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Book Review: Lost Youth in the Global City: Class,Culture and the Urban Imaginary

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Jo-Anne Dillabough and Jacqueline Kennelly. (2010). *Lost Youth in the Global City: Class, Culture and the Urban Imaginary*. New York: Routledge. ISBN 9780415995580 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jeena Owens, doctoral student in instructional leadership at The University of Alabama

In *Lost Youth in the Global City: Class, Culture and the Urban Imaginary*, Jo-Anne Dillabough and Jacqueline Kennelly challenge existing paradigms that reinscribe binary ideologies about youth culture in society. In challenging dominant discourses in youth culture that posit juxtapositions between, for example, low-income and middle-class youth or children of color and white youth, the authors have produced a text that not only encourages scholars to view youth in increasingly nuanced ways, but they also provide a methodological path that other researchers may choose to follow in future scholarship related to investigating youth's lives.

Dillabough and Kennelly analyzed various dimensions of youth identity through qualitative research completed in two Canadian cities—Beacon Park, Vancouver, and Tower Hill, Toronto—cities that are seen as uniquely positioned to inform educators' understandings of the diversity among youth subcultures. The authors characterized these cities as global, given various ethnic populations, and the extent to which multiple youth subcultures are a part of each context. With these cities as a backdrop, the authors set out to learn about the cultural experiences of ethnically diverse youth from different social classes within cities described as “radically transformed modern urban centres” (p. 2). Through an ethnographic lens, *Lost Youth in the Global City* documents two years of research on youth interpretations of their identities in relation to the global city in which they reside.

As a foundation for this research, Dillabough and Kennelly draw on an interdisciplinary theoretical approach; primary theoretical frameworks used to support this study are Ricoeur's (1981) hermeneutic [interpretive] imagination, and cultural phenomenology. Together, these approaches allow the authors to learn about youth's worlds by comprehending “their deeply felt cultural experiences” (p. 44). Since the concept of hermeneutic imagination posits youth culture as an interpretive enactment, the researchers are able to use this concept to create a sense of the performative within a more traditional phenomenological approach. Applied collectively, these theoretical frameworks enable the collection of data that includes participants' visual representations, youth narratives, and interviews, and this data is particularly effective in communicating the perceptions of youth who are often seen as “lost” in global cities.

Dillabough and Kennelly are first able to explore the cultural experiences of youth in global cities through visual representations that show the diverse perceptions that youth hold about themselves and societal concepts. For example, participants illustrated “good citizenship” through drawn pictures of good and bad citizenship (p. 189). By collecting visual artifacts (including photographs and participants' drawings) and placing these pictures and photographs throughout the text, a window into the meaning participants associated with their visual artifacts was created. However, this is not a “window” shaped only from researchers' interpretations; Dillabough and Kennelly demonstrate their commitment to learning the experiences of youth by gathering photographs from youth coupled with a description of youth's meaning attached in order to share a clear picture of participants' ideas. This approach, one that is increasingly encouraged in ethnographic work, is also used in the incorporation of drawings by youth that represent their future goals (Baert, 1992; Cavero, 2000). Participants' illustrations—and participants' own explanations of these illustrations—offer researchers an unambiguous idea of how youth view themselves and the value they attach to individuals and things in their life.

In addition to visual artifacts, youth shared their stories with the authors during interviews. Students' drawings and photographs, along with interview responses and stories, bring the experiences of youth closer to the reader. Through an analysis of youth narratives, the authors demonstrate the power of stories to represent lived experience and the meanings attached to it as complex and multi-layered. For example, when a young white male's peers have classified him as a thug because he listens to rap music, has shaved his head, and wears flashy clothing, he conveys his unhappiness with this categorization, expressing that he just wants to be himself. During an interview, the student

(Tony) shares the following with the interviewer:

Tony: [I] listen to rock music, which I usually don't like but now I'm getting fully into it...the rockers are happy with that, me getting into it.... Most people classify me as a thug because they call me Sun [Slim] Shady, 8, you know, Eminem. They mostly classify me as that 'cause I listen to rap and all that...and I had my head shaved and dyed blonde at the base.

Interviewer: OK.

Tony:[B]ut they said that I'm slowly starting to turn....I eventually hope to get out of that, like being my own self, next year (p. 117).

Through Tony's responses, readers come in close contact with the participant's struggle to be defined beyond the monolithic characterizations of others.

Throughout the book, the authors weave theory through discussions of participants' lived experiences, and in doing so, clearly illustrate the connection between theory and material conditions for youth on the fringes of global cities. For this reader, this was most clear in the way that Dillabough and Kennelly shared the experiences of a 15-year-old Portuguese boy named Hayden, who lives with his mother. During an interview, Hayden discussed his feelings about the fact that his mother had to work two jobs. When asked if this was the ideal work situation for his mother, Hayden stated that it did not bother him, and "everything's okay" (p. 149). The authors offer supportive scholarship that theorizes Hayden's responses regarding his mother's arduous work demands. Reay and Lucey (2000, 2003) "describe [Hayden's] ambivalence as a form of working-class resilience or refusal, a manner of seeing things as bearable, 'even OK', in order to not be overwhelmed" (p. 149). Dillabough and Kennelly's straightforward technique of linking theory to participants' experiences is effective because they provide examples that illustrate their method of using theory to explain material conditions in society.

Aside from showing readers how to link theory to rich qualitative data, Dillabough and Kennelly provide a thoughtful and theoretically well-grounded model for how to explore the experiences of youth who reside in global cities. By developing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws support from an effective ethnographic research design, the authors emphasize the importance of a reflective and critical strategy for researching youths' lived experiences in global cities. Such a model may be useful in replicating this research in other geographic and cultural contexts around the world. In this way, the authors create the opportunity for comparing youth experiences in many global cities, which in turn will contribute to a more intricate understanding of the ways that youth culture and identity develop and are performed. However, in regard to understanding the ways youth culture is discussed in this book, it is evident that this research is tailored to the needs of a particular audience, individuals who pursue careers in the academy. With this in mind, the authors do not provide an invitation for the results from their study to be shared with individuals studied in their research. It would have been helpful for the authors to discuss how the results are applicable to the youth and their families. Perhaps it is beyond the scope of the book, but further research investigating youth subcultures should build the need to ponder the idea of creating a research project that communicates to the individuals in the study as well as individuals in academic circles. In order to transform the position of youth in global cities, it is important to continue the work discussed by the authors by making it accessible to all audiences. The engagement of multiple audiences (educators, youth, parents/guardians, other stakeholders) in this text would have made the book stronger, and would have encouraged needed dialogue.

Overall, the authors use engaging methodological tools to learn about youths' perceptions of their lived experiences in global cities. Their work is a contribution to interdisciplinary fields, including education, sociology, and youth studies, and is ideal for novice researchers seeking a model of ethnographic research, especially given the ways in which efforts are made to articulate clear links between theory, methods, and analysis.