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What Makes A Youth-Produced Film Good? The Youth Audience Perspective

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Abstract

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In this article, we explore how youth audiences evaluate the quality of youth-produced films. Our interest stems from a dearth of ways to measure the quality of what youth produce in artistic production processes. As a result, making art in formal learning settings devolves into either romanticized creativity or instrumental work to improve skills in core content areas. We conducted focus groups with 38 youth participants where they viewed four different films produced by the same youth media arts organization that works with young people to produce short-form, autobiographical documentaries. We found that youth focused their evaluations on identifying the films' genre and content and on assessing how well the filmmakers' creative decisions fit with identifications of genre and content. Evaluations were mediated by audiences' expectations and seemed to inform judgments of quality and creativity. We hope that our work can inform the design of formal learning spaces where young people are producing narrative art.

Keywords: adolescents; audience; evaluation; quality

For too long, artistic production processes have occupied a pedagogical no man's land. In many cases, creativity has been romanticized to the point where it becomes difficult to judge the quality of youth-produced art without judging the young artists (Fleming 2010; Sefton-Green 2000). However, formal schooling has become so constrained by testing and accountability that any content or skills that are not seen as directly contributing to students' improvement in tested areas are considered extraneous and frivolous. Some empirical studies showed that learning in arts-based disciplines such as music and drama improved students' skills in 'core' content areas such as math and reading (Fiske 1999). This argument, however, does not recognize the value

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of the arts as standalone disciplines worthy of attention or convince math and literacy educators to draw time and attention away from skills that improve students' performance on standardized measures.

In this article, we use youth-produced autobiographical documentaries as an example of an artistic medium that lends itself to evaluating the quality of youth-produced artwork. We asked youth audiences to reflect on the criteria they use to assess the quality of films when engaged in a critical dialog. Based on our prior research documenting the way young people learn to make art about the stories of our lives, we examined the relationship between audiences' perceptions of uniqueness (termed 'reportability') and their perceptions of believability (termed 'credibility') when engaging in a dialog about the quality of narrative-based art work (Halverson 2008). We conducted a series of six focus groups with adolescents in a mid-sized Midwestern city from April 2010 through September 2010 where teens watched and discussed a set of youth-produced films that they had never seen before. Through verbal analysis (Chi 1997) of their discussions, we found that the young people were evaluating the films by locating the films within a genre and a narrative and then determining how appropriate the creative decisions were for these categories. Appropriateness was mediated by their expectations for what 'should' be in the film. For the most part, our audiences preferred instances when their expectations were met, though there were occasions when breaking the rules of the genre or the narrative was evaluated positively. We believe that their discussion process was connected to highlighting both reportability and credibility as core features of quality films. While we do not believe that the youth in our study have a definitive claim on how young people judge quality in youth-produced art, these youth represented a place to start and demonstrate the potential power of reportability and credibility as criteria for evaluating narrative arts products.

Questions about the evaluation of quality of youth-produced films grew out of our extensive case-study work with youth media arts organizations across the USA that work with young people (ages 14–20) to produce autobiographical digital art. This research identified key moments in the pedagogical process that served as stopping points for youth to reflect on their work and for mentors to determine whether youth artists were moving down productive artistic paths (Halverson and Gibbons 2010). We were also able to develop a method for analyzing how young people engage in complex representations of identity through the digital art they produce (Halverson 2010; Halverson, Bass, and Woods 2012). However, this work has lacked a method for evaluating the quality of the products as representative accomplishments of a learning process. While it is impossible to decouple product from process in arts-based learning settings, the arts will not be taken seriously as academic endeavors if we cannot develop a language for evaluation as one way to describe learning. With this in mind, we devised a study that might invite a deconstructing of the elements of quality artwork in order to reconstruct these qualities into a system with clarity as well as evaluative potential. We know that final

products matter and that youth artists develop complex understandings of the relationship between their identities and these products, but we do not have a way to determine What make a youth film 'good'? And, how do you know?

Evaluating artistic products in learning settings

When institutions of formal education want to bring creative endeavors into the curriculum, lack of flexibility on the part of assessment practices often hinders innovation around the arts and learning (Cachia et al. 2010). While researchers and practitioners have begun to develop ways to measure what youth learn in digital arts production processes (Goodman 2003; Nelson, Hull, and Roche-Smith 2008; Sefton-Green and Sinker 2000; Soep 2006), much of this work lacks attention to how the products ought to be evaluated. It is important to acknowledge that any criteria and/or standards of quality in the arts are culturally situated and, therefore, often changing (Ito et al. 2008). We do not aim to make universal claims about what makes quality art – in fact, the very definition of 'art' has changed drastically over the time period that formal education has played a role in teaching and learning in the arts (Fleming 2010). Cultural discourses around art are at play; yet, some clear discourses exist and young people must learn these discourses, know where they stand within them, or at times, how their own discourses counter those more dominant ones. Therefore, to deny young people the opportunity to access, understand, critique, and apply the culturally situated standards that do exist to their own digital art work is akin to denying them access to academic discourses of power (Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Martineau 2007). While past solutions have focused on eliminating evaluative criteria from the way formal learning environments engage with youth-produced art, we aim to understand the culturally bound assessments of quality that audiences bring.

Our interest is to bring together both theoretical research and empirical research on how quality, assessment, and evaluation have been defined and studied in the context of youth art production and to establish a link to the role of audiences in evaluating the quality of youth art. Determining how to evaluate youth-produced art is a historically troubled endeavor. What does one focus on in the evaluation of youth-produced art: the product, the process, the artist? Focusing solely on any one of these parts could negate complexity, such as focusing solely on the artist could value creativity at the expense of 'form and technique' (Fleming 2010) or focusing solely on the product could boil the complexities down to a matter of 'taste', which is itself a contested concept (Bourdieu 1979).

What lies at the crux of this debate for us, then, is the idea of evaluation itself both conceptually and methodologically. Sefton-Green (2000) explored the complexities around evaluation. First, evaluation is often confused with assessment and vice versa. While assessment is usually seen as a teacher or other authority giving the student work a grade, such as final grades or scores on tests, evaluation can be done by anyone to gauge where a student is across a particular

learning trajectory (p. 4). Of course, at best, this distinction is blurry; for example, sometimes teachers evaluate work in order to assess it, but it is useful to make a distinction between assessment and evaluation to show that they are, in fact, related but different (Sefton-Green 2000). Second, Sefton-Green asserts that evaluation is most useful when it 'emphasizes explicitness and shared discourse' (p. 223). For this article, then, we focus on making it explicit how young people talk about youth films in order to evaluate them by discussing the 'shared discourse' of their evaluations in order to make explicit how these young people evaluated youth-produced films.

Audience as a window into quality and evaluation

Even if one decides to focus on the product of youth-produced art, one still has to decide whose evaluation is being given. Essentially, evaluation begins when a piece of art meets an audience (Sefton-Green 2000). Having an authentic audience plays a crucial role in motivation, learning, and development for young artists (Heath 2000; McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman 1994). Lange and Ito (2010) found that seeking and gaining audience for work were key components of independent creative production. For organizations that work with young people to produce art, attention to how external audiences will receive the final products is always at the forefront of conversations (Halverson 2008; Heath 2004; Wiley and Feiner 2001). Furthermore, audience serves as a linking concept between cognitive and sociocultural conceptions of what it means to become literate (Magnifico 2010). In short, the one aspect of how people become producers that researchers can agree on is the centrality of audience in the learning process.

Film audiences as evaluators

Our inquiry looks specifically at youth-produced digital videos, so we turned to research highlighting how audiences have evaluated the quality of films. Sheridan's (2008) study of film fans across a range of ages who participate in online forum discussions evaluating films demonstrates the expertise and rich literacy practices involved in this activity. Buckingham, Fraser, and Sefton-Green (2000) explored specifically whether students, their teachers, and skilled outsiders used the same evaluative criteria for assessing short pieces of student video. They found a diverse array of warrants used to evaluate the quality of films from personal taste to valuing of different genres (i.e., the documentary versus the horror movie) to self-evaluation claims based on audience responses and technical constraints. While they do not propose a unified set of criteria, the authors conclude by stating the importance of being more explicit about the criteria in assessment, making sure that these criteria are understood by students, and using more innovative approaches of self-evaluation that go beyond the written essay.

Research methods

The overarching goal of our study is to develop a method for evaluating quality in youth-produced films. As described in the literature review, our study rests on the assumption that audiences are productively able to assess the quality of artistic products (Buckingham, Fraser, and Sefton-Green 2000; Magnifico 2010; Sheridan 2008). We focused our research efforts on audience response to youth-produced films:

- Do youth audiences have evaluative criteria for youth films?
- How are these evaluative criteria connected to ideas of quality and creativity?

In this section, we describe the audience we solicited, the films we selected for them to watch and discuss, our method for collecting data with this group, and our data analysis strategies.

Data collection

Focus groups as data collection method

In order to solicit audience feedback on youth-produced films, we conducted a series of semi-structured focus groups (Buttram 1990; Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007). A focus-group methodology allowed us to strike a balance between the specific questions we had about the films and the audiences' interests. Likewise, working with audiences in groups, as opposed to in individual interviews, allows youth to build on one another's responses, creating more of a 'shared discourse' (Sefton-Green 2000, 223) in response to the films. Our audience for these films was adolescents, ages 13–17, from a mid-sized Midwestern city. We conducted a total of six focus groups from April 2010 through September 2010 (Table 1).

Film selection

The films our participants watched and discussed were drawn from our prior case-study work. Specifically, we chose films made at Reel Works Teen Filmmaking, a non-profit organization in New York City that works with young people to produce short-form, primarily autobiographical documentaries. We had analyzed previously the corpus of 90 films produced by Reel Works films between 2002 and 2008 and found a very explicit, expected structure to Reel Works films including a message, where the youth producers share with the audience a moral, an affirmation, or a strong concluding idea regarding the topic of the story they have just shared (Bass 2009).

We selected four of the 90 films in the Reel Works corpus that we hoped would elicit certain features of film quality that we predicted would matter in

Table 1. Description of six focus groups.

	Number of participants	Level of expertise	Context
Group 1	4	Experience making and/or evaluating films	Afterschool
Group 2	1	Experience making and evaluating films	Afterschool
Group 3	5	No experience making or evaluating films	Afterschool
Group 4	1	Experience making and evaluating films	Afterschool
Group 5	10	Experience evaluating films	During class
Group 6	17	Experience evaluating films	During class
Total	38		

youth audiences' evaluations. Our selection criteria were based on our prior analyses of artistic production processes that demonstrated youth working toward the development of both 'reportability', an aspect of a narrative that makes it unique and worth telling, and 'credibility', an aspect of the narrative that makes it believable or recognizable to an outside audience in their final pieces (Bass 2008; Halverson 2008). In order to test whether audiences would identify film quality based on the films' degree of reportability and credibility, we selected films from each of the four quadrants outlined in Figure 1. We predicted that youth would judge the films in quadrant four to be of the highest quality and films in quadrant one to be of the lowest quality.

We used a nomination and voting process across our research team to select a film from the Reel Works corpus that we felt represented each quadrant. Each team member viewed the nominated films multiple times, and we chose films after debate and 100% agreement. Figure 2 represents the same quadrant diagram, but with the film names represented.[1]
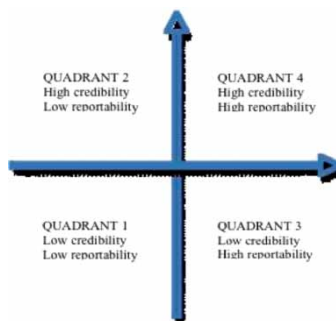

Figure 1. Film selection quadrants.

QUADRANT 2
Jewmaican

QUADRANT 4
Thanksgiving

QUADRANT 1
Love is all
around...or is it
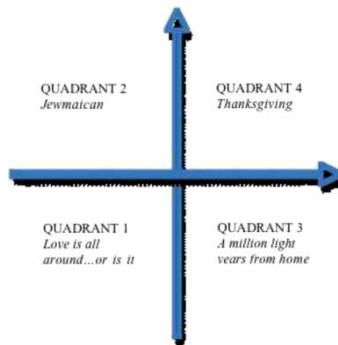
QUADRANT 3
A million light
years from home

Figure 2.   Film selection quadrants with youth-produced films.

Focus-group protocol

Each group watched all the four films in a row. The participants were given materials to take notes with, but we did not discuss each film in between each of the films. Though, of course, there is some bias in that we chose particular films and the film order, we tried to mitigate this by reordering the films for every group. After watching all the four films, each participant was asked to rank the films on two scales from 1 to 4: first from the worst to the best and second from the one they liked the least to the one they liked the most. We hoped that this distinction would help surface the evaluative criteria youth were using. Then, we had semi-structured discussions about each of the films where we asked them questions to discuss orally whether they liked the film or not and whether or not they thought that it was good and why, including, when possible, time for general comments.

Data analysis

To understand how audience members discussed the quality of individual films as well as how they characterize the quality of youth-produced films more broadly, we employed Chi's (1997) verbal analysis, a method of working with verbal utterances that aims to capture conceptual understanding of a given topic. We began by segmenting the data in order to identify the appropriate unit for analysis. We chose to segment our data based on the content of the discourse; our unit of analysis was bounded by a statement or an exchange that referred to what someone (or a group of people) liked, did not like, thought was good, or thought was not good about an individual film. Segmenting the data based on discourse units of interest (as opposed to time, keyword, or length) allows us to attend to the content of what was said and to treat specialist and non-specialist language equivalently – responses were not 'punished' if they did not include specific film terminology.

Once we segmented the data based on these content criteria, we engaged in an iterative, thematic coding process (Saldaña 2009) based on common patterns

and themes that emerged in the discourse. As a result of this iterative process, the most salient codes for all of our data segments were (1) content and (2) creative decision. We also looked at whether the comments were negative or positive comments, particularly in the category of creative decision. We also looked at how the codes creative decision and content overlapped. Additional codes were technical, genre, expectation, and suggestion (for a complete coding scheme, see Appendix).

Since we were interested in treating as equivalent the formal language of film critique and the informal ways that novices discuss film quality, we had to develop a series of evidence markers that our team was comfortable with for identifying each of these codes. Given that this was a study, the discussion was constructed, in part, by us as researchers; therefore, the discourse we generated was not naturally occurring in that we solicited answers to questions about what made the films likeable and/or good. To account for this somewhat artificial discourse, as well as coding data segments in the form of goodness or liking as positive, negative, or neutral, the questions themselves sometimes served as evidence markers, especially if the participants responded with a resounding positive or negative answer.

Results

Do youth audiences have evaluative criteria for youth films?

We found that there was a consistent process the participants went through to determine quality. Though we never asked these questions, the patterns in the discourses revealed that the youth seemed to be following a consistent process in order to evaluate the films:

- What is the film? Youth respondents evaluated the films based on the type of film being made, such as documentary, experimental, and autobiographical. This question seems to be connected to Eisner's (1985) claim that evaluation of youth art production begins with connoisseurship.
- What is the story? Youth respondents evaluated the films based on what they thought the film was supposed to be about.
- How well does it tell or show the story? Youth respondents evaluated how well the narrative and genre were communicated using the tools of film as a communicative medium, what we termed 'creative decisions'.

This method of discussing the films was recursive and cyclical. We found that our participants took multiple 'paths' toward determining quality. One path was locating the genre of the film and then determining if the creative decisions the filmmakers made fit within that genre. Likewise, the youth identified the story that was being told and then determined if the creative decisions told that story well or not. Alternately, the youth sometimes worked in the other direction, drawing on creative decisions to determine which genre the film was in or

which story was being told. It is by tracing these paths in respondents' talk that we can understand how they are evaluating quality. We will develop each in turn.

Identifying genre and story

The youth were continually attempting to identify films as particular genres and/ or particular types of stories, which led us to ask how and why the youth were doing so. In this section, we provide representative examples of youth determining genre and story. Overall, we found that they were using their personal familiarity with both genre and story to identify the films and the filmic choices.

Genre

A prevalent pattern in our data was how often the participants discussed genres of films as they referenced multiple media genres at a variety of levels of scale including films (specifically documentaries, skater films, and student films), television shows (specifically the Oprah Winfrey Show), previews, and DVDs.[2] For example, one youth compares all of the films with one another to determine their genres and what the genre meant for their evaluation:

> Some [were clearer] than others because the first one [A million light years from home] wasn't really a documentary. It was like a preview, and *Jewmaican*, yeah, it would be a documentary like on TV. And the third one [Thanksgiving], probably one of the ones we would get on DVD and then maybe the fourth one [Love is all Around], but it was kind of confusing. (Focus Group 3, 27 April 2010)

This pattern of identifying and comparing films to one another and to externally established media shows the significance of genre in establishing 'what' the film is. In the example given above, the youth use past viewing experiences to describe and classify the different films. The example highlighted above is representative of a need to define what they are seeing as a method of evaluation. Most interesting to us was the idea that these films may be something other than documentaries. Recall that one of the reasons we chose these films was that we thought that they represented consistency of genre; we were surprised that to the participants, these films represented different genres and, then, that this definition of genre is a path to determining quality.

Story

Just as the youth were trying to identify what type of film it was that they were watching, they also continually tried to identify what type of story was being told, which they determined through the films' content. For example, one youth discusses how Thanksgiving was his favorite film because of the story told:

> R: I thought that, it was actually my favorite. Because I thought that it was kind of like the same story as like *Jewmaican* about the mom dying, but the thing that

they went for is that he got really too interested in family at first – he showed all the different personalities of the families and who they were and there was humor in it so you had fun and were interested. Then he explained, you know, his mom died and he felt really sad, but that just really brought his family even closer together. (Focus Group 1, 22 April 2010)

In this example, we can see how this youth is trying to determine whether the story is more about 'moms dying' or if it is about 'families'. This youth decides that Thanksgiving is more about how the mom's death 'just really brought his family even closer together'. It is telling an important story about families. He decides that this story is worth telling, and the choice of story makes the movie well done.

The role of creative decisions

Sefton-Green (2000) discusses how part of making explicit the evaluation of the creative works of young people is making the language used to evaluate those works explicit. We found this to be true as the youth spent a great deal of time talking about individual creative decisions the filmmakers made and whether and how these decisions contributed to, or detracted from, their evaluations of the quality of the film. The youth intuitively were able to identify and comment on the purpose that individual creative decisions did or did not serve. These creative decisions could be related to the genre (i.e., is this the kind of thing you might see in a documentary?) or related to the story (i.e., Does this creative decision add to or detract from the narrative?). These evaluations went beyond 'good'/'bad' or 'like'/'dislike'; rather, they served as the vocabulary and grammar in the phrasing of the film's message.

Some evaluations of creative decisions were related to whether the decision contributed to or detracted from the story itself. For example, in *Jewmaican*, the filmmaker included a Bob Marley song overlaid over images of time spent in Jamaica. One respondent commented on this creative decision in this way:

I don't think the music in *Jewmaican* was . . . like I listen to that music. But it was in the worst places ever. Like, a Bob Marley song went on right before the intro about how her mother committed suicide. And it just did not fit. It just didn't. There should have been no music. I don't think there should have been any music in the entire thing because I thought she was just like 'oh, Jamaican . . . oh Bob Marley! (Focus Group 5, 21 September 2010)

In this example, the youth recognizes that music serves a purpose in films, and s/he finds that the choice made in this film does not 'fit' and suggests a better creative decision of 'no music'.

How are these evaluative criteria connected to ideas of quality and creativity?

The second question we explored was how the evaluative criteria youth audiences brought to bear might be related to broader notions of quality and

creativity. In our discussions with youth, evaluations of quality seemed to be mediated by the expectations they brought to bear in watching the films. Whether from their experiences as filmmakers or as media consumers, youth seemed to create certain expectations of youth-produced films based on familiarity of genre and story, and they evaluated films based on whether those expectations were met. In fact, the relationship among these concepts indicated evaluative criteria for quality – films were of quality if audiences could determine a positive relationship between creative decisions, genre, and story. It is almost as if they were asking themselves What do I expect to see based on genre? What do I expect to see based on story? How well did the filmmaker give me what I expected? Once they identified the genre and story, they evaluated to see if it met whatever expectation(s) they had.

There were four ways of classifying expectations: (1) Expectations met, (2) Expectations not met, (3) Deal breakers and, (4) Rule breakers. These four types of expectation exchanges were shown through the way that the youth discussed the films, and it is through these exchanges that the youth evaluated film quality. The participants tended to evaluate films where expectations were met as having 'good quality'. When expectations were not met, however, the youth described the experience as either pleasantly broken or horribly shattered. In other words, there seemed to be some sort of standards or rules that they recognized.

Expectations met and expectations not met

Thanks giving was the film most often described as the best film as well as the film the youth liked the most. The following excerpt is representative of how the youth described Thanksgiving as meeting their expectations well:

> I just liked it 'cuz I appreciate being with my family so it was like something that really hit me personally. And I liked how he incorporated the home videos. And it wasn't like he tried to incorporate and it didn't work. But he actually got like a smooth transition in it and talked about his family and stuff. (Focus Group 3, 27 April 2010)

This youth thought that the story's focus on the family was familiar in a personal way, but then s/he goes on to describe the creative decision of 'incorporat[ing] the home videos'. In this example, s/he asserts that this incorporation was good because of the 'smooth transition'. So, it is the good use of a creative decision combined with the story about 'his family and stuff' that made the film meet expectations.

Across the films, the participants also described expectation failures in their viewing experiences; they described how specific creative decisions, genres, and the stories did not match up. For example, in A million light years from home, the filmmaker's use of text instead of voiceover confused both genre and tone. One participant remarked that the film was 'more like a preview than an actual movie type thing…because, it's like not really telling you a

story like a real movie would, and then the preview is just showing like clip shots and not really giving any information . . . ' (Focus Group 5, 21 September 2010). While expecting a documentary, this youth described the overall effect of the film as 'more like a preview'. This indicates that youth audiences expected certain features in a documentary film and made a negative judgment on the quality of the film based on its not living up to those expectations.

Deal breakers

The participants' evaluations were more sophisticated than simply describing expectations as met or not met. While there were many instances when the youth referred to the lack of match between the creative decisions and the story, some of these broken expectations were what we called 'deal breakers', decisions that played a large role in audiences' evaluations of distractions from a film's overall quality. For instance, in *Jewmaican*, the filmmaker includes a self-interview that has a close-up shot angle. Many youth found the interview to be appropriate but expressed an extreme dislike for the close-up, as in this example:

R1: Yeah, and then she had that extreme close up of her just in the middle . . . It was like self-indulgent and it was just . . .
R2: Yeah, it was all about her.
R3: It's like she didn't try that hard.
R1: [Laughing] There's no reason for me to really watch that.
R2: It's just like, 'Here look at me and my life.
R1: 'I'm Jewish; my mom was Jamaican
R3: Well, I don't necessarily agree with that. I think it's a really great story, like she's trying to tell all the different perspectives.
R1: But she didn't tell the story
R2: Yeah, she just wanted to talk about her. (Focus Group 1, 22 April 2010)

The participants had a strong emotional reaction to the close-up shot because they found it to be 'self-indulgent' or that she was saying '"Here look at me and my life", or she was just "want[ing] to talk about her[self]"'. With deal breakers, a creative decision or set of creative decisions seemed to defy expectations to such an extent that youth judged the film itself as 'bad'. The creative decision(s) ruined the film no matter how good the story was.

Rule breakers

An unexpected pattern that emerged was the participants' recognition that sometimes defying expectations results in positive evaluations. For example, though we had chosen Love is all around because we thought that this film would receive the lowest quality evaluations, several comments indicated that certain non-conformist decisions were appreciated by our youth audience:

I almost kind of liked it because it was so out there. Maybe technically it wasn't that good, but it feels like he had some creativity. Like with the beginning. Like,

what was that? But you wouldn't see that anywhere else. He was kind of sincere about it and it was kind of adorable that way. (Focus Group 1, 27 April 2010)

So what is cool rule breaking and what is a disliked deal breaker? What makes one celebrated and the other unacceptable? We found that there is a continuum along which creative decisions run. There are those decisions that advance a story and those that distract from a story. And there are those that reinforce genre and those that confuse genre. Those creative decisions that advance the story and that reinforce genre are evaluated positively. Creative decisions that stray too far away from the story or genre are deal breakers. Creative decisions that do not stray from these, even if they are a little unusual or unlikable, are simply rule breakers. Sometimes, creative decisions that are unexpected but that further the story without destroying the genre are acceptable. For instance, the lack of dialog in A million light years from home prompted the youth to describe the experience that they were watching a preview, yet they acknowledged that the work was interesting, compelling, and technically competent. The close-up that was used in *Jewmaican*, however, did not further the story she was telling or fall within the usual expectations about interviews in documentaries; therefore, it was a deal breaker that ruined the movie.

Discussion

While prior studies of audiences' evaluations of amateur and professional films have focused on audiences with prior experience or interest (Buckingham, Fraser, and Sefton-Green 2000; Sheridan 2008), our findings indicate that youth audiences have intuitive theories (McCloskey 1983) about how to evaluate films that mirror how their more experienced peers evaluate work. Regardless of levels of expertise, our participants evaluated youth films based on the relationship between the genre, the story, and specific creative decisions in the films. Furthermore, the relationship among these elements was mediated by the participants' expectations. When there was alignment among these elements, expectations were met. When there was a lack of alignment, expectations were not met. In some cases, expectation failures were 'deal breakers', resulting in a negative evaluation of the film. In other cases, expectation failures were 'rule breakers', unique combinations that made the film stand out or that added to its quality. In summary, 'rule breakers' were often considered the best films, films that met expectations next, and films with multiple 'deal breakers' were evaluated the most harshly.

Our selection of films for youth to watch and discuss was based on the hypothesis that youth would evaluate the most positively films that had both reportability (a uniqueness, something that makes the film worth seeing) and credibility (a recognizability, something that connects the film to the audience). For the most part, our hypothesis was confirmed. The film we selected to represent both high reportability and high credibility was universally selected as the best and the film we selected to represent both low reportability and low credibility was universally selected as the worst (in comparison with the

others). The presence of credibility seemed to be marked by a perceived positive relationship between the filmmakers' creative decisions and the recognizability of the genre or the narrative. The presence of reportability seemed to be marked by some element of uniqueness, either a recognizable departure from the genre or the narrative or a 'rule breaker'. In this way, consistent with our prior results, rather than absolute, fixed points (Bass 2008; Halverson 2008), we consider reportability and credibility as continua.

Conclusions and future directions

Our long-term goal is to develop a way to evaluate quality in youth-produced films so that emerging artists can have a sense of how successful their products are and teachers, mentors, and designers can understand how to improve their instruction based on external audience feedback. As such, we are interested in whether youth audience responses to youth-produced films can establish a baseline for thinking about quality. Using the results of our coding process, we aimed to produce models for how the youth in our sample evaluated the quality of each individual film and to create a working model for how they evaluated quality overall. These models were generated from the bottom-up and also compared with our initial hypothesis about the presence of both reportability and credibility.

By querying youth audiences about how they evaluate youth-produced work, we aimed to extend audience studies that have identified the practices of evaluation (Sheridan 2008) toward determining the criteria youth audiences use for evaluation. We found that youth explore the quality of their peers' films by using expectations to determine whether the films are reportable and credible. These findings point the way toward the development of evaluative criteria for youth-produced digital art that is neither instrumental nor overly romanticized (Sefton-Green 2000). We are hopeful that future work (ours and others) can continue to move this conversation toward the development of such criteria. As a next step in this direction, we intend to conduct similar studies with media educators in both formal and informal learning settings since prior work has indicated that youth producers and adult instructors may apply different sets of criteria to the evaluation of youth-produced media (Buckingham, Fraser, and Sefton-Green 2000). We are curious whether the ideas that emerged in this study, the explicit language patterns in how young people evaluate films and the identification of reportability and credibility as defined by expectations, apply to adult instructor audiences. These studies may help us to build a bridge between what intended audiences like the youth in our study and instructor audiences view as appropriate criteria for measuring the success of youth-produced art.

Notes
1. For more in-depth descriptions and to watch the films, visit: http://rw.fcny.org/rw/
2. At least one participant referred to DVDs as a type of film.

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Appendix. Coding scheme for youth audience responses

Code	Definition
Content	Content +: Comments that indicated appreciation for quality story structure as well as interesting story content. Remarks that the story was worth telling and relatable
	Content −: Comments reflecting a lack of interest in story or confusion. Story was unstructured and unrelatable
	Content neutral: Comments about content that pertain to personal preference, reliability, or liking

Creative decision	Creative Dec +: Recognition of choices the filmmaker is making to emphasize something or convey a message
	Creative Dec −: Recognition of the filmmaker's decision to be inappropriate, irrelevant, or distracting from the film
	Can be recognized as 'good' or 'bad' rather than just preference
	Creative Dec neutral: Creative decision is perhaps inappropriate or distracting but does not take away immensely from the story and is therefore acceptable
Overlap of creative decision and content ±	Story is interesting in content or structure and is enhanced by the filmmaker's decisions OR choices made by the filmmaker either create distractions from story or accentuate problems with story
Familiarity	Aspects of film (genre or story) were recognizable based on personal experience or prior knowledge
Technical	Comments regarding evidence of production-related competency or incompetency such as framing, lighting, and audio quality
Expectation	Anticipation or disappointment that certain filmic conventions fulfilled or did not fulfill expectations
Genre	Identification of film as a certain genre or possessing certain stylistic elements associated with a certain genre
Suggestion	Suggestions made regarding creative decisions and technical decisions