Constructing a Sense of Place through New Media: A Case Study of *Humans of New York*

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ABSTRACT

In 2010, Brandon Stanton started the photo blog *Humans of New York* (HONY), posting daily portraits and interview captions of people in New York City. Since then, it has amassed an enormous social media following. Media, including digital media such as HONY, affect how people perceive cities and how they act within them (Gordon, 2010). New York City and 'the city' are known places in our cartographic imaginations. But in reality, people only experience small corners of the city at a time (Krupat, 1985) which often have little to do with those cartographic constructs. The purpose of this study is to investigate how HONY portrays life in New York, one of the most iconic and stereotyped cities in the world. The fields of urban representation and human geography offer a constructive framework to investigate the central research question of this project: *How do the photo-narratives of* Humans of New York *contribute to the construction of a sense of place in a contemporary urban setting?* A mixed method approach, using visual semiotic analysis and narrative analysis of eight HONY images and their captions, was employed to answer this question. This research contributes to the ongoing discussion around *place* in modern culture at a time when digital technology and new media are increasingly altering definitions and conceptualizations of spatiality. This research indicates how representations of cities in new media can foster a more cosmopolitan understanding of cities and urban life.

INTRODUCTION

> "The creative photographer…imparts humanity to the inhuman world around him."– Clarence John Laughlin (quoted in Sontag, 1977;146)

In 1936, *Life* magazine revolutionized American visual culture. As the 'Show-Book of the World,' it was the first magazine to tell stories predominantly with images (Weems, 2004). Short texts were supplementary to *Life*'s captivating photographs. For decades, *Life* stood in contrast to other magazines that were text heavy. Global online media follows in *Life*'s footsteps, developing this idea on a larger scale. The increasing popularity of image-centered apps, infographics, and new media platforms such as Vine, Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest, point to the power of visual communication. Through online media, images are circulated at a faster rate and to larger audiences than ever before. Global media feed our imaginations about ourselves and others, the places we inhabit, and our sense of belonging (Appadurai, 1990; Orgad, 2012). As digital technology and visual communication evolve, it is important to examine the impact of a visually-stimulated culture on people's lives. This research explores the question: How are mediated images and narratives contributing to the construction of a sense of place in cities? This question is addressed in a case study of the blog *Humans of New York* (HONY), one of the most popular contemporary examples of the blueprint first set by *Life* magazine.

Amateur photographer Brandon Stanton started HONY in 2010 with the goal of taking 10,000 portraits of New Yorkers and plotting them on a map of the city. The project turned into something much larger when Stanton began captioning photos with excerpts of conversations he had with his subjects. The blog transformed into an eclectic collection of stories of hardship, love, loss, routine, and peculiarity. Between one and six new images are posted each day and shared on a variety of social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In the 22 months between October 2013 and July 2015, the blog's Facebook followers have increased over nine-fold from 1.5 million to 14.2 million (Ginberg, 2013; Stanton, 2015b).

HONY 'provides a worldwide audience with daily glimpses into the lives of strangers in New York City' (Stanton, 2015a). In Stanton's thousands of posts of New Yorkers, he

draws on the tradition of humanistic photography, which emerged in the mid-twentieth century as an attempt by photographers to capture 'human essence.' Photographers such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, Marc Riboud, Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis, and Édouard Boubat sought 'not to hold back the truth, not to intervene and change the scene, to turn the city over to the citizens' (Avancini, 2011: 57). Humanistic photography offers 'inclusive and attractive' definitions of humanity and 'allows the viewer to feel empathy and a sense of commonality with the persons in the photograph and to appreciate the joy of human sociability' (Emmison, Smith, & Mayall, 2012: 50). Stanton builds on this work by combining street portraits with captions in the words of his subjects, hereafter referred to as 'photo-narratives.'

This research examines the ways in which mediated representations of the city construct a sense of place. Using visual social semiotic analysis and narrative analysis, I analyze eight HONY photo-narratives focusing on four themes of urban life: work, family, encounters with strangers, and encounters with bureaucracy. This research demonstrates that HONY's images and stories, many of which communicate moral messages related to urban life, both confirm and challenge urban stereotypes and construct a human and cosmopolitan sense of place.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Central to an understanding of how mediated representations of urban life construct sense of place is an awareness of how photography and storytelling have evolved in the 20th and 21st centuries, especially with the rise of digital technology. This theoretical framework will review research on mediated representations of the city in relation to stereotypical urban myths, sense of place, and cosmopolitanism.

'Anything whatever' photography

With the rise of online media, photographs of everyday life have increased in prominence. Both Barthes (1984) and Sontag (1977) note that the subject matter of photographs has changed over time from the 'notable...in order to surprise' to the 'anything whatever' (Barthes, 1984: 34); from the 'idealized' to the 'plain' (Sontag, 1977:

28). Baudrillard (1981, 1996, 1998), in his theory of commodity-signs, posits that society is overloaded with an endless flow of mediated information and images. In fact, technology has 'democratized image capture and use' with small, inexpensive cameras and pervasive online distribution platforms (Newton, 2009: 237). According to Featherstone (1991: 269–270), the increased flow of images in modern society has come to 'saturate the fabric of everyday life' and has led to the 'aestheticization of everyday life,' that is, 'turning life into a work of art.'

This art shared online records 'the décor of everyday life' across a variety of 'gestures, interaction rituals, social types, political styles, artistic motifs, cultural norms' (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003: 38). Digital technology has altered the ways in which people engage with images and use them to construct narratives about themselves and the world around them (Murray, 2008). Murray's analysis of the photo-sharing website Flickr found that the most popular pages contained 'images of the mundane with autobiographical references that either hint at or blatantly refer to their creator's work/home life' (2008: 155). Popular photography today has moved toward a 'communal aesthetic that does not respect traditional amateur/professional hierarchies' (Murray, 2008: 151). The use of digital photography on social media sites has resulted in a shift to the 'snapshot aesthetic' that privileges the small, the mundane, and the simple. It has become a way for people to build 'an autobiographical narrative of sorts' consisting of 'old versions of the self as well as collections of objects and experiences encountered in everyday life' (Murray, 2008: 156). This research project draws on Murray's notion of the 'everyday aesthetic.' I examine HONY's use of this simplified aesthetic in its portraits of strangers, and how those images combined with short textual narratives, construct a sense of place in New York City.

'Narration created humanity.' – Pierre Janet (1928: 261)

People make meaning from their experiences through narratives. According to Barthes (1977: 79), narrative 'is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind...narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.' Considerable research has been conducted on the importance of narratives in identity and relationship formation (Ricœur, 1990; Mcadams, 2006; Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011; Hammack & Pilecki, 2012;

Hoffman, 2004). Yuval-Davis (2006: 202) argues that 'identities are narratives' made up of complex 'stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not).' Fivush et al. (2011) argue that autobiographical memories and personal narratives are mediated by social interactions and cultural frames. Individuals are now expected to construct ongoing narratives about themselves – who they are and how they want to be known to the world. Riessman (2008: 7) attributes this to a 'contemporary preoccupation with identity,' which coincides with Murray's research findings related to the 'snapshot aesthetic' (2008).

Narrative has been connected to the idea of *place* in the research of Ball-Rokeach et al. (2001) on the 'storytelling neighborhood.' They examined storytelling in seven residential areas in Los Angeles and identified three levels of storytelling: macro (stories told by mainstream or corporate media to large audiences), meso (stories told by community media to targeted residents), and micro (personal narratives told by individuals through interpersonal networks). They found that urban dwellers in communities with more integrated systems of storytelling had a higher sense of belonging to their community, and they acted accordingly. While the researchers acknowledged that the Internet plays a role in the storytelling network, it was not included as a source of storytelling in their study.

Human geographer David Harvey's research focuses on the importance of spatiality in social life. Harvey (2001: 208) argues that our ideas and views of the world are influenced by historical and mediated 'geographical knowledges' and that there is a vital need to broaden the knowledge base upon which conventional geographic constructs are built, which is, in part, the media's responsibility. Harvey's view that space is constructed is central to this research project as I explore how HONY's urban images and narratives contribute to people's ability to relate to cities and construct a sense of place within them. I argue that HONY, with its thousands of human stories, broadens the knowledge base that feeds our cartographic imaginations.

Representations of the city

Mediated representations of a city contribute to stereotypes about it. For American urban planner Kevin Lynch (1960), the city's 'image' is the focal point of analysis of the

city. Indeed, the city 'is above all a representation' (Donald, 1992: 417). Post-structuralist approaches to understanding modern society, such as those by Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard, emphasize the importance of signs and representations in place-making and space-making. By understanding the symbolic (in addition to material) dynamics of the city, we develop a more comprehensive understanding of it.

Hawker's visual analysis of urban photographs from the nineteenth century to the present demonstrates that the city is typically represented as either 'empty and still' or 'dense and dynamic' (2013: 343). Representations of the empty city can evoke an atmosphere of solitude and alienation, presenting the city as mysterious and dangerous, or conversely as a clean and transparent urban utopia. Street photography, on the other hand, portrays cities as magnetic and lively by focusing on movement and vibrancy and by capturing the buzz and bustle of everyday life on the street.

Hubbard's comprehensive review of the 'represented city' (2006) includes an examination of how cities are represented in novels, news articles, movies, and TV programmess. He argues that by associating cities with particular symbolic values, urban myths construct cities as either dangerous or welcoming. The 'anti' urban myth is usually juxtaposed with the myth of the idyllic rural countryside, which is harmonious, picturesque, quiet, and clean, in contrast to the dirty, immoral, criminal, crowded, and disorderly city (Hubbard, 2006: 60). In this 'anti' urban myth, the city is threatening. This view is sustained by news stories of urban crime and poverty, and by movies and TV shows, such as *Superman*, *Batman*, *Law & Order*, and *CSI*.

In the 'pro' urban myth, the unpredictable nature of life in the city is viewed as a positive. Cities are portrayed as 'attractive, vibrant, cultured places to live…connected to what is happening elsewhere, opening a world of opportunities' (Hubbard, 2006: 64–65). Urbanism is connected to notions of progress, power, and learning. Cities provide opportunity for both business and pleasure, for multiple 'social worlds' to coexist (Hubbard, 2006: 64). In this myth, the hip, sleek, educated urban dweller contrasts with the slow rural 'country bumpkin.' Falling into the category of 'pro' urban myth is Rundell's 'consumer city' where there is cultural innovation in food, music, film, and fashion (2014: 3). New York's characterization as the Big Apple, Capital of the World, and the City that Never Sleeps are 'pro' urban myths.

Iconic cities such as New York prominently feature in our global mythology (Bodnar, 1992) and clichéd representations of them make it more difficult to entertain alternate interpretations (Reckner, 2002). These archetypal landscapes 'depend on traditions and narratives that are invented and imposed on space' (Graham, 2002: 1008). However, Hubbard (2006) argues that representations of cities can be polysemous, that is, they can signify different things simultaneously. Opposing mythologies are fluid and shift as they are represented in different media. In this sense, Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* (1986) may be a more accurate conception of the city. It describes spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions and 'exist like "counter-sites" simultaneously representing, contesting, and inverting all other conventional sites' (Sudradjat, 2012: 29). Heterotopias are the spaces between *utopia* and *dystopia*, where things are neither solely good nor bad, and more layers of meaning are acknowledged. Heterotopia can be a represented site, not just a geographical one (Hetherington, 1997). As Harvey (1990: 273) suggests, heterotopia in cities 'offers multiple possibilities within which a spatialized 'otherness' can flourish' opening the door for plurality and heterogeneity in society. My research suggests that HONY's images and stories, through their humanness and diversity, act as a counterpoint to urban stereotypes and myths that are more abstract and distanced from the realities of daily life. I argue that in portraying New York City through the words and images of its inhabitants, HONY enables the construction of sense of place in mediated urban space.

Space, place, and sense of place

Central to understanding how mediated representations of New York construct a sense of place is a recognition of the differences between of *space*, *place*, and *sense of place*. *Spaces* are defined by Chen et al. (2013: 20) as 'geographic entities with distinct shapes, scales, and other properties that set the stage for certain kinds of human activities.' The idea of urban space conjures general images of parks, city streets, public transportation, and tall buildings. *Places* 'shape the lives of human beings…As places, cities are distinct and meaningful sites in which people live out their lives' (Chen et al., 2013: 7). Imagining New York City as a place may conjure memories of personal experiences there, or iconic images of the Empire State Building or Central Park. The combination of lived, mediated, or imagined experience and space produce a place infused with personal

meaning and value (Schröder, 2006). For Cresswell (1996: 3), place 'combines the spatial with the social,' what he calls 'social space.'

Sense of place is created by human engagements with these places; it is determined by the experiences, personal relationships, and emotional meanings ascribed to them (Relph, 1976; Sack, 1988; Tuan, 1977). For Allen (1990: 1), sense of place is 'a fundamental human experience.' While it is commonly associated with positive feelings of attachment and belonging, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1980) notes that sense of place can also manifest from negative feelings, such as fear. It is an open and ongoing process that allows us to make sense of the world (Sack, 1988). Sense of place is not simply an impression or conception, but involves a deeper emotional connection to place. Bourdieu's habitus (1989) relates to sense of place in that it emphasizes the interconnectedness of structures and agents in social space. Habitus implies a 'sense of one's place' but also a 'sense of the place of others' in one's lived environment (Bourdieu, 1989: 19).

These concepts, fundamental to the fields of human geography and globalization, have become prevalent in media and communications theory. Theorists have argued that as digital technology alters quality of space (Amin, 2008; Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1990), our relationship with place is affected. A point of departure for this discussion is Joshua Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place* (1985) in which he challenges the relevance of place in modernity. He argues that electronic media have led to 'placelessness' and a near 'total dissociation of physical place and 'social' place' (p. 115). He posits that where we are physically has become less important than who we are with because media have changed the 'situational geography of social life' (p. 6). Meyrowitz's view that technology has transformed place and sense of place beyond physical boundaries has been extensively debated. For example, Moores (2012) rejects the idea of placelessness, arguing that Meyrowitz underestimates the plurality of place in social life and digital media use. Using Scannell's concept of 'doubling of place' (1996), which views digital media as allowing people to be in multiple places at one time, Moores views place as more than just location; it is somewhere we can also inhabit imaginatively via mediated representations (2012: 30). Media, he argues, have the power to multiply the complex interconnections between people and places.

Graham (2002) sees the enduring relevance of place in people's attachment to lived environments. His distinction between the 'external' and 'internal' city is relevant to discussions of mediated representations of place and space in cities. The external city is known through popular representations, iconic buildings, and remarkable landscapes and skylines. It is a 'valuable economic resource' (p. 1016) that promotes the 'international performance of a city' (p. 1009). The internal city, on the other hand, is likened to de Certeau's 'practiced place' (1984: 117), which is created 'on ground level, with footsteps' by the 'innumerable collection of singularities' of urban pedestrians (p. 97). The internal city is 'concerned with social inclusion and exclusion, lifestyle, diversity and multiculturalism' (Graham, 2002: 1011). It 'grounds people in their everyday lives' (p. 1016).

Georgiou (2011) notes, 'the city is a location where place does matter' (p. 347), and while the media provide an important '*way out* of place,' they provide an equally important '*way in* to it' (p. 345). Thus, there is a need to understand the ways in which the city as a place is configured by the media 'both in terms of the city's representation and its mediated consumption' (Georgiou, 2011: 344). This research addresses mediated representations of the 'internal city.' I consider how simple, relatable, personal stories communicated through HONY's macro digital media channels contribute to the construction of sense of place, not just for inhabitants of New York at the micro and meso levels, but for outsiders as well.

Cosmopolitanism

City dwellers constantly interact with strangers, with others different from themselves. How people are exposed to and experience difference has been theorized in different fields as *cosmopolitanism*. Cosmopolitanism has evolved as a concept and has many definitions and uses in different contexts (Beck, 2006; Szerszynski & Urry, 2006; Tomlinson, 1999). A common thread in the literature, however, is to conceive of cosmopolitanism as an open approach toward the stranger and the wider world, and a welcoming of difference. In the words of Hannerz (1996: 103), cosmopolitanism 'entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.'

This research project is specifically concerned with what Corpus Ong (2009: 458) calls 'banal cosmopolitanism,' which he describes as 'a performance of nuance and subtlety – defined as much by the ordinary as it is by the extraordinary. And so we turn to the mundane, the quotidian, the everyday.' Banal cosmopolitanism is similar to what Georgiou (2013: 146) calls 'vernacular' cosmopolitanism, which 'reflects the different ways in which urban dwellers try to live with difference, and how their inevitable and usually not chosen encounters with many different *others* become a daily reminder of the diverse and divergent worldviews, practices and moralities that surround them.' Cosmopolitanism is vital to research on any modern city because it reminds us that it is the people within it – the inhabitants, the visitors, the asylum-seekers, the consumers – who make up its dense fabric and give it meaning as a place. This definition is relevant to an analysis of how HONY's photo-narratives construct a sense of place because it focuses on the subtle yet tangible processes that emerge in everyday encounters.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Mediated representations of a city influence worldwide opinion about its openness, tolerance, and hospitality and can have far-reaching effects on its commerce, from destination branding (i.e. how attractive the city appears to potential visitors and dwellers) to transnational financial interactions. How a city is represented also has an influence on individuals' 'ideas, loyalties, a sense of belonging, structures of feeling, ways of life, [and] memories' (Harvey, 2001: 225). Therefore, the 'representational turn' in analyzing the city (Hubbard, 2006) is worthy of ongoing study as technology continues to transform not only the spaces we inhabit but also our physical and mediated relationship with place. In analyzing the mediated representations of New York City on HONY, this research project examines the 'everyday aesthetic' (Murray, 2008) of the 'internal city' (Graham, 2002). Instead of looking at how this is manifested in personal photography or lived experiences of the city, I investigate how HONY uses a simplified aesthetic in its visual and narrative portraits of New Yorkers. My research draws on the findings of Ball-Rokeach et al. about the development of a sense of place through storytelling (2001); however, I focus on how stories that are disseminated via macro digital channels construct a sense of place, both for New Yorkers and for those outside New York who experience the city primarily through digital media.

According to Georgiou (2013: 18), 'the city becomes the place it is through its representations.' But can sense of place be constructed through mediated representations? In this vein, this research addresses the following question: *How do the photo-narratives of* Humans of New York *contribute to the construction of a sense of place in a contemporary urban setting?*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In the first phase of this research project, I used visual content analysis to familiarize myself with the broad representational elements and themes on HONY (see Methodological Procedures: Step One, below). My results indicated that content analysis could not adequately capture the 'expressive content' (Rose, 2007: 72) or mood, of each post, nor could it capture complexities in the image, the narrative caption, or the relationship between the two. By focusing 'exclusively on the composition of an image…[content analysis] says little about the contextual significance of that image' (Rose, 2007: 61). When rigid and systematic methodologies are applied to narratives, Riessman argues, it 'eliminate[s] the sequential and structural features that are hallmarks of narrative. Honouring individual agency and intention is difficult when cases are pooled to make general statements' (2008: 12). As these intricacies are vital to the construction of sense of place through HONY's photo-narratives, content analysis was not used beyond the first phase of the study. To address the primary research question, an in-depth analysis of eight HONY photo-narratives was conducted using a mixed method approach of visual social semiotic analysis and narrative analysis.

Visual Social Semiotic Analysis

Visual analysis is concerned with the 'constructed character' of images (Collier, 2001: 35). It challenges the notion that images are mere records of reality. This methodology assumes that photographs are not just concrete reflections of what is visible; they are also creations of the image-maker. Visual analysis assumes that the image-maker plays a central role in how an image produces meaning. As Collier points out, 'When we use the camera to make a visual record we make choices influenced by our identities and

intentions, choices that are also affected by our relationship with the subject' (2001: 35). In analyzing an image, we are able to understand 'how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see' the 'reality' that an image-maker hopes to present (Foster, 1988: ix). The construction of an image is therefore reliant on the image-maker's perspective and creative autonomy.

The specific visual methodology this research uses is social semiotic analysis. The field of semiology is primarily concerned with the *sign*. According to Bal and Bryson (1991: 243), 'human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself.' Semiotics is largely influenced by the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who argues that a sign is made up of two elements: the *signifier*, or the form a sign takes (i.e. the actual word, object, image), and the *signified*, the concept it represents. Together, they produce meaning and sustain the work of representation. However, the link between the two is arbitrary and signs do not have fixed meaning. In social semiotics, the meaning of signs can only be produced and understood through specific historical and cultural codes (Emmison et al., 2012; Hall, 1997; Rose, 2007). The making of meaning is also influenced by the aesthetics of the image-maker. Kress (2010: 77) notes, 'the sign which the sign-maker has made gives us insight into their 'stance' in the world…[or at least an] indication of the interest of the sign-maker in relation to the specific bit of the world that is at issue.' In other words, texts produce meaning through the interplay of semiotic, ideological, and aesthetic processes that operate within distinctive cultures.

Semiotics involves two layers of description: the *denotative* – what can be easily and precisely decoded – and the *connotative* – the range of interpretations that signs can carry, 'open-ended [including] expressive codes' (Hall, 1981: 226–227). 'Prior narrative beliefs, collective memories and value commitments shape the interpretation and recognition of connotations within the images' (Emmison et al., 2012: 51) which subsequently combine to give ideological value to an image.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis was used to evaluate the caption of each photograph. Berger (1997: 174) comments that humans, rather than being identified as '*Homo sapiens*, man and woman the knower,' could be described as '*Homo narrans*, man and woman the

storytellers, the tellers of tales.' The stories that accompany HONY's photographs are an essential part of its power to alter perceptions of New York and of urban life. In this research, I use Prince's definition of narrative: 'the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes nor entails the other' (1982: 4). Narratives of everyday life are unlike fictional narratives in that they do not always have a beginning, middle, and end. They are often routine and banal (Berger, 1997) and are ever-present in our daily lives as we engage in conversations and recount stories about ourselves and others. While Stanton selects the portion of the interview for each post, the story is told in the words of the subject. These narratives give a psychological depth to the photographs that is rarely found in standard photo captions.

A notable drawback to both of these methods of analysis is that they are subjective and require researchers to incorporate their own impressions and interpretations. According to Lister and Wells (2001: 64–65), visual analysis is 'open and experimental in the ways that it frames its objects of study.' The researcher's observations are 'always embodied and undertaken by someone with an identity. In this sense, there is no neutral looking.' In other words, the researcher is inherently biased. However, other methods that are more objective, such as content analysis, have been demonstrated to be limited in their ability to capture the deeper emotive elements of the photo-narratives.

Methodological procedures

Step One: Visual Content Analysis
The first step in Collier's basic model for visual analysis (2001: 39–40) is an 'open viewing,' or 'open immersion' that allows images to "speak' to us in their own terms.' This allows the researcher to 'observe the data as a whole, look at and listen to its overtones and subtleties' in order to identify 'patterns of significance within the content of the images.' In this step, 130 HONY photo-narratives were examined using visual content analysis. Through the analysis of a larger sample of posts, I was able to form a broad picture of HONY as a whole, identify common representational tools and compositional features, and quantify patterns across Stanton's larger body of work. Visual content analysis yielded data on who is represented on the blog (age, race, gender, number of subjects, narrative subject) and how they are represented (facial expression, gaze, context, shot type).

In a pilot project, 30 HONY posts were coded on 18 variables. Inter-coder reliability results showed that content analysis was not effective in analyzing certain elements, such as narrative theme and treatment. Based on these results, the codebook for an additional 100 photo-narratives was reduced to 14 variables (Appendix A). Thirteen variables achieved a reliability of 0.90 or higher, and one variable achieved a reliability of 0.80 (Appendix B), which Riffe et al. (1998: 128) consider to be acceptable. The visual content analysis results (Appendix C) helped inform the choice of two analytic frameworks for the in-depth analysis of a smaller sample (see Step Three).

Step Two: Identification of central themes and sample selection
Collier's second stage of visual analysis involves categorizing photographs based on central themes and overall patterns (2001: 39). I identified four central themes of human experience in the city: work, family, encounters with strangers, and encounters with bureaucracy. The decision to focus on these four categories was based, in part, on Seamon's framework for people's everyday experiences of the city (1979). In his research on the 'underlying experiential structure of everyday environmental experience' and the 'nature of human existence as it happens in a geographical world' (p. 17), Seamon focuses on three phenomena in the city: movement, rest, and encounter.

Seamon's discussion of movement focuses mainly on people's movement within cities, however this project focuses on people's movement to cities. Work is often what draws people to the city, and New York is understood in popular cartographic imaginations as a place to go to achieve success. Seamon's concept of rest is concerned with 'human attachment to place' (1979: 17), which relates to my category of family. Lastly, Seamon's concept of encounter 'considers the ways in which people observe and notice the world in which they live' (p. 17). I divided the concept of encounter into two categories because city dwellers have distinctly different encounters with other people and with urban bureaucracy.

Two photo-narratives were selected in each category. Since interview captions have become an important feature of HONY and the concept of narrative is central to this research project, the sample was limited to photos with captions that adhered to Prince's definition of narrative (1982). The sample was also limited geographically to only include

posts from New York City. In 2014, Stanton went on a ten-country tour to raise awareness for the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Posts from that period were excluded.

Step Three: Structured visual semiotic and narrative analysis

The final step involved an in-depth visual and narrative analysis of the denotative and connotative elements of eight photo-narratives. Jewitt and Oyama's framework for structured semiotic analysis (2001) was used to analyze each image, and Labov and Waletzky's model for the narrative analysis of personal experience (1997) was used to analyze each interview caption. The selection of these analytic frameworks was informed, in part, by the open viewing process in Step One, and the identification of various aesthetic tools that Stanton uses in representing his subjects.

Jewitt and Oyama's structured semiotic analysis (2001) involves deconstructing three types of meaning in images: representational, interactive, and compositional. Representational meaning is conveyed by the people, places, or things depicted in an image. It refers to visual semantic features that give a particular 'essence' to photographic subjects. They are represented as 'being something, or meaning something, or belonging to some category, or having certain characteristics or components' (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 141). According to Dyer (1982), representational meaning can be divided into four sub-categories: the representation of bodies (age, gender, race, looks), of manner (facial expression, eye contact, pose), of activity (touch, body movement, gesture), and of context (props, settings).

Interactive meaning refers to the ways in which images 'can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame' (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 145). Distance, contact (displayed mainly through facial expressions and gestures), and the camera's point of view are important elements in the interactional meaning of an image; for example, they can convey various levels of familiarity as well as superiority, inferiority, or equality between subject and viewer (Collier, 2001; Dyer, 1982; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Lister & Wells, 2001; Rose, 2007).

Lastly, compositional meaning concerns the overall look and spatial organization of an image, relying on visual elements such as color, lighting, and framing. This 'determines

the extent to which the visual and the verbal elements achieve a sense of coherence to the whole unit' (Moya Guijarro, Sanz, & Jesús, 2008: 1065). The compositional meaning of each image was used in conjunction with narrative analysis to evaluate each photo-narrative as a whole.

To analyze each interview caption, I used Labov and Waletzky's model for the narrative analysis of personal experience (1997) as a point of departure. Their sociolinguistic approach 'maps internal relations between different narrative stages' and is useful 'for the exploration of linguistic markers of the narrative genre' (Eisenlauer & Hoffmann, 2010: 93). According to Labov and Waletzky's model, a fully formed narrative includes six components: abstract (optional, provides short summary of events in the form of a headline or label), orientation (sets the scene with time, place, situation, and/or participants), complicating action (narrative core, sequence of events), resolution (what finally happened, consequence of story's climax), evaluation (significance, meaning, and interpretation of action by narrator), and coda (optional, returns story to present).

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

A detailed visual semiotic and narrative analysis of eight HONY photo-narratives was conducted. Due to length constraints of this paper, a somewhat abbreviated analysis is presented here, organized into four categories of urban experience: work, family, encounters with strangers, and encounters with bureaucracy.

Work in the City

> I am leaving today
> I want to be a part of it
> New York, New York
>
> I want to wake up in a city
> That never sleeps
> And find I'm A Number One
> Top of the list
> King of the hill – Frank Sinatra, 'New York, New York' (1979)

Frank Sinatra's lyrics capture New York's reputation as a magnet for success. The city has long been viewed as a place where people come from all over the world to fulfill their

career hopes and dreams. The following photo-narratives provide different accounts of moving to, living, and working in New York City.

Criminal work

A young woman sits on the entry steps of an urban building between two rusty railings. She looks straight into the camera with a neutral expression. In one corner of the image, we see people sitting on the other side of the railing. One of them is engaged in lively conversation with friends. She is smiling and facing away from the main subject of the photograph. Her left foot is blurry and raised as if she were stomping her foot with laughter.

Several representational features work to illustrate the main subject's loneliness. Her neutral expression contrasts with the laughter of the woman on the other side of the railing. She appears excluded from the fun occurring nearby. Her professional dress stands in contrast to the other woman's casual clothing. Her body language (shoulders, hands, and feet turned inwards) also makes her appear closed off and shy. She is framed between two railings, as if barricaded by them. The physical barrier of the railings connote separation and disconnection (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 150). While the main subject faces the camera directly, the distance between the subject and the camera suggests an impersonal relationship with the viewer (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 147).

In the caption, the woman orients her story at the start of her career studying criminal law. In the first five of six sentences in her narrative, she chronicles her successful and diverse career. The complicating action is Stanton's interjection with a personal question about her biggest crime in life. The resolution is her poignant answer: 'I've never been a constant in anyone's life.' She seems to be reflecting on the sacrifices made for her career. The companionship of the group of friends next to her is a depiction of that sacrifice. Her facial expression is not that of a successful woman thriving in an international law career. It is one of a sad young woman who yearns for companionship.

Criminal Work

"I did my undergrad in law in Australia, focusing on domestic criminal work. Then I moved to the Hague in The Netherlands to work for the office of the prosecutor in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Then I worked for an NGO in Johannesburg that uses the South African constitution to enforce human rights. Then I went back to Australia to clerk for a justice of the supreme court. Now I'm here studying international criminal prosecution, though I'm considering switching to transitional justice."
"What's the biggest crime you've ever committed?"
"I've never been a constant in anyone's life."

Migrant Baby

"It was very tough at first. Moving to a new country is like being born all over again. You are just like a baby. You can't speak, you can't move around, and you don't know the culture."

The railing's shadow lends a connotation of imprisonment. The young woman's career in criminal justice involves imprisoning others, but it is also emotionally imprisoning her. Her private feelings of loneliness are expressed on the edge of a public city sidewalk. While Meyrowitz (1985) and others have challenged the relevance of place in modernity, here the subject's expression of humanism is positioned and intimately bound with the urban space she occupies.

Migrant Baby

A middle-aged black man is on his hands and knees polishing the transom of an apartment building doorway. The gold door with ornamental grillwork and the red carpet leading up to it signal it is an upscale building. The man's uniform and gloves, and the nearby cleaning products indicate he is a building employee. His task on hands and knees signals his job is a menial one. The photograph's lighting serves to reinforce his low position. He is dimly lit against the bright background of the lobby. By photographing the man on hands and knees, Stanton infantilizes him (Hall, 1997: 262) and reinforces the racial stereotype of a lowly black man working for an affluent New York employer.

Stanton usually constructs his blog posts as cohesive units where there is synergy between the photograph and the narrative selected to accompany it. However in this post, the image conflicts with the narrative's eloquent delivery. The subject describes his immigration to New York like 'being born all over again.' He compares his sense of helplessness in a new country to that of a baby, unable to comprehend his new environment. We learn the subject could not speak English when he arrived, yet as he tells his story he is articulate in describing his difficult migrant experience. His poignant and astute comment is in stark contrast to the image of him on hands and knees as if he were still a baby.

Given the wording of the caption, Stanton's decision to photograph this man on hands and knees may have been an obvious artistic choice, but it is an overly simplistic representation of a migrant. The upscale lobby symbolizes the powerful American employer whose land of economic opportunity offers most immigrants only menial and powerless positions. Here, we are confronted with a negative image of the city: unwelcoming and hard to navigate.

By saying his experience was difficult 'at first,' the subject indicates he has overcome that difficulty. He has succeeded in transforming the hard space of the city into a more manageable place. However, the photograph does not portray this transformation. The dichotomy of the image and the caption underscores the tension between the economic value of migrants who move to the city and their struggle to find social and cultural acceptance within it.
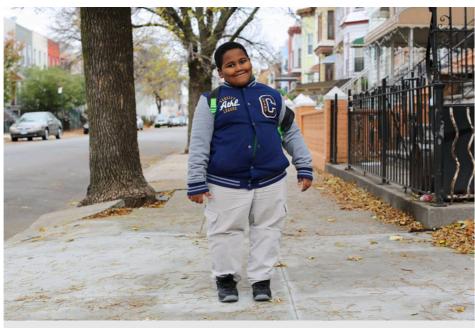
These two photo-narratives capture key aspects of the American ethos of work, opportunity, and success that is central to New York's identity. There is a tension between yearning and ambition on one hand and personal sacrifice and isolation on the other. Both the lawyer and the janitor moved to a city of ten million people and encountered isolation. 'At its extreme we have a picture of the urbanite as a person who is *physically* embedded in a tight web of others yet feels *psychologically* almost totally isolated' (Krupat, 1985: 131). These photo-narratives touch on both 'pro' and 'anti' urban myths by depicting New York as a land of opportunity and also as a place where lonely strangers coexist. By providing different personal accounts of work, HONY offers a more complete picture of what moving to New York can be like. These photo-narratives communicate a negative sense of place by evoking personal feelings of exclusion and loneliness.

Family in the City

> All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home. – Gaston Bachelard (1992: 5)

Feeling 'at home' is an essential ingredient of people's relationship with space. No matter where we go, our home is the spatial center around which our activities are oriented. Homes give people 'spatial and place identity' (Seamon, 1979: 73). Human spatial behaviour is related to family because it is rooted in an emotional attachment to places where people have formed close-knit ties with others. While home is generally depicted as the place where family life occurs, the following photo-narratives communicate an experience of family on the sidewalks of the city.

Heroic Dishes

"What's the most heroic thing you've ever done?"
"Wash the dishes without being asked."

5 a.m. Flowers

"What are the flowers for?"
"We woke up at 5 AM today. So we're saying 'sorry.'"

Heroic Dishes

A young black boy stands on an empty sidewalk. We know he is in New York – a big, bustling, crowded city – but he is alone. The houses and trees in the background signal he is in a residential neighborhood.

He is wearing khakis and an athletic jacket with 'Champ' embroidered on the front. His right pant leg is tucked into his shoe, his left backpack strap is coming off his shoulder, and the middle button of his jacket is unfastened. He looks straight into the camera with a bright, chubby-cheeked, closed-mouth smile. These signs indicate he is innocent, cheery, carelessly dishevelled, and endearing. His direct eye contact with the viewer 'increases audience identification and involvement' (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 147) and aids in forming feelings of affection toward him (Dyer, 1982: 99).

In the caption, the boy says the most heroic thing he's ever done is 'wash the dishes without being asked.' He defines heroism in terms of his contribution to his family rather than superheroes in comic books, which one might expect of a boy his age. The power of this narrative lies in its simplicity. He is describing an ordinary part of his life – washing dishes – but to him, it is exceptional. Taken from below, the photograph makes the boy appear taller and more valiant, accentuating his role as a hero. His clothing and backpack suggest he is walking home from school and while he is alone on a city street, his smile indicates that he feels safe and secure. He seems proud of his independence, just as he is proud to be a contributor to his family by washing dishes without being asked.

This photo-narrative stands in contrast to stereotypical 'metropolitan spaces of anxiety' which have historically fused 'ethnicity, location and the spatial imaginaries of danger' (Keith, 2009: 541). This image of a happy, safe boy on a city sidewalk who feels a strong sense of duty to his family contradicts stereotypical images of black urban youth in marginal spaces of the city where poverty and crime are rife and parental presence is scarce.

5 a.m. Flowers

A young man stands next to a stroller with a toddler in it. He rests one hand on the stroller and holds a bouquet of flowers in the other. He looks down at the child with a fond look. Trees and brownstones line the street, signaling this is a residential neighborhood. The brownstones in particular signal stability and a desire of its residents to set down roots for the 'long haul' (Santora, 2012).

Stanton orients the narrative by asking: 'What are the flowers for?' It serves as a conversation starter and acknowledges the symbolic significance of flowers as a gesture. The action of the narrative is that the family was woken up very early, implying a disturbance in the day. The resolution is in the form of an answer to Stanton's question: the flowers are for 'saying sorry.'

The image of a happy, attractive family evokes positive feelings (Dyer, 1982: 92) and there are several signifiers that anchor this story as an endearing scene about love and family. The father's gaze upon his son is an indicator of his paternal love. While the photo is a long shot, the physical proximity of father to son signals their emotional closeness (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 147). Their similar outfits underline their close bond. By saying 'we,' the father shares responsibility with his son instead of placing sole blame on him for the early waking of the family.

A toddler waking up early is a common family occurrence that does not typically require a grand apology. The kind gesture of flowers suggests this is a caring and considerate family. The angle of the photograph also portrays the family in a positive light. It is taken from the child's perspective, which makes the father seem taller than the viewer. This aids in portraying him as a respectable, protective father and partner.

Images of happy, healthy children on the streets of New York humanize the city and contradict stereotypes of cities as depersonalized and dangerous. These two photos are a departure from the more typical image of happy family life depicted in suburban homes and backyards. By juxtaposing family-oriented narratives with the sidewalks of a city, these posts construct a sense of place in New York City where children can walk safely, family responsibility is valued, and people are attentive and caring of one another. These posts transform the abstract public space of the city sidewalk into a safe place for

children. The simplicity and subtle moral quality of these family-oriented stories communicate a sense of place in New York.

Encounters with Strangers in the City

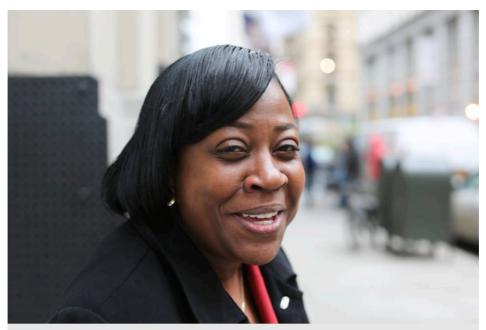> To live in a city is to live in a world with strangers. – Edward Krupat (1985: 59)

The high population density of cities causes strangers to have fleeting relationships with one another, both positive and negative. Even if encounters are transient, they can have lasting effects on people and their relationship to their urban environment.

Eugene was his name

At its core, HONY is about encounters with strangers. Stanton approaches people as a stranger and has meaningful encounters with them. Here, Stanton takes a medium close-up photograph of a middle-aged woman on a city sidewalk. Her warm facial expression (smiling and either in mid-sentence or mid-laughter) and close proximity to the camera suggest this interaction is casual and friendly (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 147). The camera angle at eye-level implies an equal relationship between the subject and viewer (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 135). We become engaged on a more personal level with the story she is telling.

We immediately learn that this story is about a 'crazy looking' stranger who appears homeless. The woman says, 'we were about to close the door on him.' This coincides with the 'anti' urban myth that cities are full of strangers who come uninvited to your door. The mother's intervention and offer of food is the complicating action of the narrative. She teaches her children a moral lesson not to judge people on their appearance. The mother's character is embodied in her act of kindness but also in her resolve to teach her children to be open and kind to others. The man returns in the resolution of the story, 'clean shaven, and wearing a suit,' to repay her mother for her kindness. This image of him contrasts with the negative one at the opening of the narrative. The story's message is highlighted by the narrator's evaluation at the end of the narrative: 'I'll never forget it! Eugene was his name.' He is no longer an anonymous stranger, but a man with a name.

Eugene was his name

"One day a crazy looking homeless guy came to the door, and we were about to close the door on him, but my mother saw him and shouted: 'Hey Eugene!' She knew his name! Then she ran around the kitchen putting all sorts of food into tupperware, and brought it out to him. After he left, we asked my mom why she gave him so much food. She told us: 'You never know how Jesus is going to look when he shows up.' She was always saying that– it was a spiritual thing. Then you know what happened? Two months later, that same man showed up on the door step, clean shaven, and wearing a suit. And he had an envelope with money for my mother. 'Ms. Rosa always believed in me,' he said. I'll never forget it! Eugene was his name."

Blind Ice Cream

"Right after I lost vision in my eye, I was so bad at walking that I ran into a girl eating ice cream, and knocked her cone out of her hand. She screamed: 'Are you blind!?!?' I turned to her and said: 'I am blind actually, I'm so sorry, I'll buy you a new cone.' And she said: 'Oh my God! I'm so sorry! Don't worry! It's no problem at all! I'll buy another one.' So we walked into the ice cream store together, and the clerk said: 'I heard the whole thing. Ice cream is free.'"

According to Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 146), 'To see people from a distance is to see people in a way we would normally only see strangers…we see them in outline, impersonally, as types rather than as individuals.' Stanton photographs his encounter with this woman, who begins as a stranger to him, with a close shot, suggesting familiarity. This underlines the message of the subject's narrative about her transformative encounter with a stranger. Through her photograph and her story, we are given a sense of who she is as a person. Just as Eugene transforms from a 'crazy looking' stranger in her story, the woman is no longer an anonymous stranger to us.

In this case, place is relevant not because of the location of the narrative; we are given no information about where the encounter with Eugene occurred. Instead, place is relevant because of the dual encounters with strangers that are depicted, one of which is on a New York City street. The subject encodes the moral of her narrative into the urban space of the sidewalk where she recounts it.

Blind Ice Cream
In this close-up photograph, we are immediately drawn to the details of a man's face. His most striking feature is his eyes, which are two different colours. The indents on his nose signify he was wearing glasses before the photograph was taken. He looks straight into the camera with a closed-mouth smile.

The close-up shot and camera angle at eye-level suggest an intimate and equal relationship between the photographer and subject that the viewer is invited to take part in (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 147). We can see details of the man's face that we would not normally notice had we passed him as a stranger on the street. The subject's gaze straight into the lens allows us to look into his eyes that are usually behind glasses. By seeing a part of the subject that is normally concealed, we are more intimately connected to the subject and involved in his story.

The narrative orients around the focal point of the image – the man's eyes – and his experience after losing vision in one eye. The complicating action is his encounter with a stranger. After he bumps into her, she screams, 'Are you blind!?!?' His kindness is displayed in his calm reaction and apology for knocking over her ice cream. Her

immediate recognition of her rude behaviour transforms her from an unpleasant stranger to someone who is sorry for her insensitive words. The resolution is when the ice cream store clerk offers them both free ice creams after overhearing the encounter. It is a positive ending to what began as an unpleasant encounter between strangers.

These photo-narratives play into both the 'anti' and 'pro' urban myths. Each story portrays an evolution from a cold and distant encounter with a stranger to a friendly experience. The stories demonstrate the dichotomous nature of the city – hostile at one extreme and friendly at the other. In each story, an encounter with a stranger leads to moral growth. The stories allow our imaginations to extend beyond ourselves to others, and they invite us to connect with similar moments in our own lives – when we were tempted to shut out a stranger, to speak harshly, or to look the other way. They encourage us to be open and to participate in urban life from a more cosmopolitan point of view. This form of cosmopolitanism is developed through a daily encountering of different others; it is banal (Corpus Ong, 2009), vernacular (Georgiou, 2013), and local. These two stories underscore an interdependence and interconnectedness of strangers in the city and portray New York as a cosmopolitan place. HONY constructs a sense of place through our emotional connection to photo-narratives such as these.

Encounters with Bureaucracy in the City

A person's encounters with urban bureaucracy are less frequent than encounters with other people, but they leave a lasting impression due to the power dynamic between an individual and a government institution. These two photo-narratives convey ways in which city dwellers are both reliant upon and subject to city bureaucracies.

Good things happen to good people
A young man sits alone on the floor of a public building, leaning against a wall. He has a neatly trimmed beard and is casually dressed in black with slightly scuffed shoes and a silver chain coming out of his pocket. Beside him are a jacket and duffle bag. His casual body language makes him appear approachable. He is photographed from the side, looking over his right arm straight into the camera. His position in relation to the camera suggests that the viewer is on the sidelines (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 135) but his gaze draws the viewer in.

Good things happen to good people

"There's a spot in front of the Pennsylvania Hotel that they let us sleep at night as long as we clean up after ourselves. I was sitting there the other night, when a man walked by and handed me a backpack. My other backpack had just broken, and so it was exactly what I needed. I thought– 'That's a blessing.' Good things happen to good people. You really do catch what you throw."

Teddy Bears

"I built this book cart after my bagpipes got stolen, because I couldn't afford a new set of bagpipes, and I needed to support myself. I used to sell teddy bears too. But one day last year, three undercover policeman showed up and took me to jail. It was just like a TV show– one was dressed like a rapper, the other like a hooker, and the other a tourist. They said you need a permit to sell manufactured goods. You're allowed to sell art, just not manufactured goods. I tried to tell them that my teddy bears were art because I dressed them and customized them. But all they said was: 'You're going to jail.' I had to spend 2 days in jail. The judge threw out the case. But they never gave me back my teddy bears."

The narrative immediately reveals the man is homeless. He talks about an area outside a hotel where 'they let us sleep at night as long as we clean up after ourselves.' The stigma of homelessness usually 'resonates with the same kinds of metaphors that have been used to describe troublesome 'others' throughout history, with ideas of homeless individuals as dirty, deviant and dangerous' (Hubbard, 2006: 112). The neat and attractive appearance of this man does not fit the homeless stereotype, nor does his narrative. By saying, 'good things happen to good people' and 'you really do catch what you throw,' the subject defines himself as a worthy person deserving of the gift of a backpack from a stranger. The narrative also counters the stereotype of New Yorkers as cold and uncaring. Contrary to the stereotype of business owners shooing away the homeless, the hotel staff show kindness by allowing them to sleep outside the hotel at night. However, the very fact of this man's homelessness signifies a failure of the city to provide basic social services to its citizens.

This photo-narrative both confirms and refutes the myth of the city as an uncaring place. The city bureaucracy is failing to care for its citizens, but city inhabitants and businesses – strangers to the subject – offer him a helping hand. The hotel provides a place to sleep at night and a stranger gives him a backpack, which was 'exactly what [he] needed…a blessing.' The representation of a cold bureaucracy juxtaposed with the kindness of strangers reveals the cosmopolitan ethos of those living in close proximity with one another. It emphasizes 'a common identity of being human and thus a moral obligation' to others (Orgad, 2012: 111).

Teddy Bears

A book vendor stands next to his cart on a busy city sidewalk. His clothes signal a quirky and unique personality. Behind his glasses, one sees a soft, neutral facial expression. His cart's varied surfaces are filled with messily stacked books. A hand-written sign on a box of diet books reads, 'EAT 'EM UP!' Scattered around the cart are a black briefcase, a plastic bin, trash, and a wicker shelf standing crookedly and sagging with more books. The messy clutter of the cart makes it look low-cost and homemade, and contributes to the man's image as eccentric.

Signs of a fast-paced modern city surround him. Bikes are locked to a bike rack, blue Citi Bikes are docked and ready for hire, and cars sit in traffic on the street behind him. In the background are office buildings, street signs, and a tree-lined city square.

The subject orients the narrative saying: 'I built this book cart after my bagpipes got stolen.' It is made immediately clear that the subject is a victim. The opening of his story contributes to the subject's quirky image since playing bagpipes and selling teddy bears are both uncommon means of making a living. The complicating action occurs when three undercover police arrest him. He describes the experience as 'just like a TV show.' His narrative toes the line between the imagined and the real. Only in fiction can we conceive of undercover cops arresting an old man for selling teddy bears. His clothing – corduroy pants, a shirt with billowy sleeves, and red suspenders (braces) – contributes to the fictional image. His arrest also suggests arbitrary, fictional criminalization.

The subject draws our sympathy as he explains that he tried to convince the police his teddy bears were 'art because I dressed them.' There is a dialectic in the narrative between powerful insiders who are not what they appear to be (the undercover cops) and a powerless outsider whose image and words coherently reveal a unique and honest individual. The police play the role of heartless bureaucrats, not only by criminalizing a harmless and powerless man, but also by being arbiters of what does and does not constitute 'art.' We are left with a heavy heart at the resolution of the story: 'The judge threw out the case. But they never gave me back my teddy bears.'

The homeless and underemployed have played an important part in mythologies of the city (Cresswell, 1996; Hubbard, 2006). These photo-narratives underline the tension between city authorities and people who occupy city streets in ways that are considered anti-normative. Geographic order enforced by authorities is often at odds with the ways in which people use public city spaces. These two subjects are representatives of 'a group whose everyday spatial practice brings them into conflict with the authorities' (Hubbard, 2006: 111). They are 'forced to occupy public space for both economic and social reasons…because they have been evicted from the private spaces of the real estate market' (p. 111). In the 'anti' urban myth, the homeless and unemployed are spurned and stigmatized for their alternative uses of public space that contradict expectations of place. These photo-narratives support the stereotype of an uncaring city bureaucracy,

but HONY's sympathetic portrayal of these men contradicts the 'anti' urban myth. By focusing on human activity that goes against the norm, these posts highlight the 'moral and social order immanent in everyday space' (Hubbard, 2006: 113). HONY offers a human and cosmopolitan account of New York City by giving a voice to people who are typically marginalized and voiceless in mainstream media.

Discussion

New media and visuality
This case study of HONY suggests ways in which new media can provide broader-based and more plural cartographic knowledges of the city (Harvey, 2001). While not absent of the verbal, HONY relies heavily on the use of images that have a banal, everyday, 'snapshot aesthetic' (Murray, 2008). Stanton's photo-narratives provide short, relatable accounts of people's experience that often have a moral to the story. The images and captions, taken together, contain layers of meaning.

In this age of new visibility (Thompson, 2005) and visuality, we need to be consciously aware that images do not represent objective reality; rather they are crafted by their image-makers. Silverstone (2005: 190) aptly notes that the media have the power to inform but also to deceive, to simultaneously represent and misrepresent, to both reflect and construct reality. Price (1997: 95) remarks, 'we speak of *taking* photographs rather than *making* them, because the marks of the construction are not immediately visible; they have the appearance of having come about as a function of the world itself rather than as carefully fabricated cultural objects.' HONY is curated; it expresses one person's artistic point of view. This is particularly evident in the photo-narrative *Migrant Baby*, in which Stanton opted to juxtapose the subject's words with an infantilizing image of him. HONY photo-narratives are constructed to evoke feelings of empathy and emotional connection. For these reasons, HONY has the power to give us a false sense of understanding New York City and its inhabitants. It can potentially increase gaps between people by aestheticizing images of distant others and their experiences. The image-maker's visual manipulations – through such elements as camera angle and proximity of the camera to the subject – convey almost subconscious messages to viewers. By our being more consciously aware of this, we can respond more intelligently to the media messages we absorb.

Stereotypes of the city debunked

The *New York Times* masthead reads 'All the News That's Fit to Print.' HONY's photo-narratives are almost the opposite of that as Stanton shares stories of ordinary people that would not be considered newsworthy. HONY's portrayal of New York explores a different side of urban life and empathizes with urban dwellers. We learn that strangers strive and struggle just as we do.

HONY's photo-narratives within the confines of city spaces provide insight into the ways in which cities are constructed by the media. In this age of big media, myths about New York have been formed in large part by commercial fiction and by fear. TV shows, movies, novels, and news channels that use New York as a backdrop for dramas focus largely on crime and corruption. They present extreme versions of the city that have little to do with most urban dwellers' everyday experiences. HONY, on the other hand, finds drama in short interactions with strangers and their simple, meaningful narratives. Stanton's depictions of life in the public spaces of New York extend the city's image and story beyond black and white hyperbolic fictions. They more fully inform our cartographic imaginations of the city.

HONY photo-narratives both confirm and contradict various urban stereotypes that convey both utopian and dystopian visions of the city. HONY's overall message is more aligned with Foucault's heterotopia (1986), in which the practices and experiences of place alter the material intentions of ordered space in society. HONY successfully represents heterotopia as 'the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves' (Foucault, 1986: 23) and 'those 'other' spaces and places that are often obscured from view' (Soja, 1995: 15). On HONY, the heterotopia that is represented is multi-faceted, juxtaposing commonality with difference, openness and kindness with isolation and unfriendliness. Through HONY's photo-narratives about work, we are given a more complex view of the work experiences of those who are pursuing the 'American Dream.' HONY's posts about family challenge the notion that cities are unfit places to raise children. A cosmopolitan view of big cities is presented in the photo-narratives about uplifting encounters with strangers and mixed encounters with city authority. HONY's representations of urban experiences are grounded and relatable; they do not neatly conform to stereotypical urban fictions. By diving beneath the surface of stereotypes,

HONY enables its followers to place themselves emotionally in the scene, thereby constructing a human and cosmopolitan sense of place in the abstract spaces of New York City.

Sense of place in city space

My research suggests there are emotional and human processes at work, beyond the material aspects of a city, that construct a sense of place within it. All eight photographs in this research study were taken in New York City, but there are no obvious visual or verbal cues that specifically refer to New York. Iconic landmarks, such as the Empire State building and Statue of Liberty, do not feature. These posts lack the specificity that creating a sense of place traditionally requires. The parks, sidewalks, and train stations that HONY's subjects are photographed in are clearly urban spaces, but it is through the blog's title that these images and experiences become rooted in our collective understanding of New York as a place. Together, HONY's photo-narratives act as a cohesive whole that constructs a sense of place through a spatial construction of the social imaginary. The mediated representations of how people live and experience one another in close proximity in the city contribute to transforming disconnected city spaces into meaningful, value-laden places. When tied to New York City as part of a single blog, the photo-narratives are given more power and meaning as 'different stories become entangled in a single urban reality' (Georgiou, 2013: 11). HONY's photo-narratives humanize New York City and allow a sense of place to be constructed within it.

In calling his blog *Humans of New York*, Stanton indicates that his blog offers snapshots of human experience. HONY photo-narratives encode human values through experiences in the city and are a celebration of the multi-faceted human condition. Through multiple local perspectives, HONY constructs a cosmopolitan representation of New York. 'Cosmopolitanism bereft of geographical specificity,' Harvey warns, 'remains abstracted and alienated reason' (2001: 211). HONY's demonstration of cosmopolitanism on a micro, street level provides a more grounded and relatable understanding of the term. It is people who make New York the city that it is, more than monuments or news stories. Stanton becomes familiar with the strangers he encounters on the streets of New York and his photo-narratives invite HONY followers to do the same. Unlike street photographers, who capture distant expressions of people unaware they are being photographed, Stanton's posed subjects connect with the photographer, and therefore

with the blog's followers. The frankness of the subjects, in both image and narrative, disclose their essence and collectively portray an essence of their city. HONY's followers develop an emotional attachment to the subjects and to the city; we feel a familiarity with the city and its residents. A cosmopolitan vision of the city and its humans emerges.

Storytelling, both fact and fiction, 'is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine' (White, 1981: 14). In other words, visual and written narratives that circulate in the media superimpose moral accounts on the moments they describe. Focusing on values surrounding work, family, encounters with strangers, and encounters with bureaucracy, this research demonstrates that HONY's photo-narratives help transform urban spaces into meaningful places, thereby contributing to the construction of a sense of place in New York. At the micro and meso levels, the big, multi-faceted, multi-community conglomeration of ten million people that is New York City is rendered understandable and accessible. At a macro level, it is possible that these stories become not just about New York City specifically, but about the experience of big city life. This helps explain HONY's popularity outside New York. To the extent that HONY provides a sense of place that extends beyond New York, it may dispel some of the anxiety people feel with the unknowns of modern life in the big city. As its title suggests, HONY humanizes New York, and in doing so, it helps humanize big city living.

CONCLUSION

> [I was] determined to 'trap' life – to preserve life in the act of living. Above all, I craved to seize the whole essence in the confines of a single photograph. – Henri Cartier-Bresson (quoted in Sontag, 1977: 185)

Through new media, images have become the powerful communicators of our time. To outsiders, big cities are unfamiliar places that are only made visible through second-hand stories and mediated representations. Urban myths in the media that conform to either 'the ideal of the metropolis,' or 'the counter-ideal of the stranger' (Rundell, 2014: 9) demonstrate our need to understand how cities are represented in the media, and how those representations affect our geographic imaginations, the ways in which we

experience the city and our place within it. Georgiou aptly notes that 'the ways in which the city is shared, communicated and symbolically constructed can have enormous consequences for cultural and social life: most importantly, in the ways in which we are exposed to each other, and understand or misunderstand each other, in an increasingly mediated urban world' (2013: 3).

HONY photo-narratives do not readily conform to simplistic, black and white urban myths. They provide a nuanced view of city life that 'perhaps better reflects the complexity of the social experience and representation of urban places' (Hubbard, 2006: 67). How do we know HONY's photo-narratives represent the 'real New York'? We don't. Because there is no single 'real New York.' What the blog does provide is an alternative version of New York's story, made up of thousands of portraits of city dwellers. Taken as a whole, a portrait of New York emerges that is different from the portrayals of New York in the mainstream media or in fiction that uses New York as its stage. Through images and stories of thousands of New Yorkers, HONY constructs New York as a more varied, human, and cosmopolitan city. HONY's subjects occupy city spaces that lack cues about physical location, but their stories represent New York as a place laden with meaning and value, thereby constructing a mediated sense of place and fostering a more cosmopolitan understanding of global cities. The personal moments that Stanton records in the photo-narratives of HONY create a sense of place not just for its inhabitants, but arguably for its followers outside New York as well.

Through HONY, Stanton maps a social geography of New York City by making public key moments in the lives of individual inhabitants of the city, and by turning encounters with strangers into meaningful and familiar experiences. Unlike fictional or iconic representations of the city, HONY relies on simple (even plain) images and poignant, personal stories to convey a multi-faceted essence of New York City. This research shows that culture and place are bound together and intimately linked in the blog's representations of family, work, encounters with strangers, and encounters with bureaucracy on the streets of the city. HONY's photo-narratives communicate the experiences of urban dwellers and the distances between them – both spatial and psychological – that contribute to a broader-based, more plural understanding and imagining of New York City and big cities in general.

This research also points to the importance of media as a moral force (Silverstone, 2005). As the mainstream media places particular emphasis on stories that sell, we are given distorted perceptions of cities. 'Visibility in the media, in image and narrative, is a way of claiming recognition and exercising power' (Orgad, 2012: 5). HONY is an example of how, by presenting thousands of stories that are morally grounded yet relatable on an emotional level, social media can adjust these perceptions and provide a counter-balance to traditional urban myths. Griffin (2008) states that photography has the unique power to 'make a real connection to people and can be employed as a positive agent for understanding the challenges and opportunities facing our world today.' Berger (1997) suggests that our ability to tell stories defines us as human. Much as *Life* magazine became the 'Show-Book of the World,' Brandon Stanton's *Humans of New York* blog has become a 'Show-Book of New York,' presenting a complex portrait of life in New York and the big city through photos and short narratives. Urban myths still exist – about big cities in general and New York City in particular – and HONY's representations of New York are filtered through the artistic lens of one person. However the New York City people create in their geographic imaginations is a little less black and white because of the thousands of faces and short personal stories on HONY. Other people's stories become ours.

The conclusions of this study are a starting point for future research. Future investigations of the construction of sense of place could explore representations of place in other new media and the ongoing tensions between digital technology and place. A second phase of this research project could examine the *reception* side of HONY to gauge the extent and nature of the impact of HONY on New Yorkers of different ages and socio-economic groups as well as followers outside of New York with various levels of personal experience with the city. An analysis of the comments section, along with interviews of followers of the blog, could provide a more holistic understanding of HONY's social impact and its ability to construct sense of place. Such research may point to individual and social changes that can be associated with a blog of personal photo-narratives such as *Humans of New York*.

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APPENDIX A

Content Analysis Coding Frame – Final Version

ID   Unique identification number allocated to each post

Date   Date of post (dd/mm/yy)

V1   **NUMBER**: number of people in photograph
0   None
1   One
2   Two
3   Three
4   Four +

V2   **SHOT TYPE**
1   Long shot (subject's entire body)
2   Mid shot (subject's knees/waist up)
3   Medium close-up (subject's head and shoulders)
4   Close-up shot (subject's head)
5   Extreme close-up shot (extreme close-up of subject's face)
6   Detail (extreme detail of other part of subject's body or object)

V3   **CONTEXT**
0   Not clear/unable to determine
1   Photo taken in a private indoor place (i.e. home, office)
2   Photo taken in a private outdoor place (i.e. garden)
3   Photo taken in a public indoor place (i.e. store, library, restaurant, or coffee shop)
4   Photo taken in a public outdoor place (i.e. park, metro, street)
5   Photo taken inside/indeterminate
6   Photo taken outside/indeterminate
99   Other

For V4-V7 images with more than one person, code each person separately from left to right, using letters to distinguish each person (i.e. person on far left would be coded V2, followed by V2A, V2B, etc.). In photographs with only one person, leave letter cells blank.

V4   **GENDER:** Gender of the subject(s)
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   Male
2   Female
3   Other

V5   **RACE:** Race of the subject(s)
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   African/African-American
2   Asian/Asian-American
3   Caucasian – Middle Eastern
4   Caucasian – White
5   Hispanic/Latino

6   Indian Asian
7   Native American
8   Mixed Race
99   Other

V6   AGE: Estimated age of the subject(s)
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   Chile
2   Adolescent
3   Young adult
4   Middle age/Mature adult
5   Elderly

For V7-V11, each subject may only exhibit one behaviour. For images with more than one person, code each person separately from left to right, using letters to distinguish each person (i.e. person on far left would be coded V2, followed by V2A, V2B, etc.). In photographs with only one person, leave letter cells blank.

V7   GAZE
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   Looking straight at camera
2   Looking in the direction of the camera but not looking directly into the lens
3   Looking at the camera out of the corner of the eyes
4   Not looking at the camera, looking to the left or right
5   Not looking at the camera, looking up or down

V8   MOUTH
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   Biting lip
2   Downturned/frown
3   Funny/goofy face
4   Laughing
5   Neutral
6   Object in mouth (i.e. cigarette)
7   Puckered lips (lips are thrust out as if in a kiss or pout)
8   Pursed lips
9   Smiling (full closed lip or full teeth smile)
10   Smirking
11   Talking/mid-sentence
12   Tongue sticking out of mouth
99   Other

V9   BODY DIRECTION
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   Body is facing camera directly
2   Body is turned partly away from camera (front of body visible)
3   Body is completely turned away (no part of front is visible)

V11   **TOUCH**: Coding for group photos only
0   Can't determine/unclear/individual portrait
1   Arms/hands around shoulders or on waist
2   Bodies touching
3   Faces or heads touching
4   Holding Hands
5   Kissing
6   No touching
99   Other

For V11-V14, please refer to the caption and photograph.

V11   **NUMBER OF SUBJECTS**: How many subjects are mentioned in the caption (including mentions of self/'I' and animals)?
0   None
1   One
2   Two
3   Three
4   Four +   (Code 4+ if group of people is mentioned)

V12   **STORY SUBJECTS**: Who is mentioned in the caption? Include all that apply in numerical order (use V12, V12A, V12B, etc. for multiple subjects)
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   Animal(s)
2   Celebrity(ies)/historical figure(s)/icon(s)
3   Classmate(s)
4   Coworker(s)/employer(s)/ employee(s)
5   Family – child(ren)
6   Family – grandchild(ren)
7   Family – grandparent(s)
8   Family – other
9   Family – parent(s)
10   Family – sibling(s)
11   Friend(s)
12   Group(s) of people (i.e. cultural/ ethnic/ regional group, and 'other' parents/ doctors/ students, etc.)
13   Object(s)
14   Romantic partner/significant other (current or past)
15   Self
16   Stranger(s)
17   Student(s)
18   Teacher(s)
99   Other

V13   **STORY TONE**
0   Can't determine/unclear
1   Positive
2   Negative
3   Mixed (both positive and negative)
4   Neutral

V14   PHOTO/TEXT RELATIONSHIP
0   Can't determine/unclear/neither
1   There is continuity between the photo and caption (i.e. expected or congruous)
2   There is a disconnect between the photo and caption (i.e. surprising juxtaposition)

APPENDIX B

Content Analysis – Pilot Study Inter-Coder Reliability Results

Agreed (a): Codes agreed upon between coder 1 and coder 2
Total (t): Total coding decisions
ICR (r): Inter-coder reliability (ratio)= a/t

	Agreed (a)	Total (t)	ICR (r)
Date	30	30	1.00
V1	30	30	1.00
V2	30	30	1.00
V3	29	30	0.97
V4	29	30	0.97
V4A	30	30	1.00
V4B	30	30	1.00
V5	27	30	0.90
V5A	28	30	0.93
V5B	30	30	1.00
V6	27	30	0.90
V6A	30	30	1.00
V6B	30	30	1.00
V7	28	30	0.93
V7A	28	30	0.93
V7B	30	30	1.00
V8	28	30	0.93
V8A	29	30	0.97
V8B	30	30	1.00
V9	29	30	0.97
V9A	30	30	1.00
V9B	30	30	1.00
V10	29	30	0.97
V10A	28	30	0.93
V10B	30	30	1.00
V11	30	30	1.00
V12	29	30	0.97
V12A	27	30	0.90
V12B	27	30	0.90

V12C	29	30	0.97
V12D	29	30	0.97
V13	24	30	0.80
V14	28	30	0.93

KEY

	>0.90
	0.80 -0.89

APPENDIX C

Content Analysis Results

A visual content analysis of 130 HONY posts was conducted to identify the broad demographics of those photographed and the manner in which they were photographed. Men were photographed more than women (59% and 41% respectively). Most subjects (66%) were young to mature adults.

60% of subjects were Caucasian, 21% were African-American, 7% were Asian, 4% were Hispanic, and all other ethnic groups comprised the remaining 7%. This reflects an under-representation of African-Americans who constitute 26% of the New York City population, Asians who make up 13%, and Hispanics who comprise 29%. Caucasians are over-represented in the sample; they comprise 44% of the New York City population according the latest US Census (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010).

The vast majority of photographs (92%) were taken in a public location. The majority of the 130 photographs in the sample (59%) were taken as long shots. Individual portraits comprised 79% of photographs in the sample. Over three quarters of subjects (76%) were looking straight at the camera, either smiling (36%) or with a neutral mouth (35%). The body position of approximately half the subjects (51%) was directly facing the camera. In 100% of the narratives in the sample, subjects talked about themselves. 33% of stories were positive, 25% were negative, and 28% were a mix of positive and negative.

Detailed results for each variable appear below:

V1 NUMBER	Count	%
None	0	0%
One	103	79%
Two	23	18%
Three	4	3%
Four +	0	0%
V2 SHOT TYPE	**Count**	**%**
Long shot	77	59%
Mid shot	13	10%
Medium close-up	32	25%
Close-up	3	2%
Extreme close-up	0	0%
Detail	5	4%
V3 CONTEXT	**Count**	**%**
Not clear	2	2%
Private indoor	2	2%
Private outdoor	1	1%
Public indoor	25	19%
Public outdoor	95	73%
Inside/indeterminate	0	0%
Outside/indeterminate	5	4%
Other	0	0%
V4 GENDER	**Count**	**%**
Male	95	59%
Female	67	41%
V5 RACE	**Count**	**%**

Unclear	4	3%
African/African-American	34	21%
Asian	12	7%
Caucasian - Middle Eastern	0	0%
Caucasian - White	98	60%
Hispanic/Latino	7	4%
Indian Asian	2	1%
Native American	0	0%
Mixed race	5	3%

V6 AGE	Count	%
Unclear	3	2%
Child	23	14%
Adolescent	13	8%
Young adult	52	32%
Middle age/Mature adult	55	34%
Elderly	16	10%
V7 GAZE	**Count**	**%**
Not pictured/unclear	6	4%
At camera	123	76%
Toward camera, not in lens	2	1%
At camera, corner of eyes	1	1%
Away, left or right	21	13%
Away, down	9	6%
V8 MOUTH	**Count**	**%**
Not pictured/unclear	9	6%
Biting lip	0	0%
Downturned/frown	9	6%
Funny/goofy face	1	1%
Laughing	0	0%
Neutral	56	35%
Object in mouth	1	1%
Puckered lips	0	0%
Pursed lips	3	2%
Smiling	59	36%
Smirking	1	1%
Talking/mid-sentence	22	14%
Tongue sticking out	1	1%
V9 BODY DIRECTION	**Count**	**%**
Not pictured/unclear	5	3%
Facing camera directly	83	51%
Turned slightly away	74	46%

V10 TOUCH	Count	%
Individual portrait/unclear	23	28%
Arms/hands around shoulders/waist	15	18%
Bodies touching	22	27%
Faces/heads touching	0	0%
Holding hands	9	11%
Kissing	0	0%
No touching	14	17%

V11 NUMBER OF SUBJECTS	Count	%
1	16	12%
2	33	25%
3	22	17%
4+	59	45%
V12 STORY SUBJECTS	**Count**	**%**
Unknown/unclear	3	2%
Animal(s)	3	2%
Celebrity/historical figure(s)/icon(s)	4	3%
Classmate(s)	4	3%
Coworker(s)/employer(s)/ employee(s)	6	5%
Family - child(ren)	13	10%
Family - grandchild(ren)	3	2%
Family - grandparent(s)	4	3%
Family - other	2	2%
Family - parent(s)	25	19%
Family - sibling(s)	5	4%
Friend(s)	9	7%
Group of people	26	20%
Object(s)	36	28%
Romantic partner/ significant other	32	25%
Self	130	100%
Stranger(s)	16	12%
Student(s)	6	5%
Teacher(s)	3	2%
Other	30	23%
Unknown/unclear	6	5%
V13 SOTRY TONE	**Count**	**%**
Unclear	2	2%
Positive	43	33%
Negative	33	25%

Mixed	36	28%
Neutral	16	12%
V14 PHOTO/TEXT RELATIONSHIP	**Count**	**%**
Unsure/neither	23	28%
Continuity	15	18%
Disconnect	22	27%

Electronic MSc Dissertation Series