

Asking ourselves  
the tough  
questions is a  
movement toward  
establishing a place  
of connectedness  
with our students, a  
movement toward  
kinship with those  
who are unrelated  
to us.

## **Fictive Kinship in the Aspirations, Agency, and (Im)Possible Selves of the Black American Art Teacher**

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In this paper, I explore the pairing of the concepts of fictive kinship and agency in order to explore racial identity narratives of the Black American art teacher. Expanding on the anthropological concept of fictive kinship, where bonds of connectedness between people help to shape selfhood, I consider the powerful impact that visual culture has on shaping identity narratives and the professional aspirations of Black American art teachers. I identify fictive kinship connections as salient in creating spaces which affect agency in the conceptualization and achievement of the self as an artist. I further use the concept of fictive kinship to highlight distinct intersections between the personal and the visual and use interview quotes to trace moments in the lives of three secondary Black art teachers where these bonds have impacted their decision to fully embrace an artist identity. I include implications for art education and how we might begin to think critically so we are able to transform the experiences of our students, helping them advance their aspirational pursuits.

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## Fictions of Kinship

My own personal identity as a person of African descent is complex. I view my point of cultural reference as multiple—a Filipino/Spanish/Chinese/Black<sup>1</sup> American woman. I am sometimes questioned about my identity and am reminded how often I must negotiate the intersections of competing identities: racialized, social, cultural, and professional. To say that locating a fixed group membership (Tajfel, 1982) has been challenging is an understatement. Yet, I have been embraced, both by Black<sup>2</sup> and Brown<sup>3</sup> racialized groups as *family*—or rather, *fictive kin*. This kinship has proven a salient feature in the structuring of my aspirational pursuits within the art world.

In this article, I ground my understanding of fictive kinship through a brief narrative of my subjective experiences as a Brown art educator and practicing artist. Additionally, I support my personal narrative to include the emerging narratives of fictive kinship from my study of three Black high school art teachers. Here, a theory of fictive kinship serves as a possible explanation for how the professional aspirations of an artist identity emerges among these individuals, despite historic and problematic (under)representation within the canon of art. To these ends, I offer an expansion of the anthropological use of fictive kinship to include the visual representation through imagination and imagery; this expansion includes how representation of Black identity through images located within (or absent from) visual culture is significant.

Ethnographic and anthropological research on Black families generally defines two types of fictive kinship. One involves unrelated individuals, such as close friends, and the other involves bringing unre-

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to give equal importance and consistency to racial designations of *Black*, *White*, *Brown* and so forth signified by the use of uppercase lettering, rather than *black*, *white*, and *brown* as designated with lowercase lettering, except when directly quoting another author.

<sup>2</sup> The term African American will be used interchangeably with Black throughout this study as referenced researchers have used Black and/or African American in defining their samples.

<sup>3</sup> This cultural signifier is one that the author has adopted, given the complexity and variation within the national language of race invested in “color” and the complexity of her own racialized/cultural inheritance. This author has articulated a multiracial identity and multiethnic lineage within the borders of a White dominant culture, which at times has come to represent a challenge to dominant definitions of Blackness (see Demirturk, 2012). Scholars have begun to write extensively about a “Browning” America (see also Milian, 2013).

lated individuals into an extended family network and addressing these individuals as “auntie,” “uncle,” “brotha,” or “sistah” (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994; Speicher & McMahon, 1992). Though multiracial, for the purposes of this essay I must reveal my deep connection to a Black consciousness, which plays a large role in how I identify racially, and further, how I have managed my professional pursuits as an artist and art educator. Informing my “Black-sentient mixed-race identity” (Dagbovie-Mullins, 2013, p. 78) and experiences, I grew up the child of a father who shared stories of living as a Black American male in the Deep South. As such, I have turned to a theory of fictive kinship in order to give an account of its salience on racialized experiences in the pursuit and structuring of professional aspirations within an historically hegemonic art world.

Using Bruner’s (1996) concept of *Self* (also described as *agency*) as a starting point, my aim is to reveal the complexities and (im)possibilities in the formation of professional identity, specifically, factors that might advance or impede such aspirations. Examining the life stories of Black American artist/teachers enabled a deeper understanding of how they think about themselves in relation to the art world. In this way, the interconnectedness of multiple identities, one always informing the other, has been exemplified.

Bruner (1996) also suggests that in order to conceptualize and foster a positive sense of agency, one must be able to envision, “self with history and possibility” (p. 36). The personal narratives I offer are examples of this vision and are intended to expand on Bruner’s concept of narratives, which, “help [people] create a version of the world in which, psychologically, they can envisage a place for themselves” (p. 39). I am suggesting that fictive kinship, through racialized bonding, presents a response to narratives of historical oppression for these Black Americans.

## Fictive Bonds and Interaction through Racialized Identity

In the U.S. fictive kinship ties have played significant roles in the lives and culture of Black Americans (Gutman, 1976). Research by Fordham (1987) and

Chatters et al. (1994) provided me with the foundation to use fictive kinship to describe the bonds of the kin-like personal relationships as a possible factor in identity development and professional aspirations of Black art teachers. These discoveries confirmed an awareness of my own personal journey as an artist/educator and how the fictive kinship construct utilizes and maintains its effect through role modeling, whether positive or negative.

Recent scholarly work about fictive kinship (Cook, 2010; Cook & Williams, 2015; Konstantinos, Jones, & Rodriguez, 2011) provided me with additional ways of understanding this construct as a means of mediating membership-bonding, self-determination, and perseverance among historically marginalized groups. Shared bonds of identity and patterns of social bonding through group membership have been well documented by scholars in psychology, anthropology, and ethnography (Ballweg, 1969; Chatters et al., 1994; Tajfel, 1981, 1982; Tatum, 1997). Memberships in racial and gender social groups have distinctiveness, significant sociocultural and sociopolitical histories, and perhaps higher salience relative to other social categorizations due to histories of marginalization and trauma (Tajfel, 1981, 1982).

Fordham (1987) proposes that fictive kinship among Black Americans emerged not only as a symbol of social and cultural identity but also as a response to histories of racism and oppression. In their review of fictive kinship ties, Chatters et al. (1994) surmise that such ties appear less prevalent amongst Anglo-Americans relative to other groups. Aside from scholarship in the aforementioned disciplines, fictive kinship has received very little attention in art education research. With recent data revealing significant declines in arts participation among Black American adults (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011), I am suggesting that the field of art education become critically conscious of the ways fictive kinship plays a significant role in the overall arts participation of students who find distinct membership within this group. This consciousness begins by understanding *interactions of racialized bonding*.

### Unpacking and Contextualizing Experiences

In order to better illuminate this phenomenon, I used in-depth life story interviewing techniques (Dollard, 1949) over a period of one year, with three participants. I conducted three go-minute interviews, which revealed stories that supported my own narrative of racialized experiences in pursuit of professional aims within the art world. By unpacking the participants' inner experiences, I determined how their aspirations of professional identity are formed in and through two specific types of interactions of racialized bonding: (1) direct, person-to-person contact, and (2) indirect, person-to-visual imagery contact. Emerging discoveries indicated participants' clear understanding of the relationship between their identity as artists who are Black American, their perceptions of and experiences within the art world, and sociohistorical contexts and events contributing to their identity formation.

Also emerging was the narrative of underrepresentation of Black American artists in art history texts and museum spaces (Jung, 2016), thereby acknowledging the significance of being denied exposure to images of successful artists who share similar racial identification. In my final analysis, I discovered a pattern pivotal to my own and my participants' success: each of us found personal association with well-established Black American artists—a resource often absent from the personal/educational experiences of students in K-12 educational environments. To these ends, this absence serves as a limitation toward the achievement of agency (Bandura, 2000) and fulfillment of a professional aspiration. My first realization of this occurred when I began my teaching career.

### "Black folks don't make art!"

As a newly minted 7th grade art teacher in the late 90s, I set about the school year by gaining a sense of my students' knowledge base. I began with provocations such as "Who are the makers of art?" and "What is art for?" Many of my students could engage me with names and works of individual European/White artists deemed great by the mainstream art world—the likes of whom might include Vincent van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo. Looking out over the sea

of Brown faces staring at me, I prompted my students to name a few artists, who might reflect their own rich ancestry. “What about some artists who are Black?” I asked. I remember vividly standing at the front of my classroom as my students looked at each other, amused. And then there was a brief silence before one of them shouted: “Ms. Wilson, Black folks don’t make art!” This was followed by raucous laughter.

Serious consideration of that statement—the realization of an unawareness of the existence of Black American artists and perhaps, other artists of color—was the beginning of my own journey of becoming an artist/art teacher. It became ever more clear, the invisibility of artists of color in my own formal schooling experiences. Personally, all but two of my own art teachers (K-16) had been White, with only one identifying as Black. The textbooks used in their curricula reflected a worldview represented through images mainly created by White male or female artists, including subject matter reflective of a Eurocentric or ethnocentric lens. As a result, I decided that a goal of my teaching would be to dedicate the space to discuss and display the work of William H. Johnson and Elizabeth Catlett along with better known artists including Vincent van Gogh and Georgia O’Keeffe. Yet my students did not *notice* themselves reflected among the traditional canon. No kinship was discovered.

Thinking about my students that day, I realized that they could not *conceive* that Black people could be artists. I suspected that being underexposed to Black artists, who display a rich legacy of art making (Harris, 2003), was one of multiple factors contributing to their unawareness. My heightened awareness of the power of visual culture in the formation of their beliefs and actions helped in understanding the dynamic ways their own beliefs and assumptions were being shaped—they had not been exposed to makers of art with whom they shared a racialized group membership; a potential limitation for imagining possibility in future career aspirations (Charland, 2010; Greene, 1995). I understood that my students had not been guided to critically consider their own realities within the art world, and ultimately could not conceive that anyone who shared their *Black* identity could possibly

be an artist. I also became conscious of how my own identity—and subsequent journey as an artist and art teacher—had been impacted and influenced by this invisibility.

Giving context to this writing, I should share a couple things: first, being a mixed race woman currently living in the Southern US, many have ascribed a fixed *Black* identity onto me. Second, having an awareness of my minority status within the field of art education (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004), I have critically examined my movements as a practicing artist and educator within the context of race. While impossible to share within this space a full description of the breadth of my professional experience, I feel it necessary to briefly contextualize the *becoming* of my identity within the field of art education.

Prior to college, I had not been exposed to any artists of *visible* Black ancestry. It was during my sophomore year in college that I met Mr. James Kennedy, Professor of Painting and Chair of the Art Department. Self-identifying as Black-American, he was one of two faculty *of color*—the other instructor was a woman of Japanese ancestry. Though not particularly interested in painting (my interests were in graphic design at the time), I chose to make painting my major emphasis while working toward a degree in Art Education. It later occurred to me that I found and made an initial connection with Professor Kennedy simply because, by physical appearance/and mannerism, he reminded me of the Black males in my family and close circle of friends. I found a level of comfort in speaking with him and confiding in him. Through interaction with him for the better part of three years, I learned as much about life as I did about painting. Included in these interactions were moments of exposure to other artists of color, who would later inspire my art-making and teaching practice.

The significant impact this relationship would have on my professional aspirations had not occurred to me until, as a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, I engaged in writing a paper reflecting on my art education experiences. The intersections of identity and professional aspiration became salient as research interests from that moment forward. Examining the distinctiveness of this shared bond of

racialized identity would add a dimension to a conversation, which I believed required additional unpacking through theory.

### **Black Art Teachers: Aspirations, Agency and Possible Selves**

Given the complexity of self/identity, in general, and specifically the identity of Black Americans, it was necessary to further examine, analyze, and understand the phenomena of arts participation and professional aspirational foreclosure through the use of two theories: *social identity theory* (Tajfel, 1981, 1982) and *social cognitive theory/agency* (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2000). With the purpose of understanding how individuals make sense of themselves and other people in the social environment, social identity theory suggests that group identity development is a cognitive process that uses social categories to define self (Korte, 2007; Turner, 1982). In other words, social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their selected group membership(s). Individuals derive a portion of their identities from their memberships and interactions within and among groups (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel, 1981, 1982). Categories can be based on nationality, skin color, common history and oppression, and ancestry—racial group identity is but one of several possible social identities salient to this research. In my aim to understand the role of social identity in the professional aspirations among this group, I could not ignore the significance of potential supports and limitations of *agency*.

Social cognitive theory (SCT) adopts a perspective, referred to as agency, in which individuals are producers of experiences and shapers of events. Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more focal or pervading than the belief of personal efficacy. These beliefs (perceived efficacy) play a key role in human functioning because they affect behavior not only directly, but also by their impact on other determinants such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and perception of impediments and opportunities in the social environment (Bandura, 2000). To address the phenomenon of human experience called *Self* and the impact education has on its pivotal formation, I specifically exam-

ined *agency*, deemed a universal aspect of selfhood by Bruner (1996). This provided a view of constraints which may affect self and the role narratives play in a person's conception of selfhood.

With the aims of broadening the existing literature of Black Americans as arts participators, these theories provided an intersection of lenses through which identity could be examined and considered as a factor affecting Black Americans' aspirations toward fulfillment of an artist identity. By examining the life experiences of Black art teachers, I could support my own initial musings and understandings of how individuals, myself included, within a non-dominant group, navigate, negotiate, and ultimately structure their pursuits to become agents of their *possible selves*.

Through in-depth examination of the lives of these art teachers, it became clear that there were pivotal instances of stories that emphasize their initial aspirations, conceptualization, and ultimate maintenance of an artist identity. This identity was influenced by social actors, structuring their career pursuits as artists/teachers. What follows is an attempt at uncovering singular *moments*, revealed by each participant, which give direction for considering the relevance and importance of understanding the fictive kinship construct and its impact on structuring aspirational pursuits.

I use three distinct quotes, one from each participant in my study, in order to trace moments where a fictive kinship connectedness was enacted. I follow this with a more detailed discussion of Bandura's modes of agency (proxy and collective), to show how each participant came to be an agent of their destinies, beginning with the *self* (micro) and then continuing with an explanation of the sociostructural supports (macro) guiding the participants toward agentic achievement, the supports present in their lives become clear.

### **Visual Culture Art Education: (In)Visible Narratives of Fictive Kinship**

*I'll never forget being in art history class. We were sitting there talking. [The professor] made me learn about White artists and when he would introduce*

*Black artists, he would say, "Well, you know, he's a 'brother'." In other words, he was saying that he was Black!* (Gilliam C., personal communication, November 10, 2012)

Gilliam is a high school art teacher and internationally-known sculptor. In his own words, he discusses the significance of his experience in an art history class when his professor showed him the artwork of Black American artists. Two dimensions of fictive kinship exist in this exchange between professor and student. Referencing that his professor referred to a Black American artist as a "brother," was not to imply it in a literal sense. Use of the words "brother/brotha" and "sister/sistah" as terms of endearment have existed in Black English vernacular since the 1960s (Speicher & McMahon, 1992). In his classic 1967 ethnographic study of Black street corner men, *Tally's Corner*, Elliot Liebow (1967) is struck by the use of kinship terms to describe, validate, and even formalize closely held friendships such as "going for brother," "brother," "sister," or "going for cousins."

As a Black American, Gilliam's professor used the term as a way to acknowledge the racialized Black identity of the artist, despite the nature of the subject matter of the artwork. The shared bond of a Black identity among professor, student, and artist, allows a personal interaction to take place through spoken language. What reveals itself as significant here is Tajfel's (1982) theory that social groups are an important source of pride and self-esteem, as these groups give us a sense of social identity and sense of belonging to the social world. This allowed Gilliam to locate himself within the art world.

Throughout the interview process, Gilliam reflects on additional moments, similar to this one, and the importance of knowing the existence of Black artists within the canon, but also understanding the spectrum and diversity of their artistic practices. Gilliam's own personal abstract artwork might be considered reflective of his early exposure to abstract artists in general. We might also consider the influence that was initiated by knowing about Black artists who were also producing this style of work.

## The Self: Reconciliation of Competing Identities

*I attended an art program on the Northeast coast. I was the lone African American there; this wasn't my first experience being the "only one." I can remember my cousin in Boston saying, "You're probably going to be the only Black there, you sure you wanna go?" And I said "Yeah, I want the experience." I had been told by a friend (Gilliam), "You need to go to one where you can meet more African American artists and you can meet artists who are a part of the whole genre of the Black experience like you didn't have the at Midwest University." So after that, I moved to the South and that's when my career took off.* (Betye S., personal communication, January 18, 2013)

Betye is also a high school art teacher and an internationally known printmaker. She discusses an experience and acknowledges an awareness of being the only Black American enrolled in her educational program/s. She highlighted a discussion she had with Gilliam—whom she met after graduate school—in which he suggested she connect with other Black American artists. Enacted in this exchange between Betye and Gilliam are two things: 1) a sense of shared group membership and 2) proxy agency.

Individuals vary in the degree to which they identify with a group. Consequently, variance exists in the commitment to roles and behaviors associated with that identity (Thompson & Akbar, 2003). This is to say that not all Black Americans place the same importance on racial identity (Cross, Strauss, & Fhaghan-Smith, 1999). Yet, here, Gilliam may have understood the desire that Betye had to be connected with other Black artists. As such, he suggested that she connect with a group of artists within his professional social circle. Gilliam acted as a *proxy*. What Bandura (2000) might refer to as *proxy agency*; an agency, which relies on others to act on one's behalf to secure desired outcomes; without the suggestion to pursue a space in order to meet more Black artists, Betye's pursuits might have been delayed. Prior to meeting Gilliam, she had attended predominantly White schools and universities and had not been mentored to seek out other Black artists as means of connecting with others

in a shared group membership setting and a way to support/further her artistic interests.

To these ends, understanding the complexities of agency and the (im)possibilities of the self (Bruner, 1996) in Black American culture is central to understanding the role that agency plays in shaping identity and propelling one toward aspirational foreclosure (Charland, 2010). We must then critically understand the culture of education as a space that is not neutral and ultimately impacts selfhood (Bruner, 1996). I use this understanding and vision of education as a springboard for advancing a deeper understanding of identity. To these ends, I take into consideration the historically Black college/university, and how it has served as cornerstone for encouraging Black pride and a space where fictive kinship bonds are strengthened.

### **Fictive Kinship Ties through The Historically Black College and University (HBCU)**

*I lived in the city. I didn't really ever think of this until later on in my life, but I basically went to all-Black schools my entire life...elementary, high school...college. Attending a historically Black University... you get something as a Black person...as sense of pride and purpose. My artwork is emphatically "Black."*

(Sam A., personal communication, December 12, 2012)

Sam is now retired. He spent 30 years teaching art, predominantly in a middle school setting. He is now working toward solidifying a place in the art world and is working toward earning an MFA. His work is known regionally and, as he states, the subject matter of his work contains Black people/imagery. Attending an HBCU in the Southeastern U.S. as an undergraduate, he was not prepared for the level of community he felt being connected to other Black Americans. These feelings are consistent with data suggesting a number of benefits of attending an HBCU, including: not being a "minority" within a dominant ethnic group and an increased feeling of belonging (Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005).

HBCUs also offer students greater exposure to Black academic role models (both peer and faculty)

with whom students can identify, and therefore offer increased sense of racial pride—both factors which are important to Black students academic self-concepts, further supporting the tenets of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982). The power of group memberships is salient here. Functioning interdependently, many Black students attending HBCUs enact a collective agency (Bandura, 2002) by directly or indirectly producing effects that work in concert to shape their futures.

What continued to emerge in my study was the benefits of racialized group membership as a significant factor in the aspiration and achievement of an artist identity. I found the fictive kinship construct useful when aiming to understand the effectiveness of perceived group membership through racialized identity, paired with role models in advancing the conception of an artist identity for a Black American. I found it equally effective in understanding the absence of role models (both person-to-person contact and person-to-image contact). In other words, role models work because of fictive kinship relationships. Sam's experiences while attending an historically Black college were significant not only in supporting a sense of racial pride but also in inspiring him to create artwork employing Black subjects. In this sense, his artistic contributions advance a self-determination, both for himself as artist and for his future viewing audience.

Finally, I draw further inspiration from my research, highlighting the ubiquity of our visual culture (Duncum, 2009, 2010; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004), and use it as a framework to engage a broader discussion on the role of "representation" in our visually mediated culture. Viewing Black Americans through the lens of visual culture provides a complexity to the already written and spoken narratives of marginalization and advancement. In other words, the visual is powerful; it is perhaps more powerful than simply reading a narrative or hearing it. Soberingly, in the canon of fine art, the Black body has been a site of contention for centuries (Harris, 2003; hooks, 1995; Powell, 2002; Wallace, 2004); artists have, and continue to, interrogate this narrative.

### The Future of Art Education: Becoming More

Recognizing the challenges education must address in order to transform curricula, art education might stretch itself to look at traditions past and also within contemporary visual culture. These traditions appear in the form of failure to respond to concerns of critical scholarship (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013; Kraehe, Hood, & Travis, 2015) by limiting the discourse, which frames some artists as “Masters of art.” To these ends, we should share the success stories of schooling where academic and professional aspirations of historically marginalized groups of Black American students are able to conceive of and participate in an arts-identity (Charland, 2010; Wilson, 2014).

The lack of a curriculum in which students of color are exposed to the intellectual achievements of people who look like themselves is problematic. Children of color, and in fact, *people* of color, need to see the brilliance of their legacy, too. Additionally, exposure to mixed messages, although well-intentioned, leave them with questions about their own visibility. For example, when a teacher says something like “I don’t see color, I only see students,” it leaves one to wonder if there is something wrong with being “a person of color” that it *should* go unnoticed? Discursive acts of color-blind racism act as “buffers” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 57) in support of avoidance of direct racial language. Students made invisible in this manner may be hard pressed to see themselves as worthy of being noticed.

Bruner (1996) charges that, “...we need to equip teachers with the necessary background training to take an effective part in reform” (p. 35). When youth are supported by educators to envision agency, they can imagine exploring possibilities and are able to challenge historical power structures in classrooms, schools, and their own lives and world. Educational institutions should provide opportunities for students to read about, discuss, and reflect on their own experiences with various types of social and cultural aspects of their lives that include racialized differences, as well as gender, class, and other dimensions of difference.

Delpit (2006) adds that,

...by ignoring everything except monolithic cultural constructs such as “African American culture,”

“Latino culture,” and others, we impart an inaccurate message to young people, implying that their lives should fit easily into one or another of these compartments, when the reality is much more complex. (p. 167)

We not only need to do a better job of explicitly helping students to navigate and realize the potential of these rich zones of cultural contact, but also be active in our pursuit of fitting school culture to the needs of its diverse members. This challenge includes consciously connecting to students’ lived realities by embracing a fictive kinship practice.

Concurrently, we must acknowledge teaching as a social and cultural intervention, and necessarily that teachers confront and be aware of their personal, national, and global aspects of cultural identity and their biases. Educators should think critically about how our experiences are shaped by our own social positions, informed by history. As an art educator, I am awarded the power to offer and enact a curriculum, which may illuminate the nuanced racial identities of and for my students and the rich legacy of Black artists/teachers within the art world (Delpit, 2006; Powell, 2002).

Further, art education, with its emphasis on the *visuality* of culture, has implicated itself at times in sending messages that, although well-intentioned, leave many Black/Brown students with questions about their (in)visibility within the world of art (Desai, 2010). These messages are transmitted through curricula, which expands less outside of the traditional canon of White/European artists, leaving opportunities for growth by the wayside. The responsibility, as educators, within the field of art education requires a disruption of traditional hegemonic narratives, in order to provide the space for new ones.

To further stimulate thinking and action about the means and ends of education and to be concerned about affirming the lives of Black students, who have historically rested at the margins, we must consider the impact that education has on the development or the cessation of the self (Bruner, 1996). I place it centrally into the debate, its pivotal formation should not be ignored. The “Black self” (Wallace, 2004), as reflected in visual culture, and how it is transmitted by

the educator, seeks an agency of becoming something more.

### Implications for Art Education

As mentioned earlier, scholars have documented a significant and steady decline in arts participation among Black American adults (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011). Surveys reveal that lower resource schools, those in which the majority of students are Black/Brown, often lack a cohesive arts program and the curriculum does not routinely show the existence of people of color (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011). Researchers estimate that there are approximately 50,000 practicing art teachers within the United States. Of these, teachers of color represent a mere 10%. This percentage is below that of the national average where teachers of color represent 13% of the general K-12 teaching force, yet it is too significant a number to ignore (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004). When viewed holistically, this data reveals that even when an art teacher is present in a low-resource environment, the likelihood of that teacher being a person of color is low. It seems that our discipline has an *(in)visibility* issue of sorts—an issue of absence. A simple solution might then be visibility? And presence? A visibility and presence of teachers who are conscious of what types of knowledge they may be transmitting to or omitting from Black and Brown students.

At the outset of this paper, I recounted an experience from my first year of teaching in 1996. When comparing my experience with Charland's (2010) study, it was clear that neither set of students could conceive of or embrace the idea that Black people could or should be artists. What then, does this mean for a Black student who is aiming to locate themselves in the art world? According to Charland (2010), it means that they are less likely to aspire toward this professional/social script. Without a solution of visibility and presence, we are sure to continue down the path of decline and disengagement in arts participation.

Additional compelling data from Charland's (2010) study revealed an overlap between participants' (high school students) understanding of society's negative stereotypes of artists and stereotypes of

African Americans, suggesting, "an African American adolescent who assumes the mantle of artist willingly takes on social stigma aligned with negative racial stereotypes as well" (p. 125). Among the participants, not one knew of any famous Black artists and none expressed a desire to participate in the professional art world. Why would they? The question becomes: What do we do with this knowledge?

With the knowledge that agency not only begins with forethought (initial motivations) and intentionality (bringing about a course of action), but also benefits from the actions of forces outside oneself, I call for art educators to be active in finding a kinship familiarity with their students, so that they act on their students' behalf to secure desirable outcomes. One does not need to share a racialized identity with another to enact a deeper connection. I am calling for art educators to stand in the gaps, to fill in the spaces of absence. This call to action requires a broadening of a *circle of concern* and an interrogation of biases (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013) and a dose of reality pedagogy (Emdin, 2016). We might ask ourselves these questions: (1) What are my beliefs and assumptions about my students? (2) What do I *know* about my students? (3) Does my curriculum reflect my students' knowledge base? (4) How am I stretching to expand my own knowledge base in order to connect with students who live in realities opposing my own?

Through the years, I have often heard teachers refer to their students as "my children." To this, I ask: What are the limitations to treating all of them as if they really were? I wonder if the construction of race has created just enough of a barrier, making it seem less possible to visualize some students through a fictive kin lens? Asking ourselves the tough questions is a movement toward establishing a place of connectedness with our students, a movement toward kinship with those who are unrelated to us. Perhaps it is easier to establish a connection with those who share a similar sociohistorical location. I am not suggesting that fictive kinship bonds are unable to be formed by those who exist in opposing realities. I am curious, though about the impetus for such bonds to develop. My deep interest as an educator exists in creating spaces where we are able to recognize and affirm the human spirit

and its desire to be recognized as worthy of being. However, I am sobered that embedded in the pathology of a constructed racial hierarchy is continued injustice and inequity.

This call for action is broad—one that acknowledges education as a place for active learning where transmission takes place through dialogue *with* students as well as *about* them. A reality pedagogy asks educators to meet students on their own cultural turf. This place of learning is enacted when teacher becomes student and student becomes teacher, making the strange familiar and the familiar strange (Mills, 1959). The implications of a Euro-centric curriculum that has excluded the rich legacy and artistic contributions of Black Americans should be problematized. These ideas specify a direction for education reform through investigation and understanding of student agency—within the context of race—the constraints affecting it, and implications for education’s growing racially diverse classrooms.

Understanding the culture of education as a political space confined by power structures and regulated by social forces, we might begin to conceptualize the aspirations of Black students (self) as materializing

from their lived educational experiences and narratives which have been created *for* them, and in many cases not *by* them. Often, these narratives take the form of a deficit narrative, which has historically excluded, misrepresented and underrepresented Black people (Harris, 2003; Powell, 2002, Wallace, 2004).

I am hopeful, as the field of art education has responded to changing conditions in the contemporary world (Jung, 2015; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013; Kuthy, 2017; Lee, 2013), that a transformation of art pedagogy and curricula has become an important part of the larger discourse within our field. Art educators, in the process of this transformation, are demanding that we replace older views of curriculum and instruction with an expanded vision of critical discourse and pedagogy. Inspired by ideas of empowerment (Freire, 1970/1986), critical inquiry has allowed art educators and pre-service teachers to recognize and understand the intersections, ambiguities, conflicts, and nuances of identity and social experience. I suggest that we take a critical look at ourselves as proxies, who have the agency to enact a social bonding, despite group membership, both by knowing who are students are and by showing them who they can be.

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