

Articles

HOW DID WE GET HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE? THE LEARNING SIGNIFICANCE OF PERCEIVED LOCAL HISTORIES IN WAYS YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN THEIR POST-INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Popular rhetoric suggests that the future of post-industrialized regions is dependant in part on young people's engagement. If so, school and community educators will do well to work with youth to better understand influences on how they envision engagement—both historical and present-day—and assumptions on which they are premised. They then may be better positioned to critique the local value of dominant notions of civic engagement and to envision definitions that more closely reflect their own lives and communities' needs. I examine young people's historical perceptions of their post-industrial region in the early to semi-late (1980s) 20th century. I discuss their views of and emotional responses to what they perceive as markers of the past, what they feel has changed, and what has remained the same. I consider ways their emotional responses are entry points for youth and school and community educators to critically consider the impact of changing cultural, social, and economic arrangements on young people, their communities, and their civic engagement.

Résumé

Le discours populaire suggère que l'avenir des régions post-industrialisées dépend en partie sur l'engagement des jeunes. Si cela est vrai, les éducateurs feront bien de travailler avec les jeunes afin de mieux comprendre les influences sur la façon dont ils définissent l'engagement civique—à la fois historique et d'aujourd'hui—et les hypothèses sur lesquelles elles sont fondées. Ils peuvent ensuite être mieux placés pour critiquer la valeur locale des notions dominantes de l'engagement civique et d'envisager les définitions qui reflètent plus fidèlement

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leur propre vie et des besoins de leurs communautés. J'examine les perceptions historiques des jeunes de leur région post-industrielle pendant la période d'environ 1900 jusqu'au 1980. Je discute leurs points de vue et les réponses émotionnelles à ce qu'ils perçoivent comme des marqueurs du passé, ce qu'ils ressentent a changé et ce qui est resté le même. Je considère les façons dont leurs réactions émotionnelles sont des points d'entrée pour les jeunes et les éducateurs à l'école et dans la communauté de considérer des façons pour critique l'impact de l'évolution des arrangements culturels, sociaux et économiques sur les jeunes, leurs communautés et leur engagement civique.

Introduction

Long-held community practices can permeate citizens' notions of civic engagement. When those citizens are young people living in disenfranchised post-industrialized regions, it can be challenging to manage traditional civic expectations in the contemporary world. Given that local history in part shapes their civic engagement, what are young people's perceptions of their communities in the past? How do they relate historical images with a present and a future framed by different circumstances? An examination of young people's perceptions of their region's past in relation to their present-day lives may illuminate implications of negotiating the past and present when constructing civic identities. Popular rhetoric suggests that the future of post-industrialized regions is dependant in part on young people's engagement. If indeed this is the case, then school and community educators will do well to work with youth to better understand influences on how they envision engagement—both historical and present-day—and the assumptions on which they are premised. Together they then may be better positioned to critique the local value of dominant notions of civic engagement and to envision definitions that more closely reflect their own lives and communities' needs. Therefore, in this paper I examine young people's historical perceptions of their post-industrial region in the early to semi-late (1980s) 20th century. I discuss their views of and emotional responses to what they perceive as markers of the past, what they feel has changed, and what has remained the same. I consider ways their emotional responses are entry points for youth and school and community educators to critically consider the impact of changing cultural, social, and economic arrangements on young people, their communities, and their civic engagement.

Daily Practices, Historical Place, and Emotions in a Global Era

Adapting notions put forth by O'Neill (2007) and Camino and Zeldin (2002), I describe civic engagement broadly here as actions and behaviours intended to influence decision making and/or produce some social good. A foundational thought informing this research is that civic engagement is learned across time and place. Still, many young people enter adulthood without a clear sense of the ways that past and present merge in their daily practices, ideas, and attitudes. An aim of this work is to begin to make that relationship more explicit.

Some conceptions of civic engagement are learned over time in the realm of formal schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In addition, such learning takes place

through myriad lived practices of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Katz, 2004). Accordingly, ethnographic researchers understand the need to widen their scope to better understand how various subjectivities are learned and experienced across time and place (see Katz, 2004; Kehily & Nayak, 2008; Nayak & Kehily, 2008). For example, Kehily & Nayak explore ways in which young women come to understand and live gendered subjectivities in “new times” (p. 325). Their ethnographic investigation expands beyond schools to include young people’s media consumption practices. In the research discussed in this article, daily activities are acknowledged as significant sites of civic learning and the making of civic identities.

An overarching aim of this project is to uncover and critique contemporary notions of youth civic engagement. Many of these tend to privilege formal activities such as voting and volunteering with recognized groups and employment models of citizenship (Kennelly, 2009, 2011; Smith, Lister, Middleton, & Cox, 2005). Harris (2012) claims that “youth citizenship studies say less about young people than they do about the kinds of communities, societies, nations, and civic subjects that such knowledges attempts to produce” (p. 143). Katz (2004) contends that, again, in addition to formal schooling, daily activities reveal practices that facilitate the reproduction of existing societal conditions. Therefore, I surmise that what is learned and becomes accepted over time as civic engagement may be evident through young people’s daily experiences in relation to their perceptions of people’s daily lives in the past. From here, it may be possible to begin to critique the ways such notions limit and extend how they see engagement and support and challenge assumptions about themselves, other young people, and their civic participation.

This research explores how circumstances of globalization merge with conditions of post-industrialization in the civic lives of youth. The impact of de-industrialization on the lives of young people is an important subject of concern and study. Weis (1990) engaged in ethnographic research with working-class high-school students in a community where working-class jobs were no longer available. She noted that their responses to changing times were gendered and racialized and concluded that schools miss opportunities to critically question such responses. Fourteen years later she followed up with some of the same students and illustrated that class, race, and gender continued to intersect as the former students navigated their adult place in their community and global economies (Weis, 2004). In rural regions, Corbett (2007) examined ways that schooling curriculum and practices teach outward mobility. In other words, rural students learn how to succeed elsewhere instead of at home even if their intention or desire is to stay in their community—and this ultimately has an impact on out-migration. Weis and Corbett drew attention to the ways that changing global circumstances are felt on personal and community levels—important insights informing the research presented here.

The particulars of place are significant when considering the impact of global movements on communities and people. Kelly (2009) critically explored migration and cultural loss amid global change, focusing particularly on Newfoundland and Labrador. She wrote: “Attending to such specificity emphasizes the interconnections between contexts and broader movements and remains a prudent route to articulating these critical interconnections among places and people in complex times” (p. 1). Moreover, as Nayak (2003) contended in his ethnographic work that looked at young men’s responses to de-

industrialization, historical context matters. Patterns of reproduction are geographically and historically situated (Katz, 2004); hence the focus on place and the past in this ethnographic work.

A time of global social and economic restructuring is significant to understanding how youth learn and experience civic engagement. While daily practices reveal social reproduction, "the possibilities for rupture are everywhere in the routine" (Katz, 2004, p. xi). Globalization stirs social, cultural, economic, and environmental changes as community circumstances shift. This particular moment may reveal how youth reproduce, protect, resist, and challenge ideas of civic engagement—and their emotions may offer a place to begin to witness such reactions. Sayer (2005) clarified that emotions are not the opposite of reason. Instead, emotions are evaluative and cognitive and are about things "which are important to our well-being and which we value, and yet which are not fully within our control" (p. 36). In addition, emotions are embodied (Ahmed, 2004) and relational. In other words, our emotions generate from and circulate among our relationships and interactions with the world. They are experienced in response and relation to something. Emotions give us a base from which to interrogate the collective political implications of experiences (Kelly, 2009). Here, emotions are perceived as doorways through which to critically examine implications of changing times on experiences of youth civic engagement in post-industrial regions.

Empirical Research

This article is informed by a multi-method critical ethnographic study with 41 male and female youth aged 15 to 27 from working- and middle-class backgrounds. The age range is indicative of wide variations in the period of time young people transition to adulthood (Shanahan, 2000). The research examined ways young people living in post-industrial regions learn about, perceive, and experience civic engagement. A municipality in Atlantic Canada served as the site for the portion of the study examined in this article. The former industrial region has a declining population spread over a small city, former towns, villages, and rural communities. The community is engaged in an ongoing and challenging process of social and economic restructuring. While public rhetoric calls for the inclusion of youth in community planning, there is uncertainty as to how to facilitate such engagement.

Critical ethnography is a methodology through which researchers examine cultures, practices, and understandings to expose power relations that serve some better than others (Thomas, 1993). Madison (2012) purported that critical ethnographers expose assumptions embedded in what we learn, know, and accept as the norm. I contend that prevalent ideas of civic engagement are often too narrow to capture the impact that regional disparities—coupled with varying degrees of socio-economic disadvantage—can have on the ways youth want to and can engage. Consequently, many young people are often negatively stigmatized as disengaged. A research objective is to explore how education can help expose and address such stereotypes and broaden understandings of engagement that may more explicitly attend to the needs of youth and their disadvantaged regions. This goal warrants a critical ethnographic approach to the study.

Participants were recruited through online and place-based flyers as well as information shared with community organizations, youth groups, and community and youth advocates and workers. Almost equal numbers of males and females participated. They all at some point attended some type of publicly funded schooling ranging from Grade 9 to graduate school; however, the degree of school engagement varied.

Research methods included multimedia-based focus groups, one-on-one interviews, participant observation, and informal discussions. Focus groups included photo-musical sessions (young people shared musical selections and photos that reflected their ideas and experiences of civic engagement); arts-informed workshops (participants created art to convey their ideas of civic engagement); and historical photo/arts creation workshops (participants looked at local historical photos from the early to semi-late 20th century and created paintings to illustrate their connections and disconnections with the past).¹ Participants could participate in all or some of the activities based on their desire and availability. The use of several methods provided multiple ways for participants to express themselves through channels previously deemed meaningful to youth (Bagnoli, 2009; Lashua & Fox, 2007). In addition, to help provide a context for the study, meetings, discussions, and interviews took place with key informants such as community and youth workers, researchers, policy advisors, historians, and youth artists. These informants came from Canada and regions with similar histories in the United Kingdom. Historical and present-day public documents were read and artistic representations of the Atlantic Canadian community were examined. Within this context, the data presented here are based on participants' responses to historical photos; the family and community narratives they shared with each other; and their socially constructed expressions of the past. Data were organized through a thematic analysis and further analyzed through the study's critical-cultural framework.

Emotional Response to Perceived Markers of the Past and Present

Economic Markers

Participants noted changes in the economic circumstances of their region as evident through changes in local physical landmarks. Participants considered historical photos and stories of shops, schools, hospitals, and industrial buildings to be markers of local economic success in the past. Commenting on historical photos, one young man stated: "[I'm surprised] that the community looked awesome at one point in time. These buildings are amazing. [I'm surprised] that there was almost pride in the buildings."

In comparison, present-day big-box stores run by multinational corporations with little investment in the local region were perceived to represent a local economic loss.

1 Historical photos were selected in consultation with and used with the permission of the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University. Photos included 16 images of structures, people, events, and landscapes. Participants were told that the images were a small selection and were not intended to provide a comprehensive community visual history. Hence, we also discussed what was not present in the photos.

Some participants felt the community seems to favour the demolition of old buildings in the name of "progress" and "fiscal responsibility." A participant remarked:

I feel like all of these [local] businesses are going under once Walmart and stuff started. I remember I heard stories of [downtown] packed with people, businesses thriving and stuff like that. Now you drive down there and most of the cars are parked just because they're going to the Y[MCA].

And another conversation:

Participant 1: I look at this [historical photo of a downtown] department store and think that now we have Walmart.

Participant 2: We want to make a name for ourselves and bring more people in so we try to modernize everything I guess and bring corporations like Walmart and stuff like that.

Participant 3: It's like we're trying too hard to develop more and we're just kind of losing—

Participant 4: [We're] forgetting about the old.

Participant 1: We forget about how developed we actually were ... Bigger doesn't always mean better. We're so consumed with our big-box stores and corporations that it's not helping us. It's not helping our local economy.

Participant 2: I guess where they're coming from with just having Walmart and stuff is that it's probably cheaper because it's a corporation. It's like a franchise so it's gonna be cheaper. But I don't know. It's just nice to go into little boutiques and stuff. Yeah, I miss stores like that.

Participants expressed a significant degree of frustration when they thought about the past. In reference to photos that depicted a community with active industries and businesses and beautiful structural landmarks, two participants conversed:

Participant 1: How did they mess it up?

Participant 2: What did they do?

Participant 1: What went wrong?

Participants suggested that, along with indicating an economic downshift, a lack of visible historical buildings had an impact on their sense of connection with local industrial history.

It's so strange to look at pictures from [the downtown streets] and see buildings and old schools and stuff that isn't there anymore ... I don't know how to explain [pause]. It's like you can relate to it but at the same time it feels really distant.

Some participants felt as though the buildings and economic health of the past had been taken from them by older generations.

I feel disappointed because I see how vibrant it was in the past and it isn't now. They made no effort to save landmarks. Maybe they have good reasons but they haven't done a good job of explaining why. Look at a cityscape like New York. Places like Madison Square Garden, the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty. New Yorkers can look at those places and feel the landmarks are part of them. We had landmarks and nobody cared enough to save them for our generation. Leaders made decisions saying it was for the good of the community but it wasn't. Those landmarks will never be ours now.

Farrar (2011) suggested that such responses are not just personal but have political implications, including an impact on engagement. She wrote:

After all, landscapes—shared spaces, recognizable boundaries, identifiable landmarks, common sites of remembrance—help to establish relationships between people. They serve not simply as the stages on which social and political interaction occurs but as facilitators or inhibitors of those interactions. However exclusionary those relationships might be, they are also inclusionary, providing a basis for collective political action. Places provide a grounding (quite literally) for the enactment of “we, the people.” (p. 726)

Social Markers

Another marker of distinction between the past and present is the number of people visibly out and about in the community. In a region dealing with out-migration, the historical pictures of large groups of people at local events, on community streets, and in parks sit in contrast with participants' present-day images of the region. One woman sadly remarked: “If only the region could still be doing so well with coal mines and with the steel plant. I can't imagine living here with so many people! That would just be so cool.”

In addition to out-migration, some participants thought youth might be less visible and engaged in public spaces because they spend more time interacting through technology like social media. Others suggested that young people don't hang out in public places because when they do they must justify their intention.

Participant 1: I remember a friend went [to the park]. And he got in trouble. Him and two other guys. The cops went up to them and asked them what they were doing.

Participant 2: Well the police take it as a place where people will smoke or ...

Participant 1: [laughing] Gatherings of over three people is too much.

These youth said that in order to avoid run-ins with the law and negative reactions from older people, many young people avoid parks and playgrounds and wandering around in big groups. Their experiences are not surprising given that "surveillance has long been a mainstay in the lives of youth" (Oppenheim, 2012, p. 55). These participants sensed such surveillance is greater today than in the past.

Participants suggested that less has changed when it comes to public engagement at local sporting and music events. One young woman stated: "In the past and in the present it always brought people together. Music, sports ... it brings people together, especially in small places like here."

Many participants assumed that life was more social and less stressful in the past than it is today. One woman remarked: "[In the past] it was just different. Less stressful. Today we put a lot of stress on ourselves." While participants acknowledged that there are benefits to technology, some suggested it has made life more complicated:

Participant 1: Before technology came and screwed us over. [I know there are] a lot of pros to technology today but [it used to be] a simpler way of life.

Participant 2: Yeah, my dad mentioned to me the other day people used to visit. Now all you do is text and he's like, "That's just not right."

In reference to technological advancement, one woman wondered if the world would be simpler if less had changed:

Would everyone be happier and less conflicted and stressed and all that stuff? I don't know. It would be a different world that's for sure ... I know that my grandmother is [discouraged] at times. She thinks that the world is ending because all this crazy stuff is happening.

Their assessment of shifts in socialization and technology's role therein is in keeping with what are often considered implications of globalization. Interestingly, participants claimed technology is a huge part of their lives. Yet when discussing the past and the present, they rarely mentioned technology as a tool of engagement and downplayed the positive ways they use technology. Beck (1992) may argue that participants' attitudes are a response to the increased sense of risk and uncertainty that is characteristic of post-industrial times.

Value Markers

Reflecting on the past, participants imagined their community valued hard work, family (with clearly established gender practices), community care, a slow-paced lifestyle, and limited consumption. Most said they inherited a sense of the value of hard work and community care from their families and the broader community. They felt that younger youth today (early and pre-teens) do not share the same ethic.

Participant 1: I just picture everyone being really hard workers back then.

Participant 2: Yeah, there was no laziness.

Participant 1: And I think that might just be where I come from because both my parents came from really big families. My dad has 12 brothers and sisters and my mom has 8 brothers and sisters and so they were really poor. My mom worked all through university, all through school and paid for university and everything. I just feel there wasn't that sense of entitlement back then like there is now. I believe in working hard and stuff. You have to earn what you have. I feel a lot of kids now just take from their parents and they don't work for anything anymore. When I grew up Gap sweaters were a big thing and I'd always be like, "Oh everyone else has so much money, Mom." And she'd tell me, "No, it's not them who has money, it's their parents." And she was always telling me that it's not about what you have, it's about the actual person, not the material possessions, so I feel like I wish that was instilled in kids more.

Participants suggested that family responsibility trumped individual needs in the past. They sensed that people today are less family-oriented and more individualistic.

Participant 1: You used to have your part to play and your role to play in the family. Now it's more individualistic.

Participant 2: We care so much about ourselves now. But I was raised with [family-based] values, too. [Dad] was supposed to go to college. He was accepted and everything. He was the oldest boy of eight and my grandfather said, "Nope you can't go. You have to stay and work on the farm. I can't do this without you." So we're just raised with traditional values and it's good in a lot of ways. But we're losing that. I see kids now that don't know work ethic. They don't know any at all and we were raised with that and I feel like we are the last generation that was raised like that. I think it's kind of sad in a way. So progress isn't always a good thing. That's how I feel.

Another participant stated:

Family values, family morals were huge. Respect, it was just a whole different world than it is today. There were no kids doing drugs at the age of 13 or drinking underage. It was just really a peachy-keen sorta thing but that's just what I think ... no cell phones, no Internet. There was no stress ... [It was] a lot less materialistic.

Given that family and community play significant roles in the construction of social identities (Wyn & White, 1997), it makes sense that many participants embody the attitudes and values that are part of both their familial and community histories. Furthermore, the negative perceptions of younger youth shared by participants reflect commonly held attitudes levelled at youth and young people (see Wyn & White).

Robb (2007) asserted that the transition to adulthood is "inescapably gendered" (p. 109), which may explain in part why almost all participants compared their gendered expectations with those of previous generations. Participants sensed shifts in gender values and noted that gender is less defined today and more individualistic than in the past. Female participants were relatively happy with what they perceived as less-determined roles for women today. One woman considered her grandparents when she reflected on gender practices:

I feel that was a negative thing that roles were really traditional [in the past]. Both my grandmothers don't drive because that wasn't expected of women. When my grandmother got pregnant she worked at a hotel but she left so she could raise her children. It wasn't even a question. It's just, like, that's what was expected so that's what she did.

Another woman was not sure if the change was entirely positive.

The women definitely stayed at home and those who did work were probably just like teachers or nurses and that was it and the men were the breadwinners and they sort of did it all while women stayed at home and raised the family and, you know, had the supper on the table when the man got home. I definitely say there's a huge change that's both good and bad. I think in the sense that some of the families were probably closer back then because the kids were closer to their mother but in a sense ... [pause] Well, every family is different, so ...

Reflecting on the shifting gender roles of men, some male participants surmised that historically, men were "handy." One man stated:

[My grandfather] wasn't a carpenter or anything but he was a handyman and he never took a course or something like that, you know what I mean? Because probably his father taught him But now it's like, "Oh there's something wrong with the car. Okay, take it to the mechanic, or there's something wrong with this, so call this person. Don't try to do it yourself." There's always someone [to do it for you] and everyone has the perception that we don't have enough time in the day and we're so busy, gotta get someone else [to do the handiwork]. We're like, "Oh I can't be bothered with that."

The emotional responses were more varied when male participants contemplated shifting gender roles. For example, the young man quoted above looked positively at his male counterparts in the past. He regretted that he and his friends were not able to tackle manual work with what he perceived to be the same ease as his grandfather's generation.

I feel like, you know, men aren't as manly anymore almost. And I kind of feel bad about that, you know what I mean? I'm good at [some things] but as far as like handyman kinds of stuff, me, or I don't think any of my friends, know that much about it.

Some male participants agreed with him. Others concluded that while such skills were tied to being a man in the past, they do not feel less manly. “I have different skills now. That doesn’t make us less manly,” said one participant.

Participants’ comments also suggest that they perceived values and character in part based on clothing worn by women and men in the past. Many of the women responded to a photo of women fishing. Their reaction is summed up in the following conversation.

Participant 1: Back then, they wore those big dresses to go fishing!

Participant 2: Nobody wears a dress on a regular day now. I’m happy with the change.

Participant 1: I am fine with it!

Participant 2: Women are more independent today.

Some of the men also noted the clothing that men wore in the past, and a few felt the men appeared more “gentlemanly” because they were dressed nicely. One man compared it to today, stating: “People dressed so much better back then ... here it’s odd if you wear a dress shirt to school. Everyone is like, ‘Oh you’re pretty dressed up’ Today is so sloppy.”

Perceptual Accuracies and Inaccuracies

Some participants acknowledged the idyllic nature and potential inaccuracies of their historical perceptions. One woman stated: “I feel like I have kind of an idealistic view of what it was like back then and it’s not real.” In fact, participants expressed disappointment and frustration with what they perceived as a dearth of local history taught in their schools. One woman noted: “I don’t know much about local history, to be honest, because in history class [we learned about other places].” Some participants claimed that a lack of awareness of local history accounted in part for what they perceived as diminished community engagement today as compared to in the past. Others felt it is incumbent on local leaders to have a grasp of regional history coupled with a future vision to help encourage engagement. Similar to Corbett’s (2007) findings, they seemed to suggest that some schooling curriculum did not prepare them to engage in their own communities.

Discussion

Study participants shared perspectives of the past from the vantage points of their present-day lives. Their perceptions and emotional responses illustrated some of the implications that manifest as post-industrialization and globalization merge in the daily lives of young people. They reconciled their lives with what appeared to be a somewhat idealistic perception of the past and an uncertain present. That past was perceived to be one of localized economic security, family-oriented social stability, and a value system grounded in hard work, collective care, and assigned gender relations. And although most acknowledged their perceptions were based on limited information, some still expressed sadness and frustration that they were unable to experience the apparent stability and simplicity of the past. Farrar (2011) may categorize their response as nostalgic. She cited John Urry, who

noted that de-industrialization has created a great sense of loss for technologies and social arrangements from the past. Kelly (2009) wrote, "Culturally, nostalgia is one of our most common responses to loss" (p. 5). Critiquing such emotional responses can be a valuable educative lesson. In this section, I suggest ways participants' emotional responses may help youth, educators, and researchers think about how young people's feelings about the past and present have an impact on how they engage in their community.

Participants lamented the demise of historical structures. Is the answer to preserve historical markers for the learning benefit of new generations? Farrar (2011) is cautious when estimating the potential of historical preservation. When the past that is preserved mainly represents experiences of dominant citizens, historical preservation can reproduce marginalizing power relations. If the preservation idealizes the past, little room is left to critique and consider multiple histories not necessarily visually represented. For example, aside from some of the positive elements of the industrial era, participants made almost no mention of the region's tumultuous industrial past, including the brutal working and living conditions endured by workers at the hands of industrial corporations, the forced relocation of a First Nations community, and the difficult relationships with provincial and federal authorities. Would more historical structural preservations propel such questioning? It may depend on the structures and landmarks deemed worthy of preservation.

Farrar (2011) calls for *porous* spaces where the past and present merge. Informed by Walter Benjamin's use of the term, she wrote:

Appreciating porosity requires that our response to the transformations of space through time should never be simply or only nostalgic. Rather, porosity speaks to a sense of place that understands how history and memory seep into landscapes, allowing the past to coexist alongside the present. (p. 731)

Educators and community leaders eager for youth to engage in their regions may wish to extend the concept of porosity into their teaching and community planning. Envisioning communities as classroom spaces, young people can see ways in which the past and the present intermingle. Research can explore benefits of learning that involve physical exploration and critical interrogation of communities—not just museums, but sites of industries, businesses, schools, halls, houses of worship, parks, and homes that have been restored or replaced with entirely new structures or landscapes. Farrar (2011) wrote: "It is through one's lived encounters with landscapes and architectures that one makes sense of and remembers the world; it is through one's own body that one experiences the past, reflects on it, and reinvents it" (p. 731).

Participants suggested that their civic engagement was influenced by their awareness of local histories. Learning "in the community" where the past and present interact may be one way youth can learn about their histories and perhaps both challenge and confirm some of their historical perceptions and ultimately their notions of civic engagement. Such exercises may also be small steps toward addressing young people's desire to learn local history in school.

Participants noted that extensive commitment to local sports and music has endured through time. The success of long-held sporting and music events could be

explored through an adaptation of Farrar's (2011) notion of porosity—this time in social space. Investigation to see ways in which these events merge the past and present may uncover critical civic learning potentials that take place through the region's music and sport cultures. For example, how have these cultures and events evolved and stayed the same? What values and notions of the community are represented through local music and sport and how have those changed and remained the same? Who is included, excluded, privileged, and marginalized?

Against their perceived backdrop of the past, participants saw the present as less social and increasingly stressful. While they indicated that the loss of industry accounted for some of the shifts in the region, they also identified other factors. Participants claimed that increased reliance on technology, youth surveillance, heightened consumption, and the desire to “progress” contributed to what they perceived as less face-to-face time and informal play, more stressful routines, shifting values, and reduced family and community engagement than experienced by previous generations. Their perspectives seemed to suggest a shift to a more individualistic lifestyle than they imagined was lived in the past. While some did not dismiss the potential benefits of individualism, they did not name those benefits. Throughout the broader study, some participants discussed how media forms such as music could be used as tools of engagement. Still, few referenced the potential benefits of using technology such as mobile phones and social media as means of civic engagement (for examples of such benefits, see Kahne & Feezell, 2013). If these are further examples of nostalgia, perhaps this can be examined more deeply from a technological perspective. Action research with youth can investigate the role technology has played in their communities over the past century. Community and familial responses to changes may reveal ways their reactions are warranted and the degree to which suspicion toward technology reflects a cultural panic that is reinvented through time as technological advancement becomes part of our lives (see Sandywell, 2006)—a cultural panic that may undermine the value of technological approaches to engagement.

Young people are often subject to adults' concern, mistrust, and fear (Kehily, 2007; Oppenheim, 2012; Wyn & White, 1997)—responses similarly conveyed by some participants. Their narratives confirmed that they received similar messages from family members and community authority figures. This may explain in part why participants differentiated themselves and prior generations from their perceptions of younger youth today. They did little to critique negative perceptions attached to young people. Accordingly, behaviours and attitudes exhibited by youth that are not aligned with more traditional, locally valued practices can be deemed problematic. The intention is not to judge the participants' exhibited values. Instead, the purpose is to raise some pertinent questions. Were participants inadvertently succumbing to a moral panic (see Kehily, 2007) about youth even if they were considered part of that demographic? Does this explain why some young people are resigned to or at least reluctant to resist the surveillance to which they are subject when they gather in public spaces? What about youth that do resist or challenge traditional expectations upon youth and what may be considered appropriate forms of community engagement or gathering? Furthermore, given the sadness many youth express that values and practices are shifting, how do they reconcile their self-described traditional values and ethics with what they deem a dominant individualistic life model? Educational activities and research that explore these questions may shed light on variations in how

young people navigate local and global expectations and ultimately their civic place in these communities. It may also help reveal whose notions of civic engagement are valued and whose perspectives are dismissed.

Participants' perceptions of gender relations—past and present—offered interesting insights. The young women had relatively positive perceptions of the shifts in female gender relations. They expressed dissatisfaction with traditional expectations that women, without question, did what they were expected to do—raise their families and maintain their homes. The young women in this study felt less tied to such expectations.

It has been suggested that women fared better than men in the de-industrializing shift (Nayak & Kehily, 2008) as opportunities for new ways of being women freed them from more historical femininities such as those described by the women in this study. But not all participants in this study were sure the changes were always best. For some participants, the impact on families made them hesitant to say the shift was entirely a positive thing. In these instances, participants appeared to be navigating individual and collective priorities and responsibilities. All the young women suggested that the ways in which they can engage in their communities as women have evolved from the early parts of the 20th century. Still, this should not be read to mean they now feel untied from *all* forms of gendered expectations. Weis (1990) pointed out that young men from working-class families wanted their wives to assume traditional female roles even as their community de-industrialized and gender practices shifted. And still, with new times come new dominant notions of being women and men. More follow-up is needed to determine if young women in de-industrialized places bear new expectations and the degree to which such notions may still be traditionally gendered.

Similar to young men in other post-industrial regions (Corbett, 2007; Nayak, 2003), many of the male participants in this research imagined that ties between manual labour and masculinity were strong in the past. Corbett pointed out that in rural communities, the ability to be handy at numerous day-to-day tasks was tied to masculinity and is still important for survival in rural places. However, he noted that such skills are not typically taught in schools, even though such capabilities may better enable rural young people to stay in their regions. It is worth further research to see if this may account in part for the sense of the regret some young men feel in regard to their limited "handiness."

The young men in this study focused less on handyman skills as a means of paid employment and more on the importance of such skills in being more self-sufficient—enabling them to take care of daily tasks for themselves and their families, such as, from their examples, fixing cars and building swings for children. It has been over a decade since local industries shut down. It is conceivable that the post-industrial rhetoric in the community has resonated and some young men are less likely to feel a direct affiliation with manual skill-based paid employment. However, manual skills are still—for many of the male participants—an element of masculinity. While they may not see as many men working in traditional industries, they still witness grandfathers (noted more so than fathers) being handymen. In their fast-paced lives, some young men felt there is little time to learn handyman skills, "not from a course, but from your father," as one male participant put it. Hence, some young men—not all—felt bad because they saw themselves as less

manly. Their responses beg some questions. Are we witnessing a shift from attention to traditional notions of paid “man’s work” to domestic and community man’s work? In other phases of the research, some male study participants spoke of aspirations to careers in fields such as medicine, law, and education. Do some young men today measure success by their ability to be formally educated professionals *and* handy? If so, is this unique to rural and semi-rural regions? Is there an impact on how and where these young men think they can best engage in a community? Such queries my help reveal how transitioning gender relations have an impact on young men’s perceptions of their civic engagement in small post-industrial regions.

It is tempting to wonder if participants concerned about their manliness are living a crisis in their masculinity. However, Nayak & Kehily (2008) suggest caution with such an assumption. In fact, they question the notion for a number of reasons, including results from their own empirical work. They found that unemployed working-class men living in de-industrialized regions did not describe themselves as in crisis. Similarly, while some of the youth in this research expressed a nostalgic appreciation for the working-class masculinities of the past and said they felt less manly, to claim they are in crisis is presumptuous. Instead, deeper investigation of young men’s affective responses to the past and present are needed. This may help illustrate ways in which local histories and present-day circumstances interconnect as gendered subjectivities are shaped, felt, and practised today.

Clothing also served as a distinguishing marker of shifting gender practices. For young women, the “big dresses” they assumed women had to wear in the past are in contrast to the variety of clothes they can wear today. For some of the female participants, this change in clothing choices signals women’s increased independence today compared to the past. Some of the young men felt the clothing worn in the past was “gentlemanly.” In a sense, from their perspective, being dressed with a shirt and tie went from a norm to an anomaly that must be explained. It is not surprising that clothing featured prominently in the reflections on gender practices and attitudes. As Nayak & Kehily (2008) wrote: “In popular culture it is generally assumed that what you wear says something about you; a form of self-expression and care of the self” (p. 73). A more in-depth look at changing clothing styles as representative of perceived gendered lifestyles, engagement, and values could prove an interesting path of inquiry.

As they contemplated gender practices, participants focused primarily on their own gender. As gender is relational (McNay, 2000), a wider examination of young people’s perceptions of gender relations is recommended. Furthermore, deeper investigation is needed to better understand ways that family, schooling, local histories, and local–global economies influence gender practices and attitudes of young people (Nayak & Kehily, 2008). Such insights can illustrate how a variety of shifting gender relations play out in how young people envision themselves as women and men and the ways they engage in their communities.

In a global society, citizenship and community educators cannot ignore the learning significance of how perceived local histories affect how youth transitioning to adulthood experience civic engagement in their post-industrial communities. Furthermore,

emotional responses to what youth imagine as their connections and disconnections to the local past, including their sense of what they have gained and lost, are important factors that shape how they see themselves as citizens in their transitioning regions. In her work on loss and grief in relation to migration, Kelly (2009) noted that there needs to be a place in education to critically engage with the regressive and productive potential of emotions as people navigate changes in their cultural identities and communities. Furthermore, feelings are more than personal (Ahmed, 2004). They have a collective and political nature as well. Hence, critical exploration of emotional insights may help youth and educators better understand why we accept particular notions of engagement and distance ourselves from others and how our relationships with the past and present have an impact on our engagement. Such critical reflection may serve as a catalyst to challenge notions of civic engagement too narrow to accommodate the merging of old and new meanings of civic identities in globalized post-industrial regions.

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