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# Theorizing hang out: unstructured youth programs and the politics of representation

Jennifer Rebecca Teitle  
*University of Iowa*

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THEORIZING HANG OUT: UNSTRUCTURED YOUTH PROGRAMS AND THE  
POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

by

Jennifer Rebecca Teitle

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Teaching and Learning (Language, Literacy, and  
Culture) in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2012

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Linda Fielding  
Professor Gail Masuchika Boldt

## ABSTRACT

While many adolescents list unstructured “hangout” spaces as central to their social lives and activities, the availability of such spaces has dramatically declined in the last two decades, and attendance at afterschool programs has increased. Concurrently, these programs have drawn new scrutiny: from researchers eager to show their educational value, and from funders and policy makers seeking measureable evidence of that value. Even youth centers that were deliberately designed to give young people a space to “hang out” have been forced to reorganize due to the pressure to demonstrate program results. In this dissertation, through participant-observation, archival documents, and interviews with youth workers and young people, the author investigates and critiques the complex politics of representation in the funding, research, and day-to-day existence of one unstructured youth program, the Youth Action Alliance’s offering known simply as Hang Out. Rather than producing a unified picture of Hang Out, the author takes a non-dialectic approach, using poststructuralist and posthuman theory to propose multiple plausible and powerful perspectives, and to explore their productive tensions with one another.

Abstract Approved:

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

Jennifer Rebecca Teitle

has been approved by the Examining Committee  
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Teaching and Learning  
(Language, Literacy, and Culture) at the May 2012  
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To Lizzie, Jack, and Zelda

Who is to say what meaning there is in anything?  
Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon  
that sails over tree-tops. To speak of knowledge  
is futile. All is experiment and adventure.

Virginia Woolf  
“The Waves”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research is never conducted outside of the lived lives of researchers, and this experience was no different. While still in the fieldwork stages of this project, my father underwent critical heart surgery. With little warning, I was catapulted into a realm where feelings took precedence over logic and prayer reentered my quiet moments. During his surgery and recovery, I began to think differently about the difficulties of pinning intense experiences and feelings to language. No doubt, I was more sensitive to such highs and lows for other reasons as well; I had become pregnant with my daughter, Zelda, and my spectral hopes for her future accompanied me as I observed the adolescents at YAA and those who worked with them. These voices rose to join the cacophony of Hang Out. In the time that followed, I learned a great deal about conducting research and about myself. I'm grateful for the experiences doctoral work provided, and for the individuals who helped me along the way.

The management, youth workers, and young people of Youth Action Alliance, not only inspired me during my fieldwork, but their energy, enthusiasm, and sheer liveliness has stayed with me to this day. I would especially like to thank Maggie, Zeke, and Paul, three extraordinary youth workers who helped me understand what Hang Out makes possible.

Gail Boldt, first while she was at the University of Iowa and continuing into her time at Penn State University, helped me bring my ideas to life. Gail provided a gateway to Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; her dog-eared copy of Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* launched my life in a new direction. She is an inspiration, and my friend. At the University of Iowa, Linda Fielding, my co-advisor, helped make my

work accessible to a broader audience and provided helpful advice; Kathy Whitmore and Rachel Williams asked important questions about methods; and Jim Elmborg offered kind words and excellent advice throughout. Carolyn Colvin battled tirelessly on my behalf. A true mentor in every sense of the word, Carolyn helped steer my course in ways that kept me true to my beliefs.

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Nancy and Morton Teitle are responsible for teaching me how to ask questions, and more importantly, how to look sideways at the answers. From them, I learned to think rhizomatically. Sainly in-laws, Pat Ayers, and Linda and Mike Foster, helped our house survive two dissertations in one year. Friends—Leslie Cavendish, Ann Graziano, and Lindsay Laurich, among others—helped with walks, wine, laughter, and many hours of babysitting.

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## CHAPTER I

“JUST A BUNCH OF SCRIBBLES”:

## HANGING OUT AT THE YOUTH ACTION ALLIANCE

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition, but of a fundamental encounter.

(Deleuze, 1994, p. 139)

There's nothing really big or definable going on [at Hang Out] that's slipping through your fingers...or mine right now, I guess.

(Nathan, age 16)

**Introduction**

The large glass windows of the Youth Action Alliance's downtown center work like one-way glass, reflecting back the images of downtown traffic, tasteful plantings, and bustling pedestrians. Even when looking closely through the panes, one's attention is likely to be taken by the display wall filled with vibrant artwork. But near the wall, and just out of view, sits a space for teenagers where they come by choice to hang out with friends, create art, play, make music, play games, and sometimes just to sit and relax. Stepping inside, one realizes that the illusion of one-way glass is maintained in the day by the contrast of low lighting inside against the bright afternoon sun outside. Efforts to turn up the lights are often met with shouts and grumbles.

When I entered YAA as a researcher, I carried with me assumptions and expectations that had been formed over nearly a dozen years of teaching. I spent the first six of these years with 12-year olds in a variety of settings; the latter half were spent with college students, most of whom were training to become teachers. Thus, when beginning my research at YAA, I had strong ideas about what I felt was most valuable for young

people, how we should motivate them, and what value a community organization like YAA could have in the lives of kids. I soon learned that I didn't know nearly enough.

Much of what follows in this dissertation is my attempt to reconcile my initial understandings of YAA with the daily reality of young people hanging out. To do this, I spent over ninety hours hanging out, interviewing, and mapping the hangout space at YAA over the course of six months. This dissertation reflects my efforts to deconstruct several key assumptions concerning the purpose, productivity, and motivations we assign to young people who are "just hanging out" and to move towards a more complicated reality. The centerpiece of that deconstruction is actually a block of time formally called "Hang Out."

For the moment, however, I will set aside the complexities of Hang Out and return to my original impressions, in order to provide the reader with an introduction to the local community in which Hang Out is situated and how the program appeared to me when this research began.

### *The Community*

The Youth Action Alliance is located in a Midwestern college town that will be known here as Statesville. Statesville is a town with many faces. For a lot of residents, Statesville is a primarily middle class town. This is displayed through the quaint tree-lined streets, coffee shops, and farmer's market of the old Eastside neighborhoods, and the clean, often well-maintained apartments of the Westside, where graduate students and families live close to the Law and Medical Schools. For other residents, Statesville has another face, that of unemployment and struggle. Across town on the Southside,

businesses struggle to maintain customers and residents shop at Goodwill rather than the upscale local mall. Additionally, there is a homeless demographic in Statesville, and a regular population of residents who spend their days in shelters, the public library, and other centers and service organizations.

These populations collide in the busy downtown area known as the Pedestrian Mall. Most often referred to simply as the “Ped Mall,” this several-square-block area is the beating heart of Statesville and the oldest cultural district in the state. The Ped Mall offers a downtown walking area that integrates new and old; Georgian brick houses stand side-by-side with sleek, contemporary concrete structures. Additionally, the University campus is integrated into downtown, requiring many college students to pass nearby or through the Ped Mall several times a day, lending to the feel of a busy bustling city. Residents relax on benches for lunch or naps; some live outside in the warm months, moving from space to space.

As a college town, Statesville’s population of around 70,000 fluctuates seasonally and with the academic calendar. In fall, lunchtime sees lines of hungry college students pour from the doors of popular restaurants, while in summer the same restaurants see only a handful of patrons. The college students lend a young feel to the city, where the median age is twenty-five. Like much of the state, the great majority of Statesville’s population identify as White, around 85%. The next largest racial identification is Asian, followed closely by those who self-identify as African-American. It is a highly educated city and politically liberal, with a median income well above the state average.

Statesville is also home to a lively arts culture for writers, artists and musicians. A designated “City of Literature,” the town proudly displays its passion through a series of

bronze relief panels featuring the names of authors and playwrights. Art festivals are abundant in the summer months and banks, boutiques, and half a dozen local coffee shops display the rotating work of local artists. The warm weather also brings the Ped Mall to life with music. On Friday nights, local bands play on a custom built concrete stage while children dance in the front rows; individual street musicians pepper the street corners and leave open guitar cases to collect tips. Artist-painted pianos are wheeled out to the streets by several local businesses so that any passersby can play and it's not unusual to hear anything from Chuck Berry to Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> as you walk through the downtown area.

### ***The Youth Action Alliance***

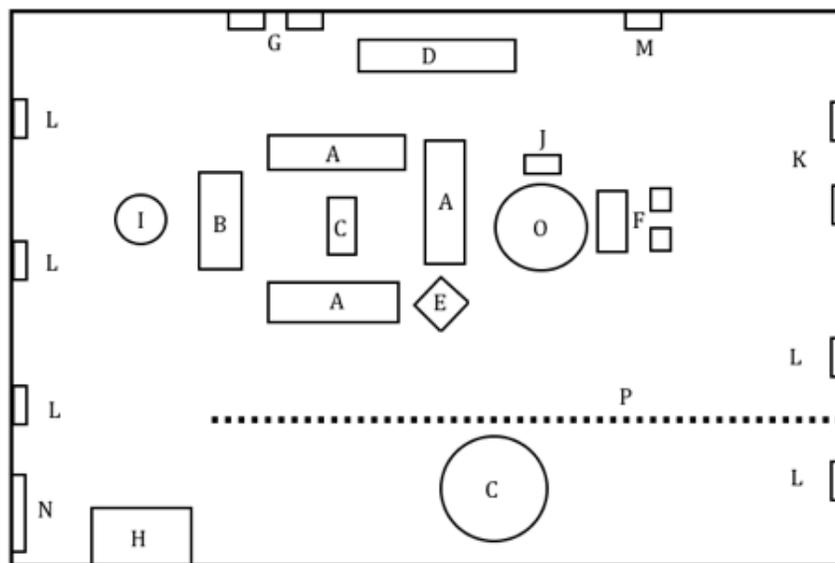
The Youth Action Alliance's connection to the Statesville community is integral to understanding how the organization functions. YAA opened in Statesville in 1970, an historical moment it shares with the town's largest student protest to date. Statesville's vivid art and music scene are reflected in YAA's offerings and the professional artists and musicians who work there also participate in the professional arts scene in town. Even the "vibe" of the city itself can be detected inside of YAA, where young people fluidly access local services and discuss local affairs from pizza places to where to get the cleanest piercings.

Currently, YAA runs on a budget of around one-and-a-half million dollars annually. Like most youth centers, federal program grants sources account for the lion's share of income at YAA. In 2010, the center brought in \$1,315,878 through such grants, and an additional \$156,961 through city and local funds. Smaller portions of income are

derived from local donors, both private and businesses. Last year, YAA's expenditures exceeded its income by about \$65,000.

Inside the downtown center, there are five offices for youth workers and counselors, a soundproof studio room, an art room and a restroom. These rooms are arranged on the exterior of a large central area containing three couches, a computer, a guitar stand, and a water cooler. A small kitchen sits near the back of the room, containing a refrigerator and microwave. Thick columns rise like concrete trees from floor to ceiling, and this along with the echoes of sound in the main room are the only reminders that this space is indeed part of a parking ramp.

**Figure 1.1: Map of YAA Hang Out Space**



A	Couch	I	Water Cooler
B	TV & Video Games	J	Guitars and Rack
C	Table	K	Doors to Studio & Jam Rooms
D	Kitchen Area	L	Door to Office
E	Chair	M	Door to Art Room
F	Computer Table & Chairs	N	Main Front Doors
G	Doors to Bathrooms	O	Support Column
H	Sign-In and Health Info Table	P	Sliding Display Wall

### *Hang Out*

On any given day, the inside of the Youth Action Alliance (YAA) is bustling with the now-official program called “Hang Out” (noted hereafter with capital letters). This popular drop-in program is aimed at teenagers ages 12-18, offering them activities and spaces for activity. For some young people, coming to Hang Out means a space to produce art or music, but for many others it means a safe space where they can socialize or “just hang out.” This latter nebulous activity can consist of anything from texting, to socializing, to daydreaming. My notes from the Hang Out program reflect a broad variety of such activities including, but not limited to: watching movies, surfing the internet, “messaging” with guitars, texting, pushing each other, doing homework, sitting on each other’s laps, eating, talking, “roughhousing,” drawing on skin, drawing on book bags, completing job applications, knitting, playing board games, recording music, writing music, hacky sack, and dancing. Hang Out offers a catchall for YAA, containing the sanctioned and unsanctioned activities that young people choose to do at the center, and attracting the most new young people.

During the course of this study, Hang Out was open Monday through Friday from 3-8 P.M. and Saturdays from 12-5 P.M. According to staff, many of the regulars seem to time their visits to allow for the maximum hours of hanging out in a row, often staying 4 or more hours at a span. The year after this study was completed, Hang Out reduced its hours by one day per week due to budget constraints.

Young people visiting Hang Out have a variety of activities to choose from. The art studio offers a long list of supplies and tables where young artists can complete work at their own pace. Additionally, the sound studio offers young people that chance to

record and mix their own music. Both music and art productions developed during Hang Out can be taken further and turned into art exhibits and band shows. YAA records these productions, and they too are available on the website and in YAA's annual report. In 2010, young people at YAA completed 2,347 art projects, 39 drama projects, and 171 recording projects.

The popularity of the Hang Out program is demonstrated both by today's numbers and the longtime success of the hang out-type programs that have been with this organization since it began. While YAA started as a site to house a variety of youth services, youth and residents primarily knew it as a youth "coffee house" and a popular hang out for alternative youth. While the first location, funded on a small set of county funds, was located in a garage "literally on the wrong side of the tracks" (Mark, Interview), later locations offered more space and amenities for young people hanging out.

Since 1970, YAA has relocated into apartments, houses, churches, and even a senior center, but it maintained its reputation as a welcoming place for young people to hang out. Hanging out was an effective draw not only because it employed a term from youth culture (the idea of "hanging out" has been associated with young people's slang since the mid-twentieth century), but also because it didn't demand that young people participate in adult sanctioned activities, or even any activity at all. It was a low-pressure environment.

Yet despite the continued popularity of YAA's Hang Out, it faces major obstacles to its continued success. In 2010, nearly 70% of one major grant supporting Hang Out was cut, forcing YAA to cut a paid position and close one more day a week. While

partner programs at YAA continue to find funding (programs for teen mothers, afterschool programs, and counseling), Hang Out cannot seem to find its niche. Changes to offer structured programs have had little success. As one youth worker and local artist explained it, kids “ask for special programs, but then don’t show up” (Lin, Interview). Efforts to track young people are similarly difficult, as many of the attendees of Hang Out prefer not to provide personal information and refuse other attempts at record keeping.

### **Youth Work**

Youth work, broadly defined, includes any activities that intentionally seek to impact the lives of young people. A social movement fueled by religious fervor, youth work caught on in the U.K. in the mid-twentieth century with the Ragged School Movement, and later in the U.S. through Sunday Schools and the introduction of the Young men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.). Today, scholarship on the topic has demonstrated how current understandings of quality youth work are highly dependent on the social, cultural, economic, and historical context in which they are formed (Smith, 1988; Halpern, Barker & Mollard, 2000; Jeffs & Smith, 1999).

While youth work has shifted continuously over the last 150 years, the last decade of the twentieth century brought a sea change to these institutions. Massive budget increases transitioned many of the small, often grassroots organizations of the 1960’s and 70’s into the large-scale, federally funded non-profits of today. Suddenly, youth work was able to grow and flourish in many previously underserved areas. New centers were opened, and competition for large grants fueled a new effort to produce recognizable

“results,” often through standardized measures of academic achievement. Yet, while the use of standardized test data to evaluate youth programs was seen as promising by researchers and policy makers in the 1990’s, many youth workers found the effort to create meaningful change on test scores not only difficult, but also antithetical to their work. Halpern (2003) notes that improving test scores has proven a difficult goal, even for educators for which this is a prime objective; youth workers, who are generally untrained in test preparation, may find it nearly impossible.

Thus, decisions to measure youth programs through the demonstration of academic improvement—a goal that few programs would have measured themselves—led to an upsurge in reports of false-scores and other scandals. For example, Halpern (2003) describes how the inflation of test scores by New York youth programs in the late-1990’s led to an inflated market, one where youth workers felt trapped in a cycle of unrealistic achievement. Dubbing this scandal “the big lie,” after a youth worker’s description of the false inflation, the author concluded that there was an urgent need to reframe our expectations of youth programming.

The 1990’s also brought an intensification of fears about young people as a threat to the social order, a move that drove a new “moral panic” (Cohen, 1972) over youth culture. Soon the belief that children and teenagers should “no longer fend for themselves” after 3:00 P.M. (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) became an expectation, and the pressure to close the “achievement gap” (Education Week, 2011) was on the minds of policy makers, law enforcement leaders, educators, and parents. These groups joined forces in the demand for more afterschool programs (Eidman-Aahdal, 2002; Radin, 2000; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 1999), and just two decades later, an estimated 8.4 million

American young people participate in such offerings (Afterschool Alliance, 2010). This number increased by nearly three million young people just in the last five years. This increased interest has led to additional money being set aside for research, development, and assessment of such programs.

Yet despite a great deal of interest in youth centers, there is little to no consensus on whether the programs offered there are successful, or even on how success should be defined (Shann, 2001; Fashola, 1999; Roth et al. 1998). While some see the role of youth centers as providing a space for developmental activities, others see the space as a place to make up for lost school time through tutoring. Palmer, Anderson, and Sabetelli (2009), note that while a “sense” of outcomes can be derived from large-scale studies employing qualitative (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008) and quantitative (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Lauer, Motoko, Wilkerson, Apthorp, Snow, and Martin-Glenn, 2006; Zief & Lauver, 2006) approaches, programs vary dramatically in their ability to produce these outcomes.

Recent reports from the Afterschool Alliance (2011) also reflect the diversity of youth programming. With titles ranging from “Afterschool: A Strategy for Addressing and Preventing Middle School Bullying,” to “Aligning Afterschool with the Regular School Day: The Perfect Compliment,” it is clear that different programs are built on different goals. Thus, while some programs are situated as controlling youth “on the loose,” others are best understood as sites of academic or service learning where young people can supplement school learning time.

Reports of varied and inconsistent outcomes, combined with the competition of non-profit funding, has created an atmosphere of constant pressure on youth centers.

Today, many of the most successful centers collect data and spend considerable time representing their work and various programs to community and to funding organizations (McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman, 1994). Yet, research conducted by youth centers has proven problematic; The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's task force (1992) outlined several problems with data collected by centers, including: small sample sizes, poor record keeping, high staff and youth turnover, resistant staff, and little goal setting. Other studies have added to this list, suggesting that abstract goals, a lack of cohesive organization, and little follow-up contribute to the lack of understanding around youth center success (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

YAA is no stranger to these problems, its directors have long struggled to collect data and demonstrate outcomes. Furthermore, while YAA increased its capacity during the funding boom of the 1990's, it now faces larger costs despite an overall tightening of federal budgets. Thus while YAA has survived on tight budgets in the past by cutting hours or youth workers choosing to work without pay (City Council, 1976), recent increases in pressure such as inflated numbers, increased competition, and high-stakes opportunities—such as those experienced through Halpern's "big lie"—could prove disastrous.

### ***Public Hangouts and Hang Out***

YAA has not only managed to stay open during a difficult period of youth program funding, but also continues to offer Hang Out in a time when the majority of public hangouts are disappearing. While young people continue to express the desire to "hang around, meet friends, and just be" (Bloustein, 2003 p. 166) during afterschool

hours, the number of places where teens can do this is increasingly sparse (Ito, 2010). Instead, teenagers are often considered a “polluting presence,” and actively pushed out of public spaces (Skelton & Valentine, 1998; Baumgartner, 1988; Cahill, 1990). From city parks and downtowns to libraries and even youth centers, bans against hanging out are increasingly common. These regulations are sometimes surprisingly blatant in their anti-teen message. A handful of parks in Minneapolis installed “screech machines,” engineered to emit a sound “like fingernails on a chalkboard,” (Screech Machine, 2011) to young ears that can still hear in high frequencies. In 2007, the *New York Times* reported on a group of east coast libraries, which when overwhelmed by teens hanging out, responded by locking their doors between the hours of 3 and 7 P.M.

This press for regulation is echoed in Statesville, where private security guards patrol the downtown mall entrance. Four-foot signs painted red on white declare, “No Standing Within 10 Feet of Entrance,” and guards regularly expel young and old for hanging out, despite the understanding that this entrance offers the closest shelter for the downtown bus stop. The population of people using the bus stop and those hanging out cannot be easily separated; the space is a social one and the talking, laughing, and roughhousing attract increased surveillance with every passing year. Adding to the tension is the racial composition of the group hanging out. Those hanging out are primarily African-American, while the shop owners and several of the security guards are Caucasian.

But blatant efforts like signs and guards represent only a part of our culture’s efforts to remove youth from public spaces. Subtler approaches employ the language of urban progress, in particular the rhetoric of economic and symbolic revitalization (Fyfe &

Bannister, 1996) and discourses that separate the spheres of adolescents from those of adults (Lesko, 1996a; Mintz, 2004). In addition, scholars such as Mitchell (1996) have noted the effects of geographical privatization and the “annihilation of public space” (Mitchell, 1996), accounting for another way that young people are squeezed out of public spaces (Skelton & Valentine, 1998). As youth are increasingly forced out of their public geographies, many have turned to drop-in youth programs, such as the one offered at YAA, as a place to hang out.

In addition to understanding the move from public hangouts to those offered by youth centers, it’s essential to note that the boundaries that separate these spaces are always permeable. In addition to flowing inside and outside the physical buildings in its downtown location, YAA’s Hang Out takes up digital spaces and school spaces; and it spills out in unexpected ways through the transference of ideas, art, and gossip as well. Hang Out changes shape with the seasons. Young people rush out of the building for a game of hacky sack in the summer; they walk to the nearby convenience store for packages of ramen noodles to ward off the winter chill. The flexibility of Hang Out has remained a stable idea in the minds of the many young people who rely on it in a time when their other hangouts are quickly disappearing.

### ***“YAA Kids”***

Prior to conducting research at YAA’s Hang Out, I had already heard about “YAA Kids.” In Statesville, this term was often employed to describe the set of alternative young people that frequented Hang Out, many of whom participated more in the local arts and music scene than in school. Yet spending time at YAA demonstrated

that there is no typical YAA Kid, any more than there is a typical “School Kid.” Instead, the young people that frequent YAA have a diverse set of interests, affiliations, and backgrounds. While they share some common threads—many see themselves as alternative or “not the popular kids” (Nathan, Interview)—they are individuals with unique experiences that cannot be distilled into a set of demographic categories.

Yet these demographics provide the numbers that funders crave; thus they are an important part of what youth workers do at Hang Out. In 2010, YAA served 3,176 young people in the greater Statesville area. The organization’s demographic data showed that of this group, the majority identified as Caucasian, with the next largest racial groups being African American and Latino. Though no official statistics concerning gender are kept, anecdotal evidence gathered from my fieldnotes demonstrates that the population visiting Hang Out is primarily male, at about a 4:1 ratio.

There are several other key features about YAA Kids that do not fit into the demographic categories measured by the organization. YAA historically has been a gathering space for young people who do not fit into mainstream cultural norms. Some seem to fit this “outside the mainstream” definition by choice, loudly proclaiming difference via piercings, hairstyles, clothing, and make-up. Others may or may not choose to stand out, with torn clothes, or what would conventionally be understood as poor hygiene (lack of showering, for example). But one important part of Hang Out is that it is often difficult to tell the difference between these varieties of non-conformists. As the youth worker Zeke put it, there are lots of ways to “not fit in the box” (Interview).

YAA strives to maintain these blurry boundaries, ones that the director, Mark, sees as beneficial for the young people attending (Interview). YAA is able to do this in

part due to the history of the center as a gathering place for subcultures, particularly those youth participating in Punk subculture. This particular subculture is important here because it offers an example of how style is used to blur class distinctions. For example, since punk subculture valorized working class life, features such as ironic styling, ripped clothing, poor hygiene, and seemingly unusual hairstyles can mean fitting in with your friends rather than simply standing out from society.

While the youth workers that I interviewed felt that the subcultural participation at YAA has waned (it was once a gathering place for all of the local punk rock bands), considered another way it may also have simply dispersed in new ways. As Muggleton (2000) notes, contemporary subculturalists, while postmodern in the heterogeneity of their styles (often mixing and hybridizing different subcultures), may still show a strong commitment to the modern ideals of individual freedom and self-expression.

Thus, while the most popular subcultural style at Hang Out during the time of this study consisted of girlfriend jeans, tight hoodies, stocking caps, and high-top sneakers (a combination of Skater, Emo, and occasionally Goth or Punk elements), young people still saw this style as expressing “being alternative” (Nathan, Interview). Additionally, there was sometimes separation between kids who favored hybrid styles and young people who favored more extreme looks such as Goth (characterized by black clothes, pale makeup and long hair dyed black or burgundy), Punk (colorful hair spiked or gelled and a variety of chains on arms, boots, and waist), or even Skin (shaved head, plaid shirts, black or military pants, and heavy boots). Some of these looks appears to be produced through Do it Yourself (DiY) styling of any materials that were around, while others appeared store-bought, purchased at the local mall or online. I noted all of these “looks” within my first

month at YAA. I also noted several young people who did not participate in these styles, choosing instead to wear mainstream conventional gear for their age, like tee shirts, sweatshirts, and loose blue jeans. The styles associated with subculture have a long history at YAA and among the “alienated” young people of Statesville (Hladkey, 1972). Youth workers described efforts to change this image, but admitted that the prevailing image of “YAA kids” as “anti-institution,” “outside the box,” and “alternative” (Interviews) is difficult to combat.

### ***YAA Youth Workers***

The first time that I visited Hang Out, I mistook one of the youth workers for a teenager. I had dropped in to discuss a research schedule with Jill, a youth worker whose name I had been given on the phone, and walked right past what I took to be three teenagers sitting on the couch playing videogames. Glancing into the darkened offices for an adult, I decided to walk over to the teens to introduce myself and ask for help. The group was chatting in low voices, and I waited for a break in their conversation. When they did turn to face me, I addressed my comments to the group, explaining myself and asking for help. The person who responded to me wore a loose oversized tunic, hemp jewelry and men’s trousers. Her heavy dreadlocks had been gathered into a haphazard ponytail and her youthful face contained no trace of make-up. Though I initially thought she was around 17 years old, her clear eyes betrayed staggering confidence when she spoke. “You can find Jill here on Friday,” she said, “or you can talk to me; I work here too.”

As I soon learned, Maggie, like many other youth workers at YAA, was a veteran

at Hang Out. Of the six youth workers interviewed, only one had worked there fewer than seven years and several had been there more than ten years. All of the youth workers that I interviewed were Caucasian, three were female and three were male. Three of the six (2 males and one female) regularly worked Hang Out, and two of the others occasionally worked it. All youth workers at YAA have multiple responsibilities, including, but not limited to: working on-site at schools, running structured activities, prevention education, teaching classes, record-keeping, and counseling. The final of the six, the long-time director of YAA, works in another building and is responsible for overseeing YAA's many projects, grants, and locations, as well as conducting public relations for the organization.

The YAA youth workers became fascinating to me from early in this research project. The fact that they had the ability to blend in seamlessly with youth provided many of them with a vantage point unknown to many adults—they were insiders to youth culture. Yet, at the same time, they lived with the constant demand to make their work appear valuable to people on the outside. I soon learned that this tension—between being an insider to youth culture and living in a larger society that demonizes it—was integral to the functioning of Hang Out.

Throughout this study, the youth workers of YAA expressed concern that outsiders would misunderstand Hang Out. For the workers who spend every afternoon sitting, eating, chatting, and laughing with teenagers there is little doubt that the space is beneficial, yet they know that not everyone sees teenagers through the same lens. They understand that for many outsiders to Hang Out, the activities that kids choose to participate in and that motivate them to return can appear confusing, haphazard, and

without purpose. As one youth worker explained of Hang Out, “if you are there for the creation you know who did what and it all makes sense to you, but if you walk in on it it’s all a bunch of scribbles” (Maggie, 2009).

### ***Planning and Hanging Out***

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I came to YAA with certain expectations of what I would find there. As a teacher and literacy researcher, I planned to conduct an ethnographic study, replete with details of youth engagement with literacy and the arts. I was most interested in the way that youth subculture played a role in the out of school engagement of young people. As I will describe in more detail in chapter two, I used standard ethnographic field notes. I added drawings and maps to these notes, fervently trying to produce a visual marker of what Hang Out looked like in a given afternoon. I had my study passed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and created a series of consent and assent forms for adults and youth to sign before interviews. I thought my plan was ready when I stepped in the door, and yet in retrospect, I realize that I was missing one major piece—I didn’t know how to hang out.

Perhaps I had simply *forgotten* how to hang out. I once knew how. Growing up as a misfit teenager in a conservative Iowa town, I had learned to locate the few hangout spaces available to me. The most important one, my hometown public library, actually functioned a lot like YAA’s hang out, offering resources and spaces to a group of “alternative” kids hiding at back tables. But make no mistake, we were not “hanging out” doing homework (though, surely that happened occasionally); we were instead reading about paganism, palm reading, sex, and philosophy. My friend, a slight boy with hot pink

hair and an eyebrow ring, taught me how to tattoo my own skin with an ink pen. Another friend, her family of Syrian descent, engaged me in debates over Israel and the rights of Palestinians. Despite the ever-watchful gaze of what must have been some very suspicious librarians, my friends and I felt worldly and cool. I remember, because it was in such extreme contrast to the way that the rest of my life felt during the greater part of my adolescent years.

Thus it should not have been so difficult for me to learn to hangout at YAA, but it was. Years of teaching, marriages, graduate school and children had taken their toll on my ability to forget myself. My perceived responsibility for everyone else left me little space to imagine myself in any other role. Nor did anyone at YAA suggest that my role would be different. I was a white elephant in the room for a long time, and there was no help to be had for it. Despite the way I see myself now (youngish, hip-ish, and generally able to communicate with all sorts of people), the young people at YAA likely saw this: a mom-aged white lady with a computer who seemed to be watching all of the time. I know that I smiled too much, a defense of so many Midwestern women, and one that proved ridiculous in this circumstance. I was a tad bit afraid, because I wanted to be liked.

In those first few weeks at Hang Out, it was mostly a matter of sticking with it. At first young people watched me back, some of them even came over and sat with me and asked to “look at what you are saying about us.” I explained myself to individuals, small groups, and in writing. I asked for volunteers and was met with blank stares. What I didn’t understand then was that my very presence brought a surveillance that I couldn’t shake. It didn’t matter if I wanted to show all of the great stuff about hanging out at YAA; my body told a different story.

Later, more painfully, they ignored me like I was a plant in the room. Though some see this as a good position for an ethnographer, I found it constantly depressing. Eventually, I gained a little ground. I brought pizza, which helped endear me to some regulars for a matter of minutes. A few would say “hi” and “bye” to me when they came or left. One boy tried to teach me to read music and play simple chords on the guitar.

I suppose, by the end of my time at Hang Out, the knack had started to return. If this was true, it was due to countless hours spent watching youth workers do this work so beautifully. Many were talented, a few were breathtakingly exceptional at being able to blend in, relax, and become teenager-like for long periods of time. This allowed workers to remove barriers between youth and themselves to the point that conversation flowed comfortably, almost like it did among my friends so many years ago.

The youth workers are the people who taught me what it could look like for an adult to hang out, and showed me the important benefits that hanging out could provide. They are also the ones that brought me their own questions about Hang Out, with the hope that research could shed some light on what was happening there. Regularly, youth workers would stop by my table and ask how things were going. They were curious, and I now believe concerned, about what I was seeing. They offered me excellent details and asked smart questions that stuck with me throughout this project.

After my data collection had ended, and my analysis started, I realized that my dissertation would take a very different form than I had first expected. It would not be a description of young people’s literacy and art engagement at YAA, though there was some engagement with the arts during Hang Out. Nor would it focus on the projects completed during Hang Out, though many of them were inspiring. Instead, what I wanted

to focus on, or what I needed to focus on, was something else. It was Hang Out.

Moreover, it was the deep seeded social and cultural understandings that were killing Hang Out's future, even as I sought to describe it here.

### **Questions: Moral and Theoretical**

The realization that my original research plan was complicit in the changes happening to Hang Out left me shaken. Despite my comfort with the rhetoric of the poststructuralist feminist and ethnographic methodologies, I still had rarely confronted such a clear conflict between what I believed and what my research would set into progress. Though it may at first appear dramatic, I now believe that many research efforts, even those with the best of intentions, leave deep footprints on their research sites and participants. Even, or perhaps especially, efforts to “illuminate” and “enlighten” an organization to its own worth should be reexamined and potentially redefined.

I didn't frame my research as a cure to misrepresentation when introducing it to a board at YAA, but this was certainly part of my intention. Like so many researchers in my field, I planned to go to Hang Out, record the great things, frame it with literacy theory, and make everyone happy. YAA would be happy because they could use my research to show the benefits of Hang Out, the kids would be happy because they could still hang out, and I would be happy because I could be assured there would be an eager audience for my optimistic work. It would be a win-win situation.

But this was before I was infected by the desire to really understand the problems faced by Hang Out. This was back when I wanted to gather quotes from happy youth who would tell me how their lives had been changed by the caring adults at Hang Out. When I

wanted to use young people's narratives to demonstrate "agency" and "identity" and to locate Hang Out as a place where they could change their lives.

This much is true; after spending six months at Hang Out and several more years thinking about what I saw there, I believe that hanging out at YAA does change people's lives, but not in the ways that many adult researchers are framing it. Our assessments, management, and developmental "truths" about what young people need offer only the smallest glimpse of the potential that is available during an afternoon at Hang Out. Even some of the most benign-seeming research tools, such as those that offer to classify and describe the individual skills young people are gaining, should be suspect as they seek to classify, and ultimately create a hierarchy concerned with the way time is to be spent.

Additionally these straight lenses of research cannot account for the mutual, yet inverse co-construction of identities at Hang Out. Many research methodologies in place today, both quantitative and qualitative, assume compliance. But if surveys are gathered up, such as they are at YAA, with names like "Harry Potter" and "Nobody," how are we to understand the results? How can we come to understand the sometimes very comfortable, while still oppositional, relationships at Hang Out?

In addition to my own concerns as a researcher, I was plagued by my concern for Hang Out. The same elements that draw young people to Hang Out were proving problematic for its continued survival. The lack of structured programs made the time difficult to account for and the term "hang out," while popular with young people, implied unproductive behavior to adults. The imagined moral and social consequences of this unproductive time were clearly a limiting factor for YAA's Hang Out. It was on

YAA to prove that kids “just hanging out” was a productive activity; adding one more Herculean task to their already overfilled schedules.

Mark, the head of YAA for nearly 40 years, believes that there are ways to prove Hang Out’s productivity, thus making it a better investment for taxpayers. During his interview, he revealed the belief that “the money always follows the research” (Interview), and that YAA needs to get on board. Like many of the most successful leaders in youth programming (McLaughlin, 1994), Mark understands the need to make connections and represent the work at YAA. He described funding through a basic understanding that he has long related to the Statesville community noting, “anytime we do a cost-benefit analysis of our work, it helps” (Mark, Interview). Yet, despite Mark’s long-term efforts to bring research to YAA, he has not found great success using research to show the value of Hang Out. Some of the assessments showed positive correlations between time spent hanging out and self-esteem, but without control groups this research didn’t yield the results YAA was seeking. Other studies proved inconclusive. Today, Mark is hopeful about a new listening skills test being offered by a local testing company, but he’s troubled by the prospect of transferring young people across town to the testing site.

Finally, it’s important to note that my fieldnotes from months of observations at Hang Out yielded information that was both fascinating and frustrating. Like Halpern, Barker, and Mollard (2000), I found a drop-in program to be a site full of energetic detail.

Many kids seem to have short attention spans, to be restless, to be moving from one spot in the room to the next, watching TV for a few minutes then jumping up, then leaving the room, returning in a few minutes...A group of kids is sitting on tables at the far end of the big room drawing. A young male is drawing a tag for a girl...the tag is her name, he shows me the letters, because, as with most graffiti art, they are hard to distinguish...[this group] continues to sit in the corner of the

drop-in room most of the early evening talking quietly among themselves, not participating in the games with others...[ellipses in original] (Halpern, 2000, p. 485).

Yet, such a description also illustrates my struggle. This moment was captured as part of an ethnographic study of a drop in center in Chicago's West Town. The abundance of ellipses and the starting up and stopping give the sense of catching a moment in the middle, leaving deeper understandings as occluded as a hand-drawn graffiti tag. I, too, found rich ethnographic detail in Hang Out, yet found capturing meaning exhaustingly elusive. I watched and recorded as clusters of young people moved and shifted, taking up this activity or that. The energy of the space seemed almost too much to be contained in my notes, and I started to draw. My drawings couldn't keep up, and I longed for a video camera. At the same time, I understood that the reasons that I couldn't film Hang Out were tied to the central problems of this dissertation, namely: drop-in centers don't require parental consent, many attendees are resistant to adult interventions, and most importantly the activity of hanging out is still considered illegitimate by many adults.

Yet these moments made Hang Out exciting, spontaneous, and adventuresome for the young people in attendance. They seemed to be what hanging out was all about, and I continued to record them. Read after-the-fact, these notes seem to linger in the middles of events, rather than beginnings or ends, often showing what seems like an endless stream of small changes in restless bodies. They show clusters of energetic activity and talk, periods of intensity. They show rises in energy that seem to happen repeatedly throughout the day, organized through any number of small topics. The following field note gives a sample:

Two boys have entered the studio and are setting up equipment. One female youth worker is positioned on the couch playing videogames with two boys. Another boy is at the refrigerator looking for a drink. One girl, new to the center, is alone drawing in the art room and occasionally glances out. Suddenly music starts up from the recording studio, the insistent boom of drums and high whine of the electric guitar. The following exchange takes place:

Boy 1: “Shut the fucking door!”

Youth Worker: “Hey.”

Boy 2: “He means shut the damn door.”

Boy 3: “He means shut the goddamn door.”

The door slams shut. The music is muffled behind it and now mixes with the sounds from the video games. The exchange was certainly about getting the door shut, but it was also clearly about much more. Does it just feel good to shout? (Field Note, 2/5/2009).

Ultimately, these notes and the moments that they captured drove me to explore alternative lenses for understanding Hang Out. I wondered what happens in these moments? I witnessed explosions of creativity, only to watch them fade away in the next minute like the forgotten shouts over loud music. Hang Out comes to life seemingly out of nowhere. A young person would pick up a guitar and use it to add drama to a story. A board game would get lively, or a group would gather to critique the film *Oliver Twist*, as it played on T.V. What was unusual, however, was that these moments seemed to grow and develop from unexpected places and at unpredictable times. Unlike the classroom, where teachers regulate time and push forward a linear agenda, Hang Out time stretched out seemingly endlessly, allowing for a constantly changing pace of activity. I started to come to terms with the idea that my research path, if continued in the way that I had designed it, would miss these moments; the rises in action and the energies that seem to leap from one person to the next would all be lost to me.

As researchers, how do we sift through countless examples of activity, some legitimized and some not, in search of the elusive meaning of Hang Out? Where do we

place our gaze? Should we, as so many others have done, discard the illegitimate moments, those “orts, scraps, fragments” (Woolf, 1941) of experience? If so, where does that leave Hang Out? Contemplating these questions helped me realize that my research agenda had to change. Just as any powerful experience changes and creates us, researching Hang Out changed me and created me as a researcher. The transition was painful and I found few handholds available as I searched for my new focus. What emerged was a combination of the old and new, a road that merged my observations with my own lived experiences and was illuminated by theory.

### **Radical Youth Work**

Recent theoretical explorations into youth work have yielded a strand of study known as radical youth work (Skott-Myhre, 2006; 2009; Belton, St.Croix & Ahmed, 2009). Though not a new concept, radical youth work has drawn increasing interest in recent years from those who wish to reexamine the problematic assumptions that characterize much traditional youth work. Radical youth work questions the social constructions of “youth” that youth work policy is based on, as well as its attempts at remedial actions and interventions, and encourage new conceptions of the products of youth work (Ahmed, in Belton, 2009). These perspectives, and the infusion of new theory into the field, is encouraging a significant shift in the “composition and relations of force” in youth work (p. 175).

Drawing on the work of French postmodern theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (whose work I will use in chapter five), Scott-Myhre (2009) outlines how today’s youth work is at a pivotal point where there is potential to move away from

hierarchical and disciplinary programs in favor of new relations between adults and youth that go beyond youth/adult binaries. Such work would be developed through a pedagogy that asks youth workers to reexamine their conceptualizations of youth and

examine their own relationships to deterritorializing movements of postmodernity as they deconstruct the world of the modern and experiment with new forms along the edge of nihilism (Skott-Myhre, 2009, p. 176).

Like YAA's Hang Out, where echoes of punk subculture encourage a leveling of the field for youth, Skott-Myhre draws on subculture as a means of reexamining the delicate relationships that happen between adults and young people in youth work environments. Drawing on subcultures allows Skott-Myhre to develop radical youth work in ways that move away from trajectories based on "founded identity and historical antecedents" (p. 180) and towards an exploration of what potential these sites have to offer. In other words, Skott-Myhre's radical youth work pedagogy includes:

- \* the development of new relations between workers and youth
- \* the harnessing of subcultural understandings to further develop youth work perspectives
- \* the exploration of multiple and shifting identities and dispersion of definitions of the self and other.

Such a vision for youth work has long thrived at Hang Out. Consider my first interview with the youth worker, Zeke, during which he revealed that subculture had long been an important part of his life:

I was raised singly by a member of the hippie movement. Actually, he's the one that got me into punk rock—he's the one who bought me the Sex Pistols record. Ummm... but as a kid I was pretty young and coming from a Midwestern small town perspective. To me it seemed like my generation's opportunity to do what the 60's had done and that the 70's had gotten kind of boring. It was time to wake people up (Interview).

During our interview, Zeke described his early association with Hang Out as a Punk youth who used the site to meet friends and practice with bands. His participation in youth subcultures not only helps him get along with young people, it helps him redefine himself alongside.

They may listen to techno, but I look at them and think they are just like [friend's name]. I mean we do have some punk rock kids now. It's sort of interesting because the current youth culture is so fractured into many different little compartments. Kids are much more heavily marketed to now. And now I belong to this little sub box. Unlike when I was younger there was like 'there's this big box and all of the weird people go in the big box' (Interview).

Zeke's reflections on subculture and identity align with scholarship on the topic, much of which presents the postmodern fracturing of subculture as a significant shift in the way resistance is mobilized and produced by young people. For some, this shift in subculture negates resistive potential (Muggleton, 2000), yet for others, subculture still offers potential to reexamine resistance and its relation to power (Skott-Myhre, 2009). It is this latter perspective that calls for a reexamination of subculture as a means to developing alternative and radical forms of youth work.

Yet, while the lens of radical youth work provides important new ways to reexamine the role of youth work at YAA, it fails to address the significant shifts in the way that contemporary youth work is funded. In the next section, I work to articulate these shifts using the work of poststructuralist theorist Michel Foucault.

### **Neo-liberal Governmentality**

French Philosopher Michel Foucault coined the term governmentality as a way of talking about what he saw as the "art of government." This meant that government was

not strictly limited to politics, but rather included a wide range of control techniques developed through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that affected the lives of individuals as well as populations.

Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, complementarity and conflicts between which techniques assure coercion and processes through which one is constructed or modified by himself (Foucault, 1993, p. 203).

For Foucault, governmentality represented a link between the “genealogy of the state” and the “genealogy of the subject,” and provided him the means to analyze the connections between what he called “technologies of the self and technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject and the formation of the state” (Lemke, 2000, p. 2). He saw the lives and choices of individuals as inextricably linked to the workings of government. Yet this vein of Foucault’s work has only recently entered mainstream consciousness, as until a decade ago, the majority of his work on the topic remained in the form of unpublished audiotapes from his 1978 and 1979 lectures at the Collège de France (Lemke, 2000). Since that time, and subsequent publications of the lectures, scholars have used and extended Foucault’s work as a means of critiquing neo-liberal social policies (Mitchell, 1994; Nettleton, 1997), managerialism (Shore & Wright, 2000), and economic life (Miller & Rose, 1990).

Governmentality is useful in exploring the shifts taking place at YAA over the course of the last 20 years. Now, youth workers at Hang Out are not only expected to work with youth on projects and provide guidance, they are increasingly expected to track and record these interventions and their results. For example, while transcribing my interview with Zeke, I noticed a curious noise in the background, something that I had

forgotten about during our interview. Moments later on the audiotape, Zeke explained, “You don’t mind if I keep typing, do you?” As it turned out, Zeke was using the few spare moments of our interview to correct and record the comings and goings of the elusive drop-in population. He is often charged with this job because he knows so many of the young people’s names and he can read the often sloppy handwriting of young people checking in and busy youth workers tracking them.

On the surface, the increased need to track the comings and goings of young people, tally their activities, and even provide them with satisfaction surveys, appears benign. But these changes represent a larger shift in youth work, one that positions Hang Out at a deep disadvantage. Changes wrought by the influx of funding have created a market for youth programs where those with the most data are often the best funded. Additionally, programs are asked to use data to show specific evidence about the changes the programs make in the lives of young people. Funders see these changes as proof that the program is creating well-adjusted citizens; youth workers see them as frustrating paperwork that keeps them from doing their jobs.

Foucault’s work on governmentality helps reveal the coercive relationship between government and youth work organizations like YAA. Additionally, through this examination, we are better able to reflect on the social and historical conditions that have rendered certain information about young people “real,” and take into account the theoretical and non-theoretical consequences of such “truths” (Lemke, 2000, p. 14) for a program like Hang Out.

## Chapters

In this dissertation, I will explore how this work is, as much as anything, a reflection on how the lenses we bring to research and analysis shape what it is we see. In what follows, I will analyze Hang Out through the lenses described above: Hang Out as a space of disciplinary governmentality, as a site of resistance, and as a site for affective production. This is not intended to suggest that one analysis is better or truer than another. This is not, in other words, imagined as a dialectic in which a previous insight (thesis) is contradicted through new insights (antithesis) to produce a new and better theory (synthesis) that takes us ever closer to the truth of what is happening. Rather, it employs different lines of theoretical, historical, and cultural knowledge to develop multiple perspectives on Hang Out.

Therefore, in what follows, I will explore several major insights about youth work that do not necessarily fit together or produce a unified picture of Hang Out at YAA. By proposing multiple plausible and powerful perspectives, I hope to both explore their effects and dwell in their productive tensions with one another.

This work is divided into five chapters. In chapter two, I examine the methodological hurdles to researching Hang Out and develop strategies for working through them. Recent educational research has focused a great deal of attention on the impact of time spent at youth centers and the public good. Some studies have focused on individual youth, while others have drawn attention to community impacts. Central to these discussions has been the need to measure and assess the growth and progress of these centers and their impact on youth. Yet despite the need for improved understanding, the methodological hurdles of gathering data at these sites have proven daunting. This

chapter draws from data collected at YAA's "Hang Out" to argue for revisions to current data collection methods employed by researchers and youth workers. The revisions were prepared in reaction to the way that current data collection techniques (youth and parent surveys, activity checklists) actually create walls between youth workers and the youth that they serve.

Chapter three draws on governmentality (Foucault, 2003) as a means of reexamining changes happening at Hang Out. Through this lens, I explore how seemingly objective measures to improve Hang Out are part of a larger coercive system of managerialism that seeks to define and create productivity through specific means. This chapter also traces the subject of youth work historically, demonstrating the productivity of youth work organizations as part of the push to incorporate technologies of audit (Shore & Wright, 2000), into contemporary youth work organizations.

In chapter four, I develop historical and current theories of resistance in order to examine Hang Out through a resistance lens. I employ lenses from cultural studies and feminism; two disciplines that have spent the most time exploring resistance (LeBlanc, 1999). Understanding the way hanging out is conceived as resistance allows us to reposition youth workers within the matrix of operations at YAA. That is, when youth workers are understood as participating in dominant discourses concerning youth culture, their work during Hang Out can only be interpreted as part of the effort to "fix" problem youth through a series normalizing interventions. A resistance lens contradicts this interpretation, demonstrating how youth workers can see themselves more aligned with theory drawn from resistance to dominant culture than from dominant culture itself.

In the final chapter I use the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1977)—particularly that which focuses on movement, affect, and sensation—to analyze adolescent engagement at YAA. This chapter does something different than earlier chapters by challenging and turning on its head what it means to be “productive.” For these youth, the experience of Hang Out is characterized by intensity, and the moment-to-moment interactions that make this space exciting. I theorize these interactions using Deleuze's work, and that which he created in conjunction with Guattari and Parnet (1977/2002), because these theories offer vital insights that have been missing from studies of youth literacy and engagement. Rather than focusing attention on predicted outcomes, or specific measures of success or failure, theory drawn from Deleuze offers insight that focuses on maneuverability and openness towards multiple potentials.

### **A Last Word**

In the following chapters, I work to examine the role of Hang Out for the young people and adults who attend YAA. In order to do this, it is necessary to combine theory with a grounded approach that draws on ethnographic data collection. I do this in the hopes of avoiding some of the pitfalls (which I will describe in Chapter 4) of a purely theoretical look, such as those offered by early cultural studies scholars (Hebdige, 1979) and the pitfalls of ethnographic research that portrays a simply “celebratory” (LeBlanc, 1999) view of the activities of young people. Yet, no study avoids all pitfalls, and as I take this opportunity to situate my work amidst the diversity of opinions within and around youth studies, I’m reminded of the importance of conversation for those seeking social change. Without such conversation, that which brings to bear the weight of

histories, cultures, and economies—as well as fears and fantasies about young people—our progress in youth studies will be stunted.

The research in this dissertation is not intuitive, and in fact, I seek to refute a number of popular assumptions about young people. I reject the notion that young people, on the whole, are a unified category and instead seek to show that young people of different backgrounds have different access to hang out spaces. I reject the directive that young people, particularly the most troubled of them, must only “do something” in order to ward off potential problems. I reject the notion that teens that sit on couches, chat with friends, and argue with adults are “doing nothing” or that these actions are not creating affects. In fact, I will argue that these youth are highly productive, in fact, cannot avoid being so, but that we must understand productivity differently in order to see this.

This approach necessitates leaving a great deal behind. As a researcher, I leave behind mountains of data that tell many important stories about Hang Out. As a teacher, I leave behind countless lenses that focus on learning, despite the conviction that individuals at Hang Out (young and old) learn incredibly quickly through the porous environment and multiple connections developed there. But perhaps most difficult to leave behind is the notion that as an adult, I know more about young people than they know about themselves. On this final point, I try to remind myself that the colonization of young people’s spaces with adult constructions of what young people need is in itself a major obstacle to researching youth work.

Once stripped of these core assumptions, I hope to use this work to produce new ways of thinking about YAA’s Hang Out and related youth work. I care about Hang Out,

and have long been caught between telling just the easy pieces of the story and the effort to redefine why those pieces are the ones we want to hear. I've opted for the latter, a decision that left me staring at the reflective glass window of Hang Out for hours on end. It is my hope that what I've produced offers more than a reflection of past histories, categories, and definitions, and more of a glimpse of the potential offered just inside.

## CHAPTER II

## ATTENDING TO "DOING NOTHING":

## THEORY AND METHODS FOR RESEARCHING HANG OUT

Monday, nothing  
 Tuesday, nothing  
 Wednesday and Thursday nothing  
 Friday, for a change  
 a little more nothing  
 Saturday once more nothing

(*Nothing*, The Fugs)

**Introduction**

As a researcher, studying young people “hanging out” was the furthest thing from my mind. I came to YAA to study practices that, at the time, seemed the opposite of hanging out; namely, the literacy activities of young people. Further, as a teacher-turned-literacy researcher, I was most interested in those literacy productions of young people who have proven withdrawn, reluctant, or downright resistant in school settings. But soon after my research began, I started to understand that my assumptions about productivity had in fact been misplaced; not long after that, my study of Hang Out turned many more of my original ideas on their heads.

In this chapter, I describe the methods used for gathering data and conducting analysis during this research project. What follows is an ethnographic narrative (Broadkey, 1997; Bishop, 1992) designed to address both my early assumptions as a researcher and the changes that happened during the course of my study. In line with poststructuralist feminist ethnographic methods, I use this technique to reveal my own assumptions as a researcher and to explain adjustments in my thinking after spending more time at my research site. I focus on an important shift: from examining the

production of individual young people at YAA, to seeing YAA and its activities as an integral part of the way that “youth” are produced in society. In effect, this meant making changes midway through my fieldwork, and attempting to “cast a wider net” over my data collection and analysis efforts.

For organizational purposes, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first contains a description of my early experiences and fieldwork at YAA’s Hang Out. Providing this narrative allows insight into the researcher’s perspective and position, while acknowledging that this perspective is one of many drawn from the site. Following the narrative is an account of the study’s progression and the questions that arose as I learned more about YAA and Hang Out. The latter portion of the chapter examines these questions as ruptures in this narrative. Here, specific examples of new methods are outlined from the unique complications of fieldwork.

### **Learning to Attend to "Doing Nothing"**

My study of the Youth Action Alliance’s Hang Out program began in the fall of 2008, when I trained to be a volunteer at the center. Soon after, on January 22, 2009, I started attending YAA’s downtown center regularly during the afterschool hours. In late February, I began formal interviews. I formally interviewed six adult youth workers and one youth. Additionally, I had countless other informal conversations with youth during this period. My regular attendance of YAA ended in June of that year. Since that time, I’ve visited YAA several times to check, learn about changes, and update the organization about my progress. Though I have been away from the physical space of

YAA for nearly two years, the challenges and the promise of this space have stayed close at hand.

### ***Plans and Training***

As I walked into the main space on volunteer training day, I was greeted by the sunny smile of Jill, a ten-year YAA veteran youth worker. Alongside her was Maggie, another long-time employee and former AmeriCorps volunteer. AmeriCorps's volunteers, I would soon learn, were funded through federal programs and often come to YAA to get experience that will help them in future jobs. Occasionally, such as in the case of Maggie, they are asked to stay on as permanent youth workers. That morning, Jill and Maggie were in charge of training the new fall volunteers.

Volunteering, while not a requirement of this research per se, provided the opportunity to get to know YAA before my daily observations had started. Volunteer training occurs on weekends, and fills the greater portion of a Saturday with activities, brainstorming sessions, and role-playing. During my volunteer session, I got to know a handful of other incoming volunteers to YAA. Our group consisted of a handful of university students seeking extra-credit, a young woman who had just moved to town and was looking to meet friends, and one Americorps trainee (a federally funded volunteer and the only one of us that would be paid for their services).

I saw volunteering at YAA as an essential part of creating my position as a "participant-observer" (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997) and negotiating the struggle that such a position entails. Participant-observation involves active participation in a community over a period of time in order to gain more accurate and detailed information

about the lives of participants. As a feminist researcher, I was also careful to remember Chiseri-Strater's (1996) pronouncement that "all researchers are positioned, whether they write a book about it explicitly, separately, or not at all" (in Mortenson & Kirsch, p. ix).

As a participant-observer and volunteer at YAA, I was acutely aware of at least three positions in relation to young people: teacher, parent, and researcher. Modeling myself after two researchers who I admired, Ann Arnette Fergusson and Margaret Finders, I imagined my role as someone who could take up a different kind of performance of adulthood, almost a hybrid "adult-youth" who could be a friend rather than an authority. I felt that I had played this role in other research projects, and maintained similar relationships with former students. Finders (1997) described such a relationship as one where she "gained their [participants'] trust slowly and negotiated a relationship that did not fit their established patterns with significant adults" (p. 17). Like Finders, I wanted to keep the "embarrassing secrets" (p. 17) of young people's poverty and protect the parts of themselves that they didn't want other adults to see. I hoped that my volunteer training and my first few weeks at Hang Out would allow such relationships to begin to develop.

At volunteer training, I learned about the rule intended to govern the majority of relationships in the space, "Unconditional Positive Regard" or "UPR." Drawn from the work of Carl Rogers (1980), UPR was supposed to mean blanket acceptance of others at the center, regardless of what they say or do. The phrase, "Are you using 'UPR?'" would soon become familiar to me as a signal that somebody had just said or done something that an adult considered inappropriate. Yet while UPR was consistent with the benign, open and inviting persona I hoped to radiate as I observed and interacted at YAA, it was

also problematic. At volunteer training, they warned us that it was a useful phrase, but that it could be overused or even be said sarcastically.

After my volunteer training was complete, I was ready to begin fieldwork at YAA. Yet, despite my training, I still didn't know what YAA looked like on a daily basis. I envisioned something like my year teaching art, where I would walk around and help young people come up with project ideas or laugh at a comic they were creating for one of the many 'zines that circulate around the Statesville underground.

I planned to bring a large yellow legal pad to YAA, with pages divided in accordance with the style of basic anthropological field notes (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997). I included the categories of "time," "observations," and "reflection." I also decided to bring my small laptop, thinking that it could be used for extra notes.

I made sixty copies of permission slips for young people who would volunteer for interviews (each required a signature by a parent or guardian as well as the youth's signature) and twenty forms for adult youth workers who volunteered to be interviewed. I planned to interview at least ten young people, and at least five adults. I planned to introduce the request for interviews about two weeks after beginning my observations to allow the participants of my study to get more comfortable with the research that I was doing.

My visits to the YAA downtown location would begin in January and occur during the peak afterschool hours (3:00 – 6:00 P.M.). I would attend at least three times per week, for two to three hours at a time, for two months. By then, I hoped to have a good relationship with individuals and would have scheduled interviews. I would then

continue my observations, but schedule them so that I could follow the progress of the young people and their projects.

Additionally, I hoped to collect artifacts from the site. I had already been provided a collection of YAA materials at my volunteer training and had started reading and exploring the YAA resources that were available online. At the time YAA had a simple website that gave their mission, information about funding, and volunteer stories, and explained how to make a donation. I also wanted to collect student artifacts, perhaps drawings or samples of music that would provide insight into the activities of the space.

My plan for analysis consisted of examining these three types of data—fieldnotes, interviews, and artifacts—and looking for patterns. I wanted to look at young people's use of popular culture, particularly those elements that were often considered illegitimate for school productions. Were they creating music that emulated their favorite alternative bands? Were they drawing anime (popular Japanese cartoon) love stories? What type of production was most popular? How did the productions differ from those activities required in school? Most importantly, I wondered what clues might be garnered from YAA's environment that would help us better understand how to engage this oftentimes-resistant set of young people.

### ***First Impressions***

My first observation of YAA during afterschool hours was on January 22, 2009, only two days after the historic inauguration of President Barack Obama. I had arrived early to the site, and quickly headed for Paul's office to let him know that I was there. He was inside talking to Zeke, another long-time youth worker. After chatting for a few

minutes about my schedule, I took a seat at a small round table near the window. I took out my notes and laptop, wrapped my hands around my mug of hot coffee, and waited.

Twenty minutes later, the first young person I would observe at YAA walked in and headed for the couch. Paul, having seen him through the glass, was already headed to the couch to greet him by name. The boy, a 16-year old that will be known in this study as Alex, shouted out to Zeke and then glanced my way. I smiled tentatively and was rewarded with a somewhat awkward smile in return. My heart soared; it seemed a good omen that I would get a smile so quickly. What I didn't yet realize was that Alex would be one of only a handful of "YAA kids" who would smile in my direction over the next six months.

Over the next fifteen minutes, I had the chance to observe Paul and Alex. I listened as Paul asked him about his day and what he had watched on T.V. over the weekend. I noticed Alex's body language, his rigid posture with hands folded in his lap. I attended to his dress, a sweatshirt and too-short blue jeans; and his short brown hair and plastic framed glasses. I listened to his speech, short and punctuated by nervous laughter. Paul asked if he wanted to play the videogame Tetris; he did. The more I watched, the more I felt confused. Alex was not the "YAA kid" that I had expected.

At 3:40, three more young people walked in, boys around thirteen years old. Paul stood up from the couch and Zeke emerged from the office. One boy greeted Zeke with a high five, and they stood together talking about a piece of recording equipment that he had been given at school. "The teacher was gonna throw it away, but I thought you might know how to use it," he said, handing it to Zeke.

Paul greeted the other two boys by name as they sat on the couch. They nodded in his direction, but otherwise ignored him, starting into their own conversation. Both boys sported tight jeans, long hair, and dark hoodies. Over the course of the next hour, I watched some young people come and go, sometimes staying only a minute, and others that were still there when I left at 4:30. Over the course of two hours, I observed conversations about school, inauguration, videogames, recording equipment, and more. It was a slow day, I was told, with only about ten kids coming and going over that time.

As I would soon learn, this glimpse of YAA was both accurate and anything but. Alex, I would soon find out, is mildly autistic and wants to be able to talk one on one with a youth worker, preferably Paul. Paul, as he told me in a later interview, tries to make sure this happens every day. The other young people that I observed that day were semi-regulars; I often saw them once or twice per week. They soon joined the ranks of hundreds of other young people that I would see over the course of my study, most of whom go unnamed here.

### ***Interactions With and Between Youth and Adults***

I returned to YAA the next day and then the following week; my presence soon began to evoke curiosity, varying degrees of nervousness, defensiveness, occasional enthusiasm and in some cases, indifference, in both youth and adults. On days when I sat alone with my notebook, youth would occasionally come over and stand over my shoulder as I wrote. They seemed to be saying, "You are in our space, and we have the right to see what you're saying about us." I couldn't disagree, and allowed interested participants to see the fast notes that I was jotting down on the large yellow legal pad.

Other youth would sit down beside me and regale me with questions about who I was and why I was watching them. Though I explained my position numerous times to youth and adults, it was never enough. Because of the high volume in and out of Hang Out, there were often youth who didn't know why I was there.

On the other hand, the adult youth workers were less direct than youth, but at least as curious about my presence at Hang Out. Different adults working at the center seemed to see my presence in different ways. Some greeted me when I entered (similar to what they did with youth), while others ignored my presence completely. I often detected nervousness with what seemed like a slight edge; the adults in this space were protective of youth and clearly didn't want me making judgments about the way that they did their jobs. To encourage communication, I tried to regularly chat with staff about what I was trying to do, and to show them notes or ask for suggestions. One week after I began my observations, the youth worker Paul asked me to send another email to all staff because, "there were still questions" about my presence. I was happy for the opportunity and composed a thorough email explaining my purpose, a move that, along with spending more time at the center, helped improve my relationship with the majority of youth workers.

When the youth workers did begin to talk to me more, I noticed that though they each maintained a slightly different approach to their work, they had many things in common. They connected with the kids through conversations about topics like music or movies before asking more personal questions. They provided advice constantly. I listened to youth workers advise dozens of young people each day on topics from finding local jobs to dealing with STD's. Overall, youth workers at YAA were amazingly

committed to their relationships with individual youth. I was surprised when listening to Zeke, a youth worker since the 1980's and former YAA youth, change his evening plans so that he could attend a spaghetti dinner event with a boy who had asked him earlier in the day. When I questioned Zeke about it after the boy had left he said, "He doesn't really have anybody right now. This is a big deal, so..." The crooked smile betrayed what were likely his true feelings, that he would rather spend that night at home, but he didn't complain. I soon noticed that this type of behavior was common for a core group of youth workers who had chosen to devote additional unpaid work to the individual kids of YAA.

### ***Getting to Know YAA Kids***

Unlike the youth workers, the actual youth at YAA were extremely difficult to get to know and remained somewhat elusive even after I felt comfortable at YAA. I yearned for the easy relationships that I observed between young people and youth workers, but noticed that these relationships also had their ups and downs, particularly when youth workers wanted something (i.e. specific forms of participation, surveys filled out, guarantees of attendance). As a researcher, I felt caught in this power relation; one where young people had the power to "either withhold or produce" needed information (Tobin, 2000, p. 11). Unlike school, with its implied consequences for a lack of participation, at Hang Out kids had no compelling reason to participate in my research. Yet, I believed that they would participate. I relied on the belief that this power dynamic could be shifted by the development of a caring relationship between researcher and participant.

In retrospect, I see that my expectations had been based on a myth of ethnographic research that is very similar to one that happens in the teaching world—the

myth of the white teacher-savior (Chennault, 1996; Giroux 1997; Stoddard and Marcus 2006). This myth is perhaps best exemplified by the genre of Hollywood films known as “White Savior Films” (WSF) that feature

a group of lower-class, urban, nonwhites (generally black and Latino/a) who struggle against the social order in general, or the educational system specifically. Yet, through the sacrifices of the white teacher, they are transformed, saved, and redeemed by the film’s end (Hughey, 2010, p. 475).

In the WSF genre, a white teacher is able to help young nonwhite students achieve success, primarily by “showing” them (and the surrounding community) their value. In much the same way, many ethnographic research narratives from the field of education tell the story of a clever researcher who redeems young people by revealing the “literacy” value behind their otherwise “illegitimate” practices. Such was my unspoken agenda at YAA. Thus, when I found that the young people there were reluctant to work with me (and even reluctant to work with youth workers that they had known for years), I felt somewhat betrayed.

In response, I considered a variety of options to garner increased participation. I had a friend whose son I often observed at YAA, and I considered asking her to let me interview him. I asked Paul, a popular youth worker, to help me drum up enthusiasm for the study. He was glad to help, but was met with grumbles, blank stares and questioning glances. He revealed to me that he gets the same response when trying to collect surveys about YAA’s efforts. I tried other techniques, which are described in the latter half of this chapter. I realized something important—namely, that if I gained the trust and told the stories of a few individual youth, I would be ignoring the vast majority of young people at YAA. I was coming to understand that YAA was very different from school, and that

by choosing to be there on their own terms, the young people had greater power to turn down my research efforts.

### ***Re-learning to Hang Out***

Knowing, then, that understanding Hang Out required a different approach to research, nevertheless I evolved as researcher in this space slowly compared to the youth that I observed, who were chameleon-like in their ability to adjust to the daily rhythms and energies of the site. In contrast, I felt awkward and conspicuous. I was painfully teacher-like in my worries about what I should be doing and what the youth were or were not doing during Hang Out. It took me a long time to relax.

In the end, I did become comfortable at Hang Out, and my presence even came to be expected. One boy mentioned my absence after I had attended a conference. I was a “nomadic ethnographer” (St.Pierre, in St.Pierre & Pillow, 2000a, p. 264) in the sense that I observed and interacted with Hang Out space in one local space and another without defining transitions and paths of connection. Hang Out entered my Facebook newsfeed, I saw “YAA kids” at local band shows, and I became aware of my own desire to hang out, noticing the way it felt anew.

These multiple connections helped me as I continued to attend YAA’s downtown center to observe Hang Out. My relationships with some young people became easier. I offered advice on local food or inserted myself into conversations about comics and movies. I appreciated more jokes and understood more individual problems.

Yet this new comfort with YAA’s Hang Out still didn’t yield easy explanations; if anything it made them harder. I listened to youth describe the space as one where there’s

“nothing really big or definable going on” and where time “slips through your fingers... or mine, I guess.” I listened to adults who described it in terms of involvement, relationships, and making products. I also listened for the struggles in both the definitions of young people and adults, the pauses, silences, and skips around what happens at Hang Out. These silences spoke volumes about pleasure and problems of YAA’s Hang Out.

### ***Getting to Know “Hang Out”***

Additionally, I was learning another lesson as I spent time at YAA. While I did find young people’s activities in art and music compelling, the more time I spent at YAA, the less I could ignore the other activity of YAA, namely “just hanging out.” It was this activity (or set of activities) that seemed most engaging, most lively, and most fun. Soon I began to understand it was in fact the element of “doing nothing,” (an unintended time when anything could happen), rather than the potential to “do something” (an intentional production), that drew young people to Hang Out. As Nathan, a Hang Out regular with near-daily attendance, told me, “there’s the art room, but I don’t often make art. There’s the jam room—the recording studio—but I don’t play anything, so I don’t go in there. I don’t really do much of anything productive here.”

Hang Out revealed another discrepancy between my expectations of YAA and my observations. Many of the youth that I observed were not finishing art projects; they might sketch on notebooks or their skin rather than choosing to create a project. The recording studio was often full, but I didn’t know how to account for messing around on guitars, or dancing to synthesized music on the stereo. It soon seemed like Hang Out was more loose threads than neat endings, a time and space full of energy, movement, and

emotion, but without always having specific products or recordable processes to show for it. Further, I was intrigued by something that I didn't have language to describe, something that I could only call "rhythm" or "flows of energy" that happened during the YAA Hang Out time.

A month into my research, it was clear that I needed to address what was happening holistically in the space rather than only addressing the space through those very few kids who were willing to represent it to me. Just like I needed to answer questions about more than a just a few young people, I needed to answer questions about more than a few projects. Yet, like the young people that rejected my decision to involve them in research, Hang Out seemed to reject my efforts to study it. I experienced a sinking feeling similar to what Lutz describes when writing about "doing nothing" (2006); it was painful to lose the narrative that would garner me approval.

Thus, the shift from doggedly ignoring YAA's Hang Out to making it the center of my research was a painful and challenging process. Not only was I concerned about the way my research would be viewed in a field that focuses on traditional notions of productivity based in the representational scheme of symbolic meaning-making (Leander and Boldt, in review), I wasn't sure what I should be noticing. While I was trained to look for recognizable processes and products, I had little preparation for the amount of stopping and starting, the bursts of ideas, energy, and motion that characterized hanging out. Initially, even in observing Hang Out, I attended to what I took to be the central features of it for both adults and youth – the opportunities to work in the music studios or to make art. And yet, my observations of this seemingly purposeful use of time were constantly disturbed by the fact that most projects begun in Hang Out were never

finished, that they were engaged in half-heartedly or that what I saw as productive activity was eschewed altogether. Unless I was going to ignore this mounting evidence that something else was going on, I needed a different understanding of what I was there to learn.

### **Critiquing and Revising Methods**

These new understandings pushed me towards a new understanding of my own research. I could not simply apply the theoretical frames that would validate me as a researcher, the youth workers as hard working, and the young people of YAA as “full of promise.” I had to show how our overreliance on such frames is causing major misunderstandings about Hang Out, and how these misunderstandings are a threat to the future of this program. In this section, I outline why the theoretical frameworks which had previously guided my methodology contributed to those misunderstandings, and describe three critiques that forced me to revise my methods for data collection and analysis.

My first data collection strategy addressed the question of what is produced in Hang Out from a specific theoretical perspective; one developed through the work of literacy scholars, and New Literacies scholars in particular (Gee, 1990; Street, 1996). In line with popular research methods from this field, I initially attended to data from Hang Out that would allow for the demonstration of a variety of youth activities as “self-directed, self-sponsored” (National Council of English Teachers, 2005) work with specific “technologies of meaning” (New London Group, 1996). New Literacies researchers often spend time at youth centers like YAA, documenting the complex

meaning making of young people working with new technologies. Hull & Katz (2006) provide a good example of how student meaning-making is represented while describing how one struggling student, in this case working with video production, can “craft an agentive self”:

Thus, Randy connected...his own historical moment...and positioned himself not only as continuing their [African American political leaders and contemporary rappers] lineage, but adding to it and even surpassing their considerable achievements. Significantly, the entire level of meaning resides in the juxtaposition of the words of his narrative with the images he selected, or the combination of multiple forms of signification (p. 58).

By representing Randy’s literacy performance in this way, the authors provide an interpretive framework for viewing Randy's work. We get snippets of Randy's life, enough of the "smart kid, but poor student" narrative to frame the authors' argument in a clear way. Since I felt Randy's description was somewhat like that students I had encountered at YAA, I thought that these authors’ methods might yield similar results from Hang Out.

But ultimately, after spending time at Hang Out, I realized that the move to represent Randy's text (and Randy) required the authors to unify several events, such as Randy’s arrival at the youth site on any given day, his mood, the environment swirling around him as he composed, and his choice of historical figures. This knitting together of multiple potentially disparate events was necessary to present them to readers as a completed idea (Boldt & Leander, in review). As readers we are to understand Randy and his work as meaning something; he is *crafting a self*. Further, as Randy’s choices are posited as rational rather than intuitive, random, or improvisational, the dots all connect. But from what I was experiencing at Hang Out, I quickly realized that to write a narrative that would read like Randy's, I would have to leave a lot of Hang Out behind. I

concluded that research that reads from just one perspective, even if it's a perspective that I agree with, creates the appearance of stability. It provides answers, but they are too often one-sided and show the value of participants' experiences from only one angle. They rarely reflect the dynamism and multiplicity of actual experience.

Thus, the popular New Literacies organizing model just didn't fit well enough with what I was discovering about YAA Hang Out. I was unable to leave behind what I didn't agree with or what I couldn't yet understand. I quickly understood that I needed a new way of attending to and thinking about the complexity of moments and the unique population of youth that I was encountering at Hang Out. I needed a perspective on youth social practices that would

begin to re-see social life as immanent, as being produced moment-by-moment and given to unexpected connections, connections that join objects and signs in unexpected ways, break off, and begin again (Leander & Boldt, in review).

This is a way of seeing performance that puts movement back into the scene. It would contain "lines of flight," (Deleuze & Guittari, 1972/1977) or outward movements toward constantly emerging new potentials, rather than restricting practices to simply repeating existing patterns, things already known and organized, what Deleuze and Guattari call the territorialized. This type of work would examine histories and discourses, while also looking for moments of energy, shifting mood, and bodies coming into sudden motion (Lorraine, in Leander & Rowe, 2006). A key to re-visioning YAA came as I began to pay attention to the connection between movement and affective intensities. Spending any amount of time observing youth during Hang Out made it clear that it was essential that I have a way to account for the constant productive rise and fall of affective intensities.

Just as I came to understand that youth actions at YAA unfolded in a largely spontaneous way that only later seemed purposeful and unified, so too did my development of ways to better capture Hang Out. By constantly revisiting the unexpected in my observations, and at the same time reading in a way that represented a constant casting around for more and better ideas, my methodology and theory constantly moved toward new potentials. This idea of movement—mine (called research) and young people’s (called what happened during Hang Out)—proved fruitful. It allowed me to see both movements in a way that included unexpected lines of flight and affective intensities, a way that also demonstrated the failures of a representational or causal logic that would conceptualize what youth were doing during Hang Out as driven primarily by intentionally starting and creating projects.

In essence, my struggle to frame Hang Out was part of larger tensions erupting between humanist and poststructuralist thought. Humanism’s language, one that develops notions of a stable self and grounds claims to authority in reason (Flax, 1990), offered a way to attribute rational meaning-making to young people’s efforts at Hang Out. For humanism, “laws” (scientific and otherwise) are often considered the conquest of reason, and a means through which individuals can establish personal freedom. On the other hand, poststructuralism offered an interrogation of these established ideas. Developing traction through postfoundational studies in queer theory, feminism, and race theories, poststructuralist scholars argue that humanism functions to marginalize, exclude, and silence parts of the population.

Yet, it is essential to understand that even as poststructuralist scholars aim to produce critique, they work within the “mother tongue of humanism” (St.Pierre & Pillow,

2000a). *New Literacies* demonstrates this tension through work that uncovers hidden productivity in (formerly) illegitimate literacies, creates linearity through narrative, and privileges a narrow definition of youth—all of which meant that I wouldn't be able to stick strictly to the methods proposed by many of my peer researchers in Literacy. The problem was that, in many ways, I was looking for exactly what many literacy researchers were choosing to leave out. Further, because I was working with a youth population that is sometimes considered elusive (a combination of youth who are often disenchanted with school, as well as several who are runaways or are homeless). I also was focusing my attention on youth who often receive less attention for their ideas and skills than they do for their negative behaviors.

### **Three Challenges**

As I have explained in the preceding narrative, to become a researcher in Hang Out, I had to deal with three particular methodological challenges. First was the challenge of “seeing” the youth of Hang Out. Though I entered Hang Out with particular ideas about what an adolescent was (or an adult, for that matter) I ended up reframing these ideas as my work progressed. Second was the challenge of participant recruitment. I use this term loosely, as very little “recruitment” actually happened over my time at Hang Out. Instead, I chose to chat with and observe the youth in a more informal manner, one that considered the unique qualities of this space. Third was the challenge to develop a way of taking fieldnotes that would record the “extra” parts of Hang Out. These bits and pieces included sensory data like touch, smell, and intuition—ideas that are often left out of educational research (St.Pierre, 2000a).

Through these challenges, I came to understand methodology not as a series of cut-and-dried procedures, but rather as a living partner, one that would adjust and shift along with my own learning. I wanted to see the problems that arose during the course of this project as pushing me into new territory; to weave these challenging threads back into my work where I felt that they belonged. And though they do not represent an exhaustive list of methodological concerns for Hang Out, it is my hope that they provide insight into new ways to think about this unique space.

### ***Seeing Youth: A Poststructuralist Lens for Hang Out***

My first weeks at YAA felt overwhelming—the acoustics of this 1500-foot space made everything loud. The sights, sounds, and smells that assaulted my nose were ones that brought to mind typical representations of “teenagers.” The walls were decorated with bright paintings, several of which advertised YAA activities, and thin-line pencil sketches of dark angels, animals, and tattoo-like graphics. The television was often on and set to a videogame, adding to the soundscape.

When young people arrived, I was instantly reminded of media depictions of adolescence. From *Rebel without a Cause* to *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the movie teenager certainly bore no small resemblance to what I was seeing. Most noticeable were the youth who entered the building loudly, announcing their presence to the room with loud shouts towards friends. But soon I noticed less obvious youth; often single boys or groups of girls who huddled together as they made their way to the couches. Once arrived, different groups and individuals would spread out, laying over couches, texting and eating. Adults, at least one always seated on the couches, would interact casually

with the youth, writing down names and recording activities in pre-set check boxes. They started conversations with youth they knew, and occasionally asked about those “regulars” not in attendance. The youth and adults that I observed in my first few days seemed eerily capable of performing the teenage roles just as I expected.

Though at first glance this chaotic scene seems far from a methodological problem, the works of Michel Foucault demonstrate how these comfortable and seemingly stable representations are problematic. My understandings of what composed a teenager—or an adult—were heavily influenced by the historical formation of these social categories; what may seem like “natural” behavior for a particular age group can also be viewed more critically, as a social construction.

Adolescence can be “re-seen” through a Foucauldian lens and understood as a productive site of increased surveillance. During the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, adolescence became a useful site for categorizing and measuring human development and classifying disorders through scientific and medical descriptors (Lesko, 1996a). This pattern has intensified over the last century to the point that adolescence, along with other discursive constructions (gender, sex, personality) now can seem utterly natural rather than the effect of social practices across multiple domains (Walkerdine, 1990; Lesko, 1996a; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris, 2008). Such constructions of adolescence masquerade as unified and ahistorical, often bringing a host of problematic assumptions into youth research.

Lesko (1996b) provides us with a clear example of the hidden danger of representation, by drawing our attention the effects of language. She cites, for example, the statement “Rachel is 16 years old,” as one that conveys a world of meaning to most

adults. The statement works by presenting embedded triggers—a chain of culturally meaning-laden signifiers (Saussure, 1983)—that allows readers to know what is supposed to be represented. Yet, Rachel may or may not be what we imagine, and her age can be as much a hindrance as help as we try to learn more about her. Thus, an uncomplicated reading of adolescence, one that relies on developmental descriptions and fails to question the legacy of whiteness, masculinity, and citizenship (Lesko, 2001), disables our understandings of difference when working with adolescents today.

For this reason, I spent time learning about and listening for the ways that I could re-see the adolescents and adults of Hang Out. Given the tremendous amount of talk about adolescence—writing about it, speaking about it, requiring it to speak for itself, recording and redistributing what has been said—it is clear that this population can be an “incitement to discourse” (Foucault, 1990). Thus, I felt it was necessary to conduct an historical accounting of adolescence in order to avoid the most common pitfalls for ethnographers in youth spaces. Without this exploration, any discussion of the adolescent is bound to the invisible categories that construct it in specific cultural, historical, sexual, and temporal realms. Though some might see these concerns as a purely theoretical, it was clear that in my work it also posed a methodological challenge. If I wanted to explore the experiences in Hang Out, I needed to be able to trace the relationships between adolescence and work that dictated the way this space is currently being understood.

What I found was that adolescence, as it is currently constructed in institutional settings, is a fairly recent conception. With the majority of language describing adolescence presented in opposition to an imagined rational adulthood, discussion

concerned with the problems, characteristics, and needs of adolescents has become “a central arena for talking about expectations for productive rational, independent adults” (Lesko, 1996b, p.142). Dominant discourses of adolescence, echoing G. Stanley Hall’s “storm and stress” (1904), paint this time as full of biological turmoil and psychological fluctuations. These representations continue to be popular throughout the social sciences, and play a role in the diagnosis of adolescents as preeminently susceptible to a range of dangers from delinquency to suicide (te Riele, 2006; Griffin, 1993).

Although my methodology does not allow for an exhaustive account of the effects of discourses of adolescence on research as a whole, I do feel that the development of such understandings has provided me with a base from which to challenge and rearrange claims about what is “natural” for this age group in relation to this work. Thus, the incorporation of poststructuralist ideas into methods can allow researchers to ask new and different questions about the formation of categories. Further, these methods can provide footholds for readers to question their own “theory of reading that produces the boundaries of the credible and the incredible” (Britzman, in Pillow & St.Pierre, 2000). Poststructuralist understandings of binaries, including the adolescent/adult binary, helped me identify the way that these two categories can seem to work in opposition to each other; the expression of one reinforcing the difference of the other. But this binary is also broken down, as the power relations between Hang Out’s adults and youth intermix allowing “adult-like” or “youth-like” positions that don’t necessarily match the chronological age of participants.

### ***Recruiting Subjects: Subcultural Considerations***

Discourses constructing an adult/adolescent binary are similar to another fiction relevant to this work, that of mainstream/subcultural. My work draws on this second binary because it offers insight into the participation of subjects in this study of Hang Out. Unlike other educational studies that take place in schools or designated afterschool programs, this study takes place in an environment that does not maintain strict records of youth attendance. Though some programs at YAA work directly with schools, Hang Out is separated due to its drop-in policy and the reluctance of staff workers to ask too many questions that might scare youth away from returning.

Much of the tension in my work is related to the real or perceived differences between being “mainstream” or “alternative.” To help understand this perspective and to negotiate through it in my methodology, I used a variety of techniques drawn from researchers who have worked with underground or “subcultural” populations. My justification for doing this is not related to a belief that subcultural youth are somehow different from mainstream youth; rather, it draws from research that has accessed subcultural populations with careful thought given to the ways that these populations self-identify (Ayers & Teitle, 2008).

Necessary to any qualitative study is an understanding of culture. In the case of my work, I’ve developed a working definition of both culture and subculture. Drawing from Thornton (1996), I define culture here as the “way of life” of a particular group or class, that is expressed through values and ideas embodied in institutions, social relations, systems of belief, mores and customs, and material objects (p. 10). Additionally the

prefix “sub” added to the definition will imply a “subordinate, subaltern, or subterranean” (p. 1) position in relation a perceived mainstream culture.

An understanding of subculture has proven particularly useful in this work by helping to provide clues into the “myths, motivations, and mysteries” (Moje, et. al., 2007) of the adolescent population of Hang Out. For this reason, I introduced several notions from Subcultural Studies into both my research methodology and data analysis. I will explore three of these ideas: subcultural cool, moral panic, and symbolic resistance.

Though the notion of subcultural cool, or simply “cool,” has long been ignored by educational research, it continues to have an important role in the lives of many adolescents. What exactly “cool” is, is a relatively abstract concept (perhaps leading to its disregard in education), but a vital one for researchers exploring youth-driven activities in a non-school setting. For this reason, I turned to research from subcultural studies, a field where researchers devote time to understanding the complex relationships between youth, style, and notions of cool.

Subcultural studies have analyzed “cool” through a Bordieuien lens, and offer the useful notion of “subcultural capital” (Thornton, 1996). Subcultural capital, a derivative of Bourdieu’s (1972) notion of “cultural capital,” can be thought of as the language and learning of particular symbols, styles, and texts that youth use to position themselves within youth spaces. Subcultural capital is often coveted by youth, but misunderstood by adults who try to pin the notion to a fixed item or style. Instead, Thornton (1996) develops a more nuanced way of thinking of cool through subcultural capital, one that describes how youth subcultures (youth affiliated though their rejection of mainstream norms) have formed a symbiotic relationship with mass culture in order to define their

practices (Thornton, 1996). For subcultural groups and individuals, the imagined mainstream (as well as representatives of that mainstream like parents and teachers) provide youth with an image against which to define themselves. Despite, (or as Thornton suggests, because of) adult disapproval, many youth take advantage of spaces where they can reject authoritative discourse and access music, styles, habits, and texts that they find more persuasive.

Notions of cool and subcultural capital allowed me to develop methods for collecting data from the sensitive populations at Hang Out. For example, I had little understanding of why—after months of attending Hang Out and developing a good rapport with youth—I couldn’t get anyone to sign up for interviews with me. I had developed good relationships with the many youth and adult staff members, the latter of which expressed similar problems when trying to get Hang Out youth to participate in any organized activity. As one adult told me, “How can we plan to have a visiting artist, when nobody shows up for the actual workshop?”

After watching and thinking about participation at the center, I decided to try something new. I had been listening to youth talk about a newly opened pizza place, a cavernous space that served unusual pizzas that appealed to many attending the center. Though there was a lot of talk, few youth had actually had the pizza. That evening, I ordered a large macaroni-and-cheese pizza and brought it back to the center to be shared. The pizza turned out to be more than a snack. It became a conversation about “cool” and new pizzas, a topic that many Hang Out youth were passionate about. It also was a momentary turning point in my relationships at YAA, as several youth wandered over, pizza in hand, to ask “if I was still doing that interview stuff.”

My lesson in subcultural cool would eventually help me to understand my own position in Hang Out as a precarious and ever-changing one. I discovered that my own presence as an adult and that of other adult volunteers was considered more separate from youth when we performed in certain ways, and that our very “adulthood” often had more to do with what we did than how we looked or what we wore. Despite my understanding of relationships with youth at the center, there were other invisible borders that dictated their relationship with me.

Prior to the pizza, it had been possible for youth to come and chat with me informally at the back table, but a “formal” interview (one that required signing papers and getting an adult to sign them as well) was out of the question. Youth would passively take the forms I offered (or reject them outright), but they were never returned. As I got to know individual youth by name, they would often tell me that they were going to do an interview, but then never brought back the forms. When I did comment about the forms, their look reminded me of a student who lost (or never completed) their homework—guilty, sheepish, or even annoyed that I asked. Yet, while on the surface this refusal could have indicated that my demands echoed those of the school or the legal systems, there are also other explanations. Many young people at Hang Out don’t have adults/guardians to sign the papers, even if they wanted to participate. Additionally, I would also suggest a third possibility, one that draws from subcultural cool. This last explanation posits that the visibility of turning in papers to an adult is not “cool.” Similar to the problems Hang Out staff report with getting youth to attend formal workshops or fill out the simplest of forms, my requests had not been appropriate for the population that I was studying. While the pizza provided an important temporary “break” in this system (one that temporarily

legitimized formal interviews for some youth), it also allowed me to deepen my understanding of the many constraints that youth feel despite the “freedom” that might be associated with Hang Out.

A second important methodological concern drawn out through subcultural studies is the notion of a researcher’s “moral panic” (Cohen, 1972). This term refers to a panicked and often morally outraged reaction of a population reacting to an event, issue or trend that seems to threaten social order or well-being. In the case of youth culture, moral panic is often understood as the condemnatory responses of adults to youth culture phenomenon, and has been long theorized by subcultural scholars to help explain the oppositional cycle between subcultures and the mainstream. It is important to note here that subcultures traditionally have maintained stylistic practices that made them highly visible on the street; from the Edwardian collars and greased up quiffs of 1960’s Teddy Boys to the leather, rubber, and vinyl of 1980’s Punk to today’s black clad, pale-faced “baby-bat” Goths, subcultural participants are often easy to spot.

Though scholars, journalists, psychologists and others have used these differences to tease out Marxist resistance (Hebdige, 1979), romantic narratives of youth (LeBlance, 1999), or even definitions of delinquency, my own use of the notion of “moral panic” was a discernibly more practical one. By understanding the role of moral panic in society at large, I was better equipped to monitor how my own reactions (and those of other adults that I witnessed) were formed. Rather than positing myself simply as an outsider who expresses shock and disdain, I was able to complicate my role by avoiding expected “moral panic” reactions.

The limits of my own resistance to moral panic were tested several times during Hang Out, most memorably during a discussion with Alice, an approximately sixteen-year-old girl who attended Hang Out sporadically during my six months of fieldwork. During the time that I knew her, Alice maintained many non-mainstream features to her personal style that may or may not have been by choice; her loose-fitting army coats covered more layers of black and grey and her spiky black hair remained uncombed and tangled. Alice, like her boyfriend, had a pungent body odor that could be detected across the room (although, notably, I never heard anyone comment on it). She had strong opinions about a variety of subjects and spent her time at Hang Out talking, arguing, and doing art projects.

On one particular occasion, I was talking to Alice and a younger boy about an upcoming art show. During our conversation I noticed a rat climb out of her pocket and up onto her head. It played with her hair while we chatted. I reacted by smiling and asking her if her pet was friendly, and if so, if I could hold it. She smiled and handed over the rat for a moment. When I returned it to her, she lifted it to her lips, kissed it, and then opened her mouth for the rat to climb in. It began to clean her teeth, while the younger boy and I continued the conversation.

My own emotions in reaction to Alice's display gave me insight into the moral panic paradox that researchers of specific "spectacular" (Hebdige, 1979) populations can experience. I was surprised, interested, and more than a little disgusted by watching Alice and the rat. Ultimately, I realized that though Alice's example may be an extreme one, the expression or inhibition of moral panic reactions is an important element to the way that Hang Out functions. It plays a role in the creation of boundaries around youth

behavior, and influences adult workers' perception of the space and their fears about the ways it might be perceived by outsiders. Ultimately, it helped me better understand both the youth that I was observing and interacting with and the negative perception that outsiders might have regarding the activities of those youth.

### ***Reconceptualizing Hang Out to Account for Emergence***

The third and final major hurdle to constructing my working methodology was the challenge of how to represent, or even how to talk about, Hang Out. This problem of representation required me to attend to what seemed to be happening at any given moment, yet I felt that much about Hang Out resisted these easy interpretations. As demonstrated by Table 2.1, my earliest fieldnotes offer a glimpse into this challenge.

It didn't take long for me to realize that these notes were woefully incomplete. First, I was losing the sensory data that made Hang Out "feel" a particular way on a given afternoon. I wasn't recording the smells (ranging from body odor to patchouli, pizza to pot smoke). I wasn't recording the conversational back-and-forth or the shifts in torsos, feet, and heads that indicated mood. I didn't even catch the distinctive styles of hair and dress that youth presented on different days. But perhaps most disturbing of all was how my separation of standard units of time during Hang Out (often by five-minute intervals), was making me lose the rise and fall of activity. This merciless chopping up of Hang Out was doing far more harm than good to my understanding of how the time worked for participants.

**Table 2.1: Sample Fieldnote**

Time	Observation	Reflection
3:40	3 (M) ages 14-15 1 w/guitar 1 art room 1 Adult (Paul) on the couch. 1 youth volunteer in office	The atmosphere seems laid back and casual. This is early release day, so they are here early. I wonder how they got here? walking, bus? parent drop-off?
3:45	1(M) more kid walks in. Greeted by a high five. Paul says to Boy 1, “If you see ---, tell him that that I said “hi.”	It seems like a majority of kids are greeted by name from adults. Often the kids recognize them too. The interactions between youth and adults seem very casual, like a friendly teacher before class. Paul is recording the boy’s name on a chart. They told us at volunteer training that we often need to sign in youth, b/c they won’t do it themselves and the center needs an accurate account with names and activities

But how could I do it differently? My fieldnotes needed to record large, shifting groups, and sometimes upwards of 40 plus youth in the span of a few hours. Further, I was at an impasse as to which activity to watch; when I recorded notes about guitar playing, it often seemed to be a backdrop to a larger conversation or even just something to do with one's hands while talking. Whereas my initial impulse was to analyze youth engagements only in relation to recognizable processes or the creation of products (artwork, music, crafts), it didn't take long for me to feel how much I was missing by

representing the interactions in this way. But if I were to move beyond the representation of popular (or even marginal) youth activities, where would I go? "Which thing," I wondered frantically, "is most important to record?"

It was becoming clear that I needed a different way of thinking about my work. Rather than looking for specific activities (or trying to divine the "meanings" that adolescents were making from them), I tried to flesh out these moments with sensory details, all the while maintaining my awareness of the subjective nature of such observations. I not only recorded that "music played" or even the artist's name, but I also recorded my observations on how the music seemed to affect the "mood" of Hang Out (excited? calm? aggressive?). By integrating the pieces of Hang Out together, I hoped to record enough information to later develop a sense of how it feels to hang out.

After a few weeks of taking notes this way, I began to see patterns emerge, but not any that I could easily explain. Rather than clear activity-to-activity fieldnotes, I saw excited clusters forming; some moments seemed to thicken and take on intense excitement for youth and adults alike. These Hang Out moments intensified and developed multiple connections, often drawing in youth from other rooms or areas of the building. It was impossible for me to predict what set these moments into action and difficult to explain the activity to anyone who had not experienced Hang Out, but I couldn't ignore what I couldn't describe.

To get a better sense of these moments, I chose to alter my fieldnotes further to include random notes, sketches, and quotes. Through close attention, I tried to be increasingly aware of "affective intensities" (Stewart, 2007) as they developed. I tried to notice the lulls and rises during the afternoon, and the various bits of story, music,

gesture, light, and smell that floated in and entangled people. With some effort, I started to see how some of these bits and pieces would get picked up and “carried” by participants, almost as mini-trends, and how others appeared to fall flat only to return again in some later destination.

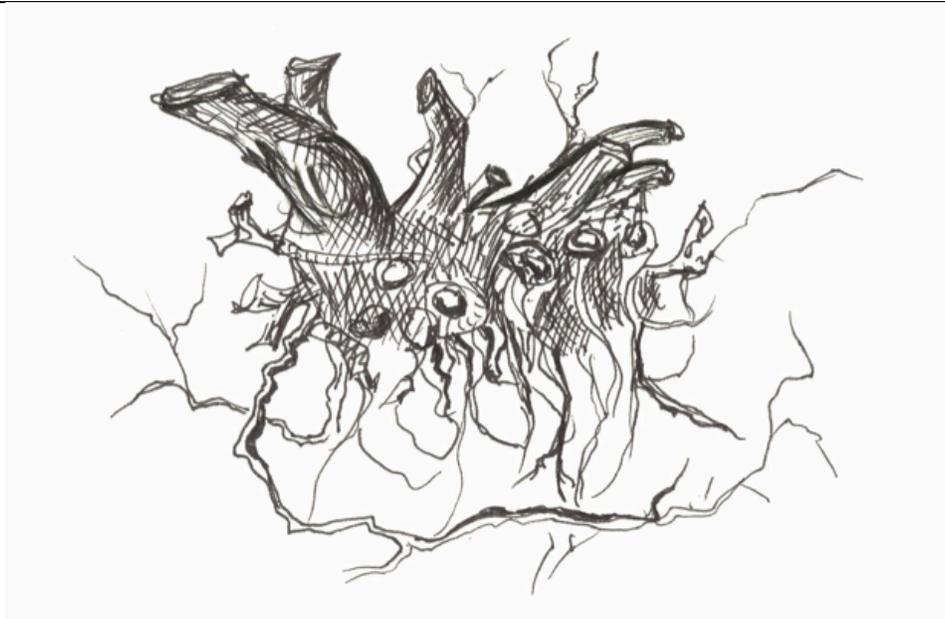
As is clearly demonstrated above, my data analysis provided the push to revise data collection methods. In particular, my exploration of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of the rhizome provided new insights into ways I could connect seemingly disparate elements of Hang Out. This type of work approaches data from multiple directions, often including developments that other research often chooses to leave off. It doesn’t seek neat endings, but rather must live in the productivity of middles, the tangles and new charges that erupt from interactions.

### ***The Rhizome in Education***

Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the “rhizome” and “rhizomatic thought” can be employed to describe a multiple and non-hierarchical approach to educational research and theory. The botanical model of the rhizome describes “an underground stem of perennial plants, as opposed to the root, which is an axial part of vascular plants” (Colombat, 1991, p. 15). Plants such as crabgrass or gingerroot exemplify the botanical rhizome; those life forms that proliferate through spontaneous outgrowth with no set points or positions, such as branches or roots, to label as such. Some features of rhizomes include connectivity, multiplicity, expansion and conquest (rather than reproduction), and an insistence on middles (rather than beginnings or ends). For example, as can be seen in figure 2.2, a rhizome can connect any point with any other point. This feature of

connectivity needn't be between the same types of growth, and can erupt in any location. Additionally, notice how there isn't any singular point or place to label as the One Plant, due to the multiplicity of growth, and how the rhizome is composed entirely of middles, rather than beginnings or ends. There is no place to point to where this growth started or where it will go next; if ruptured or shattered, such as demonstrated by the cuttings at the top of the plant in the figure, the rhizome rebounds in some new location or as an offshoot of the old one.

**Figure 2.1: Rhizome of Black Snakeroot**



This botanical model of the rhizome offered Deleuze and Guattari a convenient avenue to develop their alternative to another well-known botanical model of thought, that of the genealogical tree. Deleuze & Guattari (2004) opposed this conception, one they labeled arborescent, based on its insistence on dualism, linearity, and hierarchical

thought. “We’re tired of trees,” they write, “we should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 15)

The effort to oppose these structuralist categories has gained a steady following in educational research circles, and while rhizomatic methods are just beginning to be explored, many scholars have noted their potential for the field (Grosz, 2005; Alvermann, 2000; St.Pierre, 2000). For example, the effects of rhizomatic thinking are clear in the work of Honan (2007), who develops three areas of insight from her use of the rhizomatic model: writing rhizomatically; understanding texts as rhizomatic; and analyzing rhizomatic links between participant talk and texts (p. 532). In her model, we see a dissertation that combines poetic writing, deep analysis, and open ends, to provide new questions and new insight.

In addition to Honan's model, Richardson & St.Pierre (2006) offer an assessment device for Creative Analytic Process (CAP) ethnographies that mimics some of Honan’s uses of the rhizome. They propose that such postmodern ethnographic work should be measured through the categories of substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, and impact. Rather than searching for objective truths (either directly or through "triangulation" that more covertly deposits an author’s "truthful" account), a CAP ethnography, or the related "nomadic ethnography" (St.Pierre, 2000), should blur the lines between the social sciences and the arts, meaning and experience, to add new elements of understanding to studies of youth engagement. Other scholars have explored the rhizome as a means to map literacy performances (Leander & Rowe 2006), to develop the static understandings of knowledge into a more dynamic and process oriented model (Semetsky, 2006, p. xxii), and to critique current qualitative frameworks

(Alvermann, 2000). With this potential in mind, I looked to rhizomatic thought for its “multiplicity of effects” (Honan, 2007, p. 532), rather than as a strict blueprint for a methodology.

In this work, Rhizoanalysis was able to provide me with something that I couldn’t find in post-structural discourse analysis or deconstruction alone—the ability to record and analyze the tangled, and seemingly unrelated, paths that intersected during Hang Out. By employing rhizomatic thinking, I was able to leave endings open in my fieldnotes and resist the urge to complete the picture in some easy to understand way. I was able to maintain openness towards the next thing that would happen at Hang Out.

### *Discussion*

While tangling myself in a rhizome of multiple disciplines and theoretical lenses, I also tangled myself in the web of connections that compose a Deleuzian social perspective. It was from this vantage point, where beginnings and endings are the stuff of myth, that I wrote the following chapters. By necessity, such work resists easy conclusions, instead seeking to replace “restrictive analogy” with conductivity (Massumi, 1992, p. 5) and the stammering “AND, AND, AND” (Deleuze and Parnet, 1977, p. 34) of Deleuzian multiplicity.

It is not the elements or the sets which define the multiplicity. What defines it is the AND, as something which has its place between elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND—stammering. And even if there are only two terms there is an AND between the two, which is neither one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity (Deleuze and Parnet, 1977, p. 34).

Thus, a refusal of the dialectical paradigm meant both a careful examination of how representation works for YAA’s Hang Out and the inclusion of data and analysis

that defy these representational imperatives. This latter idea requires language which functions on registers which social science research is less familiar; it looks towards the development of “intensities”—regularly, intermittently, urgently, or as a slight shudder” (Stewart, 2007, p. 10)—that are too often are lost between the tightly inked pages of research.

An area of concern for planning and executing such poststructuralist methodologies might be summed up as follows “...how do we constitute data; how do we avoid getting frozen by uncertainty; if we're not doing realist, modernist research, what systems do we employ?” (McWilliam, Lather, & Morgan, 1997, p. 2). In other words, in a world where systematic scholarly critiques have leveled the notion of “data” (St.Pierre, 1997), “validity” (Lather, 1993), “interviewing” (Scheurich, 1995), “experience” (Scott, 1991), and research writing as a means of representation (Richardson & St.Pierre, 1995), where do we turn for our research questions?

Possible answers come from many of the same fields that have offered the most vigilant critiques; cultural studies, queer theory, and poststructuralist feminism all have offered potential routes to reframing the way we do research, and revising what we consider “truth.” Poststructuralist ethnographic methods have contributed greatly to finding new ways to collect data and think about our participants and ourselves, resulting in work that bridges traditional narratives of learning and experience and substantial poststructuralist critique (Anzaldua, 1999; St.Pierre, 1995).

For my own research, the questions drawn from these fields have encouraged deep revisions in both theory and methodology. I had to find a way to come to terms with my own stubborn desire to find a “system that works” and move towards a flexible

methodology that changed as I used it. In conjunction with this, I needed to employ deconstruction not only during analysis, but also during data collection—a notion less popular in the field of literacy—without becoming “frozen by [the] uncertainty” that these techniques can encourage. This often meant the constant destabilization of my reality, community, and sense of “truth” (de Laurentis, 1987). This de-centering, vital to feminist theory, requires us to give up what is “safe” physically, linguistically, epistemologically, and speak instead from a place in discourse that is tentative and uncertain (Sawicki, 1991).

This strand of poststructuralist feminism blends neatly with the aforementioned Deleuzian methods, including the rhizome. Linstead (2006) describes a Deleuzian organization, like poststructuralist feminist destabilization, as one that would

subvert and disrupt, escape, exceed and change organization, thus making possible a new concept of organization...which is both autopoietic and autosubversive. Such a concept is not fixed, but in motion, it never rests, but constantly trembles (Linstead, 2006, p.2)

In other words, a trembling organization would allow for new ways of understanding social relations, one that highlights the disruptions and draw attention to the breaks in organizing schemes. It would provide tools for the investigation of the non-organizational and the relationship between the organized (and represented) and the non-organized Other (Linstead, 2006). In this way a trembling organization encourages positions that are both inside and outside current modes of representation, a position that can work towards adding affect to current representation.

Through my use of and adjustments to poststructuralist ethnographic techniques, I came to see Hang Out as shifting and multiple. It was more than just a holding tank for those caught between the poles of child and adulthood, more than a funding nightmare,

more than a time and space without a proper name or definition. It was, and still is, a space and time that serves many people and many purposes.

In retrospect, I've found that composing a research methodology for exploring YAA's Hang Out is more of an art than a science, although the latter is far from eliminated. Good methodologies are informed by theory, but not blinded to new possibilities. In this work, such new possibilities took many forms and are not only the direct result of attending Hang Out, but also of discussions with YAA participants and university colleagues, interdisciplinary readings, and observations of the natural world. I believe that it was the incorporation of these new ideas, rather than the rejection of them, that allowed me to consider my work in new and different lights.

Revisions to this methodology led me towards a dissertation composed of multiple readings of what was happening in Hang Out, an idea that forms the basis of the chapters in this dissertation. I wanted to not only describe YAA's Hang Out, but also to address the complexity of its efforts within the matrix of youth work and society. In such an examination, Hang Out becomes a pry bar for opening neatly labeled categories, one which, when used effectively, reminds us "there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can possibly imagine in humanism" (Foucault, in St.Pierre, 2000, p. 16). In the next chapter, I begin this critique of humanism's limits for understanding Hang Out by focusing on one of its essential narratives in the space, the recovered promise of adolescence.

## CHAPTER III

## RECUPERATING WASTED PROMISE: HANG OUT IN A CULTURE OF AUDIT

People want structure in afterschool programs. That's what I feel they want. They want to know exactly, and I don't blame people for that, as a parent. But maybe my answer is that does work for some kids, but that there are a lot of kids out there that already do make their own decisions, and if you want us to have any interaction with them...well, they are not going to come around. I mean, that's just not gonna happen.

(Paul, Interview)

**Max: Hanging Out and Doing Nothing**

Max is hanging out. Draped over worn couch cushions, his long, dyed-black hair falling over his eyes as he watches a videogame on the large screen television. Around him, other loose-limbed youths text, chat, and experiment with guitar chords. He appears listless, much like the images of lazy teens that dominate the public imagination. He could be in his parents' basement, or a friend's bedroom. But Max isn't at home, and a brisk attendance check from Maggie interrupts his dalliance:

Maggie: "Hey Max, what are you doing today? Art? Music? Games? Max ignores her for a full minute, eventually giving a grudging "no." She pauses, pen in hand, and waits.

Max: "Just put whatever—I guess you can't just say we're doing nothing."

Maggie: "Art, then?" She inquires.

Max: "Yeah, art..."

However Max may have thought or felt about this exchange, the fact that such a moment would occur at all struck me as remarkable. How could it be that a youth center which has set aside time for kids to hang out—and indeed called that time "Hang Out"—would find it necessary to represent kids' hanging out as productive? This was not a rogue youth worker deciding, in a moment, that Max needed to find something to do. There were clipboards and forms. There were boxes to check. An infrastructure was in

place here that made it impossible to let kids be, and necessary to get them to do. Or, at the very least, to represent them as doing.

In this chapter, I explore the impact of ethical shifts in youth work towards an explicit agenda of control and accountability (Jeffs & Banks, 2010; Davies, 2005). An agenda of control in youth work—not unlike that currently being promoted in many American schools through regimes of standardized testing—promotes the logic of conformity and regulation over creativity, play, and experimentation, and promotes externally defined agendas above any local analysis of needs (Ravitch, 2010). Additionally, while many scholars have argued against increased structure in youth work, citing how such structures prove a hindrance to the social and emotional work that young people pursue (Ball & Heath, 1993; Hechman & Sanger, 2001; McLaughlin, et. al., 1994), little work has attended to the subtle changes wrought through the efforts of individual programs to align themselves with “outcomes” required by government grants and private funders.

This struggle between providing youth with autonomy and developing control, while not always on the surface during Hang Out, bubbled up repeatedly in my data and drew my attention back to moments like the one between Maggie and Max. I witnessed youth workers reluctantly placed in the position of managing youth, thereby transforming their relationship with them. I listened to them lament being repositioned as the “heavy” (Paul, Interview), as someone who needs to make kids do things, thus altering the delicate balances of power in Hang Out. I started to understand why “the best youth workers are the worst at paperwork” (Mark, Interview), noting what paperwork does to their ability to do their jobs in the manner to which they had become accustomed. My

analysis in this chapter shows that such interventions—from the seemingly benign record keeping demonstrated by Maggie and Max, to the more intrusive pretests and posttests—are actually undermining the role of youth workers at Hang Out.

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality (1991), British anthropologists have coined the term "audit culture" (Shore & Wright, 2000) to describe the process whereby individuals render themselves accountable to long-distance external controls. Educational researchers have applied this term to understand how teachers render themselves auditable through terms such as "value-added," "transparency," "benchmarking," "best-practice," and "data-driven" (Salvio & Boldt, 2009; Apple, 2007). Youth Studies scholars are beginning to identify the same trends in youth work, noting that, like education, youth workers exhibit mixed feelings about the new systems of control (Jeffs & Banks, 2010).

Therefore, rather than focusing on what youth say they are doing at Hang Out, I am interested here in how the adults who run YAA strategically represent what kids are doing at Hang Out, and its value. As discussed in chapter two, my data is comprised of interviews, field notes of observations of interactions during Hang Out, and artifacts collected from the space. Because the focus of this chapter is how adults—primarily youth workers—represent what youth do during Hang Out, little of the data presented here is from the youth themselves, except where youth concerns intersect with the two discourses outlined above.

My initial question upon seeing Maggie's exchange with Max—why would youth workers need to represent hanging out as productive?—has two corollaries. How is productivity being defined at Hang Out? How does this new definition of productivity

change how Hang Out is understood and valued? To answer these questions, I begin by outlining the relevant history of what youth work and this institution were charged with producing, namely, good citizens. Second, I develop this definition through a specific example, a success story that YAA uses to promote its services. Finally, I examine what scholarship has identified as a major shift in the understanding of productivity (Halpern, 2003), one exacerbated in youth work due to the largest increase of federal support in a five year period (1994-1999) in history (Bartko, 2003).

The issues raised in this chapter, taken together, speak to contemporary debates over the productivity of youth and the value of adolescent's discretionary time. In 2002, Eidmann-Aadahhl recommended that although researchers studying what adolescents do outside of school "might be surprised to find themselves participating in a debate about the productivity of youth or the value of discretionary time [...] they would be wise to prepare to do so" (2002, p. 244). In the decade since that recommendation was made, the debate over adolescents' time has only become more urgent, threatening major changes to the programs such researchers seek to study.

### ***Something from Nothing: Youth Work during Modernity***

Despite the suggestion that teens are producing more than ever before through new media and online participation (Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Ito, 2010; Gee, 2003), many adults harbor a nagging fear that teens like Max, are in fact, doing nothing at all. This is a suspicion that, at first glance at least, was often borne out in my observations at YAA. Even the stylized choreography of Max's postures, the listless gaze and sunken shoulders

that accompany his declaration of “doing nothing,” seem to betray a certain bodily illegitimacy that adults use to demonstrate this lack of productivity.

Adults have long viewed young people’s desires to “hang out, meet friends, just be” (Bloustein, 2003, p. 166) with skepticism (Ito, 2010; Skelton & Valentine, 1998; Lucas, 1998). Seen as a “waste of time,” teens’ hang out time is now often relegated to the hidden parts of teens’ lives, stolen moments at school, in teens’ bedrooms, or basements. The majority of this time occurs outside the gaze of adults, contributing to adult fears about youth problems. While much hanging out is secretive, it is also an activity that has a public element. Hangout spots, such as libraries, parks, and malls, were once (and occasionally still are) vibrant spots for teens to “hang out” publicly. This hanging out is also viewed suspiciously by adults, many of whom see these activities as early stages of delinquency (Skelton & Valentine, 1998; Cahill, 1990).

Youth work, however, has long drawn on teens’ “natural” desire to socialize and hang out as a means of attracting them for other purposes. From the Teen Canteens of the 1950’s to the Youth Coffeehouses of the 60’s and 70’s, teenage socialization has long provided the draw to bring youth to youth work organizations. Yet, paradoxically, while youth organizations have taken advantage of hanging out as a way to attract young people, these organizations have continued to rely on the negative image of dangerous youth “just hanging out” during the afterschool hours, a practice that many see along a continuum with delinquency. In this way, young people like Max become useful physical manifestations of the “youth problem” that youth programs are required to solve. In the following section, I briefly outline some relevant history in youth work to demonstrate the intimate ties between the development of youth work and the construction of the

“youth problem.” These three sections that follow roughly align with the developments of youth work as it shifted over the course of modernity

from a voluntary service aimed at character building and helping the poor to an increasingly public service aimed at social inclusion and citizenship, to a public outreach service to the casualties of affluence and the provider of education aimed at self development (France & Wiles, 1998, p. 72)

Understanding these shifts is useful when considering youth work’s nearly constant realignment of its goals with changes in society. The following sections provide the background necessary for later explorations of the complex role of representation in youth work and its effects on the material conditions of young people.

### ***Street Urchins and Ideal Americans: Early Youth Work***

Capitalizing on societies’ concerns over young people has been part of youth work from its earliest incarnation. Take for example, author Charles Dickens’ visit to one of the earliest youth work programs, a Ragged School in central London named Field Lane. Ragged Schools were more youth programs than institutions of learning, serving youth “too ragged, wretched, filthy, and forlorn” (Dickens, in London, Chapman & Hall, 1909) to attend church schools, and providing them with activities from mending fishnets to learning bible verses. Dickens, a progressive reformer, visited the school with the intention of writing a pamphlet in support of the program. After his visit, he changed his mind, seeing that his talents would benefit the center much more powerfully through another means. Writing to another school supporter, he outlined a new idea. Instead of the intended pamphlet, Dickens used his observations to inspire the novel *A Christmas Carol* (Glancy, 1998; Ledger, 2007). Writing of his decision to a lawmaker, he said, [Y]ou will certainly feel that a Sledge hammer has come down with twenty times the

force – twenty thousand times the force – I could exert by following out my first idea” (Dickens, in London, Chapman & Hall, 1909). History demonstrates the accuracy of Dickens’ assertion; the essential ingredient for youth work is often the way young people are represented in a given time.

Not long after Dickens’ popular portrayal of childhood poverty in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, American reformers found a different but similarly popular image to promote their own services. American reformers began promoting youth work as a means to achieving the goal of creating “ideal” Americans. Drawing on nationalistic discourses, progressives targeted immigrant communities, poor families, and adolescents in transition, as part of an effort to Americanize these populations through the administration of social programs (Vasudevan & Campano, 2009). Like in Britain, American youth work was a prime vehicle for this message. Also, like in Britain, popular literature played a part in representing youth to the public. Horatio Alger’s bestseller, *Ragged Dick*, popularized a character that was the epitome of the new American. A boy whose ingenuity demonstrated the new social rules of capitalism and showed how even a “bootblack” could rise up in society if given the proper chance (Alger, 1868). Thus, talk of youth work became an effective avenue for promoting an idea about individuals, the economy, and the future.

Youth work soon became tied to other goals of modernity, specifically the creation of a productive citizenry (France & Wiles, 1998). Organizations like the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) played a critical role in the transition of children into young adults that could help supply the labor market as well as social supports for young people in new urban centers (Gustav-Wrathall, 1998). In addition, youth work

helped to further the goal of universal citizenship as a means of securing society (France & Wiles, 1998), though it is worth noting that many of the benefits of citizenship were still denied to many groups of Americans during this period.

While the social, cultural, and political milieu of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early twentieth century helped define youth work's mission as one of citizenship and production, change was on the horizon. As the post World War II era brought full employment to the United States, youth work was required to redefine itself as a site for leisure and social adjustment. Increasingly, "excluded" youth became part of the equation, and resistant young people, rather than young people as a whole, became the targets of youth work.

### ***Targeting the Problem: The Rise of Teenage Delinquency***

Hobsbawm (1994) argues that the category of teenagers was "discovered," due largely to the success of the projects of modernity. The 1950's represented the first time that many young people saw the benefits of increased education and employment, and the subsequent autonomy offered to them both as thinkers and consumers. Young people of the postwar period are often considered the main beneficiaries of the postwar period (Abrams, 1961), and were the products of the historic anomaly known as the baby boom.

The baby boom—a period dominated by an increased birth rate, decreased rate of working women, and a stable divorce rate—saw nearly 19 million infants born between the years of 1946-1964. At its peak, women bore nearly twice as many children as two decades prior. Child-rearing practices also were being re-made during this time.

Parenting was expected to appear effortless and child-centered. Dr. Spock's (1946) bestselling books urged parents to "trust themselves," and attend to the rhythms of life at

home. In this way, discourses of childhood in the postwar period celebrated childhood as a time of play and freedom from responsibility. While this was not the lived reality of all children, it was promoted as the middle class ideals to which families were to aspire.

Popular concerns about childhood and what children needed were also concerns about adulthood and adult identities. Child rearing in the postwar period provided a powerful venue through which adult men and women could exert influence in a new society (Jenkins, 1998). For women, their role in child rearing was linked to the new economy, and a “sentimentalization of the mother-child bond worked to secure middle class women’s exclusion from the workplace” (Spiegel, 1998, p. 112). Men’s positioning through post-war discourses as moral, intellectual and economic head of the family provided the semblance of authority, even if the alienating conditions of an increasingly industrial world did not bear that authority out in reality (Mintz, 2004). This adult anxiety over young people meant important changes in the way that society saw appropriate activities for teenagers.

Linking concerns over teenagers to the production of adult anxiety gives a new context to what was conceived to be the largest “youth problem” of the postwar period—juvenile delinquency. Robert Hendrickson, a Republican senator from New Jersey, began the first major investigation of juvenile delinquency during the postwar period. Hendrickson created and served as the first chairman of a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, and worked through the committee to frame delinquency as a conspiracy to “demoralize, disrupt, confuse and destroy our future citizens” (Mintz, 2004, p. 293). Though Hendrickson was convinced that delinquency was the “scourge” that would debilitate the country, he needed a way to spread his sense of urgency and alarm to

others; he found a solution through tying delinquency to the rising threat of communism.

Delinquency entered the bloodstream of America during the 1950's, making it a key factor in legal, medical, and social policy. Between 1948 and 1954 the number of youth appearing before juvenile courts increased 58%. Between 1948 and 1951 alone, auto theft attributed to juveniles jumped 61%, breaking and entering 15%, and robbery 25% (Mintz, 2004). Delinquency, the causes for which were often blamed on a variety of forces including T.V., novels, and comic books, was presented as a problem that could be treated and prevented. Notably, inside this effort to root out delinquency was certain attention to the problem of "passive" and vulnerable young people. Critics of television sought to counter young people's "mindless" pleasure through the promotion of "industrious behavior rather than passive reflection" (Spiegel, 1998, p. 121).

The role played by research in the development of the concept of delinquency scarcely can be overstated. Studies "born within criminology [and] fuelled by moral panics" (Skelton & Valentine, 1998, p. 10) laid the foundation for youth services for the latter half of the century. In the United States, the Chicago School of Sociology led the way with academic study focused specifically on juvenile delinquency. Though this school is known for a variety of work that relates to delinquency, including the first use of statistics to predict crime, it is perhaps best associated with the subculture theories which described how the failure of family, schooling, and religious centers, police, etc. contributed to delinquency. In short, the Chicago School sociologists decided that it was young people's commitments to conventional goals, conventional activities, and their acceptance of conventional morals and standards of beliefs that would prevent them from juvenile delinquency (Hirschi, 1969).

While debate continues as to whether or not there was actually more crime during the postwar years—or if simply more crimes were prosecuted—youth studies scholars argue that by the 1950's, delinquency was considered the central social problem of American society (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). In response, research and policy urged conformity, while the teenage population increasingly sought non-conformity. In the next section, I outline the final stages of modern youth work as conceived through the grassroots youth work movement and the opening of the Youth Action Alliance in Statesville.

### ***Protests and “Rap Sessions”: The Founding of YAA***

One warm spring day in 1970, a group of protestors, estimated to number between 300 and 1300 young people, took over the University Recreation Building in Statesville. The event started with a “quiet marijuana stoke-in” on the steps of the Old Capitol Building, but soon moved to a large scale protest with students and youth crowding the streets and forcing their way past security offices and into the building (Press Citizen, 1970). This protest, though non-violent in nature, was part of a larger cultural phenomenon that was sweeping the nation.

This particular University protest ended without incident. Morphing into a “Gentle Thursday” type event, the protesters, ROTC members and campus police were said to have conducted a non-violent “rap session.” But violence was just around the corner; two days after Statesville’s protest was reported, another protest—this one at Kent State University in Ohio—demonstrated to the country how deadly serious generational conflict had become. In the same week as these two protest stories were

printed in the Statesville local paper, another story took up a small, but central space on the paper's cover page. It announced the funding for a new grassroots youth center, a place where young people could have their "voices heard" and have "rap sessions" amongst themselves. This center was to be named the Youth Action Alliance.

The 1970 YAA, and organizations like it, represented a new chapter in the common understanding of youth need. Whereas youth centers before this time had worked towards the development of some institutional standards, the 60's brought a splintering of youth work that brought experimental and street-based youth work to the fore (France & Wiles, 1998). These smaller, loosely structured programs often reflected popular anti-fascist ideologies of the period that focused on self-expression rather than rigid curricular demands. Like YAA, they were often created under the name of "youth coffee houses," rather than known institutions such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) or Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). They were venues that highlighted youth participation and voice, targeting young people's new interest in political participation.

Meanwhile, in Statesville and many other cities across the nation, politicians were roused by the suggestion that youth work could reduce the dropout rate by providing disenchanted young people with support. Panic around high rates of high school students leaving school between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade had gripped the county, and youth centers like YAA were able to position themselves as the response. The "major district goal" (Press Citizen, 1970) of reducing the dropout rate below 15%, combined with YAA's promise to draw the kind of "alienated youth" who were "disenchanted with the school system and education," was a selling point. Thus, YAA was built around the fears of a certain

kind of young person: male, resistant to authority, defiant at school, and at risk for delinquency; some had “drinking problems” and others were accused of “roughing up” other youth only blocks from the summer pilot program.

Two year later, when a lack of funding threatened to close YAA, the same argument was made, but this time youth workers who had been working with the young people demonstrated their loyalty to the program and refuted claims that kids hanging out there would be exposed to “the wrong element” (Press citizen, 1972).

There is no question about it—they may be unwanted elsewhere but they also need a place to go—and they really are a bunch of nice kids. Maybe they can’t communicate with others, but they really are a bunch of nice kids (Burns, in Press Citizen, 1972).

An appropriation of \$5,600 of local money complimented the \$17,000 in federal funds allocated, and YAA was approved. Its young founders as a site where various local youth services could be housed together, but also, importantly, as a space where young people could go to “relax” and “have rap sessions” (Svoboda, 1970). This understanding, that allowing young people to drop in and spend unstructured time at a youth center was a way of preventing future delinquency, was the basis for YAA’s official “Hang Out” program.

### **“Music is One of My Best Friends”: Valuing Hang Out**

Today, much of YAA’s Hang Out is still based in modernist notions of citizenship and inclusion. The organization’s mission statement reflects an approach focusing on the idea of self-improvement and community:

At a time when youth look to their friends to define themselves, [YAA] is a safe place where young people from all walks of life can be silly, thoughtful, outrageous, or sad. They can try new things, make friends, explore their talents,

share their skills, and start defining the adult that each will become. They can partner with caring adults, who encourage, teach, and give honest feedback ([YAA] Mission, 2011).

Officially, YAA promotes these ideals from their mission through a curriculum of “Positive Youth Development” (PYD). PYD approaches youth development through a positive lens, it is based on risk-prevention and skill-development through the promotion of “positive outcomes.” Though this approach is quite diverse, it’s often understood that a PYD program would offer youth a safe space, caring relationships, positive social norms, the potential for skill-building, and meaningful challenges (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, and Lerner, 2009; Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003a; 2003b).

While PYD understandings are present in YAA youth workers’ perception of their work, they have altered these goals to adjust to the local needs of Hang Out. For example, Jill, a 10-year YAA veteran, sees attendance as a key part of Hang Out’s value. She notes that many Hang Out regulars are young people that choose to avoid school and religiously-based extracurricular activities. Additionally, she sees the hurdle of attendance as a reality that must be accepted before promoting any youth work agenda.

Right off the bat, they choose to be here. It provides an opportunity for them to unwind and not have expectations. All day they are on a time schedule and there are things to get done. And they can come in and sit on the couch and have somebody listen to them. They have a voice and an adult that’s listening to them—the staff are able to genuinely respond to them...It starts with them, rather than us having an agenda and trying to impose it on them. We are not working with kids in response to something bad; we just get to know them.

Overall, while YAA youth workers cited a variety of features that they felt were important about Hang Out, four were most consistently mentioned during casual discussions and interviews. First, while a mix of targeted and non-targeted populations visit Hang Out, it was open to all populations. Second, friendships developed between

and among youth and youth workers that were based primarily on shared interests. Third, Hang Out made available what I call “big risk big reward” scenarios. Finally, for some youth workers, Hang Out provided a site for the development of “critical thinking” or “resistance.” This last issue, one of particular importance to youth work over time, is also taken up again in chapter four.

### *An Unlabeled Population*

The first strength of Hang Out is based on the mixed population that visits the space, and the notion that even youth with “problems” do not wear these labels in order to receive services. Zeke, a longtime YAA youth worker and former “YAA Kid,” describes the mix of young people at Hang Out as one of its strengths. Oldenburg (1989) describes such a mix as part of the “character” of a good hang out space, one which creates excitement around the uncertainty of membership on a given day, encouraging such questions as “who among the regulars will be there? Will there be newcomers? Will someone not seen in a long while show up?” (p. 46). Mark, YAA’s director since 1974, also sees a mix of youth as integral to the success of Hang Out:

We always, from the day I was hired, we face the challenge of trying to make it clear that any young person can take advantage of the services. So how do you avoid being labeled as the place that’s for ‘those kids’? The advantage of lots of general programs and some targeted is having an environment where it’s hard to distinguish who is getting served. Who is there for counseling, who is there as a youth volunteer, who is there because they are trying to get help for a runaway situation, who is there because they think they are pregnant. So combining all that is critical to our programs working well...sometimes they don’t want everyone to know they are coming for counseling.

Clearly Mark, while somewhat distanced from the daily activities of Hang Out, seems to maintain his belief that targeted youth work would prove problematic there.

Though many of the grants he writes apply for targeted funds, he feels confident that he hasn't altered the mix of targeted and untargeted youth who maintain free access to Hang Out.

### *Shared Interest Friendships*

The second area of strength youth workers cited when discussing Hang Out was the development of friendships based on shared interests. Several studies suggest the importance of adult-youth relationships in youth work (Diversi & Meecham, 2005, Rhodes, 2004), and YAA youth workers were unanimous in seeing this as an essential part of their work. These relationships, however, might more accurately be called "friendships" and often were between adults (Zeke, Interview) and youth (Nathan, Interview). The friendships exhibited during Hang Out revolved around shared interests between youth and adults or between youth and youth, and were often based on mutual interest in music, videogames, style, or even one's sense of humor. Youth workers described youth just "gravitating" towards certain adults (Paul, Interview), when they shared things in common. For example, Paul, when talking about a few Hang Out regulars, described Max's (the youth introduced at the beginning this chapter) unique kinship with Zeke. Paul saw Max as smart, but often unruly and frustrating. He acknowledged that his sense of humor didn't extend to Max's long and sometimes grotesque monologues or name calling while playing videogames. "But Zeke," he related, "is his buddy."

Shared interest in music was a connecting point, even when the youth and adults concerned were not playing music. Lin, a relatively new youth worker, having worked

there only six months as an Americorp volunteer, saw these connections as important sparks that could lead to deeper relationships. For example, she described her experience wearing a tee-shirt during Hang Out with the logo of experimental psychedelic band “Animal Collective” on it, and how this tee shirt allowed her to connect with two middle school aged boys that she felt wouldn’t have otherwise approached her. She felt that she was later able to connect with these boys more because of their mutual appreciation of this niche cultural phenomenon.

### ***Big Risk, Big Reward***

The third area of strength for Hang Out can be described as “Big Risk, Big Reward” experiences. These are best described through examples of recording and band shows. For example, Paul relates the story of a shy teenage girl, Anne, who came to Hang Out having never sung in front of people. After practicing in the studio and getting to know other youth and adults, she eventually started a band. After her performance, which Paul helped set up and manage, he asked how she felt. Her response was that “this was the best night of my life.” Paul reflected on this comment during his interview, adding, “but when I think about it, the first time that I ever performed was probably the best night of my life too” (Paul, Interview).

Big Risk, Big Reward opportunities are not necessarily planned like Anne’s was. During Hang Out, there are often spontaneous moments when young people take risks in front of the group. This might mean picking up a guitar and narrating a story about your day, such as I observed Max do, and then getting applause and laughter from the audience that formed to listen. In some cases, a Big Risk, Big Reward opportunity might

seem quite small to an outsider, but seem important to youth workers who know the situation. For example, when Leo, a non-speaking and non-interacting boy started attending Hang Out, he took care to avoid all interaction. My fieldnotes show Leo consistently attending Hang Out, but never speaking to adults or youth. He was a question mark for the youth workers, and several even asked me if I saw him talking to kids or noticed him doing anything. After almost two weeks of non-participation, Paul triumphantly told me that Leo had come over and sat near him on the couch to have a (brief) conversation.

### *The Role of Resistance*

The final area of strength youth workers regularly cited when describing Hang Out was the space's potential to incite resistance to socially conforming roles. This quality, while not part of the PYD framework, does have a long history for some youth work programs. I describe it briefly here, but address in much greater detail in chapter four.

Maggie, the self-avowed “feminist” of Hang Out, sees this space as essential to providing youth the opportunity to engage in conversation about critical issues. Far from a classroom-type lecture, she believes that learning takes place organically when conversation erupts during Hang Out. She also likes to have some other activity going during her interactions, most often a videogame. “I shake up their brains a little bit, but subversively, while we are playing Tetris” (Maggie, Interview). One of my fieldnotes (2/2/09) captures her technique: Maggie is sitting on the couch playing Playstation with two teenage boys who are approximately 14 years old. One boy brings up that the

drawings of women are the best part about Anime, a popular genre of Japanese cartoons. Maggie enters the conversation to announce that she thinks that female Anime characters are just “sex slaves,” a trend she finds “disturbing.” The boy responds by saying “I was drinking when I watched that anyway,” a move that elicits a raised eyebrow from Maggie, who responds, “you mean drinking... ahem... soda?” The play continues and within 15 minutes Maggie brings up another topic of interest, assisted suicide. The boys both join into the conversation, listening and agreeing with some of her ideas.

Though the limitations of recording events such as this one are clear, I repeatedly watched Maggie subvert her own “adult” power of control and discipline in order to maintain the “flow” of Hang Out. In this event, drawn from the middle of a much longer series of conversations, we see how Maggie manages to let the young people know that she disapproves of their drinking, while not confronting it directly. She understands that this was not the time (during games, in front of friends) to confront this boy about underage drinking. She understands that he might have just said the comment for the effect (laughter) from others around. She chooses to move on and wait for the opportunity to bring up another issue she finds interesting—a move rewarded by participation from the two boys.

### **Jessie’s Story: Recovering Lost Potential**

In this section, I examine the case of Jessie, a former YAA Kid whose story is outlined in YAA’s 2009 Annual Report. Jessie’s story is useful here because it not only illustrates the way that YAA is able to capitalize on images of problem youth, but also because the youth problem being addressed was one that caused epochal change in the

field of youth work. This section explores the transition of Hang Out, and other “garden-variety” (Halpern, 2000) youth work programs, from sites of relative autonomy for young people to those where youth workers are expected to be in control of young people’s decisions and activities.

Jessie’s story was featured in YAA’s 2009 annual report, a glossy brochure distributed to funders, parents, and interested community members for promotional purposes. It describes all of YAA’s programs, and provides numbers, demographics, and success stories, the latter of which is extremely important for programs like Hang Out that “don’t translate well to parents and funders” (Jill, Interview). It is through such success stories that we can learn a great deal about how YAA has narrated Hang Out to the public.

Jessie’s narrative suggests that YAA can help recuperate what would be wasted promise from teens, and that hanging out—something long considered a problem behavior in teens—is actually productive. This message relies on the development two ideas: first, that certain young people exhibit risk for slacking that must be curtailed, and second, that YAA’s hang out offers a way to draw in these populations and work with them to develop skills from their otherwise problematic interests, such as music and playing videogames.

Reading Jessie’s success story from the *Annual Report*, it’s easy to imagine the twelve-year-old attending Hang Out over a decade before:

My time at YAA helped me out tremendously in my current career as a sound engineer. I started hanging out at YAA when I was about 12, getting guitar lessons from [Zeke]. From there I started recording my own music, and shared with Zeke and Paul my interest in the engineering side of recording. Over my high school years I got to where I could run a recording session for my peers on my own. I then went to the University of California, San Diego to pursue a B.A.

in music with an emphasis on technology. The summer before my final year of college I got an internship at one of the leading sound recording studios in San Diego, Signature Sound. Even though I walked into the studio with very little experience with Pro Tools and I hadn't taken any classes specifically on recording yet, my time at YAA gave me a strong sense of studio etiquette, which honestly put me light years ahead of any other intern at the studio. I am now the studio manager at Signature Sound, I am making a living recording local bands, I've had the opportunity to assist on a session in Akon, Los Tucanes de Tijuana and Delux (both popular Mexican acts) and most recently 2<sup>nd</sup> engineer for The Used. I'm also learning live sound at a venue near where I live. I would not be in the place that I am in my career and life if it hadn't been for the experience and confidence that I gained at YAA.

At first glance, Jessie's story doesn't look like a typical "success story." Unlike the other two youth narratives contained in the 2009 report—that of an African American teenage mother and that of a depressive runaway—Jessie's story doesn't demonstrate obstacles such as overcoming institutionalized racism, poverty, or mental illness. Instead, her narrative relies on the understanding that youth like Jessie, the kind who like to "hang out" and listen to music, are inherently at risk.

This risk is emphasized through Jessie's love of music, something long associated with young people's rebellion and delinquency. Since early associations with Rock and Roll, to the protest songs of Bob Dylan, teen interest in music has long "tapped into the bulging vein of teen alienation" (Palladino, 1996, p. 226). Thus, a teenage girl who spends her time "messing with guitars" can be understood as already at potential risk for developing as a problem to society.

During the time that Jessie attended Hang Out, the 1980's and 90's, America was experiencing a moral panic about youth that had grown rapidly in the last fifty years. The last decade of the twentieth century brought new fears about teens, some of the strongest to date, and the rise of the teenage slacker and super predator.

### *Slackers and Super Predators*

Slackers, as the term suggests, were originally just people who did not do their work. But the term has evolved in interesting ways over the course of the last two centuries. Prior to the industrial revolution, “slacker” did not have particularly negative connotations because the desire to avoid work was common (Lutz, 2006). However, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the term enlisted as a means to describe the much-maligned figure of the World War I draft dodger. While “slacker raids” were conducted to round up new men, Senator Miles Poindexter discussed the management of inquiries that would identify “slackers” and “cowards” from other draft dodgers. But, mid- to late- twentieth century slackers were quite different. This highly mutable term moved from its military usage to a new arena in the field of juvenile delinquency. Here, “slacking” was used as a way to describe and diagnose a variety of youth problems.

Decades later, the slacker would have a secure place in the popular culture canon. Slackers were the subjects of movies (*Slacker*, *Clerks*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Bottle Rocket* and *Office Space*), literature (*The Idler*), and television (*Beevis and Butthead*) (In Lutz, 2006). The representation grew to such heights as to be parodied by the *Saturday Night Live* skit, *Wayne’s World*, that depicted the lives of two slacker teens who lived in a parent’s basement while trying to achieve their dreams of being in the music business.

The deployment of the slacker representation has been a central discourse for making sense of Hang Out time for adults. By drawing on negative depictions of directionless young people, YAA and other youth organizations secured funding by tapping into public fears about slacker youth. A 1992 article in *U.S. News & World*

*Report* provides a glimpse of the representation of young people in the late twentieth century:

Twentysomethings are a generation in need of a press agent. The elders think of them (when they think of them at all) as a generation of uppity, flesh and blood Bart Simpsons, so poorly educated that they can't find Vietnam on a map or come within 50 years of the Civil War. With their MTV-rotted minds and sound-bit attention spans, they are a whiny cohort with the moral compass of street gang Blood and Crips, a bunch of apathetic slackers don't vote and couldn't care less (Shapiro, in Kusz, 2007, p. 19).

Though it's difficult to parse the many allegations hurled by reports such as this one, it is clear that representations of the slacker have taken up an important spot in the American imagination. Slackers played a pivotal role in the late 1980's and 90's in "constructing and legitimizing conservative-inflected crisis narratives about the American family, the nation, the middle classes, and the economic and cultural position of white males" (Kusz, 2007, p. 19). Yet understanding how the slacker came to be understood as a true representation of a young people in the last two decades of the twentieth century requires a deeper examination into the intersection of discourses about disintegrating family, a nation in decline and at-risk, the eroding middle class, and massive economic and social change. Representations of the slacker also helped contain two interrelated fears about teens toward the end of the twentieth century: economic fear of welfare loafers and a new kind of fear of the effects of an alienated adolescence.

The 1990's slacker was characterized by refusal to work, particularly the refusal to work low-paying "McJobs" (Coupland, 1991). This refusal confounded older generations who—when seeing young people's inability to secure upwardly mobile employment—perceived this as a lack of effort and desire. Lutz (2006) described the attack on slackers as tied to economic fear.

From George Wallace's attack on 'welfare loafers,' to Lester Maddox's claim that aid for Dependent Children was 'reward for promiscuity,' to Newt Gingrich's claim that the welfare state taught children 'not to work, not to acquire property, not to learn to read and write and to wait around for the welfare check,' the welfare recipient has been damned as just pure lazy (p. 9).

Workfare alone—a program where people are denied access to a safety net of social care unless they can prove employment—demonstrates the conflicted ideology of Americans concerning work. This program strives to enforce work regulations for welfare recipients even if the available jobs pay a minimum wage that is below the standard of living.

But it wasn't images of slackers playing videogames or gazing listlessly at the T.V. that ignited the biggest panics about young people in the 90's; rather, it was something far more spectacular. On April 18, 1999, two teenagers would commit a crime that reaffirmed for many the suspected connections between slackers and delinquency. When 17-year old Dylan Klebold and 18-year old Eric Harris entered Columbine High School, they came well prepared. Armed with sawed-off shotguns, semi-automatic rifles, and a 9-millimeter semi-automatic pistol, they killed 13 people and injured 24 others in less than an hour. It wasn't only the brutality of the attacks that surprised; it was the demographics. Harris and Klebold were middle class kids who grew up in two-parent homes in an affluent Colorado suburb. These findings led the police to conclude that the two teenagers were in fact taking revenge for years of "perceived slights from peers" (Mintz, 2004, p. 374) But Columbine was only one episode of the violence that was predicted from young people by the media during this time. The 1990's were not only the decade of the teenage slacker, it was also the decade of the "super predator."

The super predator was a term developed during the 1990's to describe what was imagined to be the violent future of often, young, African-American male teens living in

urban environments. A 1996 Berkeley Media Studies Group found that the descriptions of such a predator dominated the media—with more than half the stories on youth focused on violence and two-thirds of stories about violence reported on teens under the age of twenty-five—despite 57% of crime being committed by those over twenty five and 80% being committed by those over eighteen (Dorfman et. al., 1997)

This fascination with youth crime both stirred public interest and drove new policy. For example, Princeton Professor and future director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives under George W. Bush, John J. DiIulio, took the threat of super predator as a major threat, announcing that about 270,000 more “juvenile super predators” would be roaming American streets by the year 2010 than were in 1990 (Zimring, 1996; Greve, 2006). DiIulio warned that this great surge should be met with at least 150,000 new placements in juvenile confinement over the course of the late nineties. Bob Dole also drew on the super predator fear in DiIulio’s prediction in his 1996 presidential campaign, fueling the flames of moral panic.

Ultimately, Jessie’s story represents YAA’s struggle to demonstrate that kids are not being encouraged to be *more* unproductive through hanging out there. By showing that it channels teens’ otherwise misguided or wasted energies into productive pursuits, YAA demonstrates its mission of encouraging self-development and community involvement. The use of the term “hanging out” is intended to be appealing to youth, insofar as it implies freedom from adult pressures to apply themselves in any particular way, and yet it is exactly this use of the time of which adults disapprove. Jessie’s narrative is powerful precisely because it works with this common representation of teenagers in order to show how YAA works against the social forces that would derail

otherwise productive teens. In the next section, I describe how these moral panics of the 1990's—fear of the slacker and the super predator—allowed YAA and other youth organizations to grow tremendously based on their potential for recuperating lost promise from problem kids.

### *Afterschool Solutions*

The response to public outcry over teenagers in the 1990's was a tremendous burst in public funding for youth programs and services. The Clinton administration, with bi-partisan support in Congress, approved the most rapid increase in funding for any federal program in history (Bartko, 2005), expanding the Jeffords-Gunderson legislation from \$25 million in 1994 to \$800 million in 1999 (Vadeboncoeur, 2006). These increases continued through the mid 90's, eventually reaching 2.5 billion at the federal level, before falling again to \$981 million under the Bush administration's reduced funding for the No Child Left Behind Act and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers initiatives (Smith & Van Egeren 2008). Despite these cuts, the 2009 funding level remains about \$181 million dollars above what it was in 1999 (Vadeboncoeur, 2006).

In addition to funding support, researchers have focused tremendous energy on demonstrating the promise of “afterschool time” and “out-of-school programs” (Eidmann-Adahl, 2003; Miller, 2003; Perry, Teague & Frey, 2002), efforts supported by large non-profit foundations such as the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Robert T. Brown Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Harvard Family Research Project, and the Afterschool Alliance.

Yet, some argue that the merging of fears about youth, increased federal funding, and large-scale research had its own price tag. Halpern (2003) explores how increases in funding during this period resulted in what he calls “The Big Lie,” a problematic cycle of half-truths created by youth work organizations to maintain federal funding. Additionally, tying pressure to produce local data from kids at youth work organizations to externally developed goals, Halpern demonstrates how the Federal government began to dictate the agenda of youth work from afar.

Many new programs sprang up during the mid-to-late 1990’s, lured by the promise of exploding federal funds. Many of these new programs, while quickly funded for their promises, had little knowledge of the field’s history or inclination to consult individuals or organizations with years of experience (Halpern, 2003; Bartko, 2005). Instead, they drew on pre-*No Child Left Behind* efforts preoccupied with the issue of the academic achievement gap, particularly that between more and less advantaged children and between different racial groups. Because these programs have been founded on and funded through promises to close the achievement gap, gathering data from schools via pre-and posttests has become increasingly valuable. This focus on academic achievement, narrowly focused on test preparation and achievement, has encouraged many youth programs, and even long established ones, to change their course, as Halpern describes below:

Philosophically, [long term practitioners] were inclined to continue arguing for afterschool programs in broad developmental terms. But they also knew that a meaningful share of scarce resources would not be secured by arguing that low and moderate-income children deserve the same access to fun, enrichment, and challenge as their more advantaged peers (Halpern, 1997, p. 113).

Thus, despite a long history of “diffuse and flexible” missions defined by “providers’ idiosyncratic visions” (Halpern, 1997, p. 111), the changes ushered in by the 1990’s increasingly favored targeted youth work over general programs (France & Wiles, 1998; Maychell et al. 1996). This “value-added” approach further divided and classified the youth targeted by youth work, deepening divides in how programs were administered.

YAA didn’t rely exclusively on targeted funds in the 90’s and in fact now views that period as a very positive time. Mark explains the increased availability of funds to YAA in the early 1990’s as resulting from the coincidental alignment of their program language with that of the federal government. PYD policies already in place at YAA gave the organization a head start when competing for large-scale opportunities such as Family and Youth Service Bureau’s Runaway Grant. The funds available in the 1990’s helped make possible the purchase of the new center in 2002, despite its hefty \$500,000 price tag. This new space was essential, as YAA was attracting over twice as many youth to Hang Out per day as they had ten years prior (Paul, Interview).

The Bush Years were lean for YAA, requiring them to patch together funds from any source possible. Mark compared this change to YAA’s experience in the 1980’s when it was all “at-risk” youth, noting, “Those of us that endured that decade hated it.” It was like, “You can come to the arts program if you have a drug problem.” But, at the time of his interview (2009) Mark had high hopes for the new administration, believing that Obama’s years of community service would guide him to better understand youth work.

### **Audit culture**

Understanding the shifts in youth work during the 1990's is aided by an understanding of what British anthropologists have termed "audit culture." Audit culture, a term that "evokes the principles of scrutiny, examination and passing judgment" (Shore & Wright, 2000, p. 59), has been identified as a major interest of policy-makers and Western governments over the last two decades. During this time, audit, once firmly rooted in the financial management sector, has migrated to new domains through the acquisition of *keywords* (Williams, 1976). Shore & Wright (2000) identify keywords such as "academic audits," "health and safety audits," company audits," "value for money audits," "computer audits," "data audits," "stress audits" and "democratic audits," to name a few, noting that the term "audit" was never previously associated with any of these fields (p. 59).

Audit promotes a model of efficiency, standards, and outcomes for youth work. Containing the managerial language that's "as unopposable as virtue itself" (Pollitt, in Shore & Wright, 2000, p. 61), a proliferation of reports seek to advise youth centers on how to best organize their work for economy, efficiency, and maximum benefits. From the William T. Grant Foundation's report "From Soft Skills to Hard Data," to the Carnegie Corporation's "Guide for After School Practitioners," privately funded research aimed towards helping youth work "find itself" is being published at a frantic pace. These organizations tout new research and assessments as helping move youth work "from babysitting to educationally enriched youth development programs" (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010), often through the creation of literacy programs, either those developed on site or

prepackaged plans such as AfterSchool KidzLit, LitART, and Voyager TimeWarp Plus. While many of these pre-packaged programs may offer benefits for individual youth, their promotion through research amounts to coercion when youth work is funded based on their implementation. Additionally, tracking grades and standardized test scores, a method of ranking of youth work that gained popularity in the 1990's, continues to influence which programs are funded.

The increased recognition and support for educational OST [Out-of-School Time] programs brought forth new expectations for what may be accomplished in the non-school hours. Funders began requesting that OST programs demonstrate their impact in terms of students' academic achievement...Grantees funded by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) Grants must track numerous school-related outcomes of their participants including school attendance, grades, and standardized test scores (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010, p. 10)

This request to provide data from afterschool programs is one of the prime examples of adult culture's developments and dispersion into afterschool programs. The language of audit culture, transmitted through vocabulary such as "transparency," "performance," quality assurance," "best practice," "stakeholder," and "empowerment" can be recognized in policy aimed towards youth work programs.

Funders want to know the optimal timing, intensity, duration and breadth, and target populations for demonstrating effects. Is one year too little? How many kinds of activities per week suffice? Should programs slots be 'set aside' for high risk children? Public and private funders seek 'promising' or 'proven' models to replicate "outcome-driven" or 'results-oriented' organizations or systems (Halpern, 2002, p. 114)

In addition to the language of audit, Shore & Wright (2000) suggest two additional features that make audit recognizable: the identification of new norms and practices, and the identification of effects from these practices on conditions of the work and thought of individuals (p. 58). These two areas will frame the final part of this

chapter, as I return to YAA's Hang Out in order to examine how audit culture has played out in it.

Following the trajectory outlined by French Poststructuralist Michel Foucault in his lectures on governmentality, this analysis of audit culture demonstrates changes in governance that reorganize economic life, state activities, and even the conduct of individuals around the norms of the free market (Shore & Wright, 2000, p. 61). These changes align individuals and organizations through a combination of external regulation and an internalization of new norms of self-improvement. In short "Audit thus becomes a political technology of the self: a means through which individuals actively and freely regulate their own conduct and thereby contribute to the government model of social order" (p. 62). Through this system, the power of governance is hidden, transferred into an individual's self-regulation of his or her own productive potential. Thus, audit culture works by creating self-regulating subjects that "freely" govern themselves.

### *New Norms and Practices of Audit*

"The research is driving the types of programs that are getting approved because the ones that are easier to research are getting approved more quickly than those that are difficult to research," declared Mark, the longtime director of YAA. Yet, Mark is anxious to get research done at YAA that can demonstrate the effectiveness of Hang Out. He understands that gathering data from programs makes his grant applications more persuasive, citing the example of the teen mother's program, where YAA has numbers for birth weights, developmental milestones met, and high school graduation rates.

Young women provide this data as part of the requirement for receiving services (Mark, Interview).

Jill also mentioned the need for numbers, noting that it's "the quantitative stuff that they [funders] are looking for... they want this many youth to be participating and this activity to happen. But they don't really know what happened" (Interview). Yet this need for numbers has been partially accounted for by the introduction of labeled sign-up sheets where young people check a box to show what they chose to do during Hang Out. Options for young people during Hang Out include "Art," "Music," "Games," and "Other."

Mark described another major effort to gather data from Hang Out that "looked good on paper," but proved "shaky in the implementation." This effort involved categorizing each youth's entry into Hang Out into one of three phases. These phases were marked as 1, 2, and 3 and youth were grouped into them depending on how long they had been attending Hang Out and what they wanted to do there. This method was originally created in order to increase the number of youth that could be in some way be held accountable for their time; as they moved up in phases they would receive more time with musical equipment in exchange for increased participation in YAA's data collection:

We first set up the workshop so that anybody could drop in and we wouldn't do any testing. Anybody that was trying to do a workshop or participate in more structured things, they would be in phase one. In order to be in phase one, you had to agree to take the adjective checklist. Phase two was for people who really wanted a lot of time in the program. The notion there was that they would get priority time in the studio. Phase three was for those students that had been involved a lot to become volunteers. Eventually we had so many phase one kids that...well... we probably tracked about a couple hundred, 50% of phase one kids actually did the pre-test. But, for the phase two kids, though, we could be a lot more strict, it would be like 'come on, you said that you wanted to...'we are giving you phase two status [but] we don't have your checklist yet.' You also had a more captive audience to do the posttest with (Mark, Interview).

As youth progressed through the phases, they were allowed more studio time or other benefits in exchange for completing “adjective checklists” or pre and posttests. The adjective checklist, designed by a former YAA employee and counselor, is one of Mark’s preferred tools for assessing the self-esteem of young people at Hang Out. It involves a 300-word checklist for youth and a “matrix of responses,” with which to score their answers (Mark, Interview). Yet, despite these efforts, Hang Out continues to be a difficult space in which to gather data, something Mark attributes to the lack of a “captive audience,” such as would be available through a class or workshop.

Those programs that are given approval...a lot of those are curricula. We use a program called Life Skills. It got heavily researched and because you have a captive audience, you can teach at a school. So a lot of the approved programs tend to be school based or need a captive audience (Mark, Interview).

Marks’s description of Life Skills, in reference to YAA’s program that was offered at afterschool sites, demonstrates a central problem for Hang Out. Noting that funding is often linked to the approval of particular programs, and that such programs require a “captive audience” such as a classroom, to be implemented, Mark’s comment alludes to key problems with the Hang Out model ever finding secure funding. In particular, two areas of Hang Out that give young people choice—the lack of pre-planned programming and the drop-in feature—are antithetical to the curricula to which Mark refers.

Yet Mark, in line with the most successful managers of youth programs, chooses to promote partnerships with local agencies (McLaughlin, 1994), such as the Statesville School District, and the local University. Not only are these programs universally praised for connecting youth with the community, but they also offer YAA the “captive

audiences” required for pre and posttests, observational data, and population counts.

Developing these areas allows YAA the needed information to demonstrate “outcomes” through specific interventions.

Mark sees the need for an account of YAA’s programs as one fundamentally tied to demonstrating the center’s value through economic terms:

You know, I’m a taxpayer like everyone else and I want to know that there’s a good return on the tax dollar. The Center for Academic Excellence [report] that came out in 2000, that said that for every dollar spent in youth development, there’s a ten-dollar return in the community-- they documented that. Anytime we do a cost-benefit analysis of our work, it helps (Mark, Interview).

He uses crime statistics to emphasize YAA as a good investment, “I just try and make sure that they understand how much money we spend on prison. I go, ‘How can we not have money?’” Drawing out the comparison, Mark ends his plea with a comparison between the costs of helping a youth at the center to that of keeping an adult in prison. For example, he related, making the argument several years ago that while prison costs \$30,000- \$35,000 per inmate per year, the youth collaborative [four youth centers that include YAA] would only ask \$200,000 to service nearly a thousand young people. At that time, he concluded, “at least ten of those kids were on their way to being in prison” (Mark, Interview). Mark’s economically slanted analysis of YAA’s work, while not a new argument, demonstrates a key cultural understanding consistent with audit, namely the enforcement of “accountability” to the taxpayer.

### ***The Effects of Audit Culture***

In this section, I explore some of the effects of audit culture on the way we understand YAA’s Hang Out. Scholars are divided in their interpretations of the effects

of audit. Power (1994, p. 41) suggests that audit should not be seen as a “conspiracy of the vested interests of accounting practitioners,” and instead be understood as the development of a pervasive belief in the safety of “discipline.” Alternatively, Shore and Wright (2000) reject this notion, seeing audit as anything but benign: “The time has come to hold audit itself to account so that we may realize the true extent of the disastrous social costs of this coercive new form of governance” (p. 85).

Whatever the larger social implications of audit may be, there is little doubt that audit is having real effects on the day to day workings of Hang Out. In this section, I explore three interrelated effects of audit at Hang Out: the development of insecurity and the feeling of surveillance experienced by youth workers; the development of youth workers as controllers; and the hidden shifts of power implicit in audit culture that are affecting the delicate relationships formed during Hang Out.

Shore & Wright (2000) see one of the primary effects of audit as “keep[ing] people on their toes by making them feel insecure” (p. 77). This effect was demonstrated by youth workers, many of whom expressed anxiety over what people (funders, parents, community members) are thinking about Hang Out. For example, Jill described her concern that funders would see a side of Hang Out that they found unappealing. This could be anything from the “slacker” posture of young people flopped over couches to the low lighting that many young people at Hang Out preferred. These are things that she imagined a funder would be “suspicious of” (Jill, Interview). She expressed her concern that “someone could walk in and think something,” a move that she imagined could have effects on the way the program was perceived by outsiders.

Jill, like other youth workers at YAA, felt caught, knowing funders would prefer a “clean” and “welcoming” atmosphere, yet also understanding that “clean” doesn’t necessarily translate to “welcoming” for the particular youth served by YAA’s Hang Out. Mark also cited this concern, although he experienced youth’s insistence on keeping old furniture more as a frustration, recalling how he had to “fight” youth to introduce new furniture, despite the terrible condition of what they had formerly.

But the daily appearance of Hang Out is less of a concern for youth workers than the representations that they need to get on paper. Data collection from youth during Hang Out is a problem, one Jill attributes to

a population of kids that are anti-institution... they’re savvy to... like I think they have great perspective and they have interesting things to share and I love talking to them and then I’m like, would they talk, would they do an interview with you... and no way (Jill, 2009).

Youth workers therefore fight the constant struggle of building and maintaining the trust of resistant young people. In my observations, as well as in the reporting of the staff, it was not unusual for young people to sit at Hang Out for weeks before providing any adult with more than a one-word response. Others flagrantly disregarded rules, which led to arguments with other young people or youth workers. These situations were handled in different ways, with Hang Out workers often taking up the sides of young people, trying to see things from their perspective. In the words of Zeke, the job often meant “taking a professional attitude towards being a perpetual 16-year-old” (2009), something that he did quite well as he mixed with young people to chat about everything from niche musical trends to Marxist philosophy.

Yet regular participation in youth culture was regularly interrupted for other youth workers, such as Paul. Though Paul was originally hired almost 25 years ago as a sound

technician, and has long been a member of a local band, his years of experience at YAA often result in the need to become the “heavy” during Hang Out. Paul uses this term to describe times when he has to make young people do something. For example, the day before our interview, he had needed to get a group of teens who were “hiding” in a stairwell of the building to come back to the main Hang Out area. Paul, a father of two teenagers himself, doesn’t have a problem with this type of conflict, feeling that it can be healthy for young people and adults and pointing out that he rarely faces problems from kids because they understand why he’s making the requests. His philosophies in parenting and for Hang Out seem interchangeable. For his daughter he believes that he should “let her go and be around,” but to be there at home for her if she runs into tough times. Similarly, Paul intervenes little in the lives of young people at Hang Out, choosing instead to wait for them to approach with their problems.

Yet Paul’s calm competence and comfort with authority seem to melt under bright gaze of audit. For example, Paul’s effort to get YAA kids to fill out forms almost always proves frustrating. He paces the room, circling youth on the couches, and raises his voice trying to get them to comply. He often puts the pressure of maintaining funding on youth, a tactic where he asks youth, “Do you like coming to Hang Out? If you do, you need to fill this out.” Occasionally these tactics work, but often they do not. Notably, Paul made similar efforts, several times, appealing to youth to participate in this study. While occasionally youth will take the forms or surveys, it appears that this is more to pacify Paul than with any real intent of filling out the papers. When he collects surveys, he complained, they are only sometimes useful as many are blank and others are signed with names like “Harry Potter” and “Barack Obama” (Paul, conversation 6/09).

It's important to note that Paul doesn't feel a lack of conflict about Hang Out. Noting that kids at Hang Out can have what seems like *too much* leisure time, Paul admits that he sometimes wants to ask kids to get out their homework. But he also believes that Hang Out should not be school, and that his goal is keeping young people coming back—something that is challenging to do if you are repeating the same patterns of authority that certain youth reject during the school day. He ends up conflicted, thinking to himself, “I often wonder, ‘do they have homework?’ But I think it's their life. I struggle with that.” Thus, it's not that Paul ignores the societal pressure to get young people to do particular types of activities, but rather that for him the relationship with youth supersedes controlling their activities. This type of relationship or “friendship” between young people and adults, while often seen as negative in school settings, has a long history of success in youth work.

For youth workers like Paul, the “whole audit procedure takes on the feel of an artificial and staged performance,” inasmuch as they are required to perform dozens of small tasks that separate them from their work with young people. Additionally, the effect of audit incurs a double loss—first, through the collection of unusable or unreliable data—and second, through the altered relationship between youth worker and youth.

Lastly, it's important to note the effects of audit on the group of youth that Paul refers to as “regulars.” Many regulars at Hang Out, while occasionally participating in various activities at Hang Out, often spend more time on the couches than doing specific auditable activities.

The kids that are doing well, those are probably the kids that you see coming in doing volunteer work, or doing a recording once a month or something, they won't necessarily be our regulars.

Instead, Hang Out regulars include those young people who are described variously as “alternative,” (Paul, Interview) “anti-institution” (Jill, Interview), artsy (Lin, Interview), or “outside of the box” (Zeke, Interview), “engaged, but not engaged at school” (Maggie, Interview), but who often share the main characteristic of resistance to authority. These are the young people most visible when observing Hang Out, and those rendered invisible through the culture of audit.

## **Discussion**

The development of audit culture at Hang Out is a slow and incremental process, but is having tangible effects nevertheless. On the micro level, there are new types of conflicts, such as those over the categorization of activity, and the subsequent requirement that youth workers take up new roles as managers. On the macro level, YAA is finding the challenges to produce tangible results from Hang Out a contributing factor to its difficulty in funding the program. But perhaps the most disastrous effect of audit on Hang Out is one that has yet to be realized.

Power (1994) suggests that in order to be audited, an organization must transform itself into an auditable commodity. In this way, audit “reshapes its own image on those organizations that are monitored” (Shore & Wright, 2000, p. 72), thus creating an organization in a constant state of preparation for audit. For Hang Out, a site that thrives on drop-in attendance, unstructured time, and “activity for activity’s sake” (Maggie, Interview), a “state of constant preparation” actually is not possible. Consider the conversation between Max and Maggie that opened this chapter:

Maggie: “Hey Max, what are you doing today? Art? Music? Games? Max ignores her for a full minute, eventually giving a grudging “no.” She pauses, pen in hand, and waits.

Max: “Just put whatever—I guess you can’t just say we’re doing nothing.”

Maggie: “Art, then?” She inquires.

Max: “Yeah, art...”

But while Maggie resists the pressure of audit in order to maintain her casual relationship with Max, another youth worker, Jill, struggles to integrate audit into her vocabulary, declaring that it’s just something youth workers need to “get comfortable with.” On collecting data from youth, she relates:

It just interferes and feels awkward. I know that there’s an aspect of us changing our minds and getting comfortable with it. But it just interrupts the process. It’s like we say, “Hey we need to find out if there’s change, can you fill out this pretest and then do a posttest?” (Jill, Interview)

Yet, “getting comfortable with” an overabundance of control and surveillance features risks curtailing conversations with youth, and reducing honest, open and critical dialogue (Jeffs & Banks, 2010, p. 108). Meanwhile, little conversation happens at Hang Out, or in the field of youth work at large, about the effects of audit culture. In fact, Foucault (1977b) might argue that disguising the way power works is a central principle of audit culture, masking change under the unassailable banner of progress. The accountability practices of the growing culture of audit and measurable outcomes assessment assumes a specific sort of youth worker: one who agrees with the proposition that youth work is best understood as guiding youth into productive uses of their time, with productivity narrowly and conventionally defined.

But constant demonstrations of productivity is antithetical to those who value the culture of slacking, to musicians and artists who value experimentation, and to many of those who work with young people every day. In fact, I found that youth workers actually

find value in the tendency of YAA youth to resist the cultural forces that encourage social conformity. That resistance, and how the youth workers at YAA frame it, is the subject of chapter four.

## CHAPTER IV

## FRAMING RESISTANCE: SUBCULTURAL FEMINISTS HANG OUT

Some people would say that we need a ground from which to act. We need a shared collective ground for collective action. I think we need to pursue the moments of degrounding, when we're standing in two different places at once; or we don't know exactly where we're standing; or when we've produced an aesthetic practice that shakes the ground.

(Butler, 1994)

**Sharpie Lipstick: An Introduction to Resistance**

Visiting YAA's Hang Out one brisk spring day, I was drawn in by a colorful new art display on the main wall. The images were torn from the pages of popular women's magazines such as Redbook and Cosmopolitan—I quickly recognized the airbrushed look of ads for Maybelline, Revlon, and other cosmetics—but something was clearly different. Upon closer inspection, I noticed scribbles of Sharpie marker covering the glossy images. Gap-toothed grins marred formerly whitened smiles; tiny horns sprouted from perfectly-coiffed hair. One model sported a Hitler mustache. The work appeared to have taken little time; the goal wasn't to showcase drawing skills. Rather, it seemed that this exercise was devoted to speaking back to the overly pretty, glossy, and perfect images of womanhood, a graffiti-type activity meant to disrupt the sleek commercial images.

However interesting the appropriation of conventional, commercialized images of women was to me, however, this was not the original intention of the activity. Though staff-designed, structured activities were not the norm during Hang Out, the youth workers at YAA occasionally would have an idea and attempt such an activity. One youth worker fond of these activities was Lin, an AmeriCorps youth worker and art

teacher at YAA. Frequently these were loosely planned, and intended to capitalize on interests that youth had mentioned in a previous Hang Out session.

In this case, Lin brought in magazines with the intention that the youth would make collages. Before she could even explain her purpose, however, the youth derailed her plan.

They got as far as opening the magazines, and there were pens lying around and so I just kind of encouraged it and started talking about Dadaism and Marcel Duchamp who did the famous mustache on the Mona Lisa. I thought... I can roll with this. (Lin, Interview)

After the doodling was completed, Lin had the idea of turning the activity into “a serious art project” by cutting out the pictures and turning them into an art show (Lin, Interview).

The girls sat together and talked about the pictures, and Lin led a discussion intended to “show them that art can be something different than what they’re taught in school and to give them confidence in their work. To raise what youth art is to an adult level of what adults consider art” (Lin, Interview).

Lin is not the first adult to try to harness the playful experimentation of young people; in the name of a larger cause youth workers, teachers, and researchers have sought to develop understandings of young people’s unstructured time as a site for meaning making through the arts (Hoffman-Davis, 2005; Heath, Soep & Roach, 1998) symbolic resistance (Hall & Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 1979) or individual agency in the face of institutional norms of class, race, gender, and sexuality (Holland et. al., 1998; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Parmar, 1995). Such work has encouraged some to argue that resistance should be a primary goal of youth work (Skott-Myhre, 2009)

Yet, while resistance is interwoven into the ideological underpinnings of youth work, just what resistance means can be difficult to pin down. Unlike the problematic

terms for youth that were explored in chapter three, such as “slacker” and “delinquent,” the term “resistance” is one that has been linked to positive as well as negative perceptions. In academia, resistance scholarship has raised questions about our definitions of power, the self, and agency, in such diverse fields as cultural studies (Hall & Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 1979; Cohen, 1972), feminist studies (Radway, 1984; Durham, 1999), and literacy (Holland et. al, 1998; Lewis, Enciso, and Moje, 2007). Additionally, depending on which theoretical lens researchers employ, questions about “whether resistance must be conscious or articulated, what or whom is being resisted, and finally what resistance entails” (Raby, 2006, p. 139), are answered differently. Finally, while resistance traditionally has been conceived as a modernist project, it has received a number of postmodern revisions in recent years. Thus, while the ambiguity of resistance can seem problematic in a modernist frame (is everything resistance? nothing?), a poststructuralist position acknowledges the self as constructed through discourse and sees resistance as “more sporadic, diffuse, and localized” (p. 148).

In this chapter, I examine how two of the most salient theoretical lenses for theorizing resistance— subculture theory and feminist theory—are used to construct meaning from the activity of young people in general, and from the activity of young people at Hang Out more specifically. Additionally, I engage in the debate between subculture theory and poststructuralist theoretical revisions, one that Greener and Hollands (2006) have described as “productive and engaging” (p. 393), for the larger field of youth studies.

Through this exploration of subcultural feminist resistance and relevant poststructuralist critique, I wish to rethink traditional determinations of “conformity” or

“resistance” on the part of adolescent girls, moving beyond “resistance to something” and towards “resistance-as-affirmation” (Mules, p. 260). In the words of Foucault (1994), “resistance comes first,” (p. 167) a force precedes the power exerted upon it. Thus, while modernist discourses of youth culture as resistant offer important insights, I will contend in the closing of this chapter and in chapter five that these discourses of youth resistance also have their limitations.

My discussion of resistance in this chapter is broken into three parts. First, I offer a detailed accounting of historical and theoretical perspectives on resistance, and explain what the combination of subcultural and feminist theories brings to bear on understandings of Hang Out. In the second part, I use subcultural feminist theory to analyze a specific event happening during Hang Out. Finally, I end this chapter by discussing the gaps left when we use subcultural feminist theory to understand situations like those presented during Hang Out.

Finally, while this chapter focuses attention on girls’ subcultural resistance, I believe that the frameworks that I make available are useful for talking about a variety of resistances that we attribute to subcultural youth. The dominant/subordinate binary that is set up by both early cultural studies and second wave feminism shed light on ideological underpinnings that are integrated into today’s youth work, social services, and social justice efforts. Additionally, I wish to acknowledge that my attention to the relationships between gender and subcultural participation are shaped by my own experiences, which I describe briefly in this section.

### *A Feminist Subculturalist Positioning*

Growing up feeling different in a conservative Iowa town, I believe my own subcultural participation was a positive force that helped me experiment with alternative ways of performing gender. Thus, consistent with feminist tradition, I choose to enter this work with the understanding that my personal history, complete with its subcultural styles, rituals, and rejections, has been a powerful force in my research. I feel indebted to the communities that have allowed me the space for the imaginative play, activities and ideas that helped me develop ways of being otherwise unavailable in a conservative Iowa town.

My own youth practices, many of which are recognizable from goth subculture (black skirts dragging the floors, heavy eyeliner, laced boots) allowed me both to stand out from some crowds and to join in with others. Like many other subculturalists, my life has maintained abundant contradictions; I recall wearing several heavy gothic crosses together around my neck (a practice that my Jewish family accepted as youthful experimentation) and scrubbing off make-up to visit with relatives. Yet the availability of my goth identity felt essential to my daily practice. It shielded me from unattainable norms by making them undesirable, and gave me a place to experiment with alternative practices of self.

Ultimately, I believe that subcultural practice is neither inherently beneficial nor detrimental to the lives of participants. Rather, like other community practices, it is complex and multidimensional, allowing for a variety of effects. In what follows, I look to explore the role of resistance theories both in order to examine their impact on Hang Out, and to add to the growing body of resistance research that “seeks to document and

support those local openings and social movements which seem liberatory” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 277).

### **The Rise of Resistance Studies**

I begin with a tracing of subcultural studies in order to show the influence of this area of research on historical understandings of resistance. Subcultural studies, as a subfield of cultural studies, was conceived after World War II and was closely tied to the development of delinquency studies as described in chapter three. Yet while American sociologists focused primarily on delinquency as the individual acts of youth from troubled homes, British sociologists were busy developing an understanding of delinquency that was based in class conflict. Of utmost interest in their fieldwork and analysis was the increasing fervor around youth subcultures.

Driscoll (2002) demonstrates how subcultural and delinquency studies “...emerge at a time when the role of culture in securing domination had been elaborately investigated and there was a need for analysis of struggles over meaning” (p. 223). It was during this prodigious period that Richard Hoggart founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Beginning in 1964, this collection of scholars focused attention on themes of resistance, demonstrated through “spectacular” subcultures like Mods, Teddy Boys, Punks, and Skinheads. Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) became a seminal text for these early resistance scholars, helping lay the foundation for later examinations of mass media in post-war Britain. This book also coincided with new social and political efforts of the period, quickly positioning it as a seminal text in the nascent field of cultural studies. Soon other scholars were hard at work

teasing out resistance from subcultural texts, symbols, and bodies; through their analyses, they sought to uncover the inherent resistive potential in everything from leisure activities to stylistic irony. These early findings from the CCCS influenced both research and the popular imagination; they are visible today in everything from the diagnosis and treatment of youth participating in “negative” subcultures to romantic movie depictions of youth resistance.

Further, the CCCS brought a theoretical lens to its research that was consistent with a British Marxist approach to power and class struggle. Resistance for the CCCS was seen first and foremost as an issue of class struggle. Stuart Hall, director of the CCCS from 1968 through 1979 and arguably its most influential cultural theorist, argued that “[h]egemonic cultures...are never free to reproduce and amend themselves without contradiction and resistance” (1976, p. 66). Hall and other CCCS scholars documented how tensions in working class family structures were symptomatic of larger social issues. Since subcultures were believed to reflect intergenerational rebellion in a class-stratified society, resistance was often conceived as the natural cultural expression of class frustrations.

In developing an understanding of culture and subculture, Hall (1976) applied Marx, arguing, “[a]s individuals express their life, so they are” (p. 10). Marx’s belief that production of one’s own life is subject to the material conditions under which they live, is evident throughout early CCCS work. Defining culture as the “distinctive ‘way of life’ of the group or class” (p. 10) (including systems of belief, mores and customs, and the uses of objects and material life), the CCCS, like Marx, saw human life as produced in a planned and purposeful manner.

Subcultural scholars added the prefix “sub” to culture, to imply a “subordinate, subaltern, or subterranean” (p. 1) position in relation to dominant culture (Thornton, 1996). Subcultures were oppositional to dominant culture by their very definition. One example of this opposition was the stylistic practices that made them visible on the street.

Dick Hebdige’s well-known account, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979), exemplified the most popular form of analysis applied to resistance, demonstrating how class and race tensions led to the stylistic resistance displayed by subculturalists. In this account, Hebdige reads resistance in the meanings of style, music and texts; his semiotic divining fanned the flames of British and American media’s love-to-hate affair with subculture. His study of English youth sought to show how everyday objects, such as a tube of Vaseline or safety pins, take on resistive value when appropriated by subcultures. “Safety pins,” Hebdige notes of this now well-known subcultural symbol, “were taken out of their domestic utility context and worn as gruesome ornaments through the cheek, ear or lip [of Punks]” (p. 106).

Hebdige accounted for outside critique (in a way that aligned his work with the CCCS) by declaring that the intention of subcultural resistance could be unconscious, noting “[I]deology by definition thrives beneath consciousness” (p. 11). This perspective provided Hebdige with the opportunity to write artful accounts of resistances that were invisible to even the most deeply invested members of subcultures. Studies of resistance became a productive site for the practice of “reading” bodies, an idea that took precedence over any sort of careful ethnographic methods. Hebdige (1988), in a later commentary, asserts that a researcher’s political agenda can often affect the desire to gain methodological objectivity within ethnography (Skelton, 1998) and that he may have

“overemphasized the equation of the subordinate with the resistant” (p. 15) during his work with subculture youth. But delineating between subordinate and the subcultural lives was a project of great interest to another groups of scholars that would soon have a great impact not only on the CCCS, but on many other fields of academic study. The rise of feminism, and its relationship with early cultural studies, will be the focus of the next section.

### ***Feminism at the Door***

Stuart Hall describes the introduction of feminism to the CCCS as one of a thief in the night: “[Feminism] broke in; interrupted, made unseemly noise, seized the time, and crapped on the table of cultural studies” (Brunsdon, 1996, p. 268). Yet despite this challenging start, he cites feminism’s impact on cultural studies as “completely revolutionary in a theoretical and practical way” (Hall, 1992, p. 282). In this section, I describe relevant events surrounding the introduction of feminist thought into the CCCS and the impacts of this change on the contemporary characterization of resistance.

The CCCS’s emphasis on visible, often "spectacular" street styles regularly served to drown out other behind-the-scenes activities of less-visible members of the group (McRobbie, 1989). A particular criticism launched towards the almost exclusively male CCCS was that their research focused exclusively on boy subcultural styles and labor concerns. References to girls’ subcultural production in the early CCCS work are scant at best, with most resistance attributed to the “female in awe of the male on a pedestal,” and often in the form of “fantasy relationships” with male music or film idols (McRobbie, 1976). Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber emerged as major cultural

theorists at the CCCS in the 1970s and 80's, offering feminist critiques in line with the liberal feminist discourse of the period. They describe how even the small amounts of autonomous space available to girls, in this case bedrooms, must be negotiated with adults

The small structures and highly manufactured space that is available for ten to fifteen-year-old girls to create a personal and autonomous area seems to be offered only on the understanding that these strategies also symbolize a future general subordination – as well as a present one now (p. 221).

With the main concern of feminist scholars being how subcultural production might mark the beginning of a subordinate life, McRobbie and Garber emphasized how teenage girl's self-presentation and style was often manipulated by powerful media influences. Resistance to sexual subordination became the type of resistance assigned to girls, setting up a pattern for the research of girls' subcultural production for the next thirty years.

While the other members of the CCCS didn't exclude girls completely from their work, they made little or no attempt to complicate the assumption that "youth culture" meant young, white, heterosexual males. McRobbie and Garber (1976) demonstrated how the CCCS valorized the resistance of white, working-class boys, leaving out the important roles girls played in subcultural production. These scholars, in collaboration with the Women's Study Group at the CCCS, offered criticism of the group's tendency to celebrate only boys' subcultural practices as "resistant" or "oppositional" (Skelton, 1998). Since "spectacular" subcultures were to be found out on the street, this became the most important geographic location for researchers, leaving out the majority of girls who were subject to stricter regulations on the times and locations of non-school activities.

Yet McRobbie and Garber (1976) found that subcultural production was alive and well for girls, despite the “strong masculine overtones” (p. 114) that the term had taken on for academics. Of the various correctives applied to the CCCS model, feminist revisionist accounts have focused on revealing the “hidden stories” of women in subcultures as one way to demonstrate the resistant theme. Girls were both hidden members of male subcultures and also maintained their own smaller subcultures often based around styles and music. Some show how subcultural style production had relied heavily on the second-hand clothing market, particularly in the “jumble sales and ragmarkets” (McRobbie, 1989) populated by female subcultural entrepreneurs. These style centers were places where subcultures butted up against each other, each continuously recreating and reinforcing their own unique styles. Though the ragmarket had long been the nexus for this type of subcultural production and reinvention, it remained an area that McRobbie called “unexamined in the field of cultural studies,” due perhaps, she suggested, to “shopping [being] considered a feminine activity” (1989, p. 132).

Driscoll (2002) further problematizes notions of women’s roles in youth subcultures through her description of the “feminization” of mass culture:

Understandings of mass culture as eroding the singular taste of the cultured individual have consistently exemplified mass culture by reference to girls...debate over cultural consumption continues, with remarkable consistency, to deploy girls as figures of late modern conformity (p. 224).

Such understandings placed girls not only in the margins of subcultures, but also in opposition to them, as a commodifying force. With the importance of the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic and “authenticity” woven throughout the CCCS documents, it’s clear that subcultures required images of mass culture against which to set up boundaries. Since the

majority of these “authentic” subculture participants were male, the convenience of a binary that feminizes mass culture is plain. In other words, the link between the CCCS and the mass culture critiques of Frankfurt School Marxists like Horkheimer and Adorno provided a template for researchers to see resistance as a primarily masculine endeavor.

### **Poststructuralist Critique and New Resistances**

In addition to understanding how resistance has been structured historically in youth research, important critiques have arisen within the fields of cultural studies and resistance. Poststructuralist feminism, in particular, has offered tremendous insight into the development of resistance and how it can be understood today. In this section, I examine how New Feminisms, particularly those informed by the poststructuralist theory of Michel Foucault, can allow us to rethink resistance in productive new ways.

Poststructuralist critique eschews essentialist notions of gender that fall away in favor of gender performances, and top-down power structures are revised to examine the situated micropolitics of everyday life. Whereas second wave Feminist rhetoric, like that contained in Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), describes how women, when imprisoned in the spheres of home and family, lose their identities, many new feminists would critique such binaries as oversimplifications of women’s thoughts and desires.

Though early subculture theory often posits resistance as symbolic, collective, and economically driven, poststructuralist feminism offers an alternative lens for viewing the resistance of young women. Michel Foucault’s theories of disciplinary power provide us with a way to talk about power relations as multiple and dispersed throughout social fields such as medicine, law, and education. For Foucault, power is ever present; its

effects create a variety of subject positions – efficacious, liberatory (if only temporarily) dominating and dominated through our participation in multiple discourses. Further, Foucault (1976/1998) links power and resistance, telling us “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (p 95). The notion that power and resistance are inextricably linked is emphasized again in Foucault’s later work where he describes how power functions through the structuration of a field of possible actions. From this perspective, resistance to power should not only be understood in terms of force relations, but also in terms of potential creative action. For Foucault resistance was a positive force, in advance of power through domination. Without resistance, he suggests, there would be no need for domination.

Thus, while the early cultural studies and feminist scholars envisioned resistance as unified against mass culture, mass culture holds no special place in a Foucauldian analysis. Resistance is not defined primarily or even necessarily in relation to mass culture. Rather, a Foucauldian analysis sees resistance as having no inherent positive or negative valences. Some, though not all, resistances exist as sites of possibility wherein tactical reversals through immanent critiques can change (even if momentarily) relations of domination.

### ***Governmentality and the New Girl Subject***

In chapter three, I described the function of audit culture—a contemporary version of Michel Foucault’s notion of governmentality—to create productive bodies from the youth and youth workers at YAA. Critiques of governmentality, however, are

not only useful to understand the production of working bodies, they also apply to gendered bodies.

McRobbie (2007) argues that Foucault's concept of governmentality can not only help us understand the changes in girls' lives over the last fifty years, but also can give us a sense of how we might imagine resistance. Using Foucault (1977) and Butler (1990), she describes how complex strategies of governmentality work on the micro level to ensure the creation of female subjects endowed with capacity (p. 718). Capacity, in this sense, refers to girls' ability to perform or produce through labor. On a larger scale, girls that are "capable" are now more desirable than girls who are "passive." Notions of capacity, McRobbie argues, have been institutionalized into fields of education and the workplace and are now invisible to young women endowed with the "choice" to be productive workers and free sexual beings. For instance, the choice of occupations, areas of study, and lifestyles previously unavailable to our mothers are now ways through which capacity can be demonstrated. McRobbie's analysis traces how young women, developing under "the post-feminist masquerade" (McRobbie, 2007), are taking up subject positions unimagined by liberal feminists of the past via their occupational and educational choices.

Whereas the second wave feminism of the late 60's and 70's asserts that equality can be gained through women's choices; McRobbie (2007) demonstrates how today these "choices" are subject to specific technologies that entangle women in a "new sexual contract" that encourages them to relinquish feminist concerns (p. 718). In a world where slogans like "equal pay for equal work" have been institutionalized, the liberal feminisms of Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and Rebecca Walker seem to have accomplished their

goals.

But, as McRobbie (2007) aptly quotes from Foucault, “It’s quite clear that the danger has changed” (p. 719). Alert to the manipulation of liberal feminist discourse to “re-shape notions of womanhood to fit with the new or emerging (neo-liberalised) social and economic arrangements” (p. 719), McRobbie is quick to point out that the goals of old feminism have been hidden rather than accomplished. It’s inside this supposed panacea of freedom (as demonstrated through career options and education) that women are now silenced by their liberation. This notion leaves little room for resistance in the traditional collective sense, since in many cases women have been granted the same rights as men.

Thus, McRobbie’s analysis seeks to demonstrate how discourses of freedom for women often work to reinscribe the norms of hegemonic patriarchy in new ways. These “high-visibility tropes of freedom” (2007, p. 720) are part of a double bind where women are subject to both the discourses of “female freedom and (putative) equality” (p. 720), and the requirement that they let go of the feminist agenda. Legislation such as the Equal Opportunity Act of 1995 suggests to many that women have “won the battle for equality” (2007, p. 720), yet from another perspective it seems as though they just have a new set of norms to which they must adhere in order to be successful.

For example, today’s women are controlled less by patriarchal restrictions and more by what they are capable of accomplishing in the modern workplace. Government attention directed at the female subject through the U.K.’s Welfare State or the U.S.’s Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program encourages young women and their offspring to pursue education and jobs once thought to be out of reach. McRobbie (2007)

notes, “Women now figure in governmental discourse as much for their productive as their reproductive capacities” (p. 722). And yet within this matrix of capacity and productivity, the modern woman continues to be subject to technologies of self that regulate the production of gender in specific ways. In other words, women are encouraged to enter the workplace, but only under the condition that they perform their roles using intelligible female subject positions.

In her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler explores the subject positions available to women and outlines some possibilities for subverting gender and sexual norms. Butler uses the term “performance” to describe the process by which one *performs* a series of social acts that when repeated, give the illusion of naturally gendered bodies. From this perspective, resistance can be enacted through the queering of gender and foregrounding of it as an act. Butler gives us an example of this, drawn from the act of dressing in “drag” where a person (generally a man) dresses as the opposite sex. Here, drag has the potential to elicit laughter through parody or pastiche, retrospectively developing the reader’s/viewer’s awareness of gender as taken on and performed for a social audience rather than as a natural attribute (Harris, 1999), but Butler herself is careful to avoid generalizing drag as gender resistance. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993a), she reminds readers that all gender performances are subject to rules; they are not simply playful theatrical performances outside of social pressures. Butler’s theories of performativity are important to understanding subcultural resistance. Additionally, McRobbie builds off of Butler’s theories of gender as a sociocultural construction, demonstrating how girlhoods, once defined by passive participation, are now characterized by an active resilience, and how sexual purity has evolved into flirtatious

promiscuity under the guise of choice. Both Butler and McRobbie remind us that talk of girlhood, womanhood, and the feminine does not stand still, an idea that earlier definitions of resistance had yet to fully take into consideration.

Butler and McRobbie both draw from the work of psychoanalyst Joan Riviere (1929) to interpret the hyper-feminine performance of some women in the workplace as a mask of femininity that may be used to draw attention away from power conflicts. Riviere writes of “womanliness” and “masquerade” as indistinguishable, a notion McRobbie extends to ironically reveal how “spindly stilettos and ‘pencil’ skirts” don’t necessarily entrap women, “since it is now a matter of choice rather than obligation” (p. 723). So while choice may mask forms of resistance for women, a closer examination will reveal that the possibilities for resistance need not be viewed through this narrow lens of collective determinism. Rather, resistance can be better characterized as the constant critique and self-awareness (as developed through multiple memberships, learning, and play) that allows one to resist relations of domination. Though poststructuralist notions of resistance do not exclude the possibility of collective action, it bases this action on affiliation and temporary shared goals, rather than natural and unified allegiance.

### ***Two Examples of Feminist Subcultural Resistance***

Understanding the complex changes in the concept of resistance is perhaps best highlighted by examples from contemporary scholarship. The two examples, Black women rappers and girl punks, are drawn from studies of feminist subcultural resistances and offer informative lenses for understanding both the changes in resistance and the

ways in which we might understand the resistances of girls participating in subculture at YAA.

Tricia Rose's (1994) study of the sexual politics in rap music seeks to highlight how Black women rappers "interpret and articulate the fears, pleasures, and the promises of young black women" (p. 146) whose voices have traditionally been marginalized. Using the styling and lyrics of female rappers, Rose makes an argument that these symbolic actions help women rappers participate in a sustained conversation with their male counterparts. Controversial topics such as "sexual promiscuity, emotional commitment, infidelity, the drug trade, racial politics, and black cultural history" (p. 146), become sites for resistance through Rose's reading of rap dialogues. Her specific example, the rap duo Salt 'n' Pepa's "Shake Your Thang" video, serves as an example of what she calls the "verbal and visual display of black women's sexual resistance" (p. 166).

For Rose, women's sexual freedom is demonstrated by having choices; the body presented sexually by choice is one freed from the repressive regulations imposed by men. The rules have changed from a man *telling* a woman to dance sexually to a woman *choosing* to dance sexually and "her man" reminding her to "do what you wanna do" (Rose, 1994). Beyond her problematic equation of men with all heterosexual desire; her analysis emphasizes women primarily as subjects in an asymmetrical power relation where subcultural resistance to gender norms is demonstrated primarily through sexual choice. If, as many Foucauldian feminists would contend, mainstream dominant discourses have shifted, then the "phallic girl" is now a recognizable subject position, one that can be accessed by Rose's rappers. If this is so, then Rose's argument, along with

those of others who equate sexual choice with sexual freedom, is in dire need of updating.

Salt 'n' Pepa's "Shake Your Thang" video ends with a sexualized dance sequence that Rose describes as "teasing the male viewer who would misinterpret their sexual freedom as an open invitation" (p. 167). This dance, Rose asserts, "Forces a wedge" between "overt female sexual expression and the presumption that such expression is intended to attract men" (p. 167). Reminiscent of the Marxist mantra, "Ideology thrives below consciousness," readers of Rose's work are asked to see resistance as symbolized through the body and the sexualized gestures of dance. Also like Hebdige, Rose asks that we forgo any conclusion about what the dance might mean to the majority of viewers in favor of its resistive potential. Since Rose's interpretation is required to determine this resistance, it would be no surprise to find that people participating in this subculture (or at least interested in the music it produces) might not be savvy to her nuanced conclusions.

Patti LeBlanc's *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* (1999), provides a second site to locate women's subcultural resistance, one with many similarities to Rose's female rappers. Like Rose's description of the Salt 'n' Pepa dance video, LeBlanc describes the styles of punk as meaning something quite different than how they are interpreted by the mainstream. LeBlanc's personal memory of her own dress, consisting of "ripped up fishnets, spike heels, thigh high red mini, spiked belt, ripped up tee shirt, full geisha make-up and full-up fin" (p. 4), also garnered attention from boys. For the author, these stylistic innovations were an attempt to "communicate thoughts on nuclear war, sex, religion, language, politics, racism, classism, or any other topic" (p. 4); for outsiders the symbols were often lost as "peckerhead boys" thought that

she was “trying to be sexy” (p. 3).

LeBlanc incorporates multiple theoretic frames (feminist, sociological, Marxist, and subculture studies) to examine the resistance of punk girls. Her work reveals the deep conflict that punk girls face and how many of them view lives as a place where they can resist what they consider “mainstream” notions of feminine behavior. LeBlanc weaves the narratives of punk girls into gender resistance; unfortunately her description of femininity is drawn more from the liberal feminist imagination than modern discourses of girlhood. By relying heavily on the biology-based descriptions of adolescence, LeBlanc stays well within the discourses of second-wave feminism. Despite deconstructionist efforts to critique “adolescence” and “girlhood” as biologically constituted categories, LeBlanc presents the mainstream adolescent girl as a unified subject (Lesko, 1996a; Walkerdine, 1990). This serves the author’s purpose to secure punk as a refuge for girls trapped in the “femininity game.” Referencing adolescence as the “stage where femininity becomes entrenched in girls’ identities” is fuel for her argument that punk provides a way to avoid the norms of conventional femininity (p. 102).

Discourses of passive mainstream femininity, as described by LeBlanc, are steadily declining. LeBlanc’s reference to bestselling author Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia* (1994) aligns her with a discourse popularized in the 1990’s, one that works to construct the adolescent girl as endangered. Pipher refers to adolescent girls as “saplings in a hurricane” (p. 22), a notion LeBlanc proposes to be mainstream. Like Rose’s construction of the “sexually repressive mainstream,” LeBlanc uses the “mainstream passivity” of most girls in order to define subcultural resistance.

Both Rose and LeBlanc make cases for the resistive role played by women in

subcultures. Like Hebdige and the CCCS, they seem to view subcultures essentially as expressive forms which demonstrate a “fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives” (Hebdige, 1979 p. 132), though in their cases race and gender trump social class. These definitions of resistance have not changed much since the days of the CCCS; resistance is still seen as boys’ territory with girls’ resistive potential locked into the possibility of avoiding (although not permanently) dominant discourses about gender performance.

Additionally, through a Foucauldian lens we are able to closely examine technologies governing the production of these new girl subjects; positions where girls are constituted as sexually free and active, even aggressive, participants in mass culture in ways that place them at risk in new ways. Foucault himself struggled with setting social agendas for fear that the new relations may in fact reproduce the relations of domination that they sought to overcome. This thinking helps to explain the persistence of domination despite many second wave feminist goals seemingly having been met.

These two examples from scholarly literature demonstrate the prevailing notion that gender resistance can be formulated through an individual’s development of symbolic and linguistic signs. While both examples represent useful contemporary adjustments to the old CCCS equation—Rose updates the role of men, and LeBlanc adds the feminist requirement that an individual must articulate resistance—neither breaks from the frames of representational logic that govern how resistance is formed.

In the next section, I return to YAA’s Hang Out programs to examine ways in which the theoretical developments in cultural studies, feminism, and poststructuralist feminism offer insights into the conceptualization of resistance. I develop these

theoretical insights by applying them to an event recorded in my fieldnotes. The event, hereafter referred to the Condom Roses event, took place on Valentine's Day, 2009. I recorded the event from a seat near the three couches where youth and adults were sitting, allowing me an excellent vantage point for recording the event as clearly as possible.

Following the description of the Condom Bouquet event, I will present three analyses focused on resistances at YAA. The individuals, who I refer to as Tabitha, Amos, James, and Maggie, are all regular participants at Hang Out whom I had known prior to the event. I focus on their styles, language, and interactions, all of which are central to the understandings of resistance that I've highlighted so far.

### **Valentine's Day at Hang Out**

It was Valentine's Day at Hang Out. Two Hang Out regulars, Amos and James, sat in adjacent couches next to Maggie, a YAA youth worker. The boys, both about fifteen years old, relaxed on the couches. They wore gear associated with "skater" subculture: dark hoodies, tight "girlfriend jeans," and Converse high-tops. Maggie was dressed in her usual garb of loose fitting men's style cargo pants and an oversized tee shirt. Her dreadlocks were gathered in a loose ponytail.

Across from the trio, and slightly distanced, sat another hang out regular, Tabitha. Tabitha's dyed black hair in a short multi-layered bob, oversized men's pants and heavy military-style boots appeared both unintentional and sloppy. A thick metal chain hung loosely from her waist to pocket. In a nearby office, Jill, a second youth worker, typed on her computer. Jill, with her blond hair, sunny smile, and athletic build seemed almost at odds with the rest of the group, separated by both physical wall and stylistic choices. In

the middle of the couches sat a coffee table strewn with papers, food, videogame controllers and a vase of flowers.

The youth all seemed relaxed at 4:00; it was not long after school hours and few youth had arrived in this main hang out area. They lounged on the couches, chatting with Maggie, until one of the boys spotted something on the table.

“Is that what I think it is?” James exclaimed, laughing and pointing to the vase.

“Uh, yeah” replied Maggie, glancing at the table; “someone just dropped it off here.”

By this time all the youth were focused on the vase, which seemed to be filled with plastic flowers, which on closer inspection were made entirely of colorfully wrapped condoms. “Whoa!” they giggled. Moments later, Maggie decided to use the moment to start a conversation.

“So you use those, right?” she demanded of Amos.

“Those? Those are too small for me!” he exclaimed, giving her a wry look. James giggled. Amos quickly added, “Actually, I like to use sandpaper condoms, more pleasure for me and less for her!” As James convulsed in a fit of laughter, Maggie gave both boys a disapproving look.

Suddenly, Tabitha, whose silence had distanced her from the conversation, leapt from her chair. She reached for a rose, blurting, “Can I have this?” All attention turned towards her, and she replied with disdain. “I’m gonna make a skirt,” she said.

Maggie agreed that she could take a condom rose from the vase, and Tabitha ran from the scene towards the art room, leaving the boys and Maggie alone in the couch area. The conversation was still for a moment, before Maggie turned back towards the art

room and shouted, “Get more from the basket in the bathroom—they’re good colors!” She then looked back at Amos and James, and gesturing to the vase, said, “Actually, guys, don’t take these ones, they could’ve been exposed to heat.”

### ***Tabitha: Feminist Bricoluer***

Tabitha’s performance exhibits several features of subcultural feminist resistance. Both the “semiotic guerrilla warfare” (Hebdige, 1979) of her dress and the bricolage (or Do-it-Yourself) of her activity have been highlighted by scholars as signs of her resistance to gendered norms of girlhood. In this section, I will explore Tabitha’s performance in the Condom Roses event through a resistance lens. My intention, once again, is not to name Tabitha as resistant or not, but rather to explore the lenses offered by subcultural studies for an analysis of gender resistance.

Tabitha’s personal style mimicked many aspects of the punk subculture. Her hair, dyed a flat black, appeared to be self-cut and rarely washed and stood out at different lengths from her head. Multiple piercings speckled her face, including eyebrows and ears, to name a few. Tabitha often appeared to be wearing men’s army or cargo trousers in blank or camouflage, which she paired with tight black tee shirts. A metal chain, presumably attached to keys, looped around her waist and into the pocket of her trousers. She appeared to be dressing in some recognizable version of punk, a subculture for which dress serves to simultaneously signify membership and solidarity with other punks and disaffiliation with the mainstream. Engaging in “sartorial terrorism” (Carter, 1992), punks invert popular objects (dog collars, bondage clothes, and uniforms) to “articulate their refusal of conventional norms” (LeBlanc, 1999, p. p. 40).

Punk rock subcultures, though most well-known from their popularity and media exposure in the late 1970's and 1980's, remain vibrant in some youth communities, particularly among transient, runaway, and homeless young people (LeBlanc, 1999). While punk started as a music subculture, it quickly moved to encompass not only resistant music, but also dress, artwork, and ideologies. Since its heyday, punk music and style have diversified tremendously into seemingly endless categories including raw punk, crust punk hard-core, street punk, and Oi (LeBlanc, 1999). Yet, despite these differences, various genres of punk have retained steady themes of negation, difference, and rejection of norms as their core beliefs (Skott-Myhre, 2009).

Punk was once a highly popular subculture at YAA, with a large and varied group of participants. It was, according to a youth worker who was attending the space in the late 1970's, the most important meeting space for punk bands in the Statesville area (Zeke, Interview).

Today, many of the subcultures visible at YAA appear to be more of a "post-subcultural" (Muggleton, 2000) mish mash of styles. These youth might develop elements of subcultures, channeling pieces of punk, goth, or other subcultures, as part of their stylistic repertoire while giving little thought to the resistive value of the original design. They may also choose these styles for their romantic association with resistance, yet have no explicit message to send. These youth are often seen as "poseurs" who adopt a subcultural style while refraining from deeper participation. Subcultural scholars have traditionally seen poseurs as "relatively young, often female/or from middle-class background" (Fox, 1987), though Muggleton (1997) notes this is most likely due to male scholars using a "masculine criterion of commitment" (p. 153) to define subcultural

participation. Additionally, there are still many youth at YAA who retain more obvious commitments to hardcore subcultures. This is exemplified not only in the dress, hair, and attitude of some youth, but also in some behaviors that would appear outlandish or off-putting to many outsiders—for example, as described in chapter two, when during our conversation, Violet put her pet rat into her mouth. While this behavior appears to be a shocking break to conventional norms, it has a different interpretation inside punk culture where a cultivation of the “poverty look” (LeBlanc, 1999) has an entirely different set of meanings. In Violet’s case, her choice to put a rodent inside of her mouth could have been to shock me, a recognizable outsider. But more likely, her action had multiple meanings, for multiple audiences, only some of which are accessible from the outside.

In the Condom Roses event, Tabitha’s personal style can be read as a sort of “semiotic guerilla warfare” (Hebidge, 1979), where her personal style draws together elements of authority (men’s army uniforms and loose men’s work wear) and combining it with tight black tee shirts that show her female body. Notably, Tabitha’s look did not appear geared towards any recognizable version of “sexiness”; rather, the look as a whole appeared more aggressive, with an undercurrent of anger.

Related to Tabitha’s use of symbol on her body is her use of activity in the event. Her choice of “participation” in the Condom Bouquet event was strikingly different from what might initially be expected. First consider that the conversation between Maggie and James followed a trajectory where Maggie, as the Hang Out feminist, tried to express the importance of safe sex. James, rejecting both her authority and the (often) dominant *health* discourses of protection and (increasingly) dominant *feminist* discourses of female pleasure during sex, digs in his heels much to the appreciation of his friend. Meanwhile,

Tabitha doesn't speak. While for many it would seem that a Tabitha would demonstrate resistance through talking back to Amos and James, as Maggie does, but instead of this more predictable reaction, she responds with a gesture that is deeply tied to punk subculture, she becomes a bricoleur.

For Tabitha, the creation of a traditionally feminine piece of clothing entirely out of condoms demonstrates a particular kind of gender resistance. After having seen Tabitha at Hang Out several times, I had never seen her (nor could I imagine her) in a skirt. It seemed antithetical to her regular performance of self. Yet, a skirt is what she wanted to create from the condoms. To understand Tabitha's decision it's necessary to suspend traditional understandings of what a girl sewing a skirt might mean, and look again at the activity as a form of inversion, of political resistance that shouts, "I'm not the kind of girl who sews or wears a skirt!" She is able to deliver this message effectively to the appropriate audience (punk insiders) by composing the skirt out of an unexpected material (condoms). She takes an object that "means" in dominant discourse (adults encouraging young people to have safe sex) and use uses it to create work that opposes both adult authority and conventional femininity.

### ***Maggie: Of Role models and Resistance***

Unlike Tabitha, Maggie's resistance can be read as clearly articulated, planned, and purposeful. Maggie describes herself as a feminist, and sees her job as making young people think about their relationship with dominant norms. In this way, Maggie is a better fit for feminists who may require subjects to articulate resistance in order for it to count as such (Le Blanc, 1999). Yet, while Maggie may articulate her goals as feminist, her use

of subcultural style and symbol is apparent in her everyday actions. In the following section, I use the resistance theories developed in the earlier part of this chapter in order to better understand the way Maggie performs resistance and how her efforts are understood at YAA.

With a personal style consisting of a mish-mash of men's style trousers, tee shirts and flip-flops, at first glance Maggie can appear slovenly. Yet, her clothes and Rasta-like dreadlocks, which would make her stand out in many work places, help her blend in at YAA. Maggie has a pale, somewhat scarred complexion and bright almond-shaped eyes. Her voice is low and calm, but she often spends long periods of time in silence, sitting next to kids and playing videogames. In fact, Maggie's style is so convincing that the first time that we met, I mistakenly identified Maggie as a teenager. Her heavy dreadlocks had been gathered into a haphazard ponytail and her youthful face contained no trace of make-up. Though I initially thought she was around 17 years old, her clear eyes betrayed staggering confidence when she spoke. "You can find Jill here on Friday" she said, "or you can just talk to me. I work here too" (field note, August 2009). Yet while Maggie's attitude and physical appearance appeared to be of little concern, it would be a mistake to see her performance of self during Hang Out as effortless. Her subcultural look and distinctively laid-back attitude offer a peek inside Maggie's direct, in-your-face brand of resistance, one that is strong and explicitly political.

Maggie was a graduate school dropout who had moved from working at YAA as an Americorp volunteer to becoming a full time staff person. She recalled her YAA job taking up all of her study time and her decision to leave traditional education to join the "the school of experience" at YAA. Consistent with discourses of resistance, Maggie

often saw her own goals of education as separate from institutional schooling. She was an avid reader and adept speaker, often able to shift seamlessly between the slang-laden dialects of Hang Out and the more formal language used for communicating with parents and teachers.

Maggie's brand of feminism is consistent with the subcultural movement from the 1990's known as "riot grrrl." This term, a catchphrase for the radical feminist movement, was focused on a type of hardcore resistance that had more often been associated with young men. The movement entailed music, often punk rock, which wrestled with the feminist intersection of the personal and political. The message was familiar, but the genres were not; riot grrrls expressed rage at their exclusion and the most popular bands laced their songs with obscenity and references to the danger and violence of sexism. According to Smith (2011), even their unusual name was part of the political underpinnings of a new kind of feminism.

The titular "riot" gestured at the undercurrent of political unrest in Washington D.C. (where the bands had temporarily relocated for the summer and an actual riot had broken out in the city's Mount Pleasant neighborhood) while simultaneously evoking the tamer semiotic anarchy of the city's thriving punk scene. Meanwhile, the "grrrl" spelling took a feisty jab at the wimmin/womyn of the feminist establishment. Under the banner of riot grrl, the close knit group of friends began to disseminate their vision for a new kind of feminism fueled by the DIY ethos and cool of punk rock" (Marcus, in Smith, 2011)

Maggie's personal brand of feminism fits well with these definitions. Describing her main job at Hang Out as "to be a feminist," she both owns feminism and plays with the term in unexpected ways. For example, while she is passionate about feminist concerns, she often needs to approach feminist topics from the side door, noting, "I try to shake up their brains a little, but subversively—while we're playing Tetris" (Maggie, Interview). Maggie's use of subversive tactics to convey her message was especially

needed, she said, when working with “middle school boys.”

Maggie defined herself in opposition to some staff that she saw as “content to let kids be ridiculous” (Interview). She entered heated arguments with young people over everything from depictions of women in comics to videogames that allowed the player to virtually run over female prostitutes “for fun.” The context of the conversation was often youth-centered (videogames, comics, contemporary music), while the arguments were straight on feminist. In this way, Maggie often saw language as an entry point for developing feminist resistance:

There are words that are ingrained in our society, like ‘wife-beater,’ to describe an undershirt, and ‘you’re such a pussy’ and stuff like that... I just try to make them think (Maggie, Interview).

Notably, I rarely witnessed Maggie starting a conversation about any of the topics that she listed as concerns. Rather, she seemed to be in state of readiness, looking for opportunities to argue her ideas whenever they might arise.

Thus, Maggie’s participation in the Condom Bouquet event was fairly consistent with her regular activities during Hang Out. The boys started talking to her about the roses, providing an entryway for her to talk about sexual health. While talking about sexual health is part of Maggie’s work, it’s also something that she clearly cares about personally, as she chose to pursue a frustrating argument with the Amos and James well past the point of informing them that they should use condoms.

While Maggie’s personal political beliefs are tied to aspects of her work that position her as an authority, her manner of delivering her message is unconventional. Generally, Maggie makes use of her own understanding of subcultural style and her own participation in its political message to try to reposition herself as less of an authority and

more of a friend arguing a point. This is often effective for her, and has been known to win her apologies for anti-women slurs from a variety of adolescent boys during Hang Out (though, notably, these often come after other youth have left the area) (Paul, Interview). In the Condom Bouquet event, Maggie ties together her authority as a youth worker with her confident subcultural performance in ways that seem to win her a modicum more respect than many adult women might have in her situation. Yet the event still spirals out of her control, with Amos and James seeming to take great pleasure in rejecting her argument. Still, Maggie fights back. She refuses to stop paying attention to the two or to disregard their behavior as simply “misbehavior,” instead choosing to fight back.

This insistence on the fight is what most clearly demonstrates Maggie’s subculture resistance. For Maggie, resistance appears against the dominant message that adults should “teach” kids, rather than “fight” with them. This latter communication is much more at home in youth culture at Hang Out, where friends can argue over topics for hours. From a feminist subcultural perspective, Maggie is an intimate insider to Hang Out and her resistance includes that which is focused on outside discourses that tell her how a woman might appropriately interact with young people.

### ***Amos and James: Boys being Boys***

Amos and James provide an interesting juxtaposition to both Maggie’s and Tabitha’s resistance in the Condom Bouquet event. Their styles and behaviors are those understood to be “mainstream,” inasmuch as they wore the popular skater gear that characterized the “majority” of YAA kids (Nathan, Interview) and they resisted the

exertion of adult authority during Hang Out. As Lin described, these were two boys who would have enjoyed telling a youth worker how much they didn't want to participate in whatever had been planned (Lin, Interview).

From these descriptions, understanding the resistance of James and Amos is a difficult task. If these boys adhere to mainstream notions of masculinity that discount both health concerns and female pleasure from sex, how are they resisting gender norms?

This analysis holds firm, unless one considers the tremendous changes wrought by feminism in the last fifty years as described earlier in this chapter. Thus, for Amos and James, resistance takes place in a post-feminist world where female pleasure and female health are understood to be popular discourses. These are the discourses that Amos resists when he describes using "sandpaper" condoms so that he would retain the pleasure and cause pain to the women he has sex with. His resistance is seconded with James' laughter and appreciation.

Understandably, the resistance of James and Amos isn't the kind of resistance that makes feminists cheer. Yet, denying their approach and use of now unpopular discourses to fight back against Maggie's authority would inevitably force a reexamination of the way girls' gender resistance has been conceived as a reaction to dominant discourses privileging male experience. In this way, an analysis of Amos and James moves us towards a Foucauldian Feminist approach to understanding resistance that doesn't rely on opposing dominant discourses.

## **Resistance and YAA Youth Workers**

The relationship between subcultures, resistance, and unstructured youth work is both complex and difficult to articulate. This complexity is in no small part due to impacts of subculture and feminist scholarship on resistance that has helped to define resistance and help us understand why it might be important. Additionally, poststructuralist critiques have enabled us to imagine resistance in new ways, offering helpful critique both for subcultural resistance theories (by adding women back into the equation) and feminist resistance theories (by reorganizing definitions of dominant masculine culture). Additionally, poststructuralist theory carves out a new way to view resistance, one that is no longer located in the bodies of individuals at all. This more radical strand of poststructuralist thought is developed in the following chapter.

But the development of these critiques should not be taken as a call to dispense of earlier theory. Resistance theory as developed by the Birmingham school and mid-century feminism has had a tremendous impact not only on our understandings of young people's choices, but also on the canon of literature that has come to be known as youth studies. Without a solid understanding of resistance theory, its development, and its uses today, we would be missing key understanding about youth work.

More important than understanding how resistance theory has impacted the way we talk about youth work, however, is the impact that resistance theory has on many of the people who have devoted their lives to helping young people resist forces of oppression in their lives. The pressure to conform during adolescence is great, and narrow definitions of how to perform gender, race, class, or body type are real pressures

that adolescents face. Youth workers that employ frameworks of resistance in order to understand and combat these forces offer hope to many young people.

Returning momentarily to the example of Lin's artwork, I'm reminded of a single youth worker's effort to frame "a serious art project" from a scene of chaotic activity. This scene offers us one of the most important take away lessons for understanding the balance between the desires of youth workers and those of youth. In the case of Lin, and I believe, Maggie, seeing youth as having the potential to be resistant offers a continued sense of meaning for difficult emotional work that can otherwise appear meaningless.

Thus, through narratives of resistance Lin can move her understanding of young people's spontaneous behavior from "wasting time" or "goofing off" to a serious art activity. She can maintain enthusiasm in the face of young people who she describes as "excited to tell you that [they] will not be participating." (Lin, Interview). She has a sense of the big picture of youth work that is not all about conforming to societies norms (which she herself avoids), but rather one that is built on an identity performance of non-conformity, subculture, and resistance.

### **Resistance and Youth Studies**

While this chapter has offered an explication of resistance theories—and an analysis of how these theories are used at YAA—Hang Out is far more than a site in which to express resistance to dominant norms. While academics are busy reading resistance onto the bodies and activities of young people, we should not assume that those we study share our goals. Thus, while resistance theory offers a powerful way to understand the motivation of YAA youth workers (as well as some committed teachers

and researchers), it is less useful for viewing what individual youth experience during Hang Out. To develop this understanding, ironically enough, we must commit to a totally different type of resistance—our own.

Resistance within the academy would mean a return to more radical strands of poststructuralism, and to the domestication of poststructuralism itself (Sawicki, 1991). It would mean an exploration of our own genealogical paths as researchers and a critique of the lenses that we turn to for ready explanations of youth activity. It would also mean adding different moments, those less seen in data readied for publication. Educational research focuses on the activity of young people only when these activities can be linearly traced to meaning making and notions of future productivity. Yet, meaning making and productivity are terms with torrid histories in relation to the activities of adolescents; teenagers have been increasingly subjected to the fantasies and desires of adults since the end of World War II. Adults, in looking for our own place, have created young people as a convenient object of comparison. The history of social science theory is a map to the creation of adolescence.

Yet, the costs are high for many who work against the grain of social scientific “truths” about young people. These truths appear to stabilize jobs, ideas, and flows of capital during this period of heightened national security and economic uncertainty. But as demonstrated in chapter three, this stability costs some individuals more than others and young people have long borne the brunt of our fears. Thus, if we are to maintain the few publically funded autonomous spaces for young people, now is the time to enter conversations about young people’s time and productivity. These dialogues must critically examine spaces like YAA’s Hang Out as more than a “waste of time,” or a site

ripe for colonization by the theory du jour; they must work towards breaking down the binaries between “doing something” and “hanging out.”

My fieldwork demonstrated that there is far more to the picture of Hang Out, but these additions often exist outside of traditional frames. My fieldnotes show Hang Out as a site full of active bodies that only sometimes concerned themselves with meaning making, resistive or otherwise. From this perspective, resistance is imagined as productivity; not the productivity described in chapter three (one measured and assured by the categories of audit), but a constant productivity that awakens the “forces of life,” those that are “more active, more affirmative, richer in possibilities than the life we have now” (Rodwick, 1999, p. 44). French theorists Deleuze and Guattari are best known for reimagining bodies as eminently productive. Through their work, and additional posthuman scholarship, I seek create wiggle room for the unexpected to emerge at Hang Out.

## CHAPTER V

## RECONCEPTUALIZING HANG OUT: AFFECT AND THE ARTS

The question is not, Is it true? But, Does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?

(Massumi, 2002, p. 8)

I kinda feed off chaos.

(Maggie)

### **The Rhythm of Hang Out: A Capacity to be Affected**

A jazz trumpeter breaks into spontaneous improvisation. Other musicians seem to feel the change before they hear it, stepping back and adjusting their rhythm. The music grows and develops with no discernible beginning or end. An audience leans in breathlessly, something happens, and the music changes again, pushing out in surprising directions.

I had only been conducting fieldwork at YAA for a couple of months when Maggie, a long time youth worker, provided the following metaphor describing Hang Out. It immediately made sense with what I had observed.

[Hang Out] is like jazz. When you're playin' some "Kind of Blue" and everybody's doin' their thing and it's as it should be and then all of a sudden somebody wants to have a solo—improv a little bit—so those people around that improv have to just sort of let it happen. But the drum player has to keep his beat. If the trumpet player's off on his own thing, the drummer still keepin' his beat, the base player's still doin' his thing and everybody else kinda backs off and then whatever's happening, happens, and then the music evolves from that (Maggie, Interview).

While Maggie's description *felt* familiar, I found the specifics of her sonorous analogy difficult to untangle. What is a solo when hanging out? What makes it happen? What does it mean for youth to improv in relation to one another? What effects does this scene create? While I

didn't know the answers to these questions, I was certain that they would lead me closer to those intense moments that I had often observed and felt were so important about YAA's Hang Out program. My efforts to understand this intensity, and its relationship to the arts, are contained in the pages that follow.

In this chapter, I use the work of French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and that of contemporary posthuman scholars Elizabeth Grosz and Elizabeth St.Pierre, in order to reconceptualize productivity during Hang Out. In a departure from the previous chapters, this chapter breaks from representational logic—that which dominates much contemporary social science research—in favor of attending to those moments of Hang Out that fall between the lines, those spaces-in-construction, and those which are yet to be determined. These formerly discarded moments of data, while resisting many traditional research frames, can be reconsidered through the rhizomatic thinking developed through Deluzo-Guattarian methods. Scholars in education have taken a great interest in the potential of Delueze and Guattari's work and applied it broadly to develop new ways of considering methodological challenges (Honan, 2007; St Pierre, 2005; Alvermann, 2000), creativity (Hickey-Moody, 2010; Williams, 2000), learning (Semetsky, 2006; Roy, 2003), and literacy (Leander & Boldt, in review, Leander & Rowe, 2006; Masny & Cole, 2009; Kamberelis, 2004).

I divide this work into two sections, each of which corresponds to a larger question. The first explores the Deleuzian concept of *affect*—a felt-but-preconscious intensity—and examines how affect is produced, transmitted, and picked up during the ordinary events of Hang Out. An understanding of affect is central to this dissertation because it allows us to reconsider the value young people place on making meaning during Hang Out as less central to the experience than the affective resonance with the source of the message (Shouse, 2005)

The second section explores how we might further develop understandings of affect, particularly in relation to the arts, in order to creatively reconceptualize Hang Out.

An analysis of affect allows us to say something about the physical effects of art and music on the body without collapsing those effects into meanings (Gilbert, 2004). Thus, for arts spaces like Hang Out, an analysis that focuses on affect can add language to those experiences and develop the rich contradictions that overflow any singular meaning. Like Maggie's Jazz metaphor, an understanding of affect allows us to feel how the space "moves" us, without first having to focus on what the music "means."

In essence, this chapter draws on Deleuzian philosophy to examine a much older question: what new experiences are to be had in spaces where art is created? I argue that understanding the role of affect is essential not only to understanding this question, but also to examining how these spaces might prove useful for those who frequent them. As of yet, we have little vocabulary available to describe the productions of young people that does not result in a recognizable material object. Affect is useful in order to unlock our understandings of pre-personal experiences, capacities, and potentials that inform the day-to-day experience of Hang Out.

As foreshadowed by the first epigraph to this chapter, theorizing Hang Out using Deleuze and Guattari's concepts requires us to replace the question "What does it mean?" with the question "What does it do?" This new formulation allows us to move away from representational or cause and effect models towards a nonrepresentational language, a language that does not seek to predict or explain but rather attends to an affective register that is less often recognized. Renewing interest in intensity—not in place of meaning, but in addition to it—offers a fresh

perspective on Hang Out, and a way to renew the expression-events that have grown stiff and redundant through the overuse of representational models.

### ***Plugging In to Deleuze and Guattari***

I am far from the first to see the potential in applying the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts to literacy or education research. For example, Leander and Rowe (2006) draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the rhizome in order to rethink the language and literacy practices of adolescents. St.Pierre (2000b) developed the use of the authors' term "nomad" to restructure her analysis of the literacy practices of a tight-knit group of women living in the American South. Roy (2003) used the non-representational concepts of Deleuze and Guattari in order to examine the integration of preservice teachers into an urban school context. In addition to these examples, numerous other scholars have come to the work of Deleuze and Guattari as a means of extending the boundaries of current literacy research or rethink past projects in new ways (Massey and Cole, 2009; Alvermann 2000, Hagood 2004; Honan 2007; Kamberelis, 2004).

These efforts have forged new paths for literacy researchers who wish to reengage the non-linear and non-rational elements of literacy productions, and the spontaneous emergence that happens with new combinations of individuals, objects, and events. Deleuze and Guattari's work shows how a narrow focus on meaning making—one that looks only at parts of events that are tied in obvious ways to process and product creation—misses much about the passionate literacy engagement of adolescents. In the following section, I offer a brief examination of the thrust of Deleuze and Guattari's work, as well as some insight into how best to use their often-challenging texts.

Deleuze and Guattari were radical philosophers with ambitious goals; Guattari, a

practicing psychoanalyst, was a lifelong political activist whose attitudes anticipated feminist and gay rights movements. Deleuze, trained in classical philosophy, used his broad knowledge to attack Humanism and renew interest in the “bastard” philosophy of thinkers like Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson. Deleuze and Guattari’s most well-known texts—the two volumes that make up *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972/1983; 1980/1987)—are an effort to resist fascisms of the state and the self. The authors consider this anti-fascist effort integral to the project of philosophy, an idea that attracted the attention of fellow poststructuralist Michel Foucault. Foucault, in authoring an introduction to the two-volume set, made the oft-cited prediction that “Perhaps one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian” (1972/1983). Though Deleuze (1972) later commented that he thought this was his friend’s idea of a joke, it was clear that Foucault maintained high regard for Deleuze and Guattari’s work. In particular, these three poststructuralist giants—Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari—shared the desire to use philosophy in the effort to fight fascism, both that of the state and that of the self. Foucault’s introduction lays out Deleuze and Guattari’s method of resistance:

It could even be said that Deleuze and Guattari care so little for power that they have tried to neutralize the effects of power linked to their own discourse... The book often leads one to believe it is all fun and games, when something essential is taking place, something of extreme seriousness: the tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives (p. xvi).

As Foucault alludes, several characteristics of Deleuze and Guattari’s actual text reflect their effort to purge their work of representational frames of knowing. They are playful authors; Deleuze noted of his collaboration with Guattari, “since each of us was several, together we were quite a crowd” (1987, p. 3). They describe the circular form of their texts as a rhetorical move made “just for laughs” (p. 22), refusing to give in to those majoritarian tendencies that would present their work as “truth.” Instead, Deleuze and

Guattari suggest that their work is a playful rhizome (such as that described in chapter two) that can reach out at any point and attach to any other point such that there are no beginnings and ends, only middles, and the tangles of intensity that form and reform plateaus. Deleuze and Guattari's work is indeed characterized by a unique and often frustrating writing style. While some have considered this deliberate obfuscation, others have explained how the author's unique writing style actually furthers an anti-fascist agenda through defying representational logic (Massumi, 1992).

For example, in different books, the authors use different words to explore the similar or the same concepts. The "desiring-machine" of *Anti-Oedipus* became the "assemblage" of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Massumi, 1992, p. 82). Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari's texts are non-hierarchical and non-linear in their approach. They ask readers to "plug in" rather than "read" in the traditional sense (Deleuze 1990/1995, p. 7), and emphasize that one's goal should not be mastery, but utility. Massumi compares such a reading to the approach one might take to listening to a record.

You don't approach a record as a closed book that you have to take or leave. There are always cuts that leave you cold. So you skip them. Other cuts you may listen to over and over again. They follow you. You find yourself humming them under your breath as you go about your daily business (Massumi, 1992, p. 7).

In this way, using Deleuze and Guattari offer a fascinating toolbox for researchers, yet one with no prescribed instruction. Their work is intended to disorient those looking for answers, and suggest that instead one learn to think differently.

Such a suggestion, once taken in, is hard to shake. While writing this dissertation, I had to maintain boundaries around allowing myself to read Deleuzian texts in order to be able to continue to work in the representationalist frames required for other chapters. The effect of reading Deleuze, for me, was like carrying around a box of termites, forever ready to devour the

structures that I had just built.

Thus, in this chapter of my dissertation, I “play with” Deleuze and Guattari by offering an organization that clusters concepts rhizomatically around two metaphors. Drawn from an interview with Maggie, these twin metaphors provide an open-ended organization and conceptual tool. Not unlike the role they play at Hang Out, they are both the focus and the background in this chapter.

The use of metaphor, while resisted as part of “the signifying regime” (Deleuze, 1987, p. 129), does offer a helpful approach for employing their work. Metaphor allows us to look beyond the literal, to generate new associations useful for the application of non-representational theory. Metaphor “reorganizes and vivifies; it paradoxically condenses and expands” (Feinstein, 1982) language in playful ways. Langer (1957) contends that the arts (visual, performing, literary) essentially work in metaphor; in a twist on this idea, I draw in metaphors about the arts to help understand Hang Out

Woven into these metaphors describing Hang Out are several Deleuzian concepts that help work towards an understanding of affect. Data, drawn from fieldwork at Hang Out, appears in Deleuzian *assemblages*, a technique employed by Stewart (2007) in her study of “ordinary affects”:

a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveliness and exhaustion, a dream of escape...ordinary affects are the varied capacity to affect and be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences (p. 1).

As in Stewart’s work, the assemblages presented here are not meant to be examples that represent; nor are they whole scenes with whole bodies, whole activities, or whole ideas. I elaborate on the term *assemblage* in a later section, but for now suffice it to say assemblages occur when pieces of things (people, objects, ideas) are pulled together through intense

interaction.

For the assemblages presented here, the pieces were sewn together by intensity during Hang Out. They are composed of heterogeneous terms and establish “liaisons” or relations or between them, “across ages, sexes and reigns—different natures” (Deleuze and Parnet, 1977/2002, p. 69). Assemblages do not have a discernible beginning or end, and my narration picks up in parts of my fieldnames where I noticed a change or a charge, a felt intensity, during Hang Out. Deleuze and Parnet (1977/2002) remark that assemblages are a symbiosis “...a ‘sympathy.’ It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind” (p. 69).

It is through such playful structure—one of metaphors and assemblages, departures and connections—that I hope to ward off the containments of representational logic that Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts to break down. I focus on the concept of affect, and explore this concept through the two assemblages, or moments of intensity, recorded in my fieldnotes from Hang Out. In the second half of this chapter, I apply the concept of affect, and the related Deleuzian concept of becoming, in order to explore what is offered by non-representational thought for reconceptualizing productivity in Hang Out.

### **Affect**

The Deleuzian notion of affect is a term that is better equated with intensity than the more common description of affect as emotion (Massumi, 2002). Leander & Boldt (in review) cite Massumi, describing affect as “intensity, the potential for emergence, connecting moment to moment, movement to movement” (p. 14). Theorizing affect offers new ways to view the relationship between the body and its indeterminacy—in other words, the notion that our

physical, mental or emotional trajectories cannot be predicted with any certainty. The point is to call attention to acted and potential bodily responses together, thus demonstrating how actions that are often in excess of consciousness or of conscious planning or intent (Clough, 2007, p. 2) play an important role in our social interactions.

Through the notion of affect, the limits of bodies and individuals face massive redefinition. Attention focuses on relations, capacities to affect and be affected. It is this refocus that has the potential to transform our understanding of Hang Out, moving description from “along a straight line or number of straight lines, of which each segment represents an episode or ‘proceeding’” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 209) towards one which focuses on “zones of intensity, thresholds, gradients, flows (1987, p. 189). In terms of Maggie’s Jazz metaphor that began this chapter, one imagines the multiplicity of jazz notes, both connecting to the ongoing music (“the drum player had to keep his beat”), and to the new potentials (the trumpeter “off on his own thing”). The connections seem too numerous to count, and the music expands through the development of multiple, spontaneous, improvisations. Instead of imagining the limits of bodies and individuals, multiple Hang Outs are formed through the productive intensities of new notes.

A variety of disciplines are currently moving to include affect in the way they represent social relations in our information- and image-based late capitalist culture (Massumi, 2002, p. 27). A movement that some theorists have dubbed the affective turn (Clough, 2007) has caught the attention of scholars who are attempting to unravel the role affect plays in "travers[ing] the opposition of the organic and non-organic... insert[ing] the technical into felt vitality, the felt aliveness in the preindividual bodily capacities to act, engage, and connect—to affect and be affected" (p. 2). This move to combine human

and machine without individuation is not entirely new, but until recently it rarely found audiences in the human sciences. The goal of this chapter is to move beyond an identity-based schema which "predicts stability and defines diversity as a 'break' in the frame" (Leander & Rowe, p. 41), and towards a more complete view of adolescent engagement that takes affective intensities into account. In such a view, as I will describe below, an object like a hacky sack or a music synthesizer can induce intensity, creating a participatory experience.

The interactions I've observed during Hang Out go beyond the representational logic suggested by identity theories; they cannot be constructed in advance so that a researcher might know where to look. Rather, as Leander and Rowe (1996) describe, the logic of representation simply fails when applied to some collectives. In their example, the authors describe a human tribe investing itself in an image, inscription, or object. That tribe, they contend, cannot be adequately described by representational logic (such as the tribe's symbol); there is not an underlying identity producing the tribe. Rather the tribe is produced by their collective and intensive investment. Like this tribe, the intensity of an affective space is what gives rise to its production.

But the inclusion of Deleuzian perspectives does more than just bring necessary poststructuralist critiques to representation; it encourages new methods of inquiry to sprout, some of which can help us move "across our thresholds towards a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not preexistent" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/2002 p. 35). In other words, the inclusion of the unexpected, of our capacity to affect and be affected, has the power to change the research equation.

## **Assemblage**

Before exploring an *assemblage* recorded at Hang Out, it is useful to more fully explain how I will be using this term. Like assemblage in art, an assemblage at Hang Out consists of any number of things (people, objects, ideas) or pieces of these things brought together through intensity. It lacks organization, yet can have any number of effects; it is rhizomatic. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) draw heavily on this concept, explaining it best through examples such as that of a book:

In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity—but we don't know yet what the multiple entails when it is no longer attributed, that is, after it has been elevated to the status of the substantive (p. 4).

For Deleuze and Guattari, books demonstrate assemblages in their multiplicity and connection; they offer alternative spaces of control and lapse, identity and rupture. The authors highlight the criticality of time in an assemblage (time that speeds up or slows down in relation to felt intensities) and the need to think of time as fluid, viscous, or accelerated. Additionally assemblage, as it is used here, not only consists of bodies, objects, smells, sounds, and parts of these wholes—but also the movements to territorialize (create structure) and deterritorialize (dissolve structure), and the lines of connection that shoot out into unrealized potential. In the next section, I present an assemblage drawn from the events at Hang Out (fieldnotes, 2/20/2009).

### ***The Kaoss Pad Assemblage***

It's about four o'clock and I'm seated at a corner table at Youth Action Alliance (YAA). The physical space looms large—YAA rents nearly 1500 square feet of this downtown

building—but the intimate acoustics bring everything closer. Listening, I hear the cacophony of adolescent voices, the occasional rhythms of music (two acoustic guitars accented by the bass beats from the music room), and the bleeps and bounces of a Wii videogame on the large flat-screen television. Engaging other senses, I realize that I can smell the space too; bodies, food, drying art projects, and other aromas move and change the dimensions of the main room. Youth come and go at will, often dropping by for a few minutes or a few hours. Hang Out is alternatively considered a time to chat or a waste of time; an opportunity to record music or to “mess around” with instruments; a place to watch T.V., snack, text, sketch plans, or get condoms. This lack of definition is in fact the defining feature of Hang Out.

If understood primarily as the actions that occur during a given time of Hang Out, today, in this moment, Hang Out is created by:

- A youth duct taping large cardboard butterfly wings to her back
- An adult and two youth playing a game of 20 questions
- A youth coordinator placing Tetris-like cubes in a videogame
- A large black dog sniffing the cement floor; it wears a homemade backpack
- Four boys moving their skateboards by the outside entrance
- A youth sitting cross-legged on the couch, texting
- A youth checking his profile on Facebook

Into this mix walks a boy carrying a backpack. “I have a surprise, all!” he shouts. The movement pauses—stasis—and then shifts slightly toward the announcement. A youth coordinator, who had previously been sitting on the couch playing the videogame, looks up at the youth, “Whatta ya got?”

From the backpack the youth pulls out a small box with dials and wire connected to the outside. From my vantage point it could be a speaker, a bomb, a small recorder. The youth

coordinator knows immediately. “Awesome!” he shouts, while standing up. Several youths stand along with him, gathering around the small box. The cluster runs towards the stereo in the back of the room. Moments later the small device is hooked up, and the beat of the stereo music shifts dramatically. The sound gets louder and soon takes over the room. It produces effects that I can only later name: pitch shifting, distortion, filtering, wah-wah, tremolo, flanging, phasing, and modulation fill the space with a techno vibe. Soon after the music changes, two kids begin to dance, producing movements that quickly sink into parody, their bodies making sharp, jerky gestures with no recognizable theme. Other youth push to the center of the cluster, waiting for their chance to mix the music. New moves rise and shouts ring out from the art room to the main room. Sounds bounce off the walls and floor, reverberating in the cement hollow of this downtown-parking ramp.

### *Discussion*

I learn later that the small machine is called a Kaoss pad: a controller device that processes sound effects through a sensory grid. Touching the x- and y-axes alters the soundstream by creating multiple effects, moment-by-moment intensities that are registered on the bodies of participants. The intensity creates both minute biological shifts (Brennan, 2004) and changes in thought; new offshoots into unexpected realms. In other words, they create change or the new. Deleuzian philosophy, that which develops a critical language for analyzing flows and movement through matter, helps recover a sense of the movement and intensity that releases new affects.

Traditional social science questions about the Kaoss pad vignette might focus on meaning making (asking "what does this event mean for students, staff, or larger community?"); language

("how is language being used to create/stop/position oneself with these interactions?); or identity ("what identities are the kids performing in relation to each other?"), to name a few. They represent the event after-the-fact, organizing it under various frameworks and outcomes. And though such questions have generated valuable insights, they may tell more about our own representational frameworks than about what the Kaoss pad gathering does. Said another way, these concerns address meaning over movement, a move that reestablishes familiar ways of knowing at the expense of the unknown. Through a Deleuzian lens, we begin to re-see "social life as immanent, as being produced moment-by-moment and given to unexpected connections, connections that join objects and signs in unexpected ways, break off, and begin again" (Leander & Boldt, in review).

This way of seeing performance puts the "performative" element back into the term. It calls to mind *lines of flight* towards other potentials rather than restricting practices to the organized, the territorialized. Deleuze and Guattari chose the term "lines of flight" to describe the unexpected eruption of something new, from the image of the sudden and often dramatic change in flight direction made by flocks of birds in response to felt changes in conditions. Looking at the scene with the Kaoss pad from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of lines of flight, I look for those responses that escape dominant modes of signification; they are the unexpected shifts, the eruptions that led to dancing, parody, and new vibrations from the Kaoss pad.

Dancing bodies communicate on a radically different register from language (Hawhee, 2009, p. 44), subverting meaning to intensity. Experiencing spontaneous dance is energizing, enlivening. It breaks with the patterns of the unexpected and follows no conceivable logic, working as Burke (1935) suggests, on a "non-logical" level of bodily productivity (Burke, cited

in Hawhee, 2009). The bodies in Hang Out are impermanent; they break into spontaneous dance that changes from one moment to the next.

As dancing bodies, objects, and vibrations pull together in the intensity of the Kaoss pad assemblage, they defy the notion that we are discrete and “self-contained” in terms of our energies. Brennan (2004) notes that there is no secure dissention between the ‘individual’ and the ‘environment’ (p. 6), and that affect, consisting of unformed potential, is easily transmitted.

If I feel anxiety when I enter a room, then that will influence what I perceive or receive by way of an ‘impression.’ On the other hand, if I am not aware that there are affects in the air, I may hold myself solely responsible for them and, in this case, ferret around for an explanation in my recent personal history. Thus, the content one person gives to the affect of anger or depression or anxiety, may be very different from the content given the same affect by another (p. 6).

Notably, Brennan’s use of emotion demonstrates how this term, unlike affect, includes the conscious projection or social display of a feeling that may or may not be genuine. Shouse (2005) provides this helpful distinction between emotion and feeling through his description of Paul Ekman’s experiment videotaping American and Japanese subjects as they watched films depicting facial surgery:

When they watched alone, both groups displayed similar expressions. When they watched in groups, the expressions were different. We broadcast emotion to the world; sometimes that broadcast is an expression of our internal state and other times it is contrived in order to fulfill social expectations.

Emotions, Shouse reminds us, are social expressions of feelings. Feelings, on the other hand, are biographical; they are checked and labeled in accordance to our own personal histories. Yet what makes feelings *feel* is affect. Affect is what determines “the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality) as well as the background intensity of our everyday lives (2005)

Thus while affect, non-conscious experience of intensity, may be the most difficult of these three terms to elucidate, it is also one of the most important to understand in relation to

Hang Out. An understanding of affect allows us to consider how messages consciously received by a receiver can be of less importance than the non-conscious “affective resonance” that he or she experiences with the source of the message (Shouse, 2005). Thus the production and consumption of specific meaning making might be less important than the momentary intensity experienced by connecting to other bodies and objects.

This is illustrated in the Kaoss pad vignette, when I describe a change in the air—a crackling of energy that brought new intensity and stimulated bodies and movement. I’m not describing a particular new message being developed and received. Rather, I’m attempting to foreground an affective intensity that would, in Brennan’s terms, be taken up and processed in different ways (or not at all) by those experiencing it. Affect is the real and felt potential in the Kaoss Pad vignette, it adds intensity without reducing this intensity to specific qualifiers.

In the next section, I highlight affect in a second assemblage, one that I refer to here as the “Charlie the Unicorn” Assemblage. To provide some background, the Charlie the Unicorn video was an Internet meme; a video passed virally from one online user to another. The genre of Charlie the Unicorn, a blending of hyper-cute YouTube cartoons with the darkly sarcastic voice of an unhappy unicorn, is one that has gained tremendous popularity amongst teens in recent years. Charlie the Unicorn, and other memes that blended sugary sweet with dark humor and anger, were popular and regularly played and/or booed during Hang Out.

### ***The Charlie the Unicorn Assemblage***

A saccharine voice floats out over Hang Out announcing “Charlie! We found a map! A map to candy mountain!” The rainbow colored images of an Internet meme known as *Charlie the Unicorn* breaks the silence of an afternoon Hang Out. Shouts and groans quickly rise from

several of the young people sitting on the couch.

“Turn it off!”

“Not that again!”

“Ughhhh.”

A girl in the art room lifts her head. But the responsible party, a boy about fourteen, waits until someone rises from the couch to approach him before closing the window and silencing the meme. He pauses for a moment, motionless and mouse in hand, before returning to scan YouTube videos. The other youth, a handful of boys and one girl, also resume activities. A boy rises to retrieve a guitar from a nearby stand. He returns, lifts one foot onto the back of the couch and begins experimenting with muted chords. A cell phone comes out, and a text begins. Two tall teenage boys, one shadowed by his six-year old sister, walk from the entrance to the studio, eyeing the couch area suspiciously. The girl pulls nervously on her collar, and wide-eyed, takes in the scene. The soft voices of the cartoon unicorns hang in the air.

### ***Discussion***

In contrast to the Kaoss pad assemblage, intensity in the *Charlie the Unicorn* assemblage moved outwards after only a brief participation in the offering. Unlike the Kaoss pad event, which seemed to sustain a longer affective intensity, the Charlie event reverberated outwards, connecting with other objects, bodies, and movements. While this might appear to be a drop off in intensity, Deleuze and Guattari caution us otherwise, suggesting that rather than dissipating, affect is dispersed across a field of potential. Deleuze and Guattari develop the notion of plateaus in the second volume of their work titled *A Thousand Plateaus*. Massumi (2002), explains the authors’ use of the term

...a plateau is reached when circumstances combine to bring activity to a pitch of intensity that is not immediately dissipated in a climax leading to a state of rest. The heightening of energies is sustained long enough to leave a kind of afterimage of its dynamism that can be reactivated or injected into other activities, creating a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist (p. 7).

This afterimage is present in the Charlie the Unicorn assemblage when used to reenergize additional activity. Young people returning to strumming guitars, texting, surfing the web, are changed after having been pulled together through the assemblage. The difference is one of gradients, intensities, overlaps, and so forth (Deleuze, 1995, p. 50), rather than constructed through analogy.

Plateaus consist of an assemblage (or multiplicity) connected to any other assemblage (or multiplicity) by “superficial underground stems” so as to form a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 22). These plateaus populate Hang Out, creating sites of “bizarre intensive stabilization” (p. 22) where intensity (affectivity) is maintained, albeit picked up variously in new assemblages. Affect is pure potential,

the body’s way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience. The body has a grammar of its own that cannot be fully captured in language because it doesn’t just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds contexts...(Shouse, 2005).

Sound generates intensity, galvanizes existing pieces in the assemblage, and there is an eruption. Many of those present are moved to respond. Affect creates tangible changes in Hang Out that are picked up and branch off rhizomatically in unexpected directions. The things (bodies, objects, ideas) creating the assemblage move and combine in ways that intensify affect in Hang Out. Stewart’s lucid description of ordinary affects speak to the openness of potential

an animate circuit that conducts force and maps connections, routes, and disjunctures...at once abstract and concrete, ordinary affects are more compelling

than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings (Stewart, 2007, p. 3).

Stewart speaks of everyday events in mundane sites, such as truck stop restaurants, or Wal-Mart parking lots, but her observations of felt intensity rising through interaction speaks to the experiences of Hang Out. Importantly, Stewart's analysis attempts to slow down the jump to assigning meaning long enough to dwell in the uncertainty of emergent relations. Slowness also allows us to reconsider the affects created by so many moving parts without immediately seeking the safety of closure.

### **The Art of Hang Out: Rethinking the Limits**

In the second section of this chapter, I begin to explore the applications of the concept of affect in order to rethink Hang Out. I begin with another metaphor from Maggie, this one about art making. In the metaphor, she compares Hang Out to a project where kids dance in front of a paper that is illuminated from the other side by a light. The shapes of bodies dancing together overlap and tangle. By the end, she says, it's hard to tell one from another as it is all "a bunch of scribbles."

You take a big light and shine it on a blank piece of paper and then you have them dance in front of the light and some other kids trace how they're dancing. And you know, some of them are really dancing, you turn on the music and they dance with the beat, they are *doing* a dance, a line dance, and you can trace how that looks. But some are just flinging their arms about, so it's kinda like everything's going everywhere. I don't know if I'm explaining this very well...it's just if you are there for the creation you know who did what and it all makes sense to you, but if you walk in on it it's all a bunch of scribbles.

A metaphor like Maggie's, based in art making, provides an entrance point back into thinking about Hang Out as a space where sensations produced by art and the art process contribute to affect.

In this description, art and art making do more than provide a metaphor producing the sensation of Hang Out. Though I do not seek to develop an aesthetic (nor, even a visual) understanding of art in this work, I do wish to explore how it works, *what it makes possible*, during Hang Out. This requires a momentary delineation of Deleuze's views on the arts and philosophy, mostly to understand that while Deleuze saw philosophy as concept production, he saw art as sensation (or affect) production. Grosz (2005) notes, "philosophy may find itself the twin or sibling of art and its various practices, neither the judge or the spokesperson for art, but its equally wayward sibling" (p. 2). The arts

produce and generate intensity, that which directly impacts the nervous system and intensifies sensation. Art is the art of affect more than representation, a system of dynamized and impacting forces rather than a system of unique images that function in the regime of signs (p. 3).

In my work, I align my definition of "the arts" with Grosz's (2005), using it to describe all creative productions that work in excess and generate intensity, sensation, and affect (this could mean painting, guitar strumming, and sewing, but could also mean the storytelling and improvisational dance of Hang Out). In adding this very basic understanding of art producing affect, we can rethink Hang Out in relation to individual perception and production.

Grosz (2005) describes art as "the submission of aims and ends to intensity, the subordination of intentions to sensation" (p. 5). If this is so, then the place of art at Hang Out goes far beyond any form of individual productivity. Through this understanding we can re-envision individual participation in ways that move away from the production of meaning embedded in products and towards the production of affect. Such a revision allows us not only to reassign productivity to those young people who do not seem to be "making art" or "playing music" in the traditional sense, but also allows us to apply the rhizomatic sensibilities of living in a visual culture (Duncum, 2001; Mirzoeff, 1998) to our understandings of Hang Out.

## Unraveling the Subject

Noting her uneasiness with the human/non-human binary, St.Pierre (2004), recalls the change that “plugging in” to Deleuze (1988/1993) offered her as an educational researcher. Moving from the notion of Lockean individuality, and associations of the “I” with a self-consciousness and self-awareness of being, St.Pierre begins to explore her own data through a Deleuzian lens. Deleuze (1990/1995) sees individuation as a “time of day, of a region, of a climate, a river or a wind, of an event” (p. 26), an example of which he finds in his own collaboration with Guattari

When I said Felix and I were rather like two streams, what I meant was that individuation doesn't have to be personal. Felix and I, and many others like us, don't feel we're persons exactly. (Deleuze, 1990/1995, p. 141)

This other kind of individuation, one that releases this term from the bounds of identity, forces us to rethink the limits of the subject. Rethinking the subject, a primary concern for poststructuralists including Deleuze & Guattari, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, received additional in-depth consideration in chapter four of this dissertation.

In this chapter, identity as a “maximally powerful rhetorical fiction” (St.Pierre, 2005, p. 292) is used primarily to imagine new possibilities for Hang Out. By understanding the human as an assemblage with the non-human, “a construction of earth, space/time, speeds, intensities, durations, lines, interstices, hydraulics, folds” (St.Pierre, 2005, p. 289) we can open up new questions about what Hang Out makes possible for young people. As the lines around the self, like those around the production of art and music, continue to blur, new questions arise.

What would Deleuzian individuation, or the “undoing” of the subject do for understanding our experiences? How would it allow us to continue to rethink the relationship between the “I” that we have known, and all the other available individualities, participations,

experiences? Most importantly, how might we, as Butler (1995) queries, “become available to a transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves, a reconfiguration of our ‘place’ and our ‘ground’” (Butler, in St.Pierre, 2005, p 292)? In the next section, I explore Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming as a means for approaching these challenging questions of new individualities.

### **Becomings**

Becomings, for Deleuze and Guattari, help account for the relationships within an assemblage, particularly when one piece of the assemblage is drawn into the territory of another. Becomings are in process; they are movements within an assemblage that bring about new individualities. Becomings occur during “a withdrawal from reified structures of thought-affect to more fluid states” (Roy, 2003, p. 100). As the moment rolls out of control, lines of flight shoot out new potentials in unexpected directions. Spaces of learning open up where players can creatively reimagine the indeterminacy between bodies.

Deleuze and Guattari explore the concept of “becoming” as an event whereby a multiplicity increases in dimensions and “changes in nature as it expands its connections” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). It always involves multiplicities, a pack, population or, or band (Deleuze 1987). It relates back to affect, not through a personal feeling, but through the “effectuation of the power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel” (p. 240).

Becomings come in infinite forms. While Deleuze and Guattari spend a great deal of time explaining becoming-animal, they also describe becoming-intense, becoming-woman, and

becoming-child. They refer to anti-fascist work as the effort becoming-minoritarian. While these becomings may at first seem to be an imitation, this is far from the intention of the authors:

Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations...Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing,” “being,” “equalizing,” or “producing” (1987, p. 239).

Rather than imitating, becoming is “diagramming” (Massumi, 1992, p. 93).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) often cite examples of becomings that involve the human-animal divide. Amongst others, Deleuze uses the example of “little Hans” becoming horse and Massumi uses the example of “becoming dog.” In Massumi’s example of becoming dog, he describes how sets of affects are gradually extracted from the body through speed and slowness, motion and rest, and reorganized. Some of these affects are picked up from both man and dog, creating a new arrangement of becoming dog, the attempt fails and a new arrangement is attempted. The process goes on.

A human-animal becoming is particularly useful for these authors to demonstrate becomings as neither intentional nor “entirely rational” (Massumi, 1992, p. 93). Rather becoming, for Massumi, is an

equilibrium-seeking system at a crisis point where it suddenly perceives a deterministic constraint, becomes ‘sensitive’ to it, and is catapulted into a highly unstable and supermolecular state enveloping a bifurcating future (p. 95).

Thus, in Massumi’s example of a man’s *becoming-dog*, the man can fall back into “molar” coordinates (the normalcy of man or dog), suffer a breakdown (identity confusion), or set out on a “path of freakish becoming” with an unknown future. In other words, he is affected and changed by the dog. The dog is now a part of the assemblage which he recognizes as himself. Yet whichever “choice” is made, becoming should not be understood as a question of

will and personal decision; intentionality does not play a part. Rather, as Massumi describes, molarity and subsequent return to identity or the supermolarity of becoming are ways of responding to constraint, actualizing it in the body or counteractualizing it by removing it from its habitat in the body (p. 95). The tensions between molarity and supermolarity, being and becoming, sameness-difference and hyperdifferentiation (p. 94) draw on Deleuzian divides between the difference as achieved through sameness and like (i.e. red is different from green, but we group evergreens along with grass as “green”), and the irreducibility of hyperdifferentiation, that which is irreducible and in constant motion.

Becoming allows us to understand the productive potential in Hang Out from a vantage point that doesn't privilege identity, the benefits of which allow for the complex and developing emergence of the space. In the next sections, I further develop the notion of becoming through three examples. The first is drawn from a researcher's perspective, and serves to open up sensitivity to becoming as it might be experienced through the intensity of an afternoon. The second two examples, both drawn from fieldnotes, bring to light ways to think about becoming that offer implications for understanding Hang Out.

### ***“I Stopped Being an Adult”: Becoming-Youth***

As described in chapter two, researchers working with youth have long reflected on the complex relations of power between adult researchers and youth participants (Tobin, 2000). Additionally, many researchers who have interviewed youth have worked to relate to young people by taking up a position more akin to a friend rather than an authority figure (Ferguson, 2001; Finders, 1997; Dyson, 1997). Yet while these efforts have sometimes proven fruitful in terms of gathering data, they rarely result in any major change for the researchers. The kids

might be growing up, but the researchers always seem fully-grown. This understanding of the adult as a molar entity, one that might imitate or act child-like (but never become-child) is considered a way to build a relationship in order to do research. If something else happened, if the veneer of adulthood was ever so slightly cracked, readers of the research rarely learn of it.

Yet, occasionally, these cracks are left visible. Ann Arnette Ferguson (2001), in her study of African-American masculinities and schooling, chooses to include the following fieldnote from her afternoon attending movies with a young participant

I was never aware of the exact moment when I stopped being an adult. But somewhere between *My Girl* and *Hook*, I began to have a good time. A hecka good time at the movies. That was when the whole experience began to be transformed from the planned linear motion from beginning to end to a kaleidoscope back-and-forth of sights, sounds, and tastes... As we went from theater to theater mixing up pathos, sentimentality, greed, violence, tears, screams, laughter, horror, fear, I glimpsed Horace in ways I had not expected... I lost my preoccupation with time and schedule... my body began to grow more powerful and present. That body took me on a chase between theaters and up and down stairs. I swerved to avoid pedestrians and skidded to a halt rather than bump into or bowl over small kids and old people. I did not even think how I must have appeared to observers as I dashed behind Horace, or sometimes ahead of him, from screening to screening. (Ferguson, 2001, p. 27)

Ferguson's becoming takes place amidst a "kaleidoscope back-and-forth of sights, sounds, and tastes" where she participates in a yet-to-be-known assemblage. She is not an adult acting like a teenager, nor is she imitating Horace (say, for the purpose of becoming his friend). She assures us that she is not simply remembering her own childhood. Rather, her adult molarity is surrendered along with her physical body. Comfortable middle-aged limbs recombine with the swerving and skidding appendages of adolescence, she is neither adult nor child and she is unaware of anything but the pleasures of plunging forward.

Ferguson's becoming is useful to this work both because it is the kind that many adults might have experienced, and because it offers additional insight into the many inconstancies,

ruptures, and movement of the research process. She reminds us that becoming is actualized through intensity and how affect allows for a destabilization of former subjectivities. Ferguson's becoming isn't a rational thing to do, even for a researcher trying to befriend a young participant. Instead, it's a coordinate that emerges as she moves, changing with new potential.

In the next section, I extend the discussion of becoming to incorporate types of becomings, *becoming-intense* and *becoming-sixteen*. I use these two sections to demonstrate how the notion of becoming can help us reconceptualize Hang Out in useful and critical ways.

### ***“I don't often make art”: Nathan's Becoming-Intense***

Nathan, a Hang Out regular, struggled to describe his time at Hang Out. Despite several years of attendance, multiple days a week, he said he wasn't really sure why he liked it so much. When asked during our interview “What brings you to Hang Out?” he responded

Well, there's um...aw man...I don't know. I like to discuss things...to sit around and talk. There's the art room, I go in there occasionally but I don't often make art. There's the jam room—the recording studio, but I don't play anything so I don't go in there. I don't really do much of anything productive here (Nathan, Interview).

Nathan's stutter, his difficulty in answering the questions, reflects a tension in translating the experience of Hang Out into language. I heard similar pauses and stammers from nearly everyone that I interviewed on the subject of Hang Out, but rarely on other topics about YAA. Talking about Hang Out and the surprisingly yet-to-be known intensities developed there seemed to push the boundaries of language; words seemed to fail the people that I interviewed. Hang Out felt vital and yet unintelligible, unspeakable, a space lacking both in definition and individuality. I understood why its fate was in jeopardy—particularly in light of the culture of audit—and

worried that Hang Out's openness was leaving it susceptible to "colonization" by adult interests (Eidmann-Aadahl, 2003).

Defining Hang Out in particular stymied young people, who were closer to the intensity and further away from responsibility to produce particular representations. For Nathan, judgment came through the categories he understood from school. Through this lens, Hang Out *was* a waste of time, one that he justified through his enjoyment of the program. Even when I drew on school discourses, suggesting that his conversations at Hang Out might be valuable, he rejected the notion, laughing and replying in sarcastic voice "If you call *that* productive, yeah." Nathan's response suggests that the challenges of articulating Hang Out are not only due to young people not wanting to talk about it, as described in chapter two, but also because the affective registers made available during Hang Out are rarely articulated.

As a long time educator, I was troubled by Nathan's words, particularly because I had watched him over the course of several months and observed his daily activities, conversations, and experimentations. He rarely finished activities, but rather came to the space and seemed activated by it. Again, I do not wish to imply that he was suddenly productive in the sense that he reached for his homework, painted a picture, or learned guitar. Rather, Nathan, a self-described "outsider", was activated both with other people and on his own through the waxing and waning of affect. He "plugged in" despite not being a player; he participated in shared affect, despite not making art.

While Nathan and many other Hang Out regulars often described their efforts as lacking participation, their bodies told quite a different story. Boldt, Valente and Garorian (in review) argue that through becoming-intense "all bodies are capable of creative and political agency as they extract their differing and particular movements. In doing so, the focus is always on the

limitless potentialities of the body: what it can do rather than what it cannot do” (p. 23).

Imagining what a body hanging out is capable of, instead of imagining this experience as a site of lack, allows us to understand what Hang Out does for those many young people who do not use this time as one to complete specific projects or make specific goals. The stop-and-start nature of Hang Out becomes a site of potential.

Through a Deleuzian reading that focuses on emergence, Hang Out is filled with assemblages of bodies, food, screens and canvass, intensities that rose and ruptured, sending out lines of potential into new activity. As Stewart (2007) notes, even the most ordinary scenes “tempt the passerby with the promise of a story let out of the bag” (p. 23), and individuals at Hang Out appear endlessly tempted. In this way, potential is palpable and real, charging the scene and reminding everyone that something exciting, something to feel, could be around the corner. A pick up game of hacky-sack, a blast of sound from the recording room, a slice of leftover cake smashed into the concrete floor requiring people young and old to leap over it as they go about their business. In the swirling potential of an afternoon, Hang Out moves from a site where discrete bodies make art to one where becoming-intense releases the power to “spawn socialites, dream worlds, bodily states, and public feelings” (Stewart, 2007, p. 10).

### ***“A Perpetual Sixteen Year Old”: Zeke Becoming-Youth***

Zeke, a YAA youth worker and former “YAA kid,” describes his work at Hang Out as “taking a professional attitude towards being a perpetual sixteen year old” (Interview). Zeke believes that the young people who attend Hang Out today are much the same as they were thirty years ago: “They might listen to techno but...just [they are] just like my friend[s]” (Interview). Not only does Zeke see his old friends in the new young people at YA, he works around the

music he has always loved. Known affectionately as “Grandpa Punk,” he maintains an interest in his musical roots as well as a wide variety of contemporary music. Music, he says, is often what connects him to young people.

Zeke, the adult worker in the Kaoss Pad vignette, brims with enthusiasm charged through music. From shouts of “Awesome!” to running across the space as if his life depended on it, Zeke’s body betrays intense moments where the assumptions of adulthood are lost in the chaotic swirl of Hang Out. The “speeds and slownesses” that map his adulthood are dispersed and reconnect in multiple and inventive ways with those of a young person. Zeke does not imitate the young people at Hang Out—he remakes his adult body in ways that allow for the emergence of new formations of becoming-sixteen.

But what do Zeke’s new formations through becoming-sixteen allow him as a youth worker? Quite a lot it would seem. Zeke’s becoming-sixteen works to open up new, if momentary, sites for potential shifts in the relations of power. This may be understood by seeing Zeke’s becoming as not only crossing reified boundaries of age, but also of culture. Tsing (2005) argues that the messy and surprising features of encounters across difference should inform the way we think about culture. Using the metaphor of “friction” to describe awkward, unbalanced, and creative interconnection across difference, she reminds us that that such friction can lead to new arrangements of culture and power (p. 5). Zeke’s becoming-sixteen allowed him to experiment with new power arrangements at Hang Out, shifts that provided him unprecedented access to young people who normally maintain strict boundaries against any relationship with an adult.

Zeke’s becoming-sixteen, and similar affectively charged moments, were some of the most surprising events that I witnessed during my fieldwork at Hang Out. Over and over, I

witnessed adults do somewhat irrational things when moved by the energy brought by a group of teenagers. For some adult workers, I rarely witnessed this phenomenon. Many acted as helpful, friendly adults who supported young people much in the way I remember doing as a teacher. For these youth workers who maintained their adult identity within the space, Hang Out became an opportunity to do projects, be inspired, and “do something.” They didn’t wait for what would happen, they made things happen with an intentionality that mimicked many more traditional educational settings. For other youth workers, those like Zeke, Hang Out offered additional sensations—affect that emerged from everywhere and nowhere in particular and the chance to get lost in the music.

### ***Conclusion***

Reflecting on the limitations of representational frameworks has been an ongoing effort throughout this dissertation; I have sought to present relevant poststructuralist critiques alongside the structures of social science research that we have come to know and trust. Many of these critiques rest on notions of what we mean when we say that young people are being “productive.” For example, in chapter two, I both examine the productivity of ethnographic methods, and suggest that a rhizome offers an additional lens for imagining Hang Out. In chapter three, I demonstrate productivity as defined by capitalism’s neoliberal culture of audit. In chapter four, I examine the flip side of productivity, those scholars, activists, and youth workers who would see the productivity of Hang Out as a site for resistance. In this chapter, I have drawn out a Deleuzian notion of Hang Out’s productivity, arguing that Hang Out offers a near constant emergent space where new assemblages are being formed and reformed.

Thus, the inclusion of Deleuzian perspectives does more than just bring necessary poststructuralist critiques to representation; it encourages new methods of inquiry to sprout, some of which can help us move "across our thresholds towards a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not preexistent" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/2002 p. 35). The dynamism of the Kaoss pad scene, with its unexpected lines of flight and affective intensity, demonstrates the failures of a representational logic that would see youth starting and creating a "music project" (with all the intentionality that this implies). Rather, by attending to the momentary intensities—from the literal movement of fingers, heads, and bodies, to imperceptible chemical and biological shifts of hormones and neural pathways—we develop a more complex sense of productivity in Hang Out.

Finally, I want to emphasize that the shifts suggested by this chapter are far more than theoretical musings for academia. As St.Pierre (2005) writes,

We are in desperate need of new concepts, Deleuzian or otherwise, in this new educational environment that privileges a single positivist research model with a transcendent rationality and objectivity and accompanying concepts such as randomization, replicability, and generalizability, bias, and so forth—one that has marginalized subjugated knowledges and done material harm at all levels of education (St.Pierre, 2004, p. 286).

The harm that St.Pierre speaks of is real, and has real effects that are felt by educators, youth workers, and most importantly young people. It is imperative that we continue to discuss a wide variety of ways of understanding what happens at a site like Hang Out. We may be, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe, a "segmentary animal," whose "life is spatially and socially segmented" according to assigned purposes (p. 208), but the rigidity of our segments mustn't become a reason to limit what potential is made available.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

‘I’m going now. With the—’ I hesitated, and finally said, ‘With them, you know,’ and went on out. In fact, I had only just then realized how hard it would have been to explain myself. I could not chatter away as I used to do, taking it all for granted. My words must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining.

(LeGuin, 1985)

At fourteen, hanging out in a public library, I became an amateur philosopher, poet, and artist. As part of a small misanthropic group of teenagers, I spent my afternoons digging through subversive texts, tracing calligraphy, and discovering secrets. I walked, black skirt dragging, from my high school to the hangout spot. Then, making a slow circle through the stacks, I would search for friends amongst the books. I remember lowering my chin so that my hair would fall into my face; with my thick black eyeliner, I guessed that I looked like a younger version of Johnette Napolitano of *Concrete Blonde*. I carried a sketchbook. I wrote poetry on my fingertips. I was dramatic.

Twenty years later, I realize that this time spent hanging out had created far more durable memories than anything happening at school. I remember little to nothing of my classes or teachers. Classmates’ faces are a blur. In contrast, I remember dozens of moments hanging out: the time we shelved bible tracts beside the Kama Sutra, the time I tried to read Nietzsche, the time my friend told me his dad was in prison. All were intense and filled with sensation; they made my mind jump and my pulse race. It seemed as though anything could happen in the span of an afternoon.

Hang Out spots like the one I experienced are drying up. While some libraries do still welcome adolescents, many find the demographic troublesome and frustrating. A

handful have even decided to lock their doors rather than deal with rowdy teenagers. Similarly, malls and parks are expelling teens in record numbers in order to appear more “family-friendly.” In place of these traditional hang out spots, more youth are turning to community centers and youth centers as a place where they can relax and “just be” (Halpern, 2000) during their afterschool hours.

YAA’s Hang Out is one of these locations, a program that has offered Statesville’s teens a place to hang out for over forty years, with few rules, minimal interference, and a variety of activities in which they can participate. Several employees have been there half of that time or more. It is considered a successful program in the community with ties to other community organizations, the university, and the local school district.

Yet, despite YAA’s unique ability to fill a specific niche need for teens—a place to “just hang out”—this program faces an uncertain future. Increasing pressure to record and demonstrate the productivity of youth attending Hang Out is threatening to change the way this program is administered. This pressure does not only come from an outside regulatory force; instead it is internal pressure created by YAA itself as it struggles to compete in an increasingly competitive market for funding. Not unlike the accountability movement happening in schools, the pressure on youth centers like YAA is part of a larger turn towards market-based activity in social services, one that seeks to put a dollar value on young people’s productivity.

This neoliberal funding environment, one based on “value-added” and outcomes-based” measurements, has been termed audit culture by British anthropologists Shore & Wright (2000). Through audit culture, youth workers become managers, regulating their

own behaviors in ways that align with a centralized goal. Audit “reshapes its own image on those organizations that are monitored” (Shore & Wright, 2000, p. 72), and creates an organization in a constant state of preparation for audit. In this way, audit culture coerces the transformation of autonomous organizations into auditable commodities (Power, 1994).

### **Literacy Researchers Colonizing Youth Spaces**

Progressive educators and researchers have increasingly invested in the promise of non-school learning as a means to enriching the experiences and improving the life chances of adolescents. Literacy researchers, many of whom are frustrated by the stiff categories promoted in schools, are finding new hope in non-school spaces.

There is no better time for literacy theorists and researchers, long practiced in detailing successful literate practices that occur outside of school, to put their energies towards investigating potential relationships, collaborations, and helpful divisions of labor between school and formal classrooms and the informal learning that flourishes in a range of settings outside of school (Hull & Schultz, 2002, p. 53).

Indeed the pressures facing youth programs are often not well understood by literacy researchers (Eidmann-Aahdahl, 2002), yet the methods employed by such researchers in order to “detail successful literate practices” can also be disruptive to the very youth programs we seek to valorize. Additionally the literacy surveys, literacy interviews and skills checklists—while intended move youth programs “from babysitting to educationally enriched youth development” (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010)—can prove disorientating to youth and youth workers who do not evaluate themselves with the measuring stick of education.

Literacy researchers have much to learn from youth work. For example, many researchers may not realize how difficult it can be to draw in and maintain regular attendance from “anti-institution” (Jill, interview) young people. At Hang Out, youth workers with decades of experience move cautiously around youth that have just stopped in, trying to keep the pressure low. They offer drop-in services so that new youth can come and go with little formal accountability. Yet research and policy is increasingly asking these youth workers to change what they know works and compromise the delicate relationships of Hang Out in order to collect data that tells little about what goes on for youth.

Thus while researchers are increasingly turning to afterschool programs as ideal sites to record ongoing literacy production or even introduce new initiatives, they would be smart to move cautiously. While, youth centers may roll out the welcome mat for researchers, this might be better viewed as a characteristic of organizations that are used to building relationships in order to maintain funding (McLaughlin et al., 1994), rather than a need for change. Instead, while acknowledging that non-school spaces are fertile sites for research, we should take note of how our research agendas, once traced onto youth work sites, can leave indelible marks. Because research serves as a type of currency in the world of youth work, allowing programs to reach for new sources of funding, the programs and activities that attract research are often the best funded. Programs that appeal to researchers are often those with recognizable and measurable outcomes, particularly in today’s climate of numbers driven assessment. Thus, programs like Hang Out, where outcomes are more difficult to measure, struggle to attract research, demonstrate outcomes, and find adequate funding.

## **The Divide Between School and Afterschool**

The ideological divide between youth work and education has received little attention in recent years, but my experiences at Hang Out demonstrate the need for a reflective examination of this divide. Few policy makers understand the importance of unstructured youth programs, a problem that is exacerbated by research that measures such programs through the school-like categories of pre-planned and labeled activities that have been linked statistically to academic outcomes. Blackburn (2002), a former teacher and current literacy researcher in a youth-run center for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGTBQ) youth, illustrates the occasional hostility of youth center regulars towards education with a description of the first day at her research site

When I came to the center—the very first day, when I was interviewed by youth to determine whether I could be a researcher at the center—they asked me whether I had worked with youth before and I proudly told them I had been a teacher. At least one youth heard this with trepidation; she explained to me quite plainly, that this was a *youth-run* center and asked me what I was going to do to *not* be a teacher in this center (p. 261, in Hull & Schultz, 2002)

While Blackburn's experience was primarily with the older youth that run the center, I would argue that many traditions in youth work advocate a similar position of distrust of school procedures. The youth workers at YAA, while exceptionally kind and supportive, were also protective of youth that they felt had been unfairly stigmatized. They saw that many of the youth were outsiders, but this was of little matter when they too had been characterized this way during school. Thus, unlike teachers and researchers, many youth workers are less aligned with conventional beliefs about schooling and academic literacy than we might suppose. They are generally more likely to have cultural and educational experiences that align with the communities that they serve

(McLaughlin, 1994), and may share (or at least remember feeling) marginality and exclusion as well.

### **Methodological Hurdles**

There are many potential methodological hurdles for researchers at drop-in youth programs. Not only do these programs have little control over which youth attend, they often cater to youth that specifically resist more direct attention to their lives. Yet few researchers acknowledge these challenges in their research, instead choosing to present a narrative pieced together from the handful of youth that are willing to participate in the study. There is, however, a clear problem with creating a research narrative that focuses exclusively on participants that are willing to talk about their experiences or paint them in a positive light, especially when this group is in the minority.

Ethnographic data collection with sensitive and resistant populations can prove paradoxical. While researchers need informants in order to develop the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) required by most contemporary ethnography, this description is only coming from participants who are willing to talk about their experiences (thus, not resistant). I argue that there is a deep flaw with representational research frames that highlight the voices of the few that speak to stand in for the voices those that do not. For example, at Hang Out, I worked hard to get to know a variety of youth and to develop positive relationships with many others. However, I do not believe that the youth who would crowd around my table to chat were representative of the elusive and much more defensive demographic that Hang Out serves so well. This latter group—homeless, transient, runaway, or simply strongly anti-institution—did not talk to me about their

experiences, nor did they readily talk to youth workers. They wandered through the glass doors of Hang Out cautiously, offering no smiles, and making no requests for help.

Research conducted in a site known for catering to resistant youth should acknowledge this resistance, rather than simply piece together a narrative from the few voices that are willing to speak.

Just as we must resist removing resistant youth from our research by neglect, we must also resist some of the “aggressive culling tactics” (Tobin, 2000) applied to data in order to ready a transcript for publication. Research tends to be subtractive. By choosing to dwell in the lucid descriptions provided by young people’s talk and retaining some of the “odd, incoherent, and uncanny” (p. 138) pieces of data, we can begin to re-see the movement and interactions that characterize complex human activity.

I held on to paradoxical moments in my own research—such as when Maggie and Max seemed to align in their refusal to participate in the institutional process of naming activity—with the hope that they would continue to speak to me over the course of my analysis. My reason for dwelling on these difficult pieces of data was not primarily due to personal interest—on the contrary, I often thought that I would be better off letting them go. Rather, it was the realization that by leaving them behind, I would be leaving behind too much of what makes Hang Out valuable.

### **Talking About What Is Hard to Say**

While it was challenging to get young people to talk to me about Hang Out, there was an additional problem that had nothing to do with resistance. Much of what happens at Hang Out occurs in affective registers that are not commonly talked about—concepts

like intensity or sensation—are rarely articulated in common conversation. This leaves young people describing Hang Out to refer to the site in terms of lack (“I don’t do anything productive here”) or by describing specific activities (I took a guitar lesson with Zeke yesterday), neither of which provides a good sense of the long spans of unpredictable activity that characterize Hang Out.

During my early fieldwork at Hang Out, I wasn’t looking to describe intensity either—because I wasn’t the one experiencing it. Instead, I had the eyes and senses of an adult, a teacher, researcher, and parent. Through this adult lens, the young people around me seemed alternately hyper and sullen; emotional highs and lows that they seemed to pass around the room as if batting a ball. Youth and youth workers during Hang Out were quick to react, but impossible to predict. Intense moments could result in laughter, sarcasm, anger, or some combination of these emotions. Most frustratingly, young people often seemed scattered and unfocused, jumping from one activity to the next.

By the end of my fieldwork, I had not rid myself of my adult anxiety that young people were not producing as much as they could. Instead, I had come to terms with the idea that my adult opinion mattered little to the young people at Hang Out and that their reasons for coming to the space were entirely different than adults often imagine them.

In particular, I came to believe that Hang Out functions successfully because it mimicked much of what young people wish to do when they hang out without adults around, it allowed for an openness that meant that new things could happen. In chapter five, I describe the assemblages formed in moments during Hang Out. These happened over and over during Hang Out, and while they were not always as exciting as the Kaoss Pad, they did lend a refreshing sense of the unexpected to the space.

### **Naming and Unnaming**

While educational researchers are hard at work incorporating a new vocabulary or affect, movement, and sensation into the common language of learning, it is important to remember the pitfall of setting up this new language as “truth.” If we are to be effective in our efforts to understand the role of intensity and affect in the lives of young people we must not grow too fond of our own terminology. Rather, as Deleuze and Guattari demonstrated, we must be willing to shed names as they are incorporated into patriarchal hierarchies—we must not become too comfortable or too fond.

Shore and Wright (2000) demonstrate how the language of audit works as a magnet, drawing in related terms and employing them as part of audit. Once firmly rooted in the financial management sector, audit has migrated into new domains through the acquisition of *keywords* (Williams, 1976). Shore & Wright (2000, p. 59). They identify “academic,” “health and safety,” “stress,” and “democratic,” as just a few keywords that have been added in recent years, noting that the language of “audit” was never previously associated with any of these fields.

Thus, our role as researchers must be a cautious one, with an awareness of the way that our views about what adolescents are shape our understandings of what adolescents need. We need to build bridges with youth and youth workers, and explore what other kinds of relationships are formed through youth programs so that we might learn to value them. We must remember that while some youth programs may eagerly take up curriculum and assessment drawn from education—particularly if the potential for funding is attached—this decision is never free from the coercive powers of audit.

Youth work exists today because of its ability to adjust in accordance with societies' needs. But new programs offered to youth centers should not be seen as wholesale improvements on the local programs that are already in place. We must not introduce flawed assessments that turn youth programs into something akin to school outside of school; doing so would be disastrous for the many young people who rely on what they are already receiving from successful youth programs.

Perhaps, learning to appreciate Hang Out and programs like it can only happen through a path of multiplicity, one akin to that of YAA youth workers. These youth workers have grown adept at maintaining multiple competing narratives; they had to in order for programs like Hang Out to survive. For funders, they use numbers to demonstrate how youth are changed or reformed. For themselves, they draw on life experience to show youth how to live outside the box. For young people, they settle down into the long expanses of Hang Out and wait for whatever might happen next.

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