of students. Each painting was unique to the student’s experiences and personality. This was significant for all of us to see and brought questions and discussion to classroom work daily. The Interpretation reflection worksheets that I gave the students were helpful in deciphering artistic intent which was not revealed to everyone until they were done interpreting each others’ works. Here is what four of the girls wrote about the paintings that they made.

Courtney writes (figure 6): “There is a sun and a lot of swirls in different colors. The paint is thick. There is also a purple tree type thing. (Meaning) The sun is because I am happy. The paint is sloppy and thick because I have a laid back personality and I don’t care about things being perfect.”

Jennifer writes (figure 7): “The bubbles represent that I’m a triplet, each one being one of us. The tree with the dove in the corner is peace, and nature. The glass flower is my future, broken with the hope of something good--a flower. The flag represents that I’m an American and free. The dark thing in the top middle says ‘fashion’ but is covered to be made dark saying that while others may care about it, it’s not important to me. The handprints are who I am. (Meaning) The colors are saying that I am more than one thing.”
Audrey writes (figure 8): “It describes me. It shows many important things about myself. It represents music, which is very important to me.”

Ellen writes (figure 9): “It has a cool bluish-green, bubbly-looking background. It is calm, yet fun. Blue and green shards of glass form a flower shape and they all meet in the center. A similar shape is made with photos, and another with clippings from magazines. It [the painting] represents color that best symbolizes my personality. The magazine clippings show different aspects of our culture, and the photos tell more about myself and my identity.”

In most cases the students did a good job explaining any symbolism and meaning in the works but in Audrey’s case she did not feel compelled to go beyond saying that it described her and it represents music. Possibly she felt that because we know her we could see her meanings as she had difficulty telling her intent for the colors and composition. On my part I could have asked more specific questions but I also did not want to seem too invasive. I left the interpretations up to the students. A close friend of Audrey’s was in the class and she interpreted what she felt the work expressed, as objectively as possible: “The CDs create an attraction because of their shiny texture. They stand out from the dark background. This could be a symbol of rebellion, or breaking loose from something. It shows uniqueness and individualism.” This was a valid interpretation because we are informed of how the specific elements of the work could symbolize Audrey’s identity.

**Teacher interpretations**

Jennifer, Audrey and Ellen used images from visual culture that they felt were expressive of their identities. In addition to these cut and paste images and objects, they
created their own original art as part of the works. Jennifer used her own handprints and also made washy bubbles. Audrey painted designs on the CDs and Ellen placed personal photos on top of her watery painting. Courtney used acrylic paint exclusively. The layers are thick and she states that this work shows more about her personality of being “laid back”. Because she decided not to use any recognizable images of visual culture it is challenging to decipher how visual culture has influenced her identity, although I look at it her response to visual culture.

During the interpretive session I noticed a huge similarity among three of the girls. They each used broken pieces of material to express something (See figures 7, 8, and 9). Although Courtney didn’t use collage items, she painted a circular form that has irregular edges. The use of fragmented pieces was remarkable because the students did not work together, to my knowledge, and they did not notice this similarity of broken things until I mentioned it. This finding evokes my desire to further investigate the use of fragmented objects in the description of teen identity. What is it subconsciously reporting about teen identity within their cultures? There are many possibilities, as they explain.

Jennifer used broken glass mirror pieces for flower petals. She writes, “The glass flower is my future--broken, with the hope of something good.”

Audrey used broken, shattered compact discs and did not specify what they meant except that the painting as a whole “represents music and expresses myself.” The shattered CDs reflect Audrey’s connection to music but the fact that they are shattered is what causes me to inquire why. I agree with Ellen’s thought that they represent breaking loose or rebelling. This painting is an indication of Audrey’s readiness to be independent
and "on her own" when she graduates from high school. Currently she finds happiness and independence through her musical interests. We are not certain how music influences Audrey's identity but it appears to be an outlet for her because it was her choice to use in her painting.

Ellen's painting showed an arrangement of three circular shapes, each made of specifically different materials. One is made of broken stained glass. Another is made of cut photographs of her room and friends. The last is made with cut magazine images of things she says are from visual culture that are influential to teens. Each segment was placed in a flower form similar to Jennifer's, yet the purpose is different. Ellen did not state why she chose a flower shape but I happen to know she loves flowers and paints them often. The fragmentation was Ellen's way of creatively placing kernel images of her life, visual culture, and color, in a formation of security--the circle.

Another point of similarity is the girls' use circles. Jennifer used bubbles to represent herself as a triplet (two girls, one boy). They are placed in order of birth with respect to "boy" and "girl" colors. I should have asked why she chose bubbles. We know bubbles have a fragile skin, are three-dimensional and reflective of color and their surroundings. They also tend to represent happiness and safety. All of these qualities can be applied to humans. I don't know if Jennifer consciously used similar reasoning for her choices but I have the luxury of having known her and her siblings for the past eight years and they each are unique and do have a close bond. She used the three bubbles as an effective compositional tool to help create unity in the work.

It is significant that we have contextual knowledge that Audrey's CDs started out in complete circles and there are no whole ones included in the final work. She felt it
was necessary to separate the complete circle. When a circle is broken I interpret that it signifies change, uncertainty, confusion, uniqueness.

Ellen's circular forms are also fragmented but still together in a sense. They may also symbolize bubbles as I described for Jennifer's work. They are also similar to Audrey's because of the uniqueness factor and symbolism of change.

These findings were telling of girls who are close to graduating high school and heading into more independence and adulthood. They show images of visual culture that are important in their lives because they appeal to their interests. I am lead to believe that the fragmentations and circles are very significant for several reasons: First, the fragments convey how their unique identities have been formed and are evolving. Second, it shows an uncertainty of feelings about the world as they process their understandings of post modern visual culture in proximity to themselves. Their personal use of images is influenced by the external visual world.

I found that the paintings are reflective of the first survey finding: *Identity is the way that a person separates herself from others.* Each painting is unique, yet the four girls' paintings contain circular forms. Some are broken and I interpret this as the separateness, and uncertainty they describe. The meaning I assign to the circle forms, both whole and fragmented is: *Parents and close family influence decisions other than direct spending.* I interpret the circles as being relationships with family and the importance of the student's reliance upon them for support. They are indicative to the students' feelings about the need for guidance and acceptance. Survey finding number two is significant: *Stereotyping is a judgement.* In both the discussions and surveys the students described how stereotyping can be hurtful. The students chose not to use a great
deal of pre-fabricated images for their paintings. When they did use magazine images, as Jennifer did, we find that stereotypes are often generalized and stereotypes surfaced.

PART II – Interpretations by Art Foundations students

I decided to select a new group of students to interpret the paintings at a separate time for two reasons. First, because I wanted a more diverse group to form a discussion about the works and their meanings. Second, if the interpreters do not know who the artists are or what the project was about, they would be more curious and actively thinking about the works. Also they would be uninhibited and uninfluenced in their responses because the artists would be absent. The students in the painting class knew too much about each others’ work and how their personalities were presented, therefore I was re-energized to present their works anonymously to a group of art foundations students. This group of students had just finished a small unit about art criticism and interpreting. They each “critiqued” a work of art using four steps: Describing, Analyzing, Interpreting and Judging. I felt it would be beneficial to for them to have skills in looking at and talking about art in an open-minded sense so they could express their honest opinions and curiosity.

I gave each table of students the prints of four of the numbered works. They were to discuss what they felt the artworks meant and what they were about. Then as a class we pushed back the tables and gathered around an easel that held the actual work. This was convenient because they saw finer detail than they could see in the print. However, it gave way to the notion that the works were not famous or expensive. I used a cassette recorder to document the discussions. I was concerned that I wouldn’t be able to hear their comments on tape so I repeated answers when I felt it was necessary and it is a good
thing I did. At first I didn’t tell them anything about the artist or the assignment. I asked questions that stemmed from what I learned in Professor Terry Barrett’s classes and instructional writings about interpretive teaching strategies. These strategies were helpful in structuring the discussions to keep them moving along to hold interest and stimulate thoughtful answers.

Courtney’s painting, figure 6

“What do you see?”

“A snail on a tree and the sun is behind it.”

“The sun is engulfing it.”

“Swirls. Bright.”

I didn’t pursue as many descriptive details as I would have for a written assignment because so many students responded well.

“What does it mean?”

“Madness.”

“Pollution.”

“Confusion.”

“Flowing.”

“What is it expressing?”

“Feeling.”

“What feelings?”

“They are all confused inside.”

“How do you know?”

“Because of the colors, the way it is painted, the black.”

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"Why did they paint it chaotic and confusing?"

"That is the emotion he or she was feeling at the time because of things that are happening in their life."

"Something bad happened."

"It is about something bad because the sun is being taken over."

Another student chimed in that "Maybe something is coming OUT."

The discussion went on a little more and a boy, Austin asked, "Is it possible that they didn't mean anything by it?" While another student said the artist just wanted it "to look cool".

I asked them, "Can a work have meaning even if the artist didn't intend it?"

There were many responses of "yes." This brought up the question of a title. They were searching for more ways to extract meaning from this work by finding out a title and I was happy about that because it spiked their interest. They also wanted to know if the artist was male or female. I didn't tell them until the discussion was over. The students confidently stated their opinions and some friendly debate ensued.

"Sometimes girls can be more expressive than boys."

"The curvy lines are feminine."

"The colors are dark, it is by a guy."

"Girls would use more pink."

"Anyone can use those colors."

"Good. We don't have to assign colors to gender. What does this work tell you about the person who made it?"
“That they have a strong opinion about something that happened.”

“He enjoys life.”

“They might be having a bad day.”

Debate continued whether this work was by a male or female. Other comments about what the work is expressing: “Life.”

“Nature flows together in all aspects. Life is vibrant.

“It is protective the way it shows half the picture hiding something.”

After quite a bit of discussion about this one work, Brandon, a boy who had been participating made a real connection with this painting and his own life. He said,

“Some of it I can recognize and understand and the rest is jibberish. That is why I think a girl did it because my understanding of girls is like that. It goes from one thing I understand, to a whole bunch of stuff—jibberish.” This brought some chuckles from the class, partly because Brandon always has a sense of humor. However, I was thrilled for him to say something so honest and personal in front of the whole class, especially because it contradicted what many kids said about males being less likely to express their feelings or emotions.

Jennifer’s painting—Figure #7

“Describe the work. What did you discuss at your tables?”

“Hippies.”

“Patriotic.”

They continued to describe the hands, rainbow colors, bubbles and all the other elements of the work.

A student said it was “Done in the 1970’s or 2001.”
"Why?"

"Because of the tie dye colors and the American Flag."

"What does it mean?"

"It is patriotic. It is for something—peace."

"I am not seeing patriotic but they are celebrating freedom."

Different kids in the class seemed to agree with each comment by different students and responded with understanding with echoes of "Oh yeah that makes sense."

"What do these symbols communicate as connecting pieces?"

"Unity—because of the hands. After 911 people were more patriotic and grateful for their freedom."

Comments about September 11, 2001 were spoken frequently.

The discussion changed briefly when a boy commented, "This makes me wonder if this person is gay-he or she- because of the rainbow colors and pastels." After this comment, which I took seriously, I expected the class to laugh but there were only a few surprised chuckles. It brought up the issue of colors and gender once again.

I asked, "What does the painting mean?" The students commented that it was about rainforest preservation, the 1960's, and peace because of the bus and it's symbols, the colors and the flag. Since they seemed caught up in these stereotypes I decided to tell them some contextual information.

"What if I told you this was made by a seventeen year old student last year? Does this change your view of the artist's meaning now?"

"It is relaxed."

"It looks like the darker bubble is protesting deforestation and fashion malls."
I said, "You are connecting two images in the painting, rainforest and the word fashion. That takes us to intent. What did the artist intend here? Are they saying fashion is important or not?"

"It [fashion] is covered up. They are saying there are fashion rules but they don't care about fashion. They think people should be able to wear that they want without being made fun of."

"Maybe the painting is about their personality, what they like."

I mentioned the broken glass.

"They could be fireworks."

"The hand is touching the broken glass which can mean physical or emotional hurt."

One boy brought up the sexual preference again by saying, "I still think it is a homosexual thing. It is what he sees himself as."

I responded by asking the class, "If a male made this, does it mean he is gay?"

There was lots of conversation and I wanted to hear what they felt. Whether or not this boy brought up the topic of sexual identity as a joke, it certainly got the students to think and talk about relevant topics and issues of identity. Other students responded to this.

"They are an individual."

"If it was a guy, maybe he had a good sense of fashion and all his friends say he is gay, so it is covered up."

I asked, "What are the objects expressing?"

"Fantasy land."

"A wish of how they want to see the world."
“The glass mirror could be broken identity.”

I asked what they felt the bubbles expressed, surprisingly no one had mentioned them specifically yet.

“They mean ambition.”

“A bubbly personality.”

“They want to float away.”

“Does the painting teach us anything?” I asked.

“Maybe you shouldn’t judge people by a person’s outer appearance.”

“What does that have to do with the rainforest picture?” one girl asked.

That was a good question for which no one had an answer. It seems that rainforests and nature are important to her as her comments included this image. She did not want the class to ignore that as an important part of the painting.

I moved on and asked, “What are the three handprints and bubbles?”

“The handprints can represent important people in their life.”

“Three different people and each bubble represents a bubble they may be trapped inside.”

“Maybe it is a coincidence that there are three of each.”

I found that more contextual information was helpful once I asked,

“If I said this person is a triplet, what does the painting mean?” Many hands shot into the air and students began participating in the discussion who hadn’t before. This was exciting because they seemed more involved.

“The jungle represents their house because there are three kids and it is busy.”

“Why is there half a hand and half a bubble?”
“Good question.” I said. “Is it showing design sense or a relationship issue? Did they intend it?” The knowledge of the artist provoked some amazing connections between the images.

“It is the three triplets. There is a hand and bubble with the bus. A hand and bubble with the jungle picture. A hand and bubble with the mirror—that one is the artist because it is showing a distorted image of themselves.”

“The hand and bubble that are cut off the edge could represent one of them died.”

“The hand close to the fashion one is the girl, the others are boys because they are separated.”

“The middle triplet feels left out.”

“The artist is showing they want freedom from the other two, and they are still united, but different.”

This class period was ninety minutes long and we ran out of time to interpret Audrey and Ellen’s paintings.

My goal in this exercise was to hear student interpretations of a work that was inspired by the theme of visual culture and its influence on an individual’s identity. The interpretive group of art foundations students discussed for about forty minutes on each work. This is unusual because for the most part interest was maintained and discussion was constant. This significant event was “spinning interpretance,” a layering of meaning that develops from communal discussion (class notes from Dr. Smith-Shank). It is very unlikely for us to discuss a work for that long and get so much meaning from it. Most of the students were very interested and some seemed bored. Others had so much to say they
talked at their tables about the topics and I had to collect everyone’s attention to make sure they could hear

At the conclusion of the class the students wanted to know if they were “right” with their interpretations about the paintings. I told them that high school students made them last year and they wrote personal interpretations of the works. Knowing this I felt comfortable in telling the Art Foundations class that their interpretations were good and valid. I also instructed that it doesn’t matter if they pinpoint the artist’s intent but that they get personal meaning from the works. During the session the interest level went up once I told them some personal, pertinent information about the artist. They felt more compelled to participate at that time. It was also helpful to divulge certain details so they could build on their “blind” interpretations and go in a direction that was coherent with the artist’s intent. By doing this I had hoped to get more feedback on the way the interpreters would connect the paintings to the artists identity with visual culture. The interpretation session was satisfactory but if I am to do this activity again, I will spend more time exploring issues we see in visual culture beforehand. Perhaps we will interpret a music video or deconstruct an advertisement. Then the interpreters can relate their knowledge to the visual aspects of the works in addition to meaning. Overall I felt that the interpretive group was confident that meaning making is vital to understanding and their opinions do count and make sense.
Figure 1  *Superfriends Cartoon*, copyright DC Comics

Figure 2  Linda Carter as Wonder Woman
Figure 3  *The Punk Project*, copyright Nikki S. Lee

Figure 4  *The Skateboard Project*, copyright Nikki S. Lee
Figure 5 *The Ohio Project*, copyright Nikki S. Lee
Figure 6 Courtney’s painting
Figure 7 Jennifer’s painting
Figure 8 Audrey’s painting
Figure 9 Ellen’s painting
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

At the close of a study or lesson, it is important for me to reflect and assess the strengths and challenges of the experience. There are many directions that a teacher may take in using visual culture studies in the art classroom. I have learned this from much scholarly reading and a wonderful guidance from all of my professors at The Ohio State University. There is so much that I learned throughout this experience. Now I have a large repertoire from which to work as I continue to incorporate visual culture studies into my curriculum.

The painting class I chose to teach in this study was a very nice group of kids, several of whom I have known for many years. It has always been a pleasure to see my students grow and change each year. I have noticed changes in their personal styles, social groups, and met some of their families. From my observations and research I have found that it is a combination of influences that forms a person’s identity. Students who have a close connection with a nuclear family and understand morals still struggle with identity. Youth need to have their uniqueness and goodness validated by a role model in their lives. They realize that visual culture influences come from all places, religions, and environments. Although teens realize they are responsible for their actions they still make mistakes but need to be unconditionally accepted by loved ones.

Throughout my research, I conducted several pilot studies that gave me insight to directing my questions and topics. I was pleased with several aspects of this project. The
survey and critical writings were an invaluable source for data. This written data reveals the student’s personal experiences and affinities for objects and interpersonal relationships which reflect some aspects of their identities. I believe the students did achieve a sense of the impact that visual culture has on the attitudes, beliefs and identity formation of youth. The discussions and feedback on the PowerPoint presentations was fun for them and a successful way to find out how students feel about the things they see. It is important to use carefully selected visuals for this project. I am pleased with the paintings and interpretations in the way they reflect the efforts of my students.

There are still some modifications I wish to make before I teach this unit again. First, in Part I in the discussions I will have the students write about what they see and the way they feel about the images without as much teacher-provided contextual information. That would encourage both boys and girls to respond honestly about the meanings being portrayed. I found in my studies that a more even balance of males to females offers a better forum for diverse discussion.

I may narrow the field of images I show. Fewer slides may be just as effective as many slides. I am happy with what I have done but I could have gotten the same amount of data with a few images. I will also focus more on male points of view as well as masculinity in visual culture. I tried to make it point to include the boys in this study but they were outnumbered and I feared this imbalance would be a limitation on the study. I will plan to give the students more time to process and work on the design projects.

Time is important to process thoughts and plans for student ideas. I will instruct the students to make multiple works about this big idea of “identity” in relation to visual culture influences. A body of work will reveal more about each student and I anticipate
this will be a vital part of the process of their problem solving. On this topic it is
important to note that Audrey and Ellen made two paintings each. Ellen's final work
(figure 9) was her second attempt at this assignment. She was not satisfied with the first
one even though it was aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Audrey made a second painting
after school was out of session for the summer. It was sculptural and full of textures. In
retrospect, I should have included them in the overall study. Finally, the interpretive
session must have all painting students present to give the artists more feedback. In
addition, I will report the Art Foundations class interpretations to the student artists so
they can further reflect on their choices. This may reinforce or change the next direction
they take for their next artwork.

In Part II of the study I found that the Art Foundations class was motivated to
know what each item meant to the artists. They were more concerned about the
individual symbolic meanings of images more that the way visual culture relates to the
identity that the artist is trying to portray. They labeled the images with stereotypical
words. This is an important finding for the painting students to know how others view
their work.

I intend to continue learning ways to integrate visual culture studies in my
curriculum. All the readings I have done keep me wanting to learn more about this
subject. I can continually pursue the latest findings by scholars whom I have read and
from whom I have taken classes.

This study is significant to parents because of the personal issues that are
presented. Parents must be aware of how visual culture impacts health, behavior, values
and psychological processes of their child. The study is significance for teacher-
researchers because it provides an open wing to post-modern pedagogy in a public school classroom. Friere and Giroux say that teachers must educate students to view learning in a new way. "...learning is not merely about the acquisition of knowledge but also about the production of social practices which provide students with a sense of place, identity, worth, and value (in Giroux and Simon, 1989.p.ix). Art teachers are not held to the assumption that they provide primarily make and take art activities, but interesting critical thought exercises which empower students to voice their opinions and listen to others as well."
Survey
Please answer the following questions honestly.

1. What is IDENTITY?

2. Describe your ethnic background.

3. Describe the makeup of your family; parents/guardians, siblings, etc.

4. What is a stereotype?

5. How is a person's identity formed?

6. Name a celebrity you admire and explain why.

7. Name someone you know personally that you admire and tell why.

8. List 5 things that influence your spending and purchase choices.

9. Describe the social group(s) with whom you associate yourself.

10. Have you ever felt like an outsider? How?

11. What or Who influences you in decisions you make?

12. Do the consequences of your actions influence what you do?

13. How do you decide who your friends are?

14. How does a person display their identity?
15. How do artists show the concept of identity?

16. Does a person's religion influence their self-concept?

17. How do you know if a person is "good"? or bad?

18. What are the main messages shown by the t.v. media?

19. What kinds of commercial advertisements are the most convincing to you?

20. Does t.v. and video game violence encourage violent acts?

21. What is VISUAL CULTURE?

22. What is body image?

23. DO people create their own uniqueness? How do they do this, if so?
APPENDIX B

FAVORITE TOY
Tell about a toy you liked to play with as a child (elementary school or younger). Why did you like this toy? What was special about it? Who gave it to you? Do you still have it? Does it hold sentimental value to you now?

My favorite toy as a child was my glow worm. I liked it because if I was like scared of the dark it would light up. I also liked how the face of the worm was just so cute. I use it as a baby doll. I dont remember who gave it to me but I think it was my aunt. I dont have it anymore its in my grandmas attic. Now it doesnt really hold sentimental value. It was just cool.
APPENDIX C

TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS
Critical writing #2 - T.V.

Choose a t.v. Advertisement that you think conveys a message about body image. What is the product they are selling? Describe the scene. Describe any stereotypes you see.

The covergirl commercial... beautiful models, basically saying that if you wore a covergirl then you would have beautiful flawless skin. Not all people who wear that brand of makeup are models, or even look like models.

In what ways could this ad influence the self concept (identity) of a person?

It says that they need to wear their makeup in order to be beautiful.
APPENDIX D

FAVORITE CLOTHING
Tell about an article of clothing you like. Explain why you like it.

I love wearing flip-flops. They are comfortable, practical, and most important - inexpensive.

When are you most likely to wear this article of clothing?
Although flip-flops are meant to be worn in warm weather, I wear them usually from March to October. They can be casual or cute, and both styles are comfortable.

Does it put you in a certain kind of mood or does it convey your mood that day?
Flip flop days are meant to be comfortable and fun. Because I wear them almost every day, they are not representative of my mood. When I want to dress them up, it is fun to feel happy and girly.
APPENDIX E

TELEVISION SHOWS AND SHARED CHARACTERISTICS
Critical Writing #4

Watch and Write about a television show you like. Include what happened in that episode. Using at least 8 sentences describe a character you like.

My favorite TV show, **Friends**, is my favorite because I can’t really describe just one episode because I love every season, and I’ve seen just about every episode. The character that I love is Phoebe. She is hilarious and she has her own agenda.

I feel I relate to Phoebe the most because she has her own agenda and she really doesn’t care what others think. Phoebe doesn’t let the bad things in her life bring her down and I feel that that is a strong characteristic of mine.
APPENDIX F

A CONCEPT MAP
APPENDIX G

INTERPRETATION SHEET FOR PAINTING STUDENTS
Interpretation

Name: ________________________________

"To interpret a work of art is to make sense of it." Page 201, Barrett's *Interpreting Art*
"To interpret is to make meaningful connections between what we see and experience in a work of art and what else we have seen and experienced." Page 202.

• Describe the artwork that you created about your identity. (facts)

• Explain the meaning it holds for you.

Does your painting mean what you intended it to mean? Why? Why not? Is it still successful?

**Interpreting another's artwork.**

I am interpreting ___________________________’s painting.

List 3 adjectives about the work.

List 3 Nouns about the work.

Tell about the meaning of this work.

How does the work reflect the influence of visual culture on a person's identity?
APPENDIX H

NOTES
NOTES

The following pages are excerpts from notes and transcriptions.

Toys:
Batman-special edition
Legos
Glow worm-security
Stuffed rabbit (x2)
Pink Barbie corvette
Barbie jeep
Puppy surprise
Playdough ice cream parlor & grill
Teddy bear

TV ads.
Show-OC
Garnier fructis
Cover girl
Diamond shine lipstick
Abercrombie & Fitch

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</thead>
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<td>out w/friends</td>
<td>if in good mood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blazers-fun/dif</td>
<td>all the time</td>
<td>to feel dressy not Sleepy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaki capris-cute</td>
<td>nice/casual Events-everything</td>
<td>plain but fun mood bottoms scrunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puma clothing</td>
<td>weekends</td>
<td>conveys mood- &amp; makes me happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represents me</td>
<td>Edgy</td>
<td>Cool designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>Band Shirts</td>
<td>to school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Represent things</td>
<td>I enjoy</td>
<td>or anywhere</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>shows how tired I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I throw something on – people can tell I didn't' put much effort into it</td>
</tr>
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</table>

84
Flip flops everywhere to be comfortable & fun
Comfortable casual, cute don't rep. mood
Practical can dress them up to feel
Inexpensive feel happy, girly

TV shows
The Bachelor-Jessica-21, mature, tactful, classy, appropriate, beautiful dresser that reflects her personality. A role model.
Ellen says she is like her because, she is determined, smart, realistic, fun loving. A law stu. Determined to do well in school. Was chosen by Jesse as his prize. “She deserved it”

American Dreams—“meg”
Example of a typical teen, nice, fun,. Marisa relates to her in many situations.

Fresh prince of Bel aire.
Wil Smith the star. ---teen
Hard for him to fit in at a new school at first but the kids liked his style and personality fun, nice. Moved in with aunt & uncle. Didn’t care what people thought of him. He’s caring about his family.

Friends—she loves all the episodes. Phoebe-hilarious, has own agenda. Doesn’t care what others think. Doesn’t let bad things in life bring her down.

---survey

1. What is IDENTITY?
   - It is how you dress and your attitude. How you perceive yourself.
   - Reputation
   - Something that makes someone different
   - The description of a person or thing
   - The thing that separates you from everyone else
   - How you define yourself
   - The way you perceive things, how people look at you

2. Describe your ethnic background
   - Caucasian-6
   - Asian american-Laotian-1

3. Family makeup:
   - 3 - divorce
   - 1 - lives with aunt & cousins
   - the rest with parents

4. What is a STEREOTYPE?
   - How people perceive you
   - When other people think a certain thing about a person because of a certain quality
   - An assumption
   - Judging someone by the color of their skin
• A generalization made on a group of people
• Judging a person before you know them
• Judging someone based on how they look

5. How is a person's identity formed?

• It is formed by media and people around you.
• How they act
• Through personality and beliefs, etc.
• Looks, personality
• In everything they say or do
• By experiences and influences
• By how they act, how they look at the world around them

May 13 Out door discussion

We are discussing visual culture and its influences on identity.

T: What did you think when you were writing about the advertisement?
Did you see things you normally don't pay attention to as a result of doing the assignment?

S: the ideal image. Ellen—a girl on a motorcycle with long hair, pants. The ad was for lipstick but it never seemed to emphasize the product, just her image of beauty.

Abercrombe—clothes but the models weren't covered much.
Spring catalog—didn't show detailed info about the clothing, “just showed people parading around.” --A

Sex sells

T: What is that portraying to kids, people of all ages?
S: That clothes should be taken off.

Stereotypes—a clarification seemed to be needed—from surveys/
T: What is a stereotype?
S: judging someone by their looks.
T: Is judging someone a stereotype? (I want to make sure of underst)
S: It is placing a person into a category.

Celebrities:
T: Who do people look up to and why?
S: Britney Spears, she has become more of an image.
Christina Aguleira—changed some from her bad girl image.
T: what constitutes bad?
S: Piercings everywhere in her body, scantily clad. She has always had issues with identity.
T: Does that mean piercings or people with piercings are bad?
S: No.

T: How do you decide what your identity is?
S: If you are interested in what other people do that you like.
What seems popular.
Little kids think that is what's normal—even if it is inappropriate—like the revealing clothes—tied up shirts, thongs...

Parents have a responsibility but also may be at fault for letting kids dress a certain way. Today's kids are wearing more revealing clothes than we did...from early 90's.

T: Does the media influence parents or kids more?
S: Kids.

Both, parents want their kids to fit in --- not be outsiders.
Parents may be influenced but they "can't live thru their kids" They want their kids to have it better than they did. It is not always bad to want better for your kids but it may not always be good either.

Wonder woman cartoon
T: What cartoons now deal with girl power:
S: Power Puff girls, Kim possible, totally spies.

T: What are the poses or attitudes of the characters saying?
S: M "the guys are macho but it doesn't look like she is trying to defend anything".

Guys are confident, arrogant.
Jenn.: Why is WW wearing 10 times less that the guys?!—giggles by class
Then I showed an actual picture of Linda Carter in the costume of WW and the comments were: Wow
Did she jump around on the stage in that?
She is a lot bigger than Britney Spears, women now try to be more skinny.
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