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Editorial: All the F Words

Melanie L. Buffington

Virginia Commonwealth University

While compiling this volume and editing the articles, I realized all the authors are women. Though this was not an explicitly feminist call, it is interesting that in a field dominated by women, male voices often figure prominently in published journals. Thus, it is a welcome sign to have so many strong female voices in this volume of the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* devoted to All the F Words.

As I reflected on the articles in this volume, I noticed three themes that address the topics authors chose: identity, diversity, and explorations. The first three articles in this volume address identity. Through Kim Cosier's graphic article, we see a bit into her past and present through her explorations of fundamentalism and feminism. She delves into how her life has changed and unfolded due to interactions with family members, friends, and partners who approached fundamentalism and feminism differently. Amy Pfeiler-Wunder's piece relates to autoethnographic work she does on her own and with students. Through thinking about themselves as the teachers they are becoming, her students develop a deeper understanding of their own identity. Laura Hetrick's study with three pre-service teachers engages them in watching and analyzing clips from movies showing how teachers are depicted. Through this work, Hetrick analyzes three of the common fictions that pre-service teachers tell themselves about their future career.

The next thematic grouping is diversity with four articles in this set. Gloria Wilson explores fictive kinship as a potential means to help teachers connect with their students. Through interviews with three artist educators and a review of her own ex-

periences, she unpacks some of the demographic and equity problems in education. Claire Penketh explores fictions related to independence and interdependence through analyzing documents related to students with special needs in the UK. By challenging the notion that independence should be prized, she proposes ideas for how we might all work toward interdependence. Courtnie Wolfgang and Mindi Rhoades propose an approach to art education, fagnostics, that centers the experiences of students and teachers who are LGBTQ+ and actively acknowledges them, rather than assuming they are “other.” Pulling from their ongoing Big Gay Church performative work at NAEA conferences, they view education as a continual site of intervention and struggle. Jessica Kirker interrogates her own position within her school’s discourses about students of color. Through her journaling and reflections she studies her role within the school setting and questions if, when, and how she chooses to disrupt the dominant discourses surrounding race in her school.

The final grouping relates to explorations of different ways we may work and think moving toward the future. In Jodi Kushins’ #MobilePhotoNow article, she unpacks the way different factions in the art world operate. Through her portrait of this exhibition at the Columbus Museum of Art, she highlights a new and different way that factions in the art world might work together to challenge existing practice and hierarchy. Mindi Rhoades chose to simultaneously employ literal and metaphorical approaches to the theme of the journal. Through her visual piece of writing out all the f words in the dictionary and her written piece that addresses her personal connections to and explorations of words, Rhoades connects her life to “all the f words.”

While in graduate school, I had the fortune to learn alongside many people from different parts of the world. There were a number of women I came to know well from Taiwan and they exposed me to the concept of a “learning sister”¹ with *xué jiě* being a senior schoolmate and *xué mèi*² being a junior schoolmate. To be someone’s *xué jiě* or *xué mèi* implies that you went to the same school at the same time and

¹ The same concept exists for male students as well.

² The word *xué* translates to mean learning in English. *Jiě* is an older sister and *mèi* is a younger sister.

came to know each other. There is a connection and responsibility stronger than what is typical in the US context of education and a familial type of bond. For instance, among all the older students who may be one’s *xué jiě*, there may be a *zhí shǔ xué jiě*, a senior student who takes greater responsibility to help you. At the same time, you would also have a *zhí shǔ xué mèi*, a younger student that you look after more. In turn, she would also look after someone younger than her.

Though certainly not the same as the concept of fictive kinship that is the focus of Gloria Wilson’s article, it struck me that thinking of peers, colleagues, and students in different, more family-like terms might promote greater success in improving and humanizing education. If we overtly worked to create communities within our classrooms, schools, and institutions that fostered looking out for one another and having significant responsibility to others, we might be able to change the landscape of education. Having an overt responsibility to another person and being deeply invested in their success could promote the type of help and support that many new teachers say they are lacking. How might we be able to change our classrooms and learning environments if we embraced this notion?

Developing a strong relationship with a learning sister might be one way that educators can work together for progress. For instance, the type of trust that could be built would be helpful when educators have to acknowledge the fictions that we tell ourselves, society tells us, and our students believe. If we are to address the frictions and factions that exist in many institutions, we need a strong network and we need to help each other be successful. Embracing some type of familial relationship, be it fictive kinship or the learning sister approach, is something worth considering. These relationships might be formed with peers around our practice through professional learning communities or research and writing groups. If we can develop bonds with one another, holding each other accountable while being held accountable ourselves, we may find new ways to help each other develop and improve our practice.

Perhaps the reason for so many submissions from women is that we are fed up with the status quo, frustrated with the inequities in education, and ready to say “F U” to the next person who thinks we are not being nice or cute when we stand up for our students and ourselves. Perhaps working together in a “learning sister” type of relationship with our peers may help us advance the status of women within the field to ensure that women’s contributions—particularly women of color, women who are LGBTQ+, women

from around the world, women with disabilities, and all women who have historically been excluded—to the arts and education are well represented in the future of art education.

Acknowledgment: I would like to thank Li Yan Wang and Gloria Wilson for reading and offering feedback on this editorial. I consider both of them to be learning sisters.

I wonder how a framework that similarly cycles through doing, undoing, and redoing might open up a spiritual life for more queer people?

F-Word Fun Home

Kim Cosier

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Growing up fundamentalist can be challenging for any child, but when you do not fit within the confines of traditional gender norms, when you are masculine, female-bodied or feminine, male-bodied, navigating identity can make you feel like a foreigner within your own family. Certain forms of feminism, too, can feel alienating. In this article, I share personal experiences with both social constructions of feminism and fundamentalism. Borrowing from queer theories, I wrestle with ways of doing, undoing, and redoing religion and gender that may have implications for teaching in a more inclusive and expansive manner.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author: kcosier@uwm.edu



**F-word
Fun Home!**

Introduction

In 2006, Allison Bechdel published a landmark graphic novel called *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. In it, she told a coming of age story that was informed and deformed by her father's struggles with his closeted homosexual identity. Eventually identifying as a butch lesbian herself, Bechdel poignantly examines how she came to understand herself in relation to her father's journey. The graphic novel became a Tony Award winning musical that brought Bechdel's story to a much wider audience than a more traditional scholarly treatment of the subject could have ever done. Inspired by her work, I humbly present this autobiographical tragicomic.



In this graphic article, I examine my own queer coming of age story relative to the fundamentalist and feminist subcultural systems in which I grew up. Using aspects of my autobiography, I pursue an expanded understanding of the complex interconnections within these two social spheres that may impact identity, agency, and mental health in individuals that do not fit neatly within either system. According to Zevallos (2014) gender and sexual identities are both personal and deeply social. Avishai (2016) and others have shown that (non)religious identities are similarly rooted in the self and in interactions with others. Explorations of the intersections of gender identity and religious/spiritual identity are only recently coming out in the scholarly record and it seems as though we are poised to enter a time of robust dialogue.

I am butch/gender queer (Eves, 2004) and spiritually conflicted. As my story reveals, it has taken a long time for me to own this gender identity and I am still working on my religious/spiritual self. In my formative years, evangelical Christian fundamentalism and second-wave feminism both had a considerable impact on the development of my identity as a masculine female-bodied person. In my second coming of age, after many years of struggle and a prolonged quest to understand my queer gender identity, I am now finally at peace with who I am as a gendered person and hoping to find my home in the spiritual realm. I feel I am finally becoming a person my five-year-old self would recognize. I would really like to make that kid proud.

Religious life is fraught for most queer people I know. You may have heard people who grew up in strict religious environments, refer to being a “recovering (fill in name of religious affiliation).” For example, someone might say “I am a recovering Catholic.” The first time I heard that phrase, I was taken aback by its power and the implication that one might be able to step away from a past that had done physical and emotional damage, as one might step away from the harm of addiction. In my first coming of age, I felt the need to retreat from religion in order to become a whole person. Thus, I have used that phrase myself in the past, yet like others I know and love, I find myself longing for a spiritual life that fits me in the here and now.

One result of my struggle with this paradox has been *Big Gay Church*, a performance project that represents a collective effort among art education scholars to address that longing as we also critically interrogate religion in relation to queer identities (Rhoades, Davenport, Wolfgang, Cosier, & Sanders, 2013). My character, Miss Jeanette, is a Sunday School teacher who calls out hypocrisy and honors queer spiritual leaders in her lessons. This article is another chapter in my quest for understanding the complexities of queer identity. Though personal, I believe there are critical questions I am trying to pursue with this particular project that might have a wider impact. These include:



In what ways did feminism and fundamentalism inform and deform my sense of self as I came of age in the 1970s and 80s and (how) have things changed?

How might sampling/remix be employed to do/undo/redo gender and religious identities?

What can be learned from my particular chronologically, culturally, and socially bounded coming of age stories that can be applicable for young people today and the art educators who work with them?

In order to pursue possible answers to these questions, I first situate this inquiry within theoretical frameworks that draw from feminist, queer, and religious scholarship. Refining a theory of identity development that works across gender and religion is an ongoing project among scholars today (Avishai, 2016; Kelly, 2014) and my intent is to contribute to that important dialogue through an arts education lens. Setting the stage for my personal story and its implications for students, I end the first section with a proposed theoretical framework that uses remix as a strategy (Derecho, 2008). For students who are questioning their gender and religious identities and seeking self-determination, self-reflection in relation to social and cultural norms is crucial. Creating spaces in arts classrooms for such investigations, which allow students to sample/remix possibilities for newly imagined identities would be highly beneficial.

Social Theoretical Frames related to Fundamentalism, Gender Identity, and Feminism

Doing Gender/Doing Religion

According to Kelly (2014) and Avishai (2008, 2016), subcultural identity theory (Smith, Emerson, Gallagher, Kennedy, & Sikkink, 1998; Smith, 2000) is the theoretical framework most often applied to the sociological study of religious fundamentalism, even today. According to the tenets of subcultural identity theory, people's identities and subsequent actions can be explained by the strictures of a particular group. This framing of identity has caused scholars of religion to challenge subcultural identity theory because they believe that it limits our understanding of individuals within such groups, and precludes agency. Perhaps not coincidentally, a review of the literature reveals that studies of homosexuality were once a staple within the literature in subcultural identity theory as well (Wellman, 1999), but queer theory moved scholars into new, more productive directions. I believe a queer lens and the concept of remix may prove fruitful moving forward.

Additionally, some argue that there is a disconnect in the study of religious fundamentalism when it comes to feminist scholarship within this theoretical framework (Avishai, 2008, 2016; Kelly, 2014; Mahmood, 2004). According to Avishai (2016), there exists a persistent "feminist dilemma" (p. 262) among scholars who work within subcultural identity theory who she accuses of being inherently biased toward a view that women in fundamentalist religious life are necessarily and inevitably oppressed. I join religious scholars who call for a rethinking of the relationship of feminism to religious cases so that identity relative to gender and religion may become more understood expansively.

Making a case for the inclusion of religious cases in sociological research, Avishai (2008) suggests an alternative theoretical frame she calls "doing religion," which builds upon "doing gender," a highly influential theoretical framework posited by West and Zimmerman (1987). Doing gender was framed as an alternative to subcultural identity theory. It sees gender identity as "a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (p. 31), giving primacy to performance over rules. Avishai sees this as a potent conceptual framework to apply to religious cases. In doing religion, agency is not only possible for women in religious life but it is action within a group that shapes identity. Avishai argues that women can do religion, even in those groups that are seen as oppressive by outsiders, in ways that empower them and provide a space to exercise agency.

Although I agree with these scholars that women in religious settings are not necessarily victims, I see doing religion as unhelpful when it comes to queer people who may be outsiders from within religious frameworks. The framing of Other in such research ironically mirrors the framing of Other in fundamentalist cultures. Kelly, like others, (Smith et al., 1998; Williams, 2009), asserts that insiders in religious groups frame identity in opposition to the secular world, which often includes queer people. This opens up an interesting paradox for queer folk coming up in fundamentalist communities, as identity in the doing religion framework is predicated on identifying oneself with a circle of other insiders. Being on the outside from within a social milieu, as queer people most often are, therefore presents a challenge to doing religion.

My experience coming of age in the time of second wave feminism made me feel similarly an outsider from within as a masculine lesbian.



Doing, Undoing, and/or Redoing Gender and Religion?

In a review of the literature on gender identity development, I have found the work of Connell (2010), Deutsch (2007), and newer work by West and Zimmerman (2009) to be helpful in framing this inquiry. As West and Zimmerman (2009), point out, Judith Butler (2004) first theorized “undoing gender” in her book of that name, without referencing their original theory. In 2007, Duetsch challenged doing gender, calling for a theory that allows gender to be undone if social progress is ever to be made. West and Zimmerman (2009) countered with an argument that gender can never be undone because power imbalances will never be completely made right, but allowed that it may be possible for gender to be redone. Connell (2010) tested the do-undo-redo debate in an empirical study of transgender individuals’ experiences in the workplace. She found that her subjects actually experienced a cycle of doing, undoing and redoing gender, which she dubbed “doing transgender” (p. 51)

I have become convinced that a theoretical model that allows for a remix of doing, undoing *and* redoing gender and religion would be most helpful for understanding identity development among gender queers who have experiences in fundamentalist religions. I agree with West and Zimmerman that undoing gender (and religion) completely is probably not in the cards, there is just too much at stake for those in power (while working on this project, people across the globe have taken to the streets to fight back against the deplorable behavior and threatening actions of a regressive and repressive new president), but remix could be key to moving religion progressively into the future. A continuous cycle of doing, undoing and redoing is probably the best we can hope for. I know it sounds exhausting, but there you have it.



Our story begins with...well...I guess where everyone's story begins—on the first day!

The doctor declared the firstborn Cosier baby to be female!
(based on the usual evidence)



I was the apple of my father's eye, as they say.
A real firecracker!





My poor, fancy mother
tried her best to make
me frilly and feminine,
but it just wasn't in the
cards for her.

Nope, by my father's side, I saw what a good deal boys had in the 60s and I wanted to have it all!



Fearlessness!

Fame!

Fast bikes!

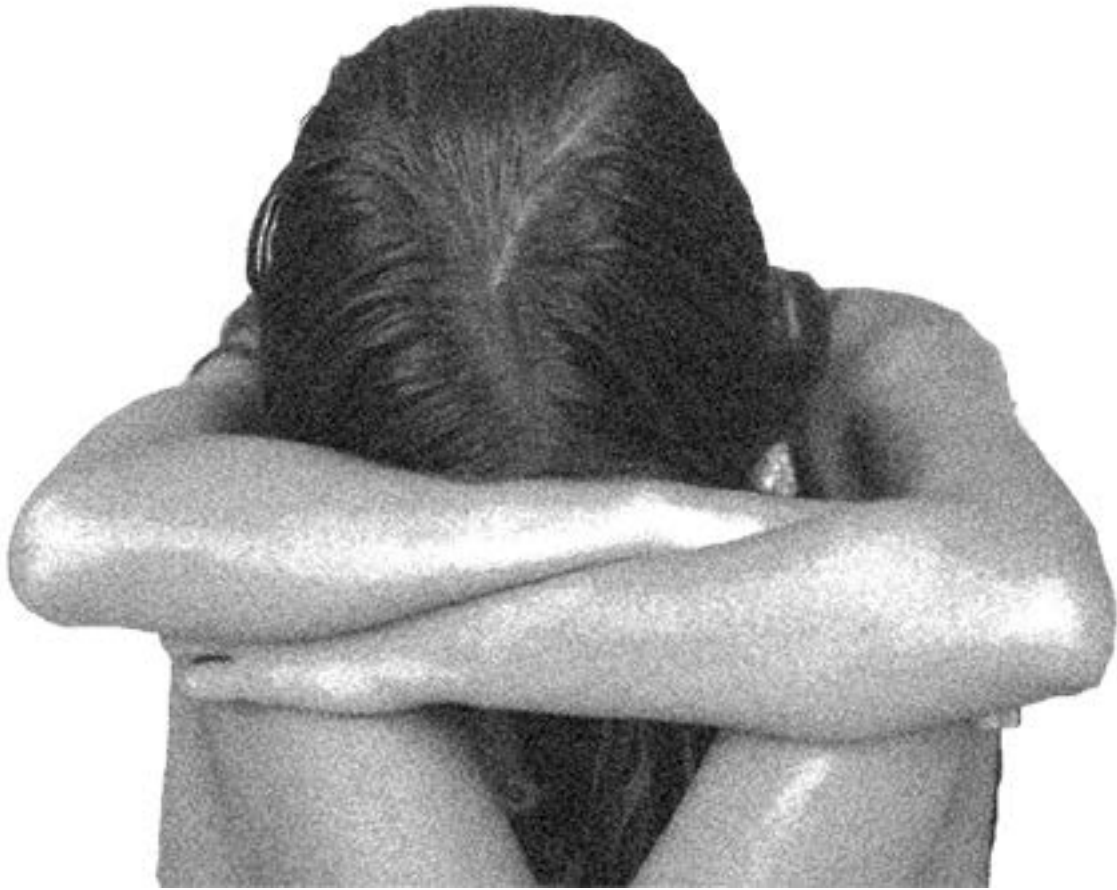
Flexed muscles!

& a future full of possibilities!



That was the life
for me,
YessireeBob! and
all was going
well until...

The Crisis of 5th Grade



...in which Father finds God
and ruins our lives.

After nine years of happiness, my life was forever changed when my father experienced a religious conversion. (We thought my mother was the driver of this transformation until decades later when she self-published a book called: Things I Learned Along "The Way")

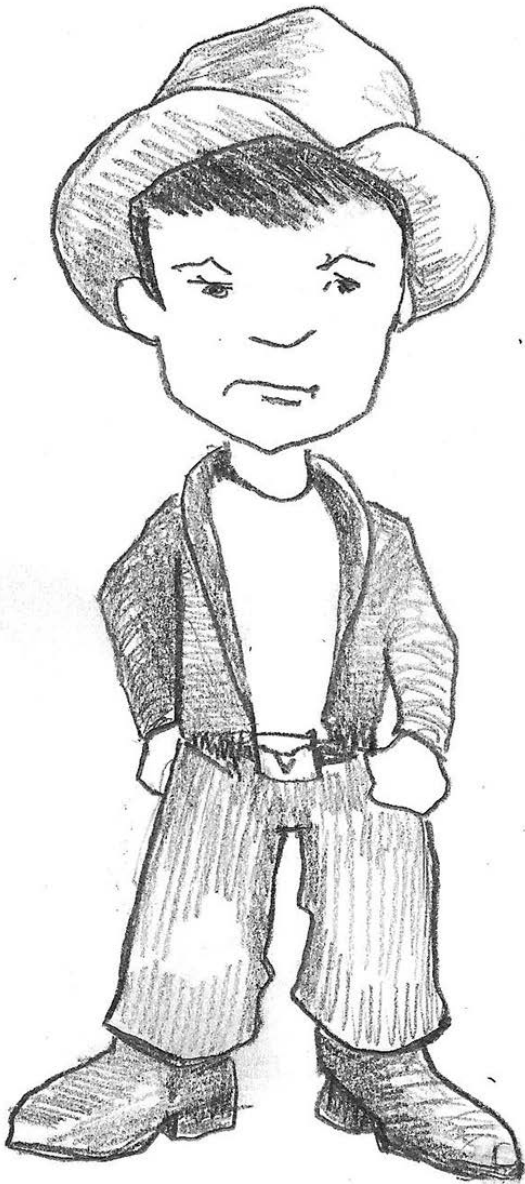
The Way began in my beloved hometown, Spring Lake, Michigan and led us to a warehouse in downtown Grand Rapids-only 50 miles, but light years apart.

To help fund a dream created within a passionate bromance between the pastor and my father, we sold nearly everything we owned to donate as much as possible to "The Church at Grand Rapids."

There, we started (and lived in) a homeless mission. It took me many years of therapy and self-reflection to realize that I had personally experienced homelessness in that place.

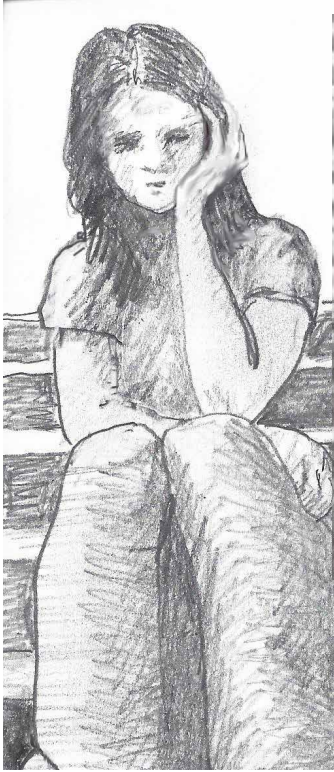


Just before we moved to the church I had my first experience of questioning the existence of God. I was sitting in a park in my soon-to-be-abandoned hometown, eating Kentucky Fried Chicken with my family. Though I had no idea how hard my new life would be, I knew it was not my choice and I was furious!



My little sister jumped off of one of those playground bouncy horses and it rocked by itself for just a second or two. Just then, as I watched that horse rock in silence it occurred to me that maybe there was no God, and that my father and mother were ruining our lives for a fool's errand.

I already knew that this kind of thinking was not going to fly in the church. The answer to every question was now "God" or "Satan." So I kept this skepticism to myself as we entered into what to me seemed to be hell on earth.



Laying on hands and healing



Holy Spirit Baptism

faith???,
feeling,
fate,
filth,
fags,
fail,
flight?!
fight!,
fear,
family
felons,
freshfood
fury
fumbling
fantasy
freedom

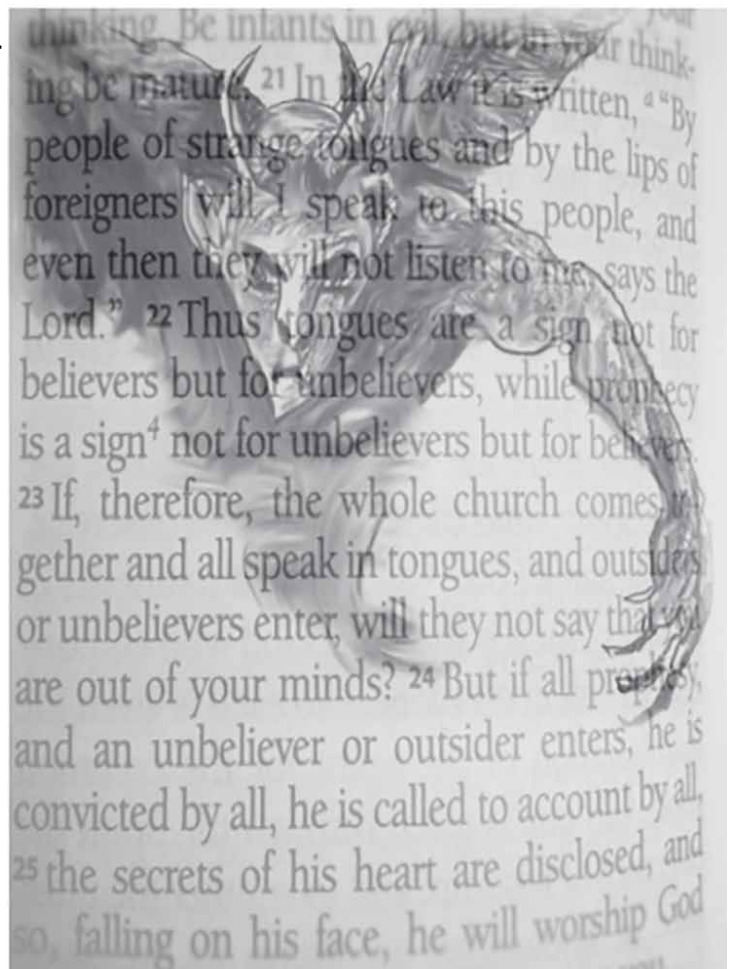
FACING DEMONS:

On God's Gifts and Faltering/Faking Faith

A bonus of being "Baptized in the Holy Spirit" are what are called, "the gifts." My father received the "Gift of Prophecy," which I viewed with suspicion due to his obvious lack of prescience or foreknowledge on matters that were having rather dire consequences on our lives.

My mom received the "gift of Discerning Spirits," which would come as no surprise if you knew her. Quite early in the game she received word from God that I had the Demon of Rebellion in me...no surprise there either, I suppose. I was diagnosed with that pesky demon again and again.

This is what I figured it probably looked like. It became a companion of sorts.



Even though we lived with many people at the homeless mission, I felt increasingly alone, frustrated, and forlorn. While my parents were ministering to the downtrodden, I withdrew into a fantasy life they knew nothing about.

I was only happy when I drew and read books and retreated into my own world, which was always strikingly similar to my old home.



I had to wear DRESSES!!
Furious, my will to live began to falter.

The first coming of Age



Lots of other really, really crappy stuff happened in the years that followed, which intensified my thoughts of dying, but I prefer to keep those stories to myself for now. In the early 80s, I took a huge step in coming out as a lesbian. This was no simple matter given my background. I made a lot of mistakes during the latter half of my first coming of age. Let's just say I tried a lot of ways to grow up or die trying. I didn't stay anywhere for too long. I always wanted to be in a relationship but always "stepped out," on them. Maybe it was that ol' Demon of Rebellion? In any case, I think I had internalized a feeling that I was made to be bad.



Feminism in that particular era did not much appeal to me. As I saw it, feminism didn't have a place for a butch like me. I favored partying with other working class butches at Club 67, a local gay bar, telling dumb jokes and talking about motorcycles and the ladies. The feminists in my life made me feel like an outsider all over again, which I had no appetite for after all those years in the church.

As far as I was concerned, "processing," which feminists seemed to do a lot of in the Second Wave, was too much like the "Love Sessions" we had at the church. The felt both dangerous and tedious; attacks poorly disguised as support. My experiences in the church had wired me to retreat into silence; according to Adrienne Rich (1977; 1995), Tillie Olsen (2003) and my first girlfriend's friends, silence was akin to lying... what????????? Of course, I lied too, my life in the church had taught me to do that all too well! Frankly, I didn't know how to live a life above board. So, I was pretty much doomed with that relationship and second wave feminism in general. And so life continued for some time.

Feminism and fundamentalism seemed too similar to me—rigid in their expectations and humorless in their approach to life. And that is what I knew until...



the 3rd Wave washed over us!

The 2nd Coming (of age)

I got a second chance to grow up rather unexpectedly as I was riding on the 3rd wave of feminism, which I knew initially only from the riot grrrl/popular culture side of things. I was still very unsettled and not really grown then. I had moved out to Seattle with another girlfriend and things ended badly but, at least this time it was not my fault it didn't work out!

Consequently, with little more than a suggestion by a person I barely knew, I applied to graduate school where I discovered that feminism was not just what I had understood it to be.



I was introduced to feminist scholarship for the first time and it began to turn my life around. One of the features of the 3rd wave that spoke most loudly to me was intersectionality. Where 2nd wave feminism felt exclusive, 3rd wave scholars were open to all of us! Queer theory and post-colonialism helped shape and inform difficult but necessary dialogues. I found queer theorists such as Judith Butler (2004), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990, 2008), to be enormously exciting! Their work was eye opening, provocative, and fascinating to me. But it was Judith/Jack Halberstam (1998), who shocked me into recognizing the full extent of the work I needed to do personally. Halberstam's forays into female masculinities shook the ground I walked on in the late 1990s. I realized I still had a ways to go before I was grown.

Leslie Feinberg's novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) was also fiercely influential. The story of life as a butch in the 1950s is at once devastating and inspiring. It taught me how courageous butches AND femmes were before the Stonewall uprising! We certainly have broad shoulders to stand on!!

Feinberg's other book *Transliberation* (1998), and a general warming to the idea of trans-identity in both academia and the broader society, brought on a period of gender identity uncertainty for me. After all these years, I began to think about my own place on the gender spectrum. When I was a kid, before life handed me a f*ckin' firestorm, hadn't I wanted desperately to be a boy?????



NosireeBob, "female" did not fit your image of me, but what about you, old timer?



This kid really started getting under my skin (or was it back IN my skin?) Now that transitioning from female to male (F to M) was a real possibility, would I go down that path? Or would I forge a different path?

Fortunately, my life experiences had prepared me well for delayed gratification, so I quietly studied and sat with my thoughts for a few years. I met more transgender and gender queer folks and kept working, all the while mulling over this question-would I go from F to M now that I could? How did I identify in this brave, new world of transgender revolution?

Female Masculinities

Ultimately, I have come to understand that for me, gender transition is not the path I will take. I have become comfortable in my butch skin.

It seems that those of us who don't transition and remain female bodied, yet masculine, or male bodied and feminine, have some work to do. We are under-theorized. My final project is to work on myself-and our society-to expand what is possible. To know that wives can wear feminine frocks and/or dream of getting hitched in a bespoke suit and a fedora!

My wife Josie has become my new Demon of Rebellion and my forever home. I once was lost, but now I'm found!



Painting by Fred Stonehouse

Fourth Wave Feminists!

We have embarked on the 4th wave (the historic Women's March on Washington has left no doubt!) and this is really the Feminism for me-badass activism and lots of FUN!!!!

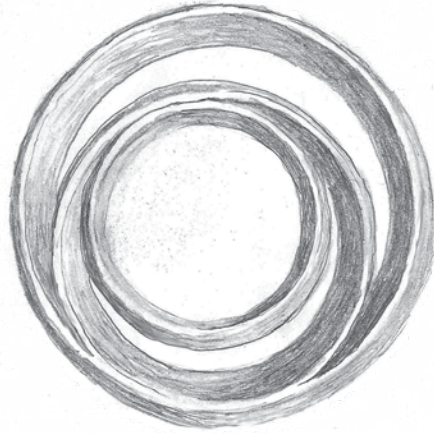
I've even begun to think about being a religious person again, in earnest. I am not sure what that means yet, but I think it is part of a story that is yet to be written. Exploration of remix here will be key to expansive potential There will be more to explore but this is my story so far.

Conclusion

As I look to the future, I find that reflecting on my experiences through remix, or a process of doing, undoing, *and* redoing gender and religion, rather than focusing on just one of those possibilities is most helpful. Feminism and fundamentalism informed and deformed my sense of self as I came of age in the 1970s and 80s in ways that were strikingly similar. As a person who questioned the tenets of our religion, and resisted proper, “Godly” gender performance, I was an outsider on the inside of the fundamentalist, Evangelical Charismatic Christian community. Although I kept quiet about my God questions, it was harder to repress my masculine gender traits. There was constant gender policing in the church, and in the religious school we went to where my elders and peers tried to maintain a very proscribed masculine/feminine gender binary. I learned to play along when people were looking.

Second wave feminism made me feel the same sense of not belonging. As a masculine woman in the early 80s, I did not fit in the Women’s Movement. Butch and femme roles were seen as replicating oppressive patriarchal structures and railed against by the feminists I knew at the time. For that reason, feminism and fundamentalism felt the same to me. Rather than hide who I was as I had earlier in the church, however, I rebelled against the strictures of second wave feminism as I also finally dared to define myself in opposition to the religion in which I was brought up. In other words, I tried to undo gender and religion in the period of my first coming of age. Thankfully, newer incarnations of feminism are more inclusive.

Though much has changed, I believe there are still lessons to be learned from my particular, chronologically, culturally, and socially bounded coming of age story that can be applicable for young people today. Even with the progress made for LGBT+ people, students today are at risk of much danger. According to a report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.), “While many sexual minority youth cope with the transition from childhood to adulthood successfully and become healthy and productive adults, others struggle as a result of challenges such as stigma, discrimination, family disapproval, social rejection, and violence” (para. 1). I believe queer and questioning youth need stories that will allow them to learn from those who have come before them and made it through dark times. Such stories can give students in peril a guiding light. I further believe that having a background in fundamentalism and a challenging history with feminism, makes me a better, more empathetic teacher educator than I may have been without such a history. One way I hope to make a broader contribution will be to make the seed planted here into a comic book that can be shared more widely with young people. I invite others to join me as I believe in story building as future building.



Undoing and Redoing Gender and Religion

Engagement with my own story relative to the questions of doing, undoing, and redoing gender (Connell, 2010; Deutsch, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 2009) and religion (Avishai, 2016) has led me to understand that a theory that may help to explain my story, and perhaps the stories of others who are neither transgender nor traditionally gendered, is one that conceives of doing, undoing and redoing gender as a remixing cycle that may repeat many times over one's lifetime. Connell argues that "doing transgender" could be a way of thinking about that cycle. I'd like to suggest "gender remix" as a more inclusive and expansive framework that makes space for non-transgender gender expansive folk.

I am moved by an idea that disruptive queer femininities and masculinities may be productive in terms of expanding possibilities for gender identity. And as I grow older and more settled in my own skin I am finding, to my surprise, that an ever more urgent call to do religion is making itself known to me. I wonder, how a framework that similarly cycles through doing, undoing and redoing might open up a spiritual life for more queer people? I am coming to understand Miss Jeanette as an experiment in that vein. She represents the feminine virtue of loving kindness that I value in my own teaching, as she also subversively radicalizes Sunday School.

As artists and educators, we have a drive to make work and do work that helps others imagine the world as if it could be otherwise, as Maxine Greene (1995) has inspired us to do. I invite you to engage in queering theories of doing gender and doing religion. Disruptive queer readings of spiritual texts, such as those we do in Big Gay Church (Rhoades, Davenport, Wolfgang, Cosier, & Sanders, 2013) are one way of insisting on change. How might we as art educators move on with more expansive remix projects? There is much more to understand about the experiences of LGBT+ youth coming of age in a society that is becoming more, not less, divisive. I hope that this story spurs others to engage with me in narrative projects and other work that explores the interconnections of identity and helps address the challenges of coming of age as a queer person in this society.

Notes

For my wife, Josie

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How then do we tell our story if we teach in a setting where parts of our stories, such as religious identity, might need to be concealed?

Dressing Up: Exploring the Fictions and Frictions of Professional Identity in Art Educational Settings

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What fictions do we tell ourselves in order to teach? How do our stories as educators impact how we see our learners? Building from auto-ethnography research I begin with the personal and then invite co-participants to further illuminate a shared experience (Chang, 2008). In this example, I highlight the self-reflective work toward revealing and concealing identities associated with “teacher.” Using collage pedagogy (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008), students in a pre-service art education class, created paper doll narratives marking and unmarking themselves through collaged backdrops and clothing choices which performed identities that would impact their role of teacher. Future teachers also “undressed” themselves from fashions that impeded their abilities to see their students beyond stereotypes. Through the design of the dolls and reflexivity, we examined the frictions of identity and representation within the larger social, political, or institutional landscapes of what it means to be “teacher/student” in the 21st century school sphere.

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What do our identities reveal about us? More importantly, as an educator, what is significant about one's professional identity? How has one's history and story impacted one's position within art education settings? How do these layered narratives impact how one sees one's students and in turn how students see their teacher?

In an art education methods course, we employed autoethnography as a "cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (Chang, 2008, p. 46). Although self-narratives focus on the author, they are never purely a study of oneself. As relational beings, we are invariably connected to others. I used an autoethnographic approach in an art methods course for students entering the teaching profession during several lessons that culminated in the creation of paper dolls. I wanted to move beyond an investigation of self by including pre-service teachers' reflections on what it means to be a teacher. Within this interconnectedness, I wondered what frictions might emerge in what we chose to reveal or conceal about self and others through the materiality of paper dolls? How did these frictions become sites of power but also possibility (Foucault, 1975/1977)? So who am I? Who are my students? Who are we in relationship to each other?

Beginning Layers

Layer One: Who Am I?

I began class sharing my layers of self through a reading of the following statements.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual female who is a college professor.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual, female, and an able-bodied college professor.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual, female, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual, female, a mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

I am a 42-year old white heterosexual, female, a

mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

I am a 42-year old Christian, white, heterosexual, female, a mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

Layer Two: Who Are the Learners?

When asked about their identities as related to being future educators, students responded with the following:

We are first generation college students.

Our families tell us we should not be art teachers.

Our friends think our major is easy.

I wonder what my future students will think of me?

We fear losing control of our future classroom.

Can I do this?

I lived in a car growing up.

I struggle with depression.

I can't wait to teach.

What are the fictions we tell ourselves and our students in order to engage in the practice of teaching and learning? From the phrases above, what do we come to assume about individuals? How might we view them as educators? Do they fit the cultural storyline of proper *teacher*, with *proper* meaning embedded historical and cultural expectations of what it means to be a teacher? If being the *proper teacher* using the *proper curriculum* creates the *proper student*, where is the conflict in learning (Britzman, 1998)?

An autoethnographic approach to understanding self with others invites conflict in examining identity and identification within cultural expectations. In order to create vulnerable dialogue, autoethnography operated as a site of revealing self from a postmodern perspective—that is, a self that is complicated, multifaceted, and impacted by an ongoing deluge of cultural, social, and political forces that seeks to locate agency within these competing forces.

To begin, I start with my story of self, essential in an autoethnographic approach, followed by the stories of my students. From here, we use our stories

created through mapping and collage to critically examine what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century. This interconnectedness was created by listening to my students' stories. Students also created *teacher identity* paper dolls to further explore their professional identity by revealing and concealing layers of self through clothing choices. Using collage pedagogy (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008), we examined the bombardment of visual culture texts related to *teacher* and created a site to critically deconstruct culturally held beliefs of what it means to be teacher. This criticality is essential to autoethnographic work that is more than storytelling, but a site of revealing fictions and frictions.

Further Layers of Self

My story begins with my doctoral work, where I studied the impact of socioeconomic status on the culture of the art room (Pfeiler-Wunder, 2013a, 2013b; Pfeiler-Wunder & Tomel, 2014). I interwove my story of growing up working class on a family farm and its impact on how I saw myself, my students, and curriculum. Class and gender became the identities I used to mark myself as *other*. In turn, I assumed these reflections provided me a sensitivity to when students felt *othered* in classroom settings. However, gender and class representations limited my perspective. I needed to employ Ellis and Bochner's (2000) "reflexive ethnographic" in which "authors use their own experience in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740). Through listening to my students' stories, I wanted to see what aspects of identity were important to students during this point in their journey so I would not be ignorant due to assumptions I held from my own story of becoming an educator. These landscaped narratives occupy a space of telling with expression and move beyond a story of events, characters, and settings (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998). Instead, a hermeneutic circle allows for interpretation by the writer and the reader. Just as a natural landscape is impacted by a range of environmental, social, and cultural forces, so are the ways in which individuals construct their stories. As H. L. Goodall Jr. (2008) shares,

when we engage in writing or telling a story, we create alternative pathways to meaning that are imaginative and analytical; that are guided by a narrative (rather than propositional) rationality; and that are relational—in production of meaning, they connect the teller of the talk to the listener or reader of the story. (p. 140)

I found that in telling my own stories, I had to be cautious of the pitfall in autoethnographic work of over-relying on memory to construct my story. Building on the research of Hanawalt (2015), Hyatt (2015), and Spillane (2015), this meant I needed to invite a conversation on the failure to do the critical work of examining our own professional identities in tandem with others in order to transform art educational settings.

So why did I start with "I am a 42-year-old Christian, white female, heterosexual, a mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background?" When I started exploring the art room through the lens of socioeconomic status, I needed to reflect on how I positioned *others* in order to position myself. Cultural studies theorist Hall (2000) discusses how seeing *other* as subject we constitute a human community. We acknowledge a need to access some "true self...hiding the husks of all the false selves we present to the rest of the world" (Hall, 2000, p. 145). He advocates moving from a modernist view of self as rational and objective. Although it might help us sleep at night, it does not address the frictions of self in relationship to other. I do wrestle with sleeping at night when I reflect on the complexities of preparing future art educators. Similar to Akkerman and Meijer (2011) and Hanawalt (2015), I feel as if I am in negotiation alongside my students in becoming the teachers we want to be versus who we think society or school cultures ask us to be.

My working-class background did have an impact on my identity and representation as a teacher. I also needed to do the critical work called forth by Kendall (2013) and recognize my privilege as a white woman raised as a Christian. From an early age, I saw images of cross burnings by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in our

local paper. I could not understand this level of hatred. I also questioned how the Catholic school I attended in the very small community in which I grew up could emphasize the Golden Rule of treating everyone equally while being so unwelcoming to anyone who was not white and Catholic. In *White*, Richard Dyer (1997), a white writer, explores how representations of extreme whiteness, such as is exemplified by KKK members, serve as cultural counterpoints to “ordinary whiteness.” This allows white people to see themselves as speaking and acting, “disinterestedly as humanity’s most average and unremarkable representatives” (p. 223), not allowing white people to see their privilege.

This work of vulnerability allowed me to move from the intrapersonal to the interpersonal by bringing critical discourse into an arts-based project—collaged paper dolls—that captured the layers of identity assumed, revealed, and made in/visible. Together, my students and I traversed the landscaped narratives of our professional identities by trying on layers of self and dressing up to understand ourselves in relation to our professional identities as teacher.

What is Professional Identity?

In the many times I have taught the course, we have begun with the question “What is professional identity?” Professional identity is connected to both our inner and outer worlds. Miller and Garran (2008) “describe [professional identity] as an inner world where we aspire to our own identities and an outer world where the social reality of our identities can be assumed by others or even imposed by others” (as cited in Lewis & Hatch, 2008, p.115). Professional identity includes the intersectionality of identities, such as race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, social class, gender, nationality, chosen interests, sexual identity, politics, and personal history.

I invited students to begin the autoethnography by telling their own stories of teaching by recalling a memory of art learning/making, including details of how the teacher positioned them as a learner and how they positioned the teacher. I used this autoethnographic approach of beginning with personal reflec-



Figure 1. Pre-service student’s image of “who should I be?” vs. “who am I?” illustrated in early memory of artmaking.

tion in order to move more outwardly later in the class.

Building Layers Together: Creating Dialogue Between Self and Others

From their initial stories of art learning, my students began to reveal how they saw the professional identity of the teacher and in turn their potential future selves as teachers. For example, in Figure 1, the student illustrated the tension between student and teacher playing perceived roles of the teacher in a role of power and the student wanting choice.

Garoian and Gaudelius (2008) advocate for the use of collage pedagogy in curriculum by nature of collage illuminating the range of disparate images individuals are bombarded with daily. It is this cognitive disassociation that provided multiple perspectives necessary for critical engagement (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008). I worked to complicate the frictions between the “Who am I?” versus the “Who should I be?” as a teacher through visual culture images and assumptions of what it means to be a teacher. These images were outcomes of students’ reflections on how their experiences in school impacted how they saw the role of the teacher. We also started by deconstructing a teacher poem:

I dreamed I stood in a studio
and watched two sculptors there.

The clay they used was a child's mind
 and they fashioned it with care.
 One was a teacher; the tools she used
 were books and music and art.
 One, a parent with guiding hands
 and a gentle loving heart.
 Day after day, the teacher toiled with
 touch both deft and sure
 while the parent labored by her side
 and polished and smoothed it o'er.
 Each agreed one would have failed if one
 had worked alone.
 For behind the teacher stood the school
 and behind the parent, the home.¹

Googling the words “teacher” or “teacher poems” often revealed the warm and fuzzy glow of shiny red apples and endearing poems about the innocence of learners and the teacher’s ability to *transform* and mold all students into the image of *perfection*. Using Duncum (2002), I worked to dislodge romanticized perspectives of the teacher and the learner. Many of my students wanted to hold tight to the cute version of the Hallmark Holiday Card of *teacher* or *kid*. At one point, several students tried to argue that childhood was sweet and innocent when another student chimed in: “My mother was an alcoholic and could be abusive...my childhood sucked.” The friction between an imagined landscape was quickly transformed into a vista that offered another perspective and possibility for how one *sees* their childhood and thus the childhood of the learners in their classrooms.

Following their personal art learning stories and cultural deconstruction of the teacher stereotypes, we then employed deep intrapersonal reflection by completing the Identity Mapping Exercise (Congdon, Stewart, & White, 2002). The Identity Mapping Exercise asks students to reflect on how various identities/communities make them the person they are, and how this impacts curriculum development. Students are asked to reflect on such identities/com-

¹The origins of this poem are not clear. It is frequently attributed to Cleo V. Swarat, occasionally attributed to Helen McCormick, and sometimes listed as anonymous. Also, it is sometimes titled *Unity* and at other times it is titled *The Two Sculptors*. While frequently included on various teacher and school websites, the author and editor were unable to find a definitive source.

munities as recreational, family, religious, economic status, etc. These identities/communities are then ranked in importance providing reflection on which parts of their identities are most important to them at this point in their professional journey. These activities all led to the collage paper doll assignment. The Identity Mapping Exercise parallels the autoethnographic use of a culture-gram where people visualize their social selves (Chang, 2008). Both the mapping exercise and chart invite participants to see their present selves from multiple perspectives, including social roles, people, groups they spend time with, and diversity criteria by which they judge themselves (Chang, 2008, p. 97). Finally, I posed a series of questions to consider as they began imagining the layers of self through various outfits and objects/accessories they would design that would literally or metaphorically reveal layers of self. These questions were:

What are the stereotypes we might hold of the art teacher?

How might we alter, change, or push against these stereotypes?

How do our personal narratives impact how we see the teacher?

What baggage might this bring to our notion of teacher?

What considerations should we make related to the lenses through which we see the teacher and learners, such as gender, race, class, ability, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation/identity, etc.?

From here, we designed and created paper dolls marking and unmarking ourselves through the selection of collaged backdrops and clothing choices. Paper dolls allowed a study of both the history and meaning of a cultural object. This acted as a form of autoethnographic data because, historically, paper dolls were tools of play and imagination while also teaching morality and gendered roles. The use of paper dolls became a fitting site in examining one’s own story and potential friction of expected teaching roles. How might playing with paper dolls embedded with historical meaning allow new sites of possibility for my pre-service students?

The first paper doll appeared in 1810 in a chapbook called *The Little Fannie Figure* and was aimed at the upper classes. Here a little girl sneaks off with her maid to the park and loses all her possessions (Oatman-Stanford, 2013). The doll and story are meant to teach a lesson about how girls spend their time, reading or in idle play. Paper dolls also occupied a prominent role as a visual culture tool as a prize in many purchased goods in the 20th century, such as Lyon's Coffee and Pillsbury Flour (Johnson, 1999). They were also a teaching tool and toy in magazines, such as *Jack and Jill's*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *McCall's*.

The dolls, snipped and cut, marked gender, class, consumerism, and opportunities to understand other. Through the spectacle of play, young children could play with Betsy McCall who "lives in a little white house" ...featuring her "very best dress" for parties (Janie & The Bleu Door, 2017) or be world travelers in the 1964-1965 *Dress Up for the New York World's Fair* paper doll book where children played with costumes "from many different lands" (Martin & Martin, 1963) to learn about other places.

These choices in play, followed by the creation of their dolls, performed identities that would impact their role of teacher. Students could also *undress* themselves from fashions that impeded their abilities to see teacher and learners beyond stereotypical views. This interplay between revealed and concealed meanings enacted Derrida's (1993/1994) notion of "re-visiting, re-remembering, re-conceptualizing, and representing knowledge from the past...whereby someone or something invisible...becomes other than what we already know" (Derrida, 1993/1994, pp. 100-101). This is integral to autoethnographic research where self-study involves study with others because collage acted as a site to critically engage or deconstruct culturally held beliefs of what it means to be teacher. What follows are examples of dolls created by pre-service teachers and how their clothing and background created sites of resistance and possibility.



Figure 2. Pre-Service teacher paper doll celebrating self and other.

Dressing and Un/dressing through Paper Dolls— Revealing and Concealing Fictions and Frictions of Professional Identity

Considering *Other*

Guys don't forget to observe your world, make connections to patterns, imagine everything and listen to nineties rock!!! Also, tolerate all differences! (L. Hartford, personal communication, May 2, 2016)

In this example, the student's zest for life, music, and artmaking was evident in her personality in class and was also revealed through her paper doll. The added note of "tolerate all differences" was also a liminal space of negotiation. Here I saw the student wrestling with course work on multiculturalism and respecting *others* intermixed with our own class conversations about honoring each student in their future classrooms. I also saw a friction with the use of "tolerate." I wondered if students believed that if they were open to students from a range of experiences, classes, races, sexual orientation, that was enough? How might I move them beyond a place of seeing or recognizing other to a place of understanding the social, political, and institutional barriers that inhibit individuals from fully participating within particular institutions? This

is especially important because schools that often function from a predominantly white, middle class ideology (Brantlinger, 2003).

If learning is to be relational, then how might I create a space for this critical conversation about what we reveal and conceal without the fear associated with the knowledge that ultimately this was also a graded assignment? This was also the first class in the major and the students would be working with their classmates for approximately the next three years. Who did they want to be to their professor? To their peers? As a future educator?

My hope was the nature of layering and building *landscaped* stories through our relational experiences would push students to make critical decisions about what to reveal/conceal through the creation of their dolls. Collage narrative enables a critical examination of constructed assumptions (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008). As Garoian and Gaudelius share (2008), it is the “in-between spaces within the fragments of collage, where knowledge is mutable and undecidable,...” a place to examine what “...curricula says we are supposed to be and what we have in actuality not become” (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 92).

Some paper doll projects took the form of closet spaces, where dressing up meant a plethora of cloth-



Figure 3. Pre-Service teacher paper doll featuring paint tube as a symbol for spirituality.

ing options where they shared the identities that mattered most to them. This was an outcome of completing the Identity Mapping Exercise. Students often revealed family, recreational, and religious identities

as those highly important to them. They also wrestled with when particular identities could or should be revealed in the classroom. Especially their religious identity.

Spirituality and the Classroom

In this passage, the student shared the tension of revealing or concealing her spirituality through her paper doll (see Figure 3):

As I struggled to make an article of clothing which wasn't too cheesy to represent my religious, or spiritual (I don't really care for the word "religious") identity, I had another idea. So, the yellow paint tube represents my love for God. It is meant to symbolize how everything I do is for him and art is one gift he has given me. (A. Whitney, personal communication, May 2, 2016)

This passage revealed the friction as a site of power and possibility. We had discussed white privilege in class and she shared this made her hesitant to reveal this part of her identity in her dolls. This caused me to pause and consider how much I stretched my students to examine the power of their identities in a classroom space while also honoring who they were as individuals in my classroom. A. Whitney also shared this in her artist statement:

"I owe it to myself to be as truthful as I can be" (Check, 2002, p.56). Teachers' relationship with their students is the most important part of their job. In my future classroom, I want to tell my students my story, I want to have conversation and honesty between the students and myself. (A. Whitney, personal communication, May 2, 2016)

How then do we tell our story if we teach in a setting where parts of our stories, such as religious identity, might need to be concealed?

Tensions Within Self

This student revealed her struggles with depression and anxiety by adding several props to her paper doll. She revealed that she sometimes has a hard time



Figure 4. Pre-Service teacher paper doll featuring pillow related to depression and t-shirt on lesbian pride.

getting out of bed in the morning which is why a pillow is included in her piece. At other times, she would like to be home alone eating pie and Chinese food (see Figure 4). She is concerned about how her anxiety might impact the challenges of working with large numbers of students in a school setting.

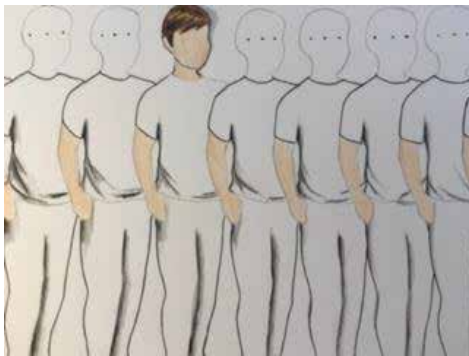


Figure 5. Pre-Service teacher image of student feeling “copied and pasted.”

Other students used their dolls to reveal challenges with perceived body types and sexual identity. As part of their pasts, they were working to reconcile concerns that could potentially be read negatively in future classrooms.

Influences from Past Schooling Experiences

Students also shared the range of clothes that represented different selves or concerns for how the past would impact their professional identities.

I wanted to mention the fact that I went to Catholic school when talking about my identity’s beginning. So why would anyone think it’s smart to ditch your personal interests and aspects just because you’re going into a profession that’s “dressy” so to speak? I hated feeling like I was copied and pasted [referencing attending Catholic school, see Figure 5], and now that I’m in school to be a teacher myself, I realize that breaking that feeling is the key to feeling special as a student [referencing self and future students]. I love rock & roll, going to concerts, exploring places...I worked way too hard to find myself in the past years that I don’t think there’s a way to go back and put them on hold. (D. Leonard, personal communication, September 14, 2016)

Another student also wanted her identity as a strong and independent woman to be present in the class while also being considered nurturing. Through collage pedagogy, the students created “writerly texts” where the paper dolls were not simply to be read but the narratives could be rewritten and readjusted and literally stripped away as the students dressed and undressed their dolls (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 93). The *Rosie the Riveter* Teacher Doll was created as a children’s storybook with perforated edges around the clothing. The classic text of teaching had possibilities for new story lines by illuminating tensions between the strong independent teacher, a feminist with a strong voice, and the cultural stereotype of the teacher as nurturer. This also raised the question of why we might hold onto the nostalgic notions of teacher, learner, and curriculum. Perhaps the weight of teaching can be understood when we juxtapose the nostalgic perspectives of teaching with commonly spoken phrases like: “Teachers change lives” versus “Teachers ruin lives;” “Teachers inspire the future” versus “Teachers maintain the status quo;” or “Teachers inspire passionate engagement in life” versus “Teachers prepare students for a mundane existence.”

Our fears become illuminated through the collage narrative, as Ellsworth (1997) shares, that “exposes, examines, and critiques the academic knowledge of institutionalized schooling” (as cited in Garoian &

Gaudelius, 2008, p. 92). The signs that mark teaching, such as red apples and happy teachers set against green chalkboards, opened up “in-between space” where meaning is negotiated by the reader. Landscapes are continually changed by frictions, environmental, political, and social forces. When we consider the landscape of learning as a new frontier, as within any interaction of teacher, student, or curriculum, the culture of the classroom becomes a site of something yet to become (Britzman, 1998).

Paper dolls also revealed growing up homeless and living in a car. Dolls revealed the weight of losing one’s mother and becoming the mother to siblings. Dolls celebrated the excitement of teaching, of wearing professional dress-up clothes, and the hopes of being taken seriously. Dolls were funny, serious, and complicated, just as the nature of teaching and learning should be if we embrace the fictions constructed, deconstructed, and told of what it means to be teacher.

All Dressed Up?—Final Layers

What are the fictions we tell ourselves and our students in order to engage in the practice of teaching and learning? Through personal narratives, we revealed assumed, hidden, and constructed professional identities that interplay into the interactions and sometimes frictions among learners, teachers,

and ultimately learning. The stories told represent the *Third Space*, where the fragments created through collage narratives “expose[d], examine[d] and critique[d] the academic knowledge of institutionalized schooling” (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 93). We worked to engage in the vulnerable and critical work of dissolving the fictions we tell ourselves in order to embrace the often difficult relationships and power dynamics of teaching.

This work calls for developing curriculum from a post-structural hermeneutic perspective embracing vulnerability, tension, and conflict. Learning should be an interpretive process emerging from the individual stories within the culture of the classroom and the social, political, and psychological elements that impact students’ reactions, acceptance, and resistance to learning. When these frictions arise, the postmodern educator embraces this game of “critique and deconstruction” (Slattery, 2013, p. 137). The subject—the teacher and learner—is an ontological process understood within the dynamic interplay of curriculum, pedagogy, and perhaps learning. Becoming is emphasized and knowledge is seen as emergent, constructed and layered.

Notes

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When talking about one's (un)conscious fictions around teaching, the space is anything but safe.

Exploring Art Student Teachers' Fictions of Teaching: Strategies for Teacher Educators

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Using portions of my research involving three art student teachers, I provide suggestions for strategies to examine preservice art student teachers' fictions about teaching (art). First, I begin by briefly introducing my three participants and listing my research methods. Next, I describe three of the most common teaching fictions I found through analyzation of the data. I discuss the productive usefulness, as well as a few procedures, of employing visual culture as a catalyst for unfolding student teachers' (un)conscious pedagogical fictions. Then, I describe how creating illustrations of the self as art teacher can further help explore fictions of teaching. Lastly, I end by discussing how important it is to have a supportive space to talk and theorize with student teachers about their continuous processes of identity (re)formation and to work through the anxieties of the profession of teaching art.

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Using portions of my research involving three art student teachers, I provide suggestions for strategies to examine preservice art student teachers' fictions about teaching (art). The suggestions that I have for the field of art education and preservice classrooms are based on the pedagogical breakthroughs that I encountered through conducting this research and the practical experiences of being a teacher educator and university supervisor of student teachers. Briefly, I found that art student teachers employ pedagogical fictions as well as develop affective investments in teaching and in their teacher identities while continuously (re)negotiating those identities. First, I begin by briefly introducing my three participants and describing my research methods. Next, I describe three of the most common teaching fictions¹ I found through analyzing the data. I discuss the productive usefulness, as well as a few procedures, of employing visual culture as a catalyst for unfolding student teachers' (un)conscious pedagogical fictions. Then, I describe how creating illustrations of the self as art teacher can further help explore fictions of teaching. Lastly, I end by discussing how important it is to have a supportive space to talk and theorize with student teachers about their continuous processes of identity (re)formation and to work through the anxieties of the profession of teaching art.

Research Participants and Methods

Olivia, Marissa, and Jean, the three participants² in my original study, were student teachers in art education at the same large Midwestern University. All of them had been under my immediate supervision during their teaching practicum at various elementary and secondary school placements. The interviews took place during the summer following completion of their student teaching practicum and prior to becoming licensed art teachers in the classroom. Therefore, the three participants were no longer in a position of subordination to me as their former supervisor because all three had completed their educational program, and along with our relative closeness in age, the dialogue was one more akin to art teacher allies as opposed

to graduate teaching assistant and students. The three participants all identified as White/Caucasian women in their mid-twenties who also grew up in the same state as the University they attended. While I am aware that this potentially has consequences for the results of my research, their subject position is seemingly a descriptor of many US teachers. For example, "In the 2011–12 school year, 82 percent of public school teachers were white" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016, p. 6). I also recognize that the pedagogical fictions that I explore in this paper may or may not be transferable to various genders, races, nationalities, subjects taught, etc.

I conducted one individual interview each with Olivia, Marissa, and Jean in regard to their ideas, reasons, or desires for becoming an art teacher and what persons and/or representations may have mediated them. Then, once the audio-recorded individual interviews were completed, transcribed, and member checked, I gathered the same three student teachers all together to watch several pre-determined clips of various films on DVD that involve art educators, including, *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003, Columbia Pictures); *Art School Confidential* (2006, United Artists); *Speak* (2004, Showtime Independent Films); and *Ghost World* (2001, United Artists); as well as clips of the TV series, *Strangers With Candy* (1999, Comedy Central). I chose these because, "films of the 'teacher movie' genre [often] provide dramatic evidence of the elusive but ubiquitous workings of desire in the classroom and the often unintended outcome that a teacher's desire may have for students" (Zook & Schlender, 2003, p. 72). Thus, I showed the participants the movie clips as a catalyst to help discover/unfold the unconscious fictions and affective investments that the student teachers may employ in regard to their conceptualization(s) of teaching, learning, and their students. I then borrowed from the traditions of psychoanalysis, as applied to filmic media, to further interpret and better understand the participants' motivations for becoming teachers.

¹In my original research I labeled them pedagogical *fantasies* (Hetrick, 2010).

²All participant names are self-chosen pseudonyms.

Three Common Teaching Fictions

A fiction is something feigned, invented, or imagined. Teaching or pedagogical fictions are those invented ideas about what pedagogical encounters/exchanges between two or more people inside or outside of an educational setting, such as a classroom, may be like. Employing fictions often helps one circumvent or endure reality, especially those realities that may be displeasurable at times, such as teaching. Though I found that there are many fictions that teachers often tell themselves in order to continue doing what they do day in and day out, there were three fictions that consistently surfaced from the data. The first pedagogical fiction that I have named through identifying patterns from the individual and group interviews is that of *subject-supposed-to-know* (Lacan, 1977/1998). In other words, the participants imagined that they should be, and always would be, the knowledgeable teacher. When utilized as an umbrella term, the *subject-supposed-to-know* subsumes the concepts of both teacher as pedagogue and teacher as reformer/philanthropist. The concept of *subject-supposed-to-know* as pedagogue includes the characteristics of: being a knowledgeable leader, guide, or mentor in the classroom; being the expert—the respected purveyor of arts knowledge (history, movements, artists, policies, techniques, etc); and demonstrating skillful/technical abilities in a variety of artistic procedures as well as classroom management. This can be exemplified by Olivia’s interview excerpt where she states:

I see myself more as a *leader*, as a *mentor*, as an *example* of... successful adulthood, you know. And that I’m an *example*- if I want my students to be a part of a bigger community, if I want them to be creative citizens, then I need to be that. (Olivia, personal communication, July 2, 2009)

The concept of *subject-supposed-to-know* as reformer/philanthropist includes the characteristics of: being the teacher as hero who denies herself her basic needs in life so that she can, in effect, save or rescue her students (from danger and (self) destruction); being the proponent of social justice who enlightens students about overcoming personal/societal woes; desires

the improvement and/or betterment of educational/societal wrongs through changes in consciousness or policy; and being a teacher who desires to do good to/for Others with(out) expectation of immediate personal reward. This second delineation presents the teacher as “acting sincerely as a role model and a leader (often leading a group of iconoclasts), rescuing others from danger, and denying oneself for a larger good” (Markgraf & Pavlik, 1998, p. 278). The teacher as reformer/philanthropist is part of the *subject-supposed-to-know* because being a hero or rescuer or proponent of social justice implies the teacher knowing more than the students do about their own situations or best interests and *how* to remedy the students’ situations. This can be exemplified by Jean’s interview excerpt where she says of teaching art: “I think that’s it just really consists of helping... *helping students find themselves and find what their talents are, and what their passions are*” (Jean, personal communication, June 18, 2009). It is not undesirable to be a pedagogue or reformer, but these become fictions when student teachers think they must/will embody these subject positions all the time or that students will always recognize them as such.

The second fiction that I have named through identifying patterns within the interviews of the participants is that of *student enchantment*. In other words, the participants imagined that they should be and always would be the caring teacher, and also be adored and respected by students. I have used the term enchantment to represent the spell-like, magical quality of the relationship(s) that can exist between teachers and students and which often elicits feelings of love, attraction, captivation, and fascination (with the teacher, student, relationships, knowledge, subject, etc). In psychoanalytic terms, the feelings (e.g., captivation or fascination) felt by the students toward the teacher is referred to as transference (Lacan, 1977/1998). Conversely, the feelings felt by the teacher toward her student(s) is referred to as counter-transference (Evans, 1996; Fink, 1997; Jagodzinski, 2002).

Teaching is not a purely cognitive, informative experience, it is also an emotional, erotical experience. “I deemed it necessary,” insists Lacan, “to

support the idea of transference, as indistinguishable from love, with the formula of the subject presumed to know. I cannot fail to underline the new resonance with which this notion of knowledge is endowed. The person in whom I presume knowledge to exist, thereby acquires my love" (S-XX, 64). (Felman, 1997, p. 31)

The concept of *student enchantment* as fiction, existing as teacher and student (counter)transference³, is indistinguishable from love and is intimately tied to the first fiction of the *subject-supposed-to-know*, or the person in whom a student presumes knowledge to exist. "As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere...there is transference," (Lacan, 1977/1998, p. 232). On the other side of the transference relationship is the teacher and his feelings of counter-transference which are "the sum total of the analyst's [teacher's] biases, passions, difficulties, or even of his inadequate information" (Lacan, 2006, p. 225) toward/about his student(s). The feelings that a teacher may have toward her student(s) might be based on her personal assumptions about where that student is from, what that student might be thinking, and/or why a student behaves in a certain manner, etc. Therefore, the fiction of *student enchantment* includes the concept of the tug-of-war and/or reciprocal inter/intra play between the student's transference toward the teacher as the *subject-supposed-to-know* and the teacher's counter-transference toward the student(s). I have recognized enchantment as a type of play because the teacher's feelings and actions toward the student often enable and encourage the students' captivation-through-transference beyond the initial recognition of their teacher as *subject-supposed-to-know* (i.e., the teacher will favorably change her behaviors or set up situations that purposely elicit feelings of transference from her students). The fiction of *student enchantment* can be recognized by the following characteristics of being a teacher that always: forms *connections* with her students which can

³The differentiation is intentional of counter-transference or (counter) transference. Hyphenated is when speaking of students only; parentheses is when mentioning both teachers and students in same sentence because it is both transference [for students] and counter-transference [for teachers].

result in friendships; creates a *community* amongst her classroom; shares/expresses a *love* for her students; recognizes the students' points of view and what they have to offer; and/or exhibits a personal charm, charisma, and/or appeal toward the student(s), sometimes with unconscious expectations of reciprocity and sometimes with(out) any conscious expectation of immediate personal satisfaction. This can be exemplified by Olivia's interview excerpt where she exclaims: "I *love, love, love* working with the kids and working with the students and just being able to get *involved with their personal lives* and that's one of the reasons that I chose art," (Olivia, personal communication, July 2, 2009). Similar to being knowledgeable, student teachers are allowed and even encouraged to form connections with their students, but it becomes a fiction when they believe connections will always happen, or believe connections will occur immediately, or believe they are unsuccessful as teachers if students dislike them and resist connections in any way.

The third most common pedagogical fiction that is employed by teachers is what I call *ego-identification*. This delineation includes ideas from the Lacanian concepts of the *ideal-ego* (imaginary identification) and *ego-ideal* (symbolic identification). As Žižek (1989) explains, "imaginary identification is identification with the image in which we appear likable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be'" (p. 105). In other words, the ideal-ego is a collection of images or conglomeration of traits of others, such as former and/or current teachers, that student teachers may wish to emulate in their professional lives. Likewise, as Žižek (1989) also explains, symbolic identification is "identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likable, worthy of love" (p. 105, emphasis in original). Instead of identifying with the image of perfection representing what the student teachers would like to be, the ego-ideal is symbolic identification from the point of view of the *perfect* Others who they believe are observing them or from the point of view of that perfect representation they hold of themselves. Therefore, the fiction of *ego-identification* includes the characteristics of: physically adopting certain attire

and/or teacherly stances in and out of the classroom; displaying/performing certain behaviors that embody desirable signifiers; admiration and love for a former/current teacher; aspiration to be like or similar to someone else perceived as *good*; disinclination to be like someone else perceived as *bad*; and/or seeing themselves [actions, beliefs, behaviors] reflected in someone else. This can be exemplified by Marissa's interview excerpt talking of her former teacher's influence: "So when I look back on it *I want to be the type of teacher that [my elementary teacher] was* [emphasis added]... I chose to do this because of the role model that I had... *she was a fabulous teacher* [emphasis added]," (Marissa, personal communication, June 25, 2009). Again, it's not wrong to want to emulate a favorite teacher, imagine your students becoming like you, or adapting teacher traits, but it is a fiction if teachers believe this will *always* happen when entering a classroom. These three fictions I just described often lead to affective investments in teaching.

An affective investment is concerned with arousing feelings or emotions in something, such as a job (teaching art) or particular identity (art teacher), that offers potential profitable returns when put to use or employed. It is "the intensity or desire with which we invest [in] the world and our relations to it. We are placed into an apparently immediate relation to the world through our affective investments" (Daspit & Weaver, 1999, p. 41). After interviewing the three participants individually and then considering their answers collectively, I noticed various similarities and patterns in their responses pertaining to their conceptualizations of the act of teaching art. As their narratives unfolded, Olivia, Marissa, and Jean had answers and explanations that were congruous to one another's in several aspects, signaling to me possible affective investments that they had developed and may employ in their individual and collective teacher identities, as well as about the overall discipline of teaching art.

Jean, like Olivia and Marissa, had an affective investment in the idea of teaching art as something more than teaching elements or principles of design, or other arts techniques. Instead, they are all invested in the idea that teaching art is an all-encompassing,

highly important profession that can inform students about life skills, cultural history, and societal criticism. This can be exemplified by Marissa's comment explaining how she speaks to her friends about how teaching art is not just coloring. "'Well it's [art] all encompassing.' It's not just production; it can be criticism and it can be history and it can be a lot of different things" (Marissa, personal communication, June 25, 2009). Likewise, the three participants had very strong investments in their commitment to teaching and in their individual and collective art teacher identities as something they passionately defend. Similarly, the three student teachers imagine teaching art as something they love doing and/or one of the only things that makes sense in life. This is exemplified by Jean's comment about becoming an art teacher: "I think that it's [teaching] everything to me...I think that it's the only thing in this world that even makes sense to me. And really, I don't understand how anybody would want to do anything else" (Jean, personal communication, June 18, 2009). These affective investments are directly tied to their pedagogical fictions which became more apparent to me through our viewing of several visual culture representations of arts educators.

Visual Culture as a Catalyst

Here I briefly discuss the productive usefulness of employing visual culture as a catalyst for unfolding student teachers' pedagogical fictions. I suggest that discussing repeated images of art teachers in the media (as social activists, carefree bohemians, saviors, etc.) is productive when working with student teachers in a preservice program because "[p]opular culture, much of which is influenced by images in film and other media, is meaningful in shaping how students [student teachers] view themselves and their relationship to learning [and teaching]" (McCullick, Belcher, Hardin, & Hardin, 2003, p. 4). Beyond helping shape how student teachers view themselves (personal identity) and other art teachers (collective and professional identities), the repetition in the media's portrayals of art teachers also affects student teachers' pedagogical fictions. Heightened experiences in viewing "enable the replaying of positions of desire

in which viewers find their places in a film's fantasy, and an 'original' fantasy exercises its capacity through the ongoing structuration of subjectivity, a process irrevocably wedded to representational practices" (Robertson, 1997, p. 85). As an example, within screen instances featuring *Mona Lisa Smile's* art history professor Katherine, student teachers may find their place in the fiction of teacher as reformer. This can be exemplified by Jean's response to one of *Mona Lisa Smile's* clips that resonated with her:

She [Katherine] had to follow her syllabus, but *not* doing that was what made her an impactful teacher... not doing it that way can be *more* powerful and have a bigger impact on your students than if you plan everything out and say 'this is what we're going to look at' and 'this is what you're [students] going to think.' (Jean, July 13, 2009)

These screen identifications in moments of pedagogical fiction help construct the psychical image of what it is to be an art teacher and may affect what student teachers are desiring and/or expecting in their future classrooms. "It involves acknowledging that investments in particular images allow people to construct something for themselves out of the material at hand, something having to do with need, demand, habit, hope, pleasure, and even profit" (Robertson, 1997, p. 90). Art teacher educators can use visual culture images of (art) teachers as catalysts to assist student teachers in exploring and unfolding how they imagine teaching and open up a supportive space where they can talk about the potential needs, hopes, and pleasures that may accompany those imaginings.

In the preservice classroom, art teacher educators can follow some of the same procedures that I followed when conducting my research. First, it is advisable to prescreen each movie or TV show to be aware of potentially explicit or graphic content and in order to decide which clips may be best to share. I selected some of the clips (see list of movies in methods section above) because they were similar to narratives/situations that the participants mentioned in the individual interviews and I chose some of the other clips because they personally resonated with

me as an art educator. I also selected clips I believed would elicit rich discussion due to seemingly realistic happenings (in the classroom, with students) and also due to seemingly stereotypical situations (clothing, behaviors). These visual culture referents create a type of fantasy screen of which to point to and in turn, avoid pointing directly at the self and expressing what may otherwise be difficult or troubling to admit. The act of self-incrimination and admission of guilt or pleasure can be difficult to share with the self, let alone contemporaries in a group or an authority figure such as a teacher educator. Before showing each DVD, I provided a summary of the movie and then prior to each clip, as I was forwarding to the next selection, I shared a very short lead-in to each clip in order to set the scene. After viewing the clips, I started a discussion with questions pertaining to whether the student teachers related to the characters, whether/how the characters fit within their concept of art teacher culture, and other questions that were constructed with close consideration of the literature on identity and desire. These discussions helped us uncover fictions they had about teaching art.

Similarly, teacher educators and/or supervisors can discuss what happens when a breakage of the fictional structure occurs (without necessarily using those specific terms) when student teachers get too close to their own fiction(s) and they soon realize it is only imaginary, an image, a deception—it is a product of their own positing—which can lead to frustration or hopelessness when teaching in real life does not effectively equate to their fictions of teaching. This reaffirms my belief that "popular culture can be used within pedagogy to explore what fantasy hopes for and ignores when it imagines teaching" (Robertson, 1997, p. 91). Art teacher educators and/or supervisors can encourage student teachers to reflect on their feelings, affective investments, and pedagogical fictions (verbally or in writing) as well as the possible effects on their identities. "Getting students to explore in personal journals [or verbally] the thoughts and feelings that these [images] evoke can help them work through their own inner conflicts and anxieties concerning particular issues" (Bracher, 2002, p. 117) that they may encounter in their teaching lives (iden-

tities). In other words, visual culture (re)presentations of art educators can be utilized in art education pre-service classrooms to act as an impetus for discussion about/working through the anxieties of the profession of teaching art and art teacher identity. Another way I have found to incite discussion about the fictions of teaching art is through creating personal illustrations of the self as art teacher.

Personal Illustrations of Self as Art Teacher

One technique I used to generate discussion about the fictions of teaching in my research and that I still use in my preservice classroom is to ask student teachers to draw a picture of themselves as an *art teacher*. These illustrations can be done with any artistic media available or that they choose (e.g. crayons, colored pencils, markers, etc). I usually ask the students not to pay attention to technical details so they will be comfortable expressing themselves fully because of reduced levels of self-consciousness of artistic ability or competition. Before beginning, I state the following directions to students:

Draw yourself as an art teacher. You may use any or all of the supplies provided. In your drawing, you should also consider where you are when you are teaching. We will spend no more than 10-15 minutes on the drawing. Once you are finished, I will ask for volunteers to explain the drawing to the class.

I asked for personal illustrations because often it is difficult to verbally articulate and interrogate one's self identity, while a drawing/illustration provides an external referent to point to while explaining the visual symbols included/excluded. Seen as a window into the mind, the student teachers' "art becomes a way to explore what is unsayable, unthinkable, and invisible" (Jagodzinski, 2008, p. 154). Immediately after the students drew the *self as teacher*, I asked them to talk about and interpret their own drawing and indicate any ideas about why they drew (included/excluded) what they did in hopes of discovering/uncovering certain signifiers or images.

Because a picture can communicate simultaneously on many levels, drawings are useful...as layered paintings *that hide or combine other social, cultural, and personal images* [emphasis added]... [A personal interpretation] of drawings can thus *reveal aspects of our personal and social knowledge* [emphasis added]—how we see the world, how we feel, and what we can imagine—that have largely been ignored. (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 19)

I did not attempt to personally interpret the drawings, but rather I interpreted the verbal statements that the student teachers made about their own illustrations. The addition of the student teachers' "interpretation[s] to the analysis [of the illustrations] complicates the reading and enables a researcher to explore the various ways [they] resist and/or appropriate images" (Freedman, 2003, p. 87). In some cases I made probing statements such as, "tell me what is going on here" if the students neglected to explain a particular part of their personal illustration. I also tried to remain cognizant of not offering any judgmental statements of their illustrations such as, "that's really good" or "what is this supposed to be?" Some semesters, I start the first day with this exercise and end on the last day with the same exercise. After they draw and explain, I pass back the first day illustrations and we compare the differences in how each student sees the *self as teacher* in the ending illustration after 16 weeks of practicum experiences with K-12 children. This always leads to productive discussions about fictions of teaching and how much the student teachers have changed their ideas about teaching in only one semester.

Supportive Spaces for Identity Development

Besides showing media clips and drawing the self as teacher, information on identity will help teacher educators and/or supervisors in the field of art education better understand some of the conflicts and disruptions that the student teachers may be dealing with as they complete their primary and secondary school placements. Reading scholarship about identity formation from education (Danielewicz, 2001; Pittard, 2003; Stout, 2004), art education (Walker, Daiello, Hathaway, & Rhoades, 2006), and psychoan-

alytic theory (Bracher, 2002, 2006; Žižek, 1989;) may assist the educators and/or supervisors in constructing curriculum, seminars, and dialogue that are conducive to positive and realistic identity (re)formation. Because, as Stout (2004) states, an “optimal time for actively working with the identity development process is during the beginning of any new endeavor, especially entry into a profession, since the formative nature of this process may occur simultaneously with the beginning of professional practice” (p. 1). In other words, since art teacher educators and/or supervisors are working closely with student teachers, it is an excellent time to provide a supportive space to work through the difficulties they may be facing in their clinical placements due to assuming new (professional) identities that they have not had opportunity to construct previously. This is because

student teaching is typically the first time preservice teachers are immersed for an extended period of time in the context of schooling as the teacher in charge, and one of the first opportunities for them to test self perceptions of their developing identity as a teacher. (Pittard, 2003, p. 5)

As I mentioned above, teacher educators need to provide a supportive space to work through their student teachers’ potential difficulties and developing identities. While one might argue that the space being opened up to talk with student teachers should also be a *safe* space, when talking about one’s (un)conscious fictions around teaching, the space is anything but *safe*. Divulging and coming to terms with concepts that may be disrupting one’s fiction or fantasy of a whole self will be intensely personal and potentially disrupting (Aoki, 2000). Therefore, I suggest that the space for talking through the fictions around teaching (art) should be done in a *supportive* space because of the potentially unavoidable and necessary disruptions that may result.

Beyond providing a supportive space to work through the difficulties the student teachers may be facing, it will also be imperative that teacher educators and/or supervisors within art education discuss how the student teachers’ personal and professional

identities may affect how they construct knowledge and teach their students. In some cases, their personal beliefs and life experiences may lead them to employ a hidden pedagogy or subconsciously cause them to work out their own past conflicts while projecting onto their students. It is therefore

incumbent on us [teachers and teacher educators] to make every effort to discern the respective identity contents, structures, and maintenance practices that underwrite each facet of our teaching, and in particular to make every effort to determine when and how our identity needs and strategies may be driving us to engage in pedagogical practices that are unproductive or even harmful to our students and/or society in general. (Bracher, 2006, p. 76)

In other words, understanding their different and sometimes conflicting identities and recognizing how those may influence their teaching habits and styles may help student teachers refrain from pedagogical practices that are potentially unproductive or even harmful to their students (racist, sexist, classist, etc.). An intimate knowledge of different identity possibilities and identity influences can potentially contribute to student teachers’ broader acceptance of other educators and their collective in-group and non-group memberships. Additionally, student teachers may need a lot of emotional support as they traverse their pedagogical border crossings. This is because student teachers

need support for their commitment, energy and skill over their careers if they are to grapple with the immense emotional, intellectual and social demands and as they work towards building the internal and external relationships demanded by ongoing government reforms and social movements. (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006, p. 614)

Teacher educators and supervisors have the distinct opportunity to provide support for student teachers as they grapple with their complex and ever-changing

identities while they transition from a student at the university to a teacher in the classroom.

Final Thoughts

I offer these aforementioned suggestions as potential ways to theoretically impact and change the existing discourse and protocol (standards) for preservice art education programs. While it may seem plausible or probable that art teacher educators and supervisors might already be incorporating some of these suggestions for exploring fictions of teaching and teacher identity, for the most part it seems as if they are not. Instead, teacher educators insightfully facilitate discussions on instructing their preservice students on how to do this with the student teachers' future K-12 student populations. Admiringly, art education scholarship offers numerous strategies and art projects and big ideas that can be implemented to help K-12 students understand and/or display their various individual and collective identities. However, while art teacher educators and supervisors focus on K-12 students' identity (re)formations, they are potentially overlooking engaging in that activity with their own preservice students. In other words, most preservice classrooms have not been spaces, so far, for talking through how the student teachers' individual and collective teaching identities can be shaped by the social and cultural groups to which *they* belong or how these groups potentially influence or disrupt how they understand or imagine teaching and learning and their conceptualization of students. To be clear, it is not wrong to focus preservice courses on the development of K-12 student identity, but I ask you to think of how much better beginning teachers might be able to

grapple with that knowledge if they first began with interrogating and unpacking their own identity development processes.

What is overlooked and often left unsaid and untaught within current art teacher preparation are ways to navigate the nuanced processes of teacher identity (re)construction and (re)negotiation that are inherent in that development and maturation process. This gap in art teacher preparation is where this particular paper finds one of its distinctive niches, as information gleaned from this research could be used as a framework for interrogation and introspection of the psychic self as teacher. Utilizing visual culture representations of art educators in TV and film and creating illustrations for the self as teacher are two pedagogical activities that can act as springboards for (teacher) identity discussions. Anna Freud's (1974) assertion that "teachers should have learned to know and to control their own conflicts before they begin educational work" (as cited in Zook & Schlender, 2003, p. 75) supports my proposal of a supportive space for preservice teacher-identity (re)negotiation and as a result could point to a reconceptualization of art teacher preparation programs in general. It is important to remember that "learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one's past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension" (Britzman, 2003, p. 31). As teacher educators, we have the perfect positions to help our future teachers explore their fictions of teaching and assist our preservice students in working through their dynamic tensions of identity (re)construction.

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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/Black¹ 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 Black² and Brown³ 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-

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ 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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...to become
interdependent we
must embrace our
own vulnerability
and that of others.

Independence as an Ableist Fiction in Art Education

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Achieving independence appears to be a significant concern for education. This is particularly evident in discourses pertaining to art education in England where the aspiration to become independent appears to be synonymous with successful learning. Drawing on disability studies, and more specifically crip theory, this paper offers a Critical crip Discourse Analysis of documents reporting on the quality of art education in England. Here the independent learner emerges as a desirable norm and pupils with special educational needs are made visible through their apparent dependency. As a consequence of this emphasis on independence, dependency is framed as exceptional, undesirable, burdensome and valueless in pedagogic terms. Acknowledging the dominance of independence as a culturally determined fiction frees us to acknowledge problematic depictions of dependency and enable us to create alternative pedagogies that recognize the role of interdependence in learning with and through art.

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Independence as an Ableist Fiction?

This article examines normative assumptions regarding a prioritization of independence in texts defining quality art education in England. The first part of the project explores the dominance of independence established in assessment criteria and re-told via multi-modal representations of ideal learners in two triennial reports on the quality of art education in England published by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) in 2009 and 2012. These aspirations for independence are then contrasted with descriptions of dependence in sections of the same documents relating to learners with so-called special educational needs. I argue that independence, created as a normative fiction, renders disabled children and young people as hypervisible via descriptions of their dependency. The purpose of this article is to highlight and problematize the emphasis on independence in such discourses relating to art education and to question this as a form of ableism that makes dependent body/minds visible and excessive to our cultural and educational imagination (Mitchell, Snyder, & Ware, 2014). The article concludes by promoting *interdependence* as a challenge to the binary distinctions between dependence and independence through a greater recognition of reciprocity and collaboration in arts practice.

As a human in a world with other humans and animals, my life is constantly touched by flows between dependence, independence, and *interdependence*, yet it is important to acknowledge my subject position here as a straight, white academic and researcher who does not identify as a disabled person. My interest in the intersection between art education and disability stems from my practice as an art educator and disability studies scholar who is committed to furthering access to and participation in art education for all children and young people. The work presented here is aligned with earlier research by Doug Blandy (1991), John Derby (2013), and Alice Wexler (2016), which has problematized the relationship between disability and art education and acknowledged the pedagogic benefits of applying disability studies to this area. It is worth noting here that the term so-called *special educational needs* is used throughout this paper to

acknowledge the problematic othering of learners whose needs are identified as additional to social and educational norms although the term special educational needs will now be used throughout this article. This next section outlines a context for thinking about dependence, independence, and interdependence, and their relationship with ableism.

Dependence, Independence, and Interdependence: A Context for Exploring an Ableist Fiction in Art Education

The field of disability studies offers a history of critical explorations of the relationship between dependence, independence, and interdependence. It is important to acknowledge the complexity of work that recognizes these terms, not in a teleological sense, with one state as a historical development of the next, but as interrelated aspects that inform and are informed by the complexity of the lived experiences of disablement. It is important to recognize from the outset that people who identify as disabled are not necessarily dependent on others and those who do not identify as disabled are often dependent on others. Indeed, one of the aims of this article is to question such binary distinctions particularly where they become evident in accounts of learning in the arts. Work in disability studies seeking to problematize dependence and independence has acknowledged the importance of interdependence in resisting such binary definitions (McRuer, 2006); these terms will now be more fully discussed.

Albert Memmi's (1984) key work on dependence begins with his own illness and subsequent incapacity that prompted a deep reflection on the subject. His resulting definition acknowledges that we cannot escape our daily need and desire to depend on something or someone. Although he distances dependence from subjection and domination, there have been significant concerns regarding the abuse of human rights emerging from the relationship between dependents and their providers. Independence therefore emerged as an essential pursuit for disability activists keen to replace problematic experiences of dependency with self-determination and the rights to make significant life choices. Robert McRuer (2007) recognizes the

importance of, "claiming independence" for disabled people keen to secure, "a space for looking back on, bearing witness to, the more sordid histories we have survived" (p. 5). However, independence, "touted as the hallmark of personhood" is a state both sought after and treated with suspicion (Kittay, 2002, p. 248). Robert McRuer (2007) recognizes the complicity of independence in processes of disablement when he questions its role in masking and entrenching, "deeper relations of dependency" (p. 8). Although the pursuit of independence remains an aim for activists and scholars, this sits alongside contemporary concerns regarding its colonization by neoliberal social policies promoting independence as a vehicle for reducing state and social responsibility (Goodley, 2014).

There are no singularly dependent or independent bodies but a diverse range of body/minds that exist as a series of complex relations (Davis, 1995; Memmi, 1984). This relational dimension is recognized in the term interdependence which has the potential to disrupt the disabling effects of binary distinctions between dependence and independence. Dan Goodley (2014) recognizes interdependence as a means of "dismantling compulsory able-bodiedness" that has emerged from neoliberal ableism (Goodley, 2014, p. 19). Robert McRuer (2006) also acknowledges the reconstructive potential for interdependence to build, "alternative public cultures" (p. 87) by re-framing our understanding of the nature of dependence. Interdependence offers a, "creative alternative" to the contemporary emphasis on the independent individual in social, cultural, and educational settings (Mitchell et al., 2014). It is possible, therefore, that interdependence can offer a means of imagining new pedagogies by refuting approaches that frame learners, teachers, and knowledge as independent rather than interrelated entities (Atkinson, 2015). However, Judith Butler (2012) in attempting to affirm interdependency warns us of the difficulties of, "fostering a sustainable interdependency on egalitarian terms" (p. 149) where there are significant inequities in power. Although interdependency is frequently touted as an antidote to the neo-liberal dominance of independence, we cannot be naïve about the role and nature of power in shaping pedagogic relationships. Interdependence is

not easily achieved where dependence is only perceived of as a state to be overcome since to become interdependent we must embrace our own vulnerability and that of others. The following section therefore outlines a methodology for exploring the construction of independence as an ableist ideal in art education and the implications of the subsequently problematic representations of dependent body/minds in the documents analyzed.

Critical-crip Discourse Analysis as a Methodology for Exploring Ableist Fictions

Disability studies offers an interdisciplinary approach to examining socio-cultural barriers acknowledging the distinction between individual impairment and the social and cultural production of disability (Oliver, 1990). Crip theory lends an important extension to this theoretical framework by exploring the abled/disabled binary. It pays particular attention to the relationship between heteronormativity and so-called able-bodiedness, and seeks to disrupt the legitimation of certain body/minds, by drawing attention to the invisibility of such naturalized identities. Crip theory offers tools for critiquing the dominance of assumptions about identity, offering the potential for reconstructing social and cultural processes by drawing attention to crip/queer identities. Introducing a "theory of compulsory able-bodiedness," Robert McRuer (2006, p. 2) acknowledges a complex relationship between able-bodiedness and compulsory heteronormativity. He identifies heterosexuality as a thing unnoticed and apparently normal against which abnormality as homosexuality is framed. He describes a process of repetitive performances that entwine and confirm able-bodied and heterosexual identities as the preferred and invisible norms upon which, "all identities rest" (p. 9). Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer (2014) advise that an analysis of the distinction between able-bodied/disabled has replaced societal concerns with heteronormativity. They argue that, "an understanding of virtually any aspect of contemporary Western culture must be not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance" (p. 131) if it fails to pay attention to this matter. Following this argument, it becomes important to apply such

readings of compulsory able-bodiedness to art education since failing to do so renders it anachronistic. A further argument for the application of crip theory lies in its reconstructive and transformative capabilities. Price (as cited in McRuer & Johnson, 2014) reminds us that, “to crip” is a transitive verb and therefore offers potential for crip theory to shift our thinking about pedagogic practice (p. 154). The verb *to crip*, therefore suggests a disruption of the relationship between so-called able-bodied-minded/disabled identities by drawing attention to the invisibility of dominant identities and the subsequent occlusion of *the other*. The verb *to crip* suggests an unsettling, and a shift in beliefs and practices. It resists the desire to ameliorate but seeks instead to fracture or rupture.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a set of tools to undertake such critical inquiry as well as offering transformative possibilities. CDA has its roots in the analysis of inequality and has been employed against racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, or neo-colonialism in and beyond educational contexts (Rogers, 2011). Although less evident in Rogers’ list, CDA has been employed to address issues in disability studies with notable work by Jan Grue (2015) and Margaret Price (2009). Critical-crip Discourse Analysis (CcDA) provides a framework for the systematic exploration of texts that describe contemporary relations between art education and disability (Penketh, 2017). This methodological approach offers a critical lens for investigating as well as radically re-visioning art education from a committed anti-ableist position (McRuer, 2006). CcDA draws on insights from disability studies in order to identify disabling discourses, but a crip reading goes further in actively promoting an anti-ableist stance (Penketh, 2017). It makes use of a problematic verb, “to crip” in order to disrupt normative practices, decentering a cultural and, in this case, educational emphasis on forms of, “compulsory able-bodiedness” that render independence as an aspiration for all learners (McRuer, 2006). A critical reading of independence takes place alongside an analysis of representations of children with special educational needs as supported, dependent subjects in order to reflect on the dominance of independence as an ableist discourse in the selected texts.

Key questions framing this study were:

- How is independence represented in triennial reports describing the quality of art education in England between 2005 and 2011?
- How do representations of support contrast with discourses of independence?
- To what extent do descriptions of independence and dependence reflect an ableist discourse in art education?



Figure 1. *Drawing Together*, 2009, p. 12.

Objects of Inquiry

The study analyzed two triennial subject reports for art, craft, and design education produced by OFSTED, the regulatory body for standards in education in England and Wales. *Drawing Together* (OFSTED, 2009), a 53 page document with 33 images (see Figure 1), reported on the quality of art, craft and design education between 2005 and 2008; and the follow-up report *Making a Mark* (OFSTED, 2012), a 66 page document with 43 images, reported on activity between 2008 and 2011. The documents are the most recent subject reports for art education and represent

judgments of subject-based inspectors responsible for reporting on the quality of art education in England and Wales between 2005 and 2011. As such they offer a window into art education during that time. As with all documents of this nature, the reports reflect and create discourses in art education and were selected in order to examine the most recent representations of art education.

The multimodal analysis used here extended to images included in the documents as, “semiotic entities” working with the text to construct particular representations of independent learning (Kress, 2011, p. 205). The relationship between text and image is significant in entrenching normalized representations of typical body/minds as ideal learners. For example, a piece of text praising, “the maturity, technical proficiency and individual expressive qualities of students’ work” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 12) sits alongside an image of an older learner apparently working on her own to develop her sketchbook. A multimodal reading therefore takes account of the construction of meaning across both modes acknowledging the content and composition of images and their relationship to text.

Norman Fairclough (2013) advises that CDA offers more than tools for analysis since any reading must also offer the transformative possibilities to think differently. A first stage is to analyze and identify influences on the construction of meaning, but this must be a precursor to action or a shift to new understandings. These reconstructive possibilities resonate with crip approaches which aim to revise social and cultural structures from an anti-ableist stance (McRuer, 2007). A CcDA therefore enables the identification of ableism and disablism but attempts to reconfigure social and cultural expectations about the value attributed to different body/minds.

Method

An initial search of both OFSTED documents was conducted in order to identify occurrences of *independ-* as a prefix for related terms such as independence, independency, independent. Each occurrence was read and analyzed in context in order to understand the relationship between independence and comments regarding the quality of art education. A

further stage included the reading of images to identify correlations between text and image. Written descriptions were developed for each image to support this reading. In a further stage, specific descriptions of work with children with special educational needs were identified and considered in light of the earlier stages of analysis. The next section offers an analysis of the findings.

How is Independence Represented in Key Documents Describing Art Education in England?

Independence emerges as a feature of successful learning in art education, and this is reinforced through text and images in *Drawing Together* and *Making a Mark*. There are 32 different incidences of independence in the documents (excluding references to independent schools or organizations). All refer to the quality of learning and teaching in art, although this is expressed in relation to different aspects of art education (e.g., gallery education, use of materials, target setting for assessment). There are 14 such incidences in *Drawing Together* and 18 in *Making a Mark*.



Figure 2. Collaboration, independence and absence (OFSTED, 2009).



Figure 3. Collaboration, independence and absence (OFSTED, 2009).

Independence as a Determinant of Successful Learning

There is a clear expectation that, in order to be successful, pupils will develop as independent learners with high examination results associated with an ability to work independently (OFSTED, 2009, 2012). Independence features significantly in assessment criteria, and teachers' effectiveness is judged on their ability to promote independence and become independent learners themselves (OFSTED, 2009). Early independence is also given as evidence of enjoying the subject (OFSTED, 2009, 2012). In examples of best practice in learning and teaching, pupils aged eight or below are described as, "accomplished in developing their own ideas, choosing resources, making decisions and working independently and in teams" (OFSTED, 2012, p. 34). Conversely, limitations in art education are reflected in, "the quality and narrow range of independent work" completed for homework (OFSTED,

2012, p. 12). Limitations in the ability to work independently are associated with younger pupils in their pre-examination stages whereas older pupils are likely to have developed their ability to work unaided. This is evidenced in the emphasis given to the relationship between developmental work for examinations for students aged 14 to 18 and their exam success. Independence is also prioritized in learning beyond the classroom in art clubs and via homework as well as with professional artists, designers, or craftworkers who also act as role models for financial independence (OFSTED, 2009).

Collaboration and Absence of Adult Interaction

Images in both documents reinforce a preference for independence with a significant number of images closely cropped to show small groups of pupils working collaboratively with their peers. This compositional device constructs the child and his or her work in a space absent of adults, reinforcing independence as a dominant narrative. Although the text offers an explanation of the enabling context created by the art teacher, the image reinforces a normative aspiration for children to work unaided.

Figure 2 shows two pupils seated on the ground with their backs to the camera. One is drawing on a transparent surface watched by the other who also has a drawing. The children appear to be working on their own and apart from teacher intervention (OFSTED, 2009, p. 3). Figure 3 also shows a number of pupils working together on a large-scale drawing. Again the image is framed to show pupils and their collaboration on a large monochrome drawing (OFSTED, 2009, p. 7). This is not an individual and isolated independence but one established through collaboration with other pupils, yet the teacher is absent. Indeed, collaboration is emphasized almost as much as independence in the two documents. Thirteen images in the first document show individual or small groups of pupils working independently of the art teacher. Images of older pupils are more likely to show an individual student developing individual responses to materials or working in a gallery setting (see OFSTED, 2009, pp. 12, 20, 33). The absence of the art teacher is also apparent in *Making a Mark* (OFSTED,



Figure 4. Collaboration between independent craft-workers (OFSTED, 2012)

2012), where a group of boys are shown engaging with craft-based activities in a kind of *Bugsy Malone*¹ workshop, a land of children working as highly skilled craft-workers where adults are no longer required (see Figures 3, 4, & 5). Again, the closely cropped images emphasize pupils at work with one another—collaboration takes place on equal terms between independent bodies.

Although the teacher may have designed the activities, they are absent in a majority of images reinforcing the notion that education takes place without significant adult presence. It may be argued that Figure 3 shows interdependence with pupils actively working together, although I would question whether this representation of collaboration shows dependency of any kind. Independent work, apart from adult intervention, is valorized through these images.

There are a few notable exceptions to this absence of adult interaction. One image shows an adult hand taking hold of a child's hand as if introducing him or her to clay (see Figure 6). Both hands are connected through this tactile experience (OFSTED, 2009, p. 29). Further examples of pedagogic interactions between an adult and child or young person can be seen on pages 16, 18, and 35 (OFSTED, 2009). However, there

¹A musical film about gangsters produced in 1976 in which all characters were played by children.

are no examples of the art teacher working directly with children or young people in the images in the later document, *Making a Mark*.

The significance of this absence of interaction between learner and teacher in the documents is significantly heightened when compared with the presence of adults in descriptions of art education for children and young people identified as having special educational needs. It is this contrast with independence that creates a problematic context since there are no models that signify support and dependence as desirable or of worth in pedagogic terms. Two such examples of support and dependency are discussed in the following section in order to explore tensions between representations of the independent ideal pupil and non-normative body/minds rendered visible through descriptions of their dependency.

How do Representations of Support Contrast with Discourses of Independence?

The following discussion is based on a more detailed exploration of two particular examples of support for disabled young people from *Making a Mark* (OFSTED, 2012). The first describes the interventions of teachers and support workers in ensuring that pupils at a school for children with so-called Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties can engage in art education (OFSTED, 2012, p. 24), and the second describes, “highly skilled teaching” that ensured that, “two partially sighted students made excellent progress” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 22).

In the first example, we learn that, “teaching and support staff worked effectively together to tailor activities to the needs of individual students. Their success in engaging individual students drew on the use



Figures 5. Independent skilled craftworker



Figure 6. Connecting through material ways of knowing/being (OFSTED, 2009)

of art therapy” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 24). This description reflects effective working practices between staff although the success of their intervention appears to be on the basis of therapeutic rather than pedagogic practice. The involvement of teacher and support worker are further emphasized as we are informed about the level of interest in the lesson: “Both lessons were extremely successful in stimulating and sustaining the interest of all, students and support staff alike. They resulted in outstanding achievement” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 24). Here, engagement is described only in terms of levels of support and the actions of the teacher and support staff. There is little acknowledgment of the students’ creative achievements, which are largely attributed to the pedagogic knowledge and skills of the teacher. This is particularly problematic when read alongside the emphasis on independent work throughout the rest of the document.

One lesson identified as an excellent example of inclusive practice describes support for pupils to participate in a drawing activity. We learn that staff “...went to *great lengths* to give all students access to drawing, for example making use of, and adapting, standing frames, or new technologies such as interactive plasma screens, to help students overcome physical barriers” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 24).

Teachers and support staff are rightly making reasonable adjustments but there is an emphasis on the “great lengths” given to supporting nonnor-

mative bodies in order for them to participate in a drawing activity. Teachers go to “great lengths” providing excessive interventions compared with the comparatively *light touch* teaching required for those with apparently independent bodies. Of further significance is the function of the drawings produced. These are valued for their creative potential since the, “drawings made often spoke loudly about their lives and interests” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 22), but they also act as a preparation for the development of writing skills. Drawing is perceived of as a form of compensatory communication, “for the many pupils facing significant challenges in making sense of the world around them and communicating with others” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 22). It therefore becomes implicated in support as a compensatory tool that emphasizes a pupil’s perceived inability to communicate. The Mitchell et al. (2014) description of a limited cultural imagination in terms of nonnormative body/minds is relevant here since art education must be compensatory or therapeutic for disabled children and young people. These descriptions become examples of the extraordinary pedagogic feats required to include disabled pupils. Such descriptions of support and dependence exceed usual expectations for pedagogic approaches because there is scant attention paid to levels and types of support given to pupils not identified as having a special educational need.

The second example emphasizes the quality of teaching provided in order to enable access for a student with visual impairment where, “[t]he teacher sensitively supported the student, exploring how light and different materials distort, fragment and reflect...The teacher and the student were taken on a highly personal journey of discovery” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 22). There is an emphasis on the *sensitive support* required to help compensate for the pupil’s *sight loss*, yet this description also suggests co-learning through interdependency because both encounter something new. This description of learning together offers a sense of the pedagogic adventure described by Dennis Atkinson (2015) as essential to a process of real learning in art. However, the high level intervention and subsequent pedagogic interaction appears to take place only in response to the pupil’s impairment.

In a further example, a “partially sighted” student enlarged a photograph “with the help of his teacher” (OFSTED, 2012, p. 24). These potentially problematic representations of disability create a context where the significant presence of and interaction with the art teacher is necessary and desirable. However, teaching has to be framed by particular sensitivity and the emphasis on support occludes the value of the pupil’s contribution. The descriptions of strong one-to-one relationships between teacher and pupil also appear to negate any peer interaction and this offers a marked comparison to the images of collaboration between pupils throughout both documents. For pupils with special educational needs, peer interactions are far less evident and appear less relevant or desirable than the pupils’ need for adult support.

To What Extent do Descriptions of Independence and Dependence Reflect an Ableist Discourse in Art Education?

In the documents analyzed, independence is prioritized as the preferred and naturalized state for learners. This is promoted as defining successful art education inside and outside of school through practical art activities, but also through engagement with museums and galleries. This emphasis on independence frames the art teacher as a facilitator of independent learning and designer of tasks that scaffold independence. Although there are merits in independent work this masks the importance of co-design and the relational dimension of pedagogies in art education where learners and teachers might work together with and through material forms of knowing. The absence of the art teacher, particularly in the images described, creates a normative fiction associating independence with ability. This is particularly problematic when positioned alongside the rich descriptions of adults working with those described as having special educational needs. Independence as a preferred state and one that defines success in art education creates a problematic context for support and dependency. Independence is an aspiration and dependence therefore becomes implicitly undesirable as it is detached from examples of the highest levels of achievement in art education.

The absence of the teacher in the examples of independence normalizes a preference for this state and erases the art teacher from direct interactions with pupils. The subsequent descriptions of support for children with special educational needs appear excessive to this imperative to work unaided. Although collaboration between pupils is valued in text and image, the detailed descriptions of support by teachers and support workers negate peer interactions because the relationships are dominated by those with teacher and support worker. Pupils with special educational needs appear isolated from their peers by these descriptions of dependency and extensive adult support.

The reproductive nature of the relationship between dependency and independence is recognized by Rachel Herzl-Betz, who describes the, “philosophical valorization” (2015, p. 36) of independence and the consequent emphasis on the dependent body in cultural (and therefore educational) institutions. Here the dominance of independence as an essential aspect of humanness produces a problematic context for dependency in educational environments. Mitchell et al. (2014) express concerns that recent social and educational policy and practices have served to limit the cultural imagination by marginalizing, “nonnormative, less easily integrable bodies” through processes of “institutional normalization” (p. 81). I argue that the emphasis on independence as a principal aspiration results in a failure to acknowledge the validity of art education for body/minds who may never aspire to the types of independence articulated in these documents. Independence as a fictional determinant of successful learning renders children with so-called special educational needs as hypervisible and disqualifies them from the highest levels of achievement defined by an ability to become independent.

Conclusion: Alternative Truths About Interdependence

Independence in itself is not a fiction, yet we can question the veracity of claims to its importance in art education. It is essential to do so since the dominance of discourses of independence result in the devaluing of the lives and creative practices of those who must remain dependent. It also negates the levels of depen-

dence inherent in many of our social and pedagogic interactions. Such an emphasis is ableist in problematizing and negating the educational experiences of those whose creative learning is perceived of only in terms of dependence. Identifying independence as a marker of success in art education limits our understanding of the relevance of art education for *all*. It devalues the contributions of those requiring particular forms of assistance while failing to acknowledge that we are all, to some extent, dependent. What is significant here is the value attributed to the types of support and levels of dependence. Writing about the importance of pedagogic relationships in art education, Dennis Atkinson (2015) argues that learner and teacher identities are formed through complex intra-actions with others rather than interactions between independent bodies. It is the complexity of such intra-actions that appear to be erased in the representations of independence discussed in this article. Equating independent learning as prerequisite for successful learning is a form of ableism since it creates a hidden norm against which nonnormative body/minds are rendered hypervisible. The fiction of independence denies that dependence is, “an undeniable truth of human existence” (Memmi, 1984, p. 185) which demands a place in our understanding of learning. Although this article does not seek to valorize dependence, its relevance to *interdependent* pedagogic relationships must be more fully acknowledged in any move to position interdependence as a progressive or democratising approach. Examples and explorations of the complex intra-actions that take place between learners and art educa-

tors would be beneficial in enabling us to appreciate the opportunities and benefits of interdependence to pedagogic practice in the arts. Becoming attentive to what happens *between* people and materials in the art classroom is vital to our understanding of learning in the arts. Explicitly drawing attention to the creative possibilities of interdependence through and with arts practice offers pedagogic gains for *all*.

This article offers a first step in questioning the fiction of independence and the implications of compulsory able-bodied/mindedness. As art educators, we can draw attention to practice that promotes a deeper thinking about the relationship between creativity and disablement. Art practice has a long heritage of interdependence through collaborative exchange suggestive of the creative benefits of acknowledging forms of dependency. I therefore conclude this article with a recommendation that the dominance of independence be more fully questioned. Examples of good practice should recognize the social, educational, and creative dimension of interdependence. As Butler (2012) advises, “we might think that interdependency is a happy or promising notion” (p. 149), yet in our moves to embrace interdependence we must fully acknowledge the creative potential of mutual dependency without reducing, diluting, or devaluing difference.

Notes

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Dear friends, do
not hold onto
old assumptions.
Believe instead,
in the words of
Brother Love,
educator and
founding member
of Big Gay Church:
*“All of my students
are queer. Except the
ones who aren’t.”*

First Fagnostics: Queering Art Education

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Virginia Commonwealth University

Mindi J. Rhoades

The Ohio State University

This article advocates for a “fagnostic” pedagogy that acknowledges the queer aspects of education in relation to not knowing, of the unknown, of the unknowable, making spaces and opportunities for becoming art educator. The article defines fagnostic, questions the assumptions of heteronormative, binary pedagogies, and considers the possibilities of queering the spaces of art education practice to be more inclusive and culturally sustainable in the 21st century.

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First Fagnostics is an outgrowth of Big Gay Church, a recurring annual conference research presentation/performance at the National Art Education Association convention focused on the intersections of art, education, religion, and love with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) issues and concerns.¹ Big Gay Church refers to an ensemble of LGBTQ+ art educators and allies, an ongoing annual session at the annual National Art Education Association conference (now entering its 9th year), and the collective whole of the clergy and congregation. Collectively, Big Gay Church presents/enacts/demonstrates/deploys critical arts-based educational research and pedagogies to explore the intersections of religion, sexuality, art, education, and activism (Rhoades, Davenport, Wolfgang, Cosier, & Sanders, 2013). This "letter" is written by two members to the Flock of Big Gay Church for instruction, information, support, and continuing connection between leaders and the congregation.

1

To the members of Big Gay Church, to believers, our friends, supporters, the curious, the questioning, and the questionable, we wish you grace and peace. We recognize your dedication, your love, and your belief in excellent, engaging, accepting educational environments for all students, faculty, and staff. We rejoice in your spirit of ever-faithful commitment and perseverance. Your efforts keep the heart of education beating rhythmically and strong, and we are comforted by its continuity and captivated by its infinite variations. We are thankful for you; may your rewards be immeasurable.

We write to encourage your contemplation, development, and adaptation of the concept and potential practices of what we call *Fagnostics* to teaching, research, and scholarship. We want to present an approach that recognizes and centers the complexity, fluidity, and queerness of educational interactions and

¹ With permission from the artist, we included works of art by Cas Renniks. They are a queer youth in Columbia, SC, age 16, agender/ace. These examples highlight powerful youth artistic expression around queer identity. Using a process of glitch, or intentional "breaking" of digital images by interrupting their code, Cas explores the interstitial spaces between gender conformity and non-conformity, and the notion of "broken" bodies that do not align with conventional societal norms. Cas's own words are included as captions to the images.



Figure 1. Is a glitch² still a glitch if you do it on purpose? Yes and no. Maybe someone would expect this to be easily answered if you have one definition of a glitch, however a glitch is more of just a digital mistake, and glitch art is just the results of that mistake. It's kind of like tripping. You might be able to tell how you're generally going to fall, but you don't know how exactly you might fall, for example if you're on a hill you might roll a bit before falling into a bush, but if you fall in your house you might fall onto your TV and destroy it. (Cas Renniks, personal communication, November 27, 2016)

the subjects involved—in terms of disciplines, topics, and people. For we grow increasingly concerned with trends toward greater objectification and evaluations of knowledge, teachers, and students. We fear the sanctification of standardization. We fear the loss of diversity, of divergence, of infinite possibilities sacrificed to the false gods of predictability, certainty, measurement, and control. We fear this for our *curriculum*, for our *students*, for *ourselves*, and for *our future*. We offer a potential alternative.

² According to Legacy Russell (2012), "Glitch Feminism embraces the causality of 'error', and turns the gloomy implication of glitch on its ear by acknowledging that an error in a social system that has already been disturbed by economic, racial, social, sexual, and cultural stratification and the imperialist wrecking-ball of globalization—processes that continue to enact violence on all bodies—may not, in fact, be an error at all, but rather a much-needed erratum. This glitch is a correction to the 'machine', and, in turn, a positive departure."



Figure 2. I wasn't out yet as trans, and so glitch art enabled me to transition temporarily and virtually by enabling the chaos and distortion I felt to myself to manifest itself visually, which was really validating. (Cas Renniks, personal communication, November 27, 2016)

2

Dear brethren, we use the term Fagnostics as a portmanteau of *fag* and *agnostic*. *Agnosticism* is less of a religion and more of a philosophy or doctrine, premised on the idea that humans are unable to know, verify, or understand certain concepts. *Agnosticism* is accepting the *unknown* and *unknowable* as valuable parts of our experience, our understanding, and our growth. Agnosticism engenders spaces of open potential and continual exploration and contemplation of the *not known* and the processes and positions of *not knowing*. We are encouraging the occupation of this indeterminate territory for educational purposes.

3

Fellow congregants, we openly acknowledge that the word *Fagnostics* deliberately foregrounds the term *fag*. Although we wish to render it differently here, the word has traditionally been used in the USA as an epithet, a term meant to identify homosexual men



Figure 3. The flag represents all people. To glitch it as little as possible and show its hurt was my intention. I didn't know how it was going to turn out going in, and I wasn't sure how I would go about doing it. But I stopped when it resonated with me and how I felt. (Cas Renniks, personal communication, November 27, 2016)

and then communicate disgust in an effort to shame and intimidate them. We also acknowledge its focus on masculinity and transgressions of it. Still, this word retains some of its power to startle. In this letter, we use the term playfully but purposely, disruptively but inclusively, extending it to include gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender/genderqueer/gender non-conforming, intersex, two-spirit, and other queer identities (Smallwood, 2015).

We use the F word *fag* subversively, employing an educational framework that welcomes differences, questions, explorations, and divergences instead of routine, fixity, and control (Britzman, 2000). Fagnostics seek to disrupt traditional educational structures and practices, in turn welcoming those traditionally marginalized due to sexual or gender identity into the center of our fold. Fagnostics see education as a site of intervention and struggle, a site for extended resistance of identity binaries, a refusal of resolutions, a "sacred aesthetic place" and time dedi-

cated to transformation and growth (Denzin, 2003, p. 39). Deep commitment to these processes can engender broadening emotional and cognitive capacities, “empathy and intellect, passion and critique” (Denzin, 2003, p. 282).

Fagnostics embrace what Smallwood (2015) entitles “queerituality,” or efforts to disrupt and reform “our essentialization of identity development,” by queering school climates and considering queer experiences (p. 79). By introducing a queer theoretical framework, queer acts of reframing ask us to interrogate assumptions around student meaning-making and identity development. They also allow us to consider multiple and intersecting identities and entwined oppressions (Smallwood, 2015). Smallwood (2015) speaks specifically about queer college students. We assert such sentiments apply to students and educators more generally. We need to “create spaces where students can explore their various queer...experiences” and ideas at all levels of education (p. 80), to ensure queer intellectual experiences for students with/ out regard to their genders and sexualities.

When it comes to queerituality, we acknowledge the risk in presenting countertruths as truths (Wilchins, 2004). How does one create a queer space without reterritorializing upon that space myths and misconceptions produced therein? We offer an assemblage of poststructural, feminist, and queer theory in acknowledging that risk.

In Derridian (1976) terms, communities use language to name what is common. By using the word *queer* as an umbrella term for what might be understood as *uncommon* in regard to gender and sexuality one risks situating that use in common language. As rights and visibility increase for queer communities, particularly in Western, industrialized global spaces, so does the need for fluid language used to talk with and about those communities. It is useful to understand queerness less as an identity than as a critique of identity (Jagose, 1996). Judith Butler (1993) claims that the mobilization and critique of queer foreground the conditions of representation. Put another way, queerness both acts on and is acted upon in order to produce itself.

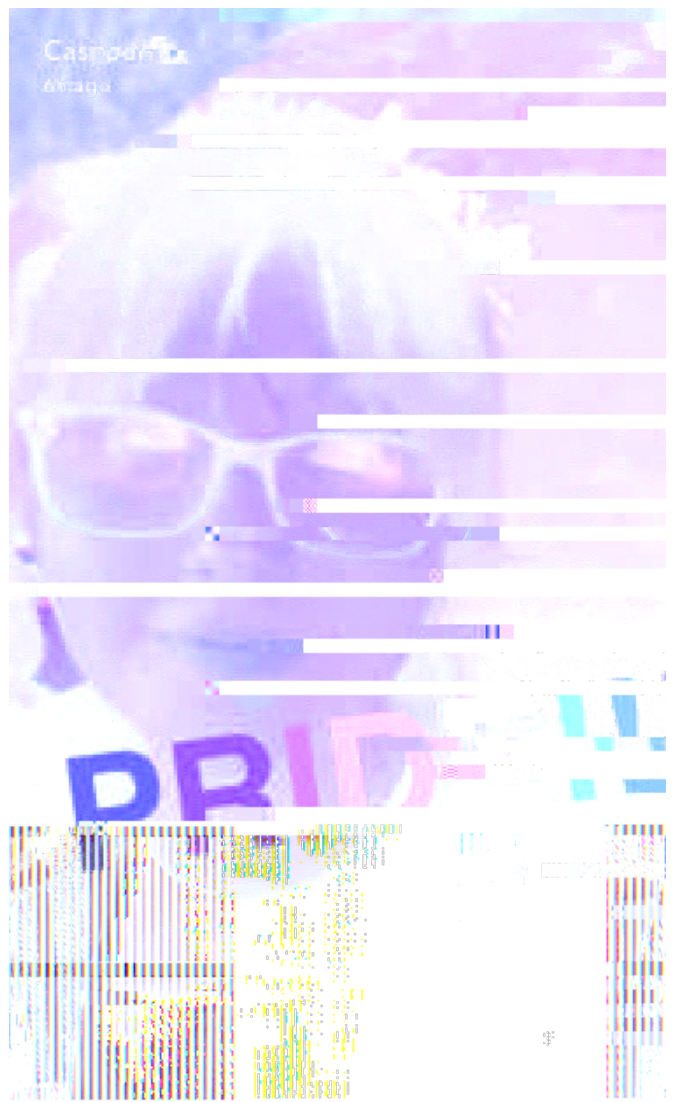


Figure 4. Instead of being motivated to create art only when your emotions are at their most extreme, the ability to express yourself is readily available at any-time. My selfies are a culmination of my experiences and emotions, from my happiest self, to my most dysphoric self, to my most neutral self. (Cas Renniks, personal communication, November 27, 2016)

According to Butler (1990), performance is bodily, nonverbal language. Performativity relates to the stylized and repetitive performance acts which often are rooted in normalized gendered performance. Performativity can, however, produce new norms. These are the circumstances wherein one begins to expect certain aesthetics or behaviors by which to code and identify queerness. Those codes and identity

markers create community but also make communities more vulnerable by virtue of their visibility.

With very few exceptions, the default construction of gender and sexuality is binary and heterosexual. Attempts to expand that construction to include non-binary gender expression and identity or a range of sexual expression and identity are, at best, considered *alternative* or, at worst, subjected to violence. De-centering the narrative around gender and sexuality involves acknowledgment of multiplicity: accepting the rage of gender and sexuality outside of either/or. José Esteban Muñoz (1999) suggests a deepening of this concept as *disidentifications*. According to Muñoz, intersections of race, ethnicity, and queer identity produce the need for a third mode of addressing dominant ideology—to neither assimilate nor oppose but rather create identities-in-difference.

A queering of school narratives around gender and/or sexuality asks one to change the collective narrative around the *deserving* student (Kumashiro, 2001). When schools elect to restrict the bathroom use, locker room use, or extracurricular activities of transgender students, for example, the rhetoric is often around *protection*. A queer perspective asks the question “Protection for whom?” Dafina-Lazurus Stewart (2017) asks for a resistance to the politics of appeasement, to replace language of “diversity and inclusion” for action around justice and equity. In particular, they complicate educational and social practices that preserve dominant narratives when we ask “Is the environment safe for everyone?” rather than “Whose safety is being sacrificed and minimized to allow others to maintain their dehumanizing views?” (para. 14). The tension between *where we were* and *where we need to go* in regard to equitable and just experiences for students in schools will—and should—always be present. We posit it is through that tension one finds the richest space of inquiry and possibility for change.

4

Dear friends, do not hold onto old assumptions. Believe instead, in the words of Brother Love³, educator and founding member of Big Gay Church: “All

³ Brother Love is the pseudonym of Courtnie Wolfgang.

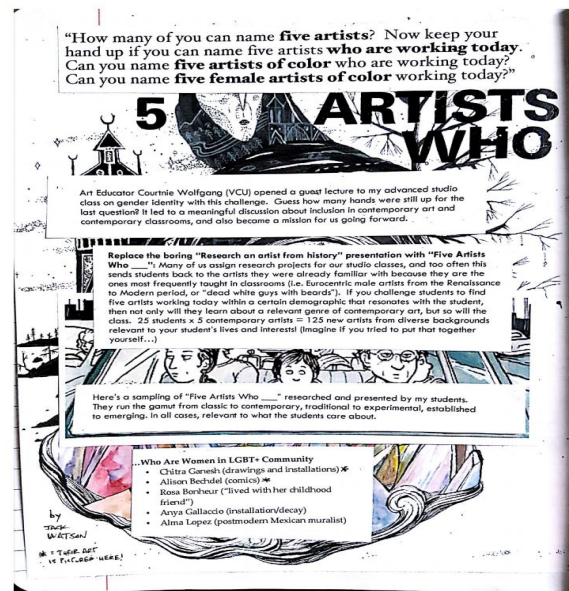


Figure 5. Excerpt from Jack Watson's *New Weird Ideas* (2017). Presentation at the National Art Education Association Annual Conference. New York, NY. See the full text at newweirdideas.com

of my students are queer. Except the ones who aren't." When presuming the status quo, queer aspects of people's lives are ignored, erased, camouflaged, or denied. The authors acknowledge the challenges of explicit bias in our communities; however, we posit that implicit biases, “thoughts[,] and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control” (Project Implicit, 2011) significantly determine a hidden agenda in pedagogies and histories of art education. Fagnostics seek to expose those erasures, to have them included and recognized moving forward.

For instance, historical records of activist and Hull House co-founder Jane Addams document her decades-long partnerships, professional and romantic, with Ellen Gates Starr and Mary Rozet Smith. Despite evidence supporting Addams' queer identity, acknowledging this in an academic manuscript elicited editorial calls to “prove” it. Why didn't the burden fall to the editor to prove Addams straight? Though Addams never explicitly identified her sexuality in any records, her archive includes intimate personal correspondences with the women she loved. At what cost do we exclude and deny evidence of queer experience?

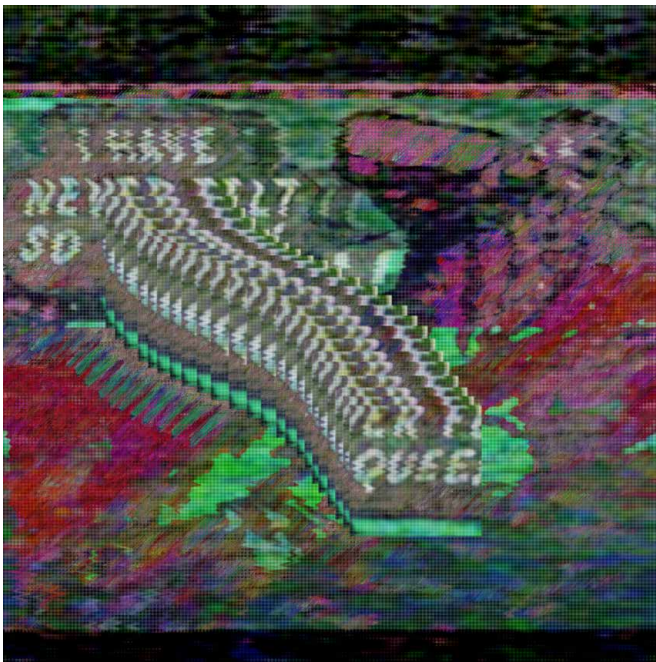


Figure 6. I wanted to creating a message through my art to the community, to say that, while we had been broken, we were not destroyed. (Cas Renniks, personal communication, November 27, 2016)

A binary heteronormative paradigm reifies queerness as unspeakable. What else does such a paradigm exclude? Cannot Zanele Muholi's portraits of Black lesbian women in South Africa be as common in the art classroom as Van Gogh's work? Why is Kehinde Wiley's queerness invisible in classroom talk of pattern and portraiture? What are the missed opportunities when we value the lived experiences of some and are silent about others? Quiet tolerance is not enough. How do Fagnostics differ from other forms of classroom dialogue or practice which seek to disrupt? For many art educators, those artists or the complexities of their lived experiences were not taught to us as a part of the art curriculum and therefore do not enter into our own curricula. But their erasure from teaching and learning spaces produces a gap in student knowledge and re-centers heteronormativity, further reifying dominant narratives that directly or indirectly push to the margins students, faculty, and families whose lives are not represented in the existing curriculum. As a way to address this, art educator Jack Watson (2017) assigns his students the "Five Artists Who _____" challenge. In it, the students locate and research five art-



Figure 7. I think people generally see the South as drawing Southern accents, old money, and intolerant views. They're not completely wrong, but the South is also an agent of change, filled with community, love, and space. It is not just conservative waste, but is a battleground for ideals and diversity, and often a place of equilibrium where people can share who they are and create dialogue about the past, present, and future. So to align my fathers hat, a symbol of the South's expectations, with myself, a queer non-binary youth, and then create art out of it, represents a destruction of the South as a harsh and unforgiving environment, and the creation of a South that represents strength and diversity through dialogue and disunity. (Cas Renniks, personal communication, November 27, 2016)

ists who represent different intersections of identity in an effort to make visible historically underrepresented artists as well as the stories that often go untold in the art classroom. Additionally, students—particularly queer/students of color—have opportunities to see themselves represented in the work of contemporary artists where the traditional canon of art history continues to fail them.

Fagnostics decenter heterosexuality and gender conformity as the norm and represent a purposeful attempt on behalf of the art educator to question

those norms. Revering fluidity, indeterminacy, and the unknown is critical to establishing culturally sustainable pedagogy which includes gender and sexuality. And it will take time and practice to become un/done. Be patient.

5

Fellow congregants, Fagnostics encourages the processes of thinking, making, applying, disrupting. Fagnostics recognizes the unknown and its potential in meaningful collaboration with others. This open-endedness is often antithetical to traditional academic environments and processes especially where gender and sexuality are concerned. Fagnostics asks one to specifically consider their complicity in the hetero-norming of educational spaces, to address a “queerblind heterosexism” (after Desai, 2010), which favors inclusion-in-name-only over justice and equity. Perhaps one begins by not assuming gendered binaries, by inquiring about students’ pronoun usage, to make more common a questioning of heterosexual assumptions about family. Look to the images and books you share with your students. Do they tell a variety of stories that include gender and sexual diversity? Consider organizing a Safe Zone training at your school. Know your rights and the rights of your students.⁴ Celebrate the lives of artists and culture makers including, not in spite of, their personal lives and loves that influence their art making. When you face resistance, ask, lovingly, why. Enter such interactions in a spirit of abundance and care. What if we welcomed the unknown and the absurd? A fagnostic

⁴ (1) *American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)*: The ACLU works to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to everyone in this country, including lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people. (www.aclu.org, www.aclu.org/library-lgbt-youth-schools-resources-and-links, www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/lgbt-high-school-students)

(2) *Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)*: Every day GLSEN works to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are able to learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment. (www.glsen.org, <https://www.glsen.org/educate/resources/guides>)

(3) *Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network)*: An LGBTQ+ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains LGBTQ+ youth leaders and allies in an intersectional effort for safer schools and healthier communities. (<http://www.gsanetwork.org/about-us>)

(4) *Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center*: Helping educators who care about diversity, equity and justice to find news, suggestions, conversation and support. (www.tolerance.org)

(5) *YouthResource*: A website created by and for LGBTQ+ youth. (<http://www.youthresource.com/>)

approach to classroom teaching is not aimless or unprepared, instead it is capitalizing on available assets, considering current contexts and participants, and embodying flexibility and responsiveness. Let us premise our interactions with students, with curriculum, and with pedagogy on our unknowing in the spirit of growth, experience, and understanding.

6

We urge you to remain steadfast and strong in your commitment to education, to students, to the arts, and to one another. Let all that you do be done with good humor and great love. Persevere, our friends. Great are the spiritual rewards for Fagnostics, for those devoted humbly to the admirable task of embracing unknowing. May blessings rain down like silver glitter upon you all.

Notes

The authors would like to thank all the members of the Big Gay Church, its congregation, and all those yet to join.

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Through these seemingly mundane accounts, prevalent teacher attitudes, values, frictions, conflicts, and ethics become more visible.

Professional Friction: Racialized Discourse and the Practice of Teaching Art

Jessica Kirker

Independent Scholar

Language is crucial in situating our selves and others. Discursive patterns create alliances or factions, establish hierarchies, and subjugate individuals or groups. In this autoethnographic study, I consider how I, as a White woman teaching art, participate in, maneuver, and manipulate spoken and unspoken racialized discourses within the context of a high school with a diverse population of students. Through the data collection process of journaling over one school year, I recorded reflections on conversations, speeches, and written communication with, between, and regarding teachers, students, parents, and school administrators.

I employed discourse analysis on these texts and draw upon Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies to examine the discourses that govern the school and inform its social conventions as manifested in my professional identity as it intersects with various collegial spaces. I also show the value in performing an autoethnography as a way to evolve as a social justice educator and scholar as well as a means to give voice to teachers' stories so that we can render visible the way radicalized discourses and discords they create can shape the daily practice of teaching art.

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Discussions of racial discrimination often only exist as history lessons, but the lessons taught throughout U.S. schools about racial identity are deeply embedded within the daily practices of all members of a school community. Racial identities are established on a daily basis through (seemingly) casual interactions and microaggressions between teachers, students, parents, and administrators. The discourses that position and subjugate individuals can be as simple as an informal email or a casual hallway conversation to more public approaches like disciplinary hearings or faculty meetings. These messages establish relationships of sameness or difference, power or subordination, and allegiance or contention. Beyond the interactions of daily personal relationships, there are normalizing school practices; ways of doing things, guiding principles, and procedures, that define and shape parties in relationship to each other as well as ascertaining a dominant value system over the school context. Rules as well as social norms are communicated through highly visible social etiquette conventions as well as formalized policies and legislation (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The discourses that define these rules are often structured to ensure dominant parties remain unchallenged (Hodge & Kress, 1988). In the context of U.S. schools, censorship of speech or imagery, management tactics, and disciplinary policies are often designed to fit the interests and desires of dominant White educational leaders.

As a seasoned White art teacher in a school with a predominately Black student population and predominately White faculty¹, I started to reflect on how race is situated, discussed, and defined in my particular school context. The original catalyst for this investigation was ongoing conversations with other faculty members regarding our students. On far too many occasions, the negative (and often stereotypical), discursively constructed images my colleagues painted of students did not coincide with my own impressions of the young adults I had come to know. I considered the process of navigating through these texts² and how I confronted interactions that created (or had the

possibility to create) friction between my pedagogical/moral beliefs and the discourses of my colleagues or myself. In doing so, I was forced to consider my own Whiteness and the ways in which I exercise Whiteness and benefit from the privilege it affords me.

In this autoethnography, I share two instances (as told through journal entries) that reveal a glimpse of my own interactions with the racialized discourses expressed by/with/between my administration and my colleagues. These are intended to illuminate the polarizing effect of racialized discourses within schools as well as provide examples of how I, a White art teacher, am shaped by, conform to, challenge, manipulate, and navigate these discourses through my daily practices. One journal entry describes how a subtle action of resistance against the status quo was silenced by a conversation between me and an administrator, both in the speech of the administrator and in my responses to this speech. Another entry highlights explicit silence in a racially-charged conversation with colleagues and examines the privilege of silence and the effect it has on a discursive context. This study considers how professional practice and social norms inhibit me from freely speaking about my understandings of the racialized identities of both students and staff and the effect it has on my teaching practice. By exhibiting my own moral conflicts and personal challenges as they exist within these discourses, I can highlight the implications of personal, social, and professional frictions within the workplace and the effect they have on teacher beliefs and practice. I also offer insights into coming to terms with one's Whiteness and moving towards becoming a White ally for students of color.

This study exposes my own weaknesses as I fall in order with dominant discourses. I did not expect this study to examine my *self* as much as my *role within a particular school*. As the study progressed, I learned about how my need for collegial support and fears of isolation led me to participate in racist conversations in ways that I did not expect. As a result, I was forced to examine my *self* as a White racialized person/educator and challenge the strength and immovability of these dominant discourses.

¹ The school of this research site is an Title I high school on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

² For the purpose of this article, *texts* refer to the presentation, participation, and response(s) to written, oral, and non-verbal communications.

(In)forming the Study

I am drawn to autoethnography because of its salient characteristics: (a) it allows for *research topics* with intense emotional connections to the researcher and acknowledges, but permits, their biases and sees these biases as part of the research; (b) it allows the *reader* to understand a larger social system through the eyes of those living it; and (c) it gives voice to *researchers/practitioners* who might not otherwise have their important stories heard in academic circles (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Denzin, 2006, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000; Jones, 2005; Miller, 2005; Rolling, 2008; Toyosaki, 2012). One of the most difficult aspects of this study is the way it allows for both cultural *and* personal critique (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) by illuminating racist practices in education as a whole, but also within my own practice. As an art teacher of 14 years, I had to face the challenge of exposing how my teacher self might bolster racialized discourses that my academic self knows to be discriminatory. I had to face how I participate in conversations that feature ableist banter that teachers exchange, such as “those crazy/wild/out-of-control kids!” as a way to vent our frustrations with our own failures in the classroom while simultaneously maintaining a sense of collegial alliance.

According to Zander (2007), discourse is a “philosophical umbrella that encompasses narrative and other forms of communication such as dialogue and conversation” (p. 189). In this study, I utilize critical discourse analysis under a lens of Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies³ to examine a portion of my professional practice and the social justice-oriented teaching philosophies of anti-racist teaching that I work towards. Critical discourse analysis is a methodological approach that probes texts and speech for underlying philosophical assumptions, ideological commitments and implicit knowledge-power dynamics (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). It helps me understand the sociocultural and linguistic discourses (ways of thinking, being, doing, speaking) that govern my context and inform the practices and representations I (and others) employ.

³ See *Theoretical Framework* section for further explanation of Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies.

To understand racist discourse in my school and how I fit into it, I had to examine semiotics, social structures, professional expectations, and interpersonal relationships for their effect on the discourses at play. Foucault (1988) says that discourse is more than just linguistic speech, it is also a sign system that relates to other social systems and symbols established through social constructions. Hodge and Kress (1988) define semiotics as the life of the sign systems in society. They understand discourse as the site where social forms of organization engage with the production of messages and their social context to reproduce or change the meanings and values that make up a culture. Every exchange in a culture is a form of communication and these communications are managed by commonly understood rules and principles that are policed by concrete social agents such as parents, teachers, employers, and other authority figures. The production of any communicated message constructs a social identity for both the producer and their hearer. Foucault (1988) also considers how language and discourse—which are regulated, mediated, and defined by social structures—create subjects and assign individual meanings. He (Foucault, 1982) claims that discourse creates taken-for-granted assumptions that are established by society as a way of governing ourselves and each other and has an incredible impact on power, discipline, and normalization. He considers the notion of a stable subject or a fixed, autonomous identity, unaffected by discourse to be a fiction; he maintains that all subjects are created through language.

As I consider how individuals are subjugated by language, I also consider the use of racial signifiers in my own practice as well as how they are utilized in this study. I recognize the danger of fixed racial categories as a limitation for those who understand racial identity to be more complicated than a polarizing label. However, each child is assigned a label in his or her school profile as one fixed race. These (often falsely) stable categories are how these students are categorized and sorted throughout their educational careers. For the purpose of this study, I will use *Black students* to refer to individuals with African ancestry and that have been described as such in their school profile. Likewise, I recognize that the identity of *White* is not

a clearly defined category, but typically describes a Caucasian person with origins from European nations. Since it is a Western tendency that White is discursively represented as the polar opposite of Black, these racial identities are often seen as a binary in opposition to one another (Kincheloe, 1999).

In addition to using semiotics to establish labels that create subjects and establish identities, I also argue that subjects and discourses could be established through allegiances and relationships. This speaks to the social aspect of identity formation and how individuals situate themselves in relation to others. All systems of language are socially constituted and should be treated as a social practice (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Therefore, racial labels and categories are "social constructions in that they can be invented, analyzed, modified, and discarded. They are not unchanging, fixed biological categories impervious to cultural, economic, political, and psychological context" (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 165). Race has been defined as a controversial concept that was originally grounded in biology, but is now generally understood to be exclusively socially constructed (Lee, 2012). With that understanding of race as a social construct, racism is also a socially constructed mechanism that is designed to create an Other to exclude from equal resources and opportunities as a means of maintaining one's own superiority (Lee, 2012).

Data Collection

My primary means of data collection for this study was daily journaling over the course of one school year (August 2013-June 2014). During the school day, I took shorthand notes that were records or transcriptions of dialogues or events. Specifically, I recorded discourses and actions that positioned the racial identity of myself or those around me. These included, but were not limited to, interactions with colleagues and administrators, discipline referrals, school-wide correspondences, and professional development sessions. I considered semiotics, behaviors (public/private/intentional/unintentional), texts, questions, and speeches, as well as ways of being, speaking, responding, and not responding. Pregnant pauses, body language, eye contact, and the way people physically situate them-

selves in a space are all integral elements in analysis of school discourse. After the school day concluded, I wrote more detailed accounts of the events as well as my personal interpretation. As my journal entries grew longer and more in-depth as the year went on, I was faced with the theoretical challenges that Jenks (2002) describes as the technical issue autoethnographers face in discerning what is observational and interpretative. By analyzing my data through critical discourse analysis, I allowed myself to be considered as a participator rather than observer of discourse. I started to realize how my own participation in racialized discourses exposed my fears and weaknesses, caused me to question my effectiveness, and reinforced the immovability of dominant, normalizing discourses and my inability to change them. Themes of hesitation, reluctance, and silence in the face of racialized discourses started to emerge through many journal entries regarding communications with other adults in my building. To interpret these journal entries, I employed a theoretical framework guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Whiteness Studies.

Theoretical Framework

Educators and scholars employ CRT to explore the social, political, and moral aspects of how race is translated into education (Bell, 2002; Blum, 2002; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013; Kraehe, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Rolling, 2008; Spillane, 2015; Vaught, 2009, 2011). CRT has provided a lens through which one can examine individual practice and attitudes as well as school/district level policy and practice as windows onto structural ideologies and mechanisms of race and racism (Vaught, 2009). Through a critique of White hegemonic discourse and power and the social disparities between races, CRT rejects notions of objectivity and neutrality and rebuilds knowledge based on individual stories about systemic racial oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT is not just a theoretical endeavor, but is also concerned with activism that effects social change by eradicating all facets of discrimination (Spillane, 2015). CRT seeks to remove the dominant ideologies of race talk and valorizes narratives drawn on experiential knowledge (Rolling, 2008). Stories of one's experiences with

discourses in particular classrooms highlight not only exclusionary acts of racism by school personnel, but also how racialized practices are maintained and normalized throughout educational systems.

Acknowledgment of the influence of power relations associated with Whiteness is typically absent from art education research (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). Whiteness is not a particular thing or concept one ascribes to or rejects, but can best be described as an individual's *White experience*, which is elusive and is constantly shifting along with changing meanings of race in the larger society (Kellington, 2002; Kincheloe, 1999). Whiteness studies examines the historical nature of how Whiteness is defined as a racial identity with specific attention to the nature of White privilege (Garner, 2008). Privilege is maintained by social structures that protect the dominant groups and preserve the status quo (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002), as well as construct norms by which all others are judged (Castagno, 2013). This White normativity creates the illusion of a status quo that maintains a singular way of being and knowing in the world (Bhandaru, 2013; Blum, 2002; Kellington, 2002).

Racism in U.S. schools represents one of many institutionalized practices in the U.S. that maintain and perpetuate the domination over racialized Others "through a discourse that presents the racial status quo as the natural order of things" (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011, p. 276) that serves to disregard the need for a critical re-evaluation of policy and practice. Through discourses and practices that cater to a White desire to deny this power and privilege, colorblindness⁴ continues to pervade schools in the U.S. This façade of colorblindness serves the interests of White people who do not want to confront the racial disparities that surround them and helps them avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings by a de-racialization of education (Lewis, 2001). This ideology leads me to believe that education is somehow disconnected from the world of power, partisanship, and the shaping of the social order (Watkins, 2001)

⁴ Colorblindness refers to the notion that one does not engage in racial discrimination because the subject does not see differences in others' skin color. A failure to acknowledge such important components of identity such as race and culture causes many educators to ignore important elements of their students' understanding of themselves and the world.

and grants Whites the privilege of not questioning what is presented to be the natural, normal order (Blum, 2002; Watkins, 2001). Conversely, I have witnessed and experienced that when White teachers *do* question the dominant power, the responses can be unsettling.

Discourse with Administration

As a public school art teacher, I have often felt restricted by the dominant discourses exercised in the school community and by the school administration, which potentially silences, hinders, or limits my educational epistemologies. Wegwert (2014) speaks to a culture of fear that is constructed around discourses of cautions and consequences between teachers and administrators and is heightened by media's general assaults on education. In my experience, many art teachers appease administration to ensure support for their program. Therefore, art teachers, like me, tread this particular discursive landscape with a certain degree of trepidation.

Desai (2010) and Knight (2006) note that art classes are ideal spaces for creatively articulating students' perspectives on the complex issues surrounding racism in their personal lives and in society. Furthermore, Desai (2010) posits that the public display of student works can foster important dialogues about racial inequality in school communities. However, in some school communities, these dialogues become monologues that silence challenging viewpoints in order to maintain a dominant colorblind mentality. This is demonstrated in the following entry from my journal:

May 16: I had to get a vice principal to approve my work for the art show today. Part of this makes me very proud because my students are producing work that is challenging status quo notions of art creation in schools. At the same time, it's demoralizing that I have to get prior approval to hang work in the hallway.

Last year an incident arose when a project based on the Guerilla Girls prompted students to create black-and-white text-based posters confronting one of their most personally relevant social issues.

These posters were hung around the school in the evening, but were torn down the following morning by several teachers and security guards. I was promptly summoned to speak with a White, male administrator regarding “school appropriateness” of several of the posters, particularly those that addressed issues of racism and discrimination. Before the posters were removed, however, they garnered positive attention from the student body and many other teachers. The supportive and enthusiastic responses from students and teachers that were in favor of the work versus the faculty and administration that opposed the notion of bringing attention to racism and discrimination drew my attention to polarizing perspectives on racialized dialogue in schools. It also provided my students teachable moment that revealed the power of student voice to rattle the dominant power structure of the school.

Since that episode, administrators race to approve my “controversial work.” The annual art show is coming, so I invited one vice principal to come to my room and go through what I am hanging for the art show. He pulled about 10 works relating to gun control, racism, immigration issues, and sexism. As always, I was told that they appreciate what I’m doing, but these works are “too much” for a school display. With the vice principal still present in the room, I immediately hung them up in my room under the “Too Real for School” wall. This administrator, always uncertain of how to respond to my blatant acts of resistance, tells me all the time with a laugh, “Oh, Kirker, you’re too much.”

In a way, it’s pretty condescending to what I’m trying to achieve. It’s as though they are politely exercising their way of taking away my social justice agenda, and do it with a smile and a wave. My pedagogical goals are trivialized and I think I’m seen as just some radical activist, not really worthy of any real consideration. (J. Kirker, personal journal entry, May 16, 2014)

What happens when asking the necessary questions is not welcome in schools? A teacher’s propensi-

ty to interrogate may depend on institutional structures such as tenure status, the open-mindedness of their superiors and peers, or the nature of the broader discourse around the school (Berchini, 2014). In light of these considerations, Berchini (2014) warns against essentializing White teacher stories as collectively embodying privilege and ignorance or assuming all teachers bring a lack of experience with diversity to their classroom. Rather, I must consider the complexity of how a teacher’s story is developed over time through frictions within their teaching environment.

The reality is that the politics of teaching warrant a particular professional discourse, but this discourse looks different in every school, district, region, and state in the United States. Furthermore, what is considered acceptable speech changes through time and across different contexts. Art teachers, much like me, have to find their place and voice within this context. This requires a negotiation of beliefs with the desire to remain actively employed. For some of my educator friends/colleagues, the inability to push back against restrictive confines became too frustrating to continue in the field. Other passionate colleagues have to find ways to live with the friction, even if it requires them to temper their voice against or towards dominant parties. This is the situation in which I find myself.

The Benefits of Whiteness

Foucault (1975) claims that discourse creates assumptions that are established by society as a way of governing ourselves and each other and has an incredible impact on power, discipline, and normalization. In Western culture, White is assumed to be the human norm, making Whiteness unmarked and unexamined (Knight, 2006), but it is also intimately involved with issues of power (Kincheloe, 1999). This White-centric power structure dominates not only my own school context, but also the overall culture of power in education throughout the U.S. (Delpit, 2006; Watkins, 2001). As I have witnessed, this White-centric, color-blind discourse is so powerful that it has the potential to threaten the professional or social well-being of anyone who blatantly confronts it, causing individuals to self-police their own discourses that may contradict these assumptions of normativity.

People take advantage of White privilege in many ways. All Whites possess some degree of benefit of their Whiteness (Clarke & Garner, 2010; Garner, 2008). However, Garner (2008), Kellington (2002), and Kincheloe (1999) all warn against essentializing Whiteness. Despite the fact that my research, scholarship, and experiences have made me keenly aware of the presence of an unjust (White-dominated) racialized power structure in education, I still benefit from my own Whiteness. One particular aspect of privilege that is often unnoticed is the ability, or perhaps opportunity, to *not have to* consider issues of race unless the topic is raised by someone else. Even when it is mentioned, White privilege grants White individuals the ability to detach themselves from conversations of race (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002) or even avoid the topic altogether. Therefore, I would be remiss if I failed to note that the ability to avoid, self-police, temper, or resist conflicts regarding the topic of race are some of the ways in which I exercise my own White privilege. Even though my desire is to challenge White normativity, I have the option of choosing the battles I wish to fight. As Spillane (2015) notes, people of color do not have the choice to ignore race in (self-) selected contexts.

I wonder if my students' Guerilla Girls posters forced my White administrator to consider his own Whiteness. Or, perhaps, there was a desire to keep the conversations about racism and discrimination in our school positive and uplifting by focusing on diversity rather than discrimination. Vaught (2009) notes that when there is discourse of races *getting along* in schools, this discourse only targets student-to-student relationships and omits the important conversations surrounding teachers. Once again, privileged White teachers can omit themselves from these conversations and never consider the effects of their actions (Mills, 1997). When they do arise, discussions of Whiteness often center exclusively on the position of the White person's experiences and challenges (Kraehe, 2015; Mills, 1997; Spillane, 2015) in such a way that it actually elevates their discomforts associated with racism above the pains of those experienced by non-Whites (Choi, 2008; Garner, 2008; Kellington, 2002; Kincheloe, 1999; Matias, 2013; Mills,

1997). In the case of my students' poster backlash, it was exclusively White teachers that removed the artworks and claimed to be offended by the display. Kincheloe (1999) talks about the "charade of White victimization" and subtle promotion of White supremacy through stories that use the language of White normativity to inadvertently mock multiculturalism (p. 180).

I consider the praise, criticism, and censorship of my students' artworks, inspired by the Guerilla Girls, and the works rejected from the art show while considering Banks' (2006) dimensions of multicultural education that strive for an empowering school culture and structure. The principal-approved artworks showcased technical talent over compelling subject matter. In lieu of my students' more thought-provoking works, the colorful *Day of the Dead* masks fulfilled the proverbial multicultural component of the annual art show. In my school, like many others, multicultural art education is relegated to tokenizing and trivializing traditions and celebrations (Desai, 2010). As I attempt to transform the formalist art curriculum that emphasizes skills—exhibited by the elements and principles of art—to a social justice-oriented art program that responds to social inequities through the study and creation of artworks, school administrators often (politely, but firmly) exercise their ability to disempower those who challenge the traditional ways of practice as per the dominant power structure. "Diversity" may be celebrated in my curriculum, but this version is merely a view of diversity that is established and maintained by White authority figures. This version of diversity does not threaten or challenge White power or privilege. Challenging the painful realities of power, privilege, and racism in one's context or their own practice is a challenging and laborious task (Yeung, Spanierman & Landrum-Brown, 2013). The comfort and pain this could potentially cause privileged Whites seems to outweigh the pain felt by people of color as a result of the actual lived experiences of marginalization and discrimination.

Discourse with Colleagues

Even before my research began, conversations with my colleagues raised more moral and ethical

conflicts and considerations than any other category of discourses at work. Fairly early in my career, I became troubled and disillusioned as I listened to White colleagues speak about the students, families, and community values in racially polarizing ways. I heard teachers criticize and complain about everything from music and clothes to family structures that did not fall in line with White normative values. These unsettling racist conversations with colleagues sparked my initial interest in researching this subject and the need for collegial support; the avoidance of professional frictions maintains the complexity of my participation and navigation within these discourses.

People spend a large portion of their lives at work and most work environments require collaboration and cooperation. Schools are no exception. Teachers may not like every one of their colleagues on a personal level, but they have to maintain a professional work environment in order to maintain a feeling of community for their students. Given the frequency of racist speech by colleagues, I fear that I may become a social pariah for directly confronting these discourses. Therefore, I have to be strategic in how I address these topics and calculate my words and timing. Often, my responses to racist discourses will arise days later, in the context of a different conversation so as to avoid direct blame. Other times I say nothing at all because I cannot come up with an effective response, or I am just too timid to create social tension.

Garner (2008) notes that one of the pitfalls of recognizing Whiteness is the assumption that all work that challenges Whiteness will have an anti-racist effect. As a White woman with a PhD who benefits from various aspects of privilege, I am conscious to not position myself as an *enlightened individual* and thus further bolster my own White privilege. I must be clear in noting that not all discourses with colleagues are disparaging to students. I have many colleagues who serve their students well and maintain nurturing and positive relationships with all students. I even have several colleagues who are keenly aware of racial discrimination in school and also strive to eradicate these injustices in and beyond our building. However, it is the conversations that conflict with my beliefs in

which I find myself stammering for words. Here are a few examples from my journal:

September 11: After school, I saw a group of teachers sitting on the tables and chatting in a nearby classroom. In the room were two White female teachers and two White male teachers. I stopped in to say "hello."

"...that kid has no business being here. He can't read, he can barely write his name, and all he wants to do in life is shoot people and steal their money," said Allen⁵.

Scott added, "yeah, and there's not a damn thing any of us can do about. We are given these kids and we're supposed to teach them and we all know they're going to fail. [The administration] doesn't even care. We'll just keep being the dumping ground for these kids because they have nowhere else to put them."

Scott complained at length about certain electives being a "dumping ground" for "them" or "those kids." He's told enough stories to know who he is referring to when he speaks of "those kids": the Black students who have academic trouble and long discipline records.

Allen concurred. "You don't have to tell me. That's all we teach anymore. That's all [counselors/administrators] give us. I can't even let them anywhere near the [expensive] equipment we have. Just give them worksheets and keep them quiet. If they act up, kick them out. Eventually they're all going to wind up in [alternative school] anyway. Or jail."

I cringe when I hear "dumping ground." It is also common to refer to students as "those students" or "them," implying there is a fixed group for all low-achieving students with discipline records. What also concerns me is my own silence towards their rhetoric. The phrases "dumping ground" and "those kids" have bothered me for years. I even vol-

⁵ All names used are pseudonyms.

unteered to teach all general classes just so I could change the discourse of “dumping ground” through my own actions. It was a passive-aggressive attempt get other teachers to stop discussing these courses, and hence using disparaging language to describe them, but subtle efforts have not changed this discourse.

I want to respond by telling my colleagues about how we, as educators, need to be aware of the language we use to describe both individuals and student groups, but I’m not sure how to do this without being dismissed as academic nonsense. I think about how my own race, gender, and academic status position me in relation to my colleagues and it makes me consider how my speech will be received by them. The anticipated reaction, unfortunately, keeps me locked in silence until I can find the key to addressing these topics in a way that will be well received. By the time I thought of a response, the conversation had ended and everyone went back to their individual classrooms to finish the day’s work. (J. Kirker, personal journal entry, September 11, 2014)

Black students enter U.S. schools with the disadvantage of stereotypes that have been constructed throughout U.S. culture, in which they have been positioned as disrespectful, threatening, un-teachable, and in need of control (Bianco, Leech & Mitchell, 2011; Davis, 2010; DeAngelis, 2014; Ferguson, 2003; Gause, 2008; hooks, 2004; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Kunjufu, 2005; Love, 2014; Majors & Billson, 2003). My colleagues’ words paint a clear image that corresponds to these prevailing thoughts, focusing on the students’ low academic achievement (“he can’t read, can barely write his name”). Although the student did not have a history of violence, my colleague speculated that the student would have a violent future (“all he wants to do in life is shoot people and steal their money”). This speaks to what Crozier (2005) describes a “pathologizing discourse [that blames] the children themselves as inadequate and innately delinquent” (p. 588). This

notion of deficit thinking⁶ marginalizes students of color and discursively places them at risk, making it difficult for these students to break past these stereotypes to succeed in a White-centric educational system (Valencia, 2010).

My colleague’s language implied that this student was unworthy of even attending school (“He has no business being here / we are supposed to teach them and we know they are going to fail.”). The assumption that this student was going to wind up in jail echoes the concept of the school-to-prison pipeline that shows how school systems mimic oppressive legal systems that prepare Black students to be the subject of White domination as early as elementary school (Ferguson, 2003) and uses harsh punishments and a perpetual cycle of marginalization to groom them for incarceration (Davis, 2010; Fanon, 1967, Ferguson, 2003; Gause, 2008; Kunjufu, 2005). Discourses that exclusively blame the child and their families while ignoring the presence of a racialized system mimics the racially sanitizing “law and order rhetoric” that mobilizes White, working-class men against Black activists in a post-Civil Rights era (Alexander, 2010, p. 96). This racially charged discourse continues to serve as a way to disenfranchise Black youth and bolster White normalization while maintaining a veil of colorblindness.

Breaking through the silence

I am notorious for going after certain student needs. The maintenance department still has not installed the kiln vent? I am on it. We do not have enough funding for mat board for the art show? I will take care of it. Take down or censor my students’ artwork? My fists are drawn. Racial discrimination runs rampant in our daily discourses? I am nearly silent. But I know that silence is still a way of participating in discourse, even though it does not feel like direct participation at the time. When I am not silent, I am extremely careful and sometimes a little snarky. One might say *subtle*. The racism is overt, but my responses are not. When it comes to raising attention to these issues—the issues I actually feel *most* passionate

⁶ Deficit thinking, as described by Valencia (2010), assumes that all minority students come with inherent intellectual and situational handicaps that they have to overcome without recognition of the social structures that construct these false assumptions.

about—I am insecure, timid, and fearful of offending. Hodge and Kress (1988) note that silence is a transparent signifier of exclusion from a relationship or a lack of power. Furthermore, transparent signifiers of solidarity are based on simply a lack of transformational modification or individual power (Hodge & Kress, 1988). I made the choice to allow my silence to indicate solidarity with my colleagues rather than taking the opportunity to challenge or shift the dominant paradigm exhibited during that particular exchange.

I have a need to belong, at least on a cordial level, with my group of colleagues. In doing so, however, I am letting my own self, my passions, and my beliefs be muted by the status-quo discourses that dominate the work environment. My journal entries reveal numerous personal defeats where my moral and ethical desires lose to my silence. The truth is, I don't feel powerful enough to dismantle the dominant order of the school.

Boylorn and Orbe (2014) state that autoethnographers need to understand the inevitable privilege we experience alongside marginalization and take responsibility for our subjective lenses through reflexivity. It was difficult to realize that I am *both* a subject of my context *and* one who helps maintain students as subjects in educational systems. Cheng (2002) states that once an individual comes to terms with the grief of her ignorance, she must be able to move on to a place beyond mere personal healing, which suggests that these discomforts must always remain complicated, thus opening the space for more work to be done. Tatum (2009) distinguishes between *guilty Whites*, those who direct their racial feelings inward and focus on the effect it has on their own sense of self, and the *White ally* that uses this knowledge to incite change. Once I realized my place in maintaining the status quo of White normalization, I was able to refocus my attention away from myself and back towards my students—to see that educational conversations frame them with hope, dignity, promise, and respect.

Discussing Discourse

In performing this autoethnographic study, I became aware of how much these discourses affect my practice. My analysis shows that professional conver-

sations in the context of my teaching position challenge my practice without changing my fundamental beliefs that align with my academic research interests. Throughout my year of journaling, my entries reveal that I never wavered in my desires to teach for social justice through art education. However, there were repeated instances in which my actions that conflicted with these desires were responses to directives that mandated acquiescence to dominant discourses. The intersection of these conflicting personal and professional discourses are complicated and difficult to maneuver, and attending to one discourse is often reliant on dismissing, silencing, or forgetting the other. However, the intersections of these discourses are complicated and difficult to maneuver, and attending to one discourse is often reliant on dismissing, silencing, or forgetting the other.

Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg, and Kamii (2006) identified teachers' concerns for maintaining their own teaching values when confronted with conflicting views held by those around them. I live in a space of constant conflict between my ethical beliefs as a teacher-scholar and the limitations that are created by discourses of *professional practice*. It is the same battle that wages between my academic self that tells me to continue to push boundaries with my pragmatic teacher self that tells me to find a way to quietly exist within these boundaries. I am not satisfied with subtle or quiet resistance. Smith (2013) says,

Essentially, we are all guilty of being a part of this machine whether by turning the oppressive gears ourselves, by "buying in," or idly sitting by for fear that we are only powerless individuals. . . . Do we allow ourselves to be trapped in a reality that is riddled with injustices, using the excuse that "I'm just one person?" (p. 41)

I do not seek to use my experience to generalize the experience of the White teacher in school with a diverse population of students or even make assumptions about others teachers' racialized identity based on how they engage in racialized discourses. Such generalizations would be dangerous and counter-productive (Kincheloe, 1999). However, I

am noting that many teachers, such as me, are very calculating in their attempts to be socially accepted by their colleagues and maneuver through institutional mandates, all while still considering their racialized positions as teachers of diverse students. This discursive landscape is not easy to navigate when it is riddled with conflicting perspectives and contradictory interests.

Through my year of data collection, I did not find any evidence of a teacher or administrator raising the possibility of racism in our school's practice. Conversely, many instances arose where colleagues denied accusations of discrimination that came from students or their parents. This homogenous community of teachers seemed to form an alliance that armors itself under the veil of colorblindness, placing its membership further into opposition to its diverse student body. The *us-verses-them* mentality is clearly defined by age, position, and racial markers. Though not every teacher in the school is friends or even friendly with one another, dominant discourses, like "those crazy/wild/out-of-control kids," position teachers as a common group that represents the alternative group: stable/grounded/in-control. No matter where we fall on the continuum of racist practices, the dominant discourses maintain the assumption of innocence and well-meaningness on the part of the teacher or administrator, protecting us from ever having to do the challenging work of self-reflection.

Foucault (1988) writes optimistically about hermeneutics and the care of the self and notes that caring for oneself is dependent on a knowledge of one's own subjectivity. He also says that, "power is not evil, power is a strategic game," and power always leaves room for liberty and possibilities, as every individual is ultimately eminent to their own self (p. 18). This provides me with hope as I know that although I feel subordinate to administrative jurisdiction, selecting my methods of resistance is an intentional and calculated response. My subtle, but ongoing, discourse of resistance against racist educational structures is my own power strategy. Even if I temper my discourses with administration and colleagues, I have found that the students I teach yearn for honest conversations centering around race and power. Even if our artworks

get taken off the high school walls, there is important intellectual work that was developed in the creation of their art. I hold tight the promise that those students will use their knowledge and voices against oppressive discourses as they go out into their world.

However, I cannot simply expect my students to carry out my wishes for my own philosophical desires. Rather, I must make it my responsibility to model how I exercise my individual power by demonstrating active participation in school discourses. Understanding my place in the semiotic systems of my professional context allowed me to see how my participation in discourses had the potential to reinforce the status quo, but it also began to show me ways to change it.

Transparent signifiers of power are based on self-suppression, magnitude, and elaboration (Hodge & Kress, 1988). These discourses are upheld by silence. Silence implies acquiescence and this is no longer acceptable.

At the conclusion of this study, I found myself examining the benefit of maintaining collegial relationships that are both professionally and personally toxic. As I started to speak up more in the copy room line or lunch duty conversations, I found that a few teachers started to drift away from me in social contexts. Striking up conversations has been replaced with nods of acknowledgement, yet these "friendships" have not been missed. I have found myself having more meaningful and productive professional relationships with like-minded colleagues and my own willingness to verbalize my position has inspired others to speak up more as well. Together, with our students, we continue to make determined strides to change the dominant school discourse regarding racism. Guided by the interests of our students, the school's art club has become more social-justice oriented and has founded successful collaborative projects with other clubs throughout the school whose students and sponsors share a vision for a discursive context in which teachers and students can freely address issues of race, power, privilege, marginalization, and discrimination.

Further considerations

The implications for my work reach much further than my own classroom practice. By illuminating

discourses that appear in my school, I am also framing many conversations that take place in schools everywhere as a way to invite scholars into the daily conversations of educational life, to give a better understanding of “the personal, concrete, and mundane details of experience as a window into understanding relationships between self and other or individual and community” (Jones, 2005, p. 766). Through these seemingly mundane accounts, prevalent teacher attitudes, values, frictions, conflicts, and ethics become more visible.

For the practitioner, an example of self-examination can lead to a teacher’s own transition in their teacher identity and practice. Additionally, an encouragement to explore the colorblind discourses of their own classrooms/schools can lead to more just schools *if* large groups of teachers begin to alter the way they communicate to and about the students they teach. For the pre-service teacher, a sample of a teacher’s daily moral conflicts as situated in, with, or against

administrative mandates or regulations can provide a sort of case study as they prepare themselves for ethical tensions in their own careers. Teacher education programs ill-prepare inexperienced teachers to critically respond to contexts laden with teachers’ fears and pressures associated with workplace socialization (Wegwert, 2014). However, knowledge of the powers of domination and oppressive school discourses over an individual can only help our future.

If art education researchers, pre-service teachers, and practicing teachers come into these discourses with a better knowledge of their force and ability to work with and against opposition, then we can begin to prepare a better strategy for using our own discourse(s) to overthrow dominant discriminatory practices. Since teachers are deeply involved in shaping childrens’ minds, we all have the incredible power *and* responsibility to challenge and change harmful ideologies that have been and continue to be entrenched in U.S. schools and society.

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The partnership between JJ and the CMA represents a challenge to the hierarchy between photographs displayed in galleries and museums and those available to people every day on their smartphones.

#MobilePhotoNow: Two Art Worlds, One Hashtag

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In the winter of 2015, the Columbus Museum of Art (CMA) co-curated an exhibition with the loose-knit mobile photography collective known as JJ Community. *#MobilePhotoNow* included images created in response to a series of prompts and shared on the photo sharing and social networking application Instagram®. The exhibition reflected a community-based curatorial practice (Keys & Ballengee-Morris, 2001) demonstrating new possibilities for participatory art and culture in the age of social media. This portrait of how the project came to be is presented as an example of how art world factions might be brought together, in both virtual and real spaces, through interactive technologies and practices.

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In 2007, the Columbus Museum of Art (CMA) in Columbus, Ohio adopted this mission: "To create great experiences with great art for everyone." When compared with other museum mission statements, CMA's may seem simplistic.¹ There is no mention of collections, conservation, or the international art world. But considering the statement in relation to experiments in programming and exhibition the museum has engaged in over the past decade, the intention of these words, and the complex relationships they beckon between art and people, is clear.

The 2015 exhibition *#MobilePhotoNow* offers one example. The show explored and put on display forms of community-based curatorial practice (Keys & Ballengee-Morris, 2001) that have developed within our digitally-enhanced participatory culture (Jenkins, Ito, & Boyd, 2015; O'Neil, 2014). Featuring pictures made by over 200 Instagram^{®2} photographers from around the world, this exhibition helped the museum break down barriers to entry for artists and viewers and build bridges between factions of the artistic community. What follows is a portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) of the exhibition describing how it came to be and key factors that enabled its evolution. It is followed by theoretically-grounded advice for art educators interested in teaching their students to reflect on their own participation in digital social networks and related collective curatorial practices.

Mobile Photo Then

In 2012, The Columbus Museum of Art, in collaboration with The Jewish Museum (New York, NY), mounted *The Radical Camera* highlighting images made by members of The Photo League. The Photo League was a group of socially engaged photographers working in New York City who took their cameras out of the studio and into the streets. They focused their lenses on the lives of everyday people, including minorities and other overlooked communities, doing

¹ For a complete report and analysis of this mission statement, see Coldiron (2015).

² Instagram is a social media application used mostly on mobile communication devices to share images. Users *follow* other users, some of whom they know in life and others whom they know online only and communicate in response to images they post. Users can *tag* their images with key terms to enable others with similar observations and interests can find their images.

everyday things from the end of the Great Depression to the start of the Cold War. Inspired by photographers like Lewis Hine and Dorothea Lange, members of The League "propelled documentary photography from factual images to more challenging ones—from bearing witness to questioning one's own bearings in the world" (Evans & Klein, 2012, p. 22). The group included many prominent photographers like Paul Strand, Sid Grossman, Weegee, and Lisette Model.

One could easily draw a line connecting The Photo League and 21st century citizen reporters who use smart phone cameras to share what they see and hear in their own communities. CMA Digital Communications Manager Jennifer Poleon drew another connection between another Photo League-sponsored activity, known as "Photo Hunts," and digital photo sharing applications and practices gaining traction at the time the *The Radical Camera* was on view. During their camera-enabled scavenger hunts, League members assigned one another a prompt, went out to take photos in response to that word or phrase, then came back to develop the pictures, and post them in a pop-up exhibition (Silverman, 2015). Poleon related these themes to *hashtags*³ that photographers were using to connect their images with others' in emerging online venues like flickr and Instagram[®].

Between 2012 and 2014, Poleon and her colleagues launched their own series of hunts. Challenges were inspired by ongoing exhibitions at the museum. Catherine Evans, the CMA Curator of Photography who co-curated *The Radical Camera*, selected images from the submissions for each category which were displayed in the Community Gallery of the museum's Center for Creativity. Nanette Maciejunes, CMA's Director, recalled that walking into the opening for the show she didn't recognize anyone. "That's when I knew we were onto something. We were connecting with a new audience" (N. Maciejunes, personal communication, February 6, 2015).

³ Hashtags are terms used to label images on Instagram and other social media sites to help other users find images with similar content. They appear after a caption like this: #hashtag.

Mobile Photo Now

JJ Community

CMA's photo hunts drew worldwide participation, including members of the JJ Community on Instagram®. JJ is a virtual collective, bound together by a common hashtag (#jj) members use to mark their images. Most posts are made in response to daily prompts published by the community's leaders, known as editors. "It's a place to come together for inspiration and encouragement" (J. Johnson, personal communication, March, 2016). Some prompts are formalist like *black & white* or *group shots* while some are object-oriented like *cars*, *the beach*, or *winter*. Others are more conceptual and thought-provoking like *where I live*, *tourist trap*, and *freedom* (see Figure 1).

Thousands of people around the world post responses to these prompts. Each is assigned a unique hashtag (i.e. "#jj_forum1055"). When a user posts an image with the daily hashtag, she is expected to find and respond to at least three other posts in that forum. The opportunity to share work and obtain feedback from peers transforms the act of making and posting images from private amusement or documentation to a creative act of connectivity. As Davies and Merchant (2009) found in their observations of similar groups on the photo sharing site flickr®:

Discussion can remain steadfastly about the images and content of the group—but frequently interactivity develops in such ways that identities are explored and presented through the modalities of word and image. Interactivity is usually enthusiastic and lively; people learn about each other's lives—often allowing for cross-cultural comparison and learning; mentoring relationships often develop; in-jokes emerge through banter and fun; people sometimes even email or send gifts; and it is often through groups that new friendships might form that result in face-to-face interaction. (p. 43)

JJ Editor Kevin Kuster describes the community as a modern-day pen pal project, one which yields nearly immediate responses. JJ founder Josh Johnson echoed this idea in his remarks at the opening of #MobilePhotoNow when he expressed his personal love for the community he helped create. In a shaky voice, he described Instagram® as a place where "this buttoned up preacher's son could be himself" (J. Johnson, personal communication, February 6, 2015). He reminded the audience of the connection between dopamine and addiction, how we respond emotionally to immediate response and gratification. Try 30 second feedback, he suggested before warning, "Powerful things can have pluses and minuses. Some

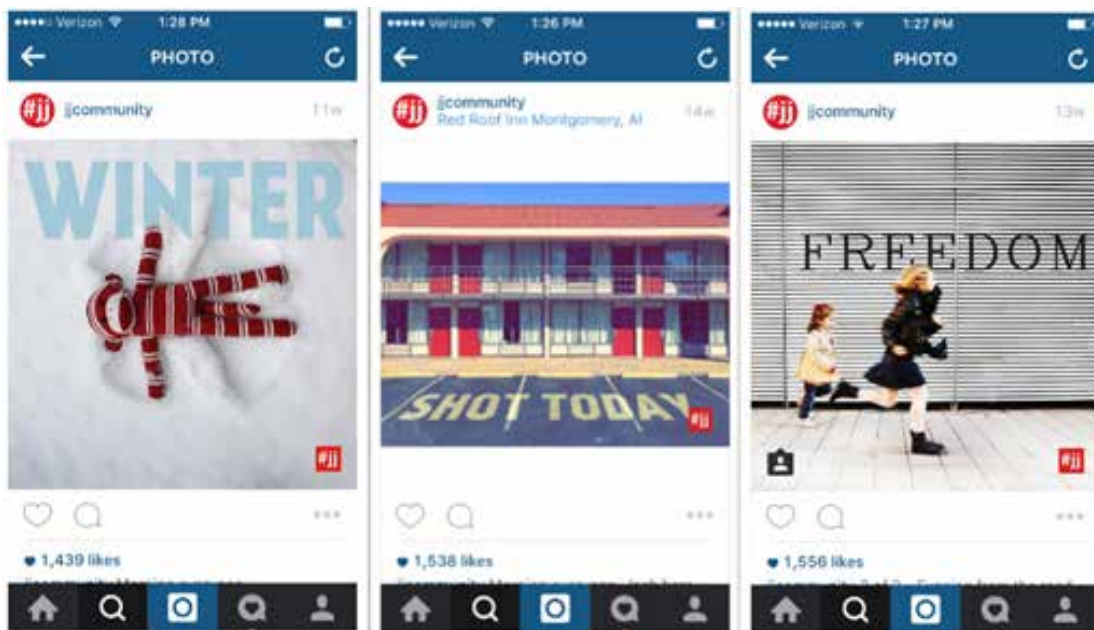


Figure 1. Select prompts from the JJCommunity Instagram® feed.



Figure 2. Visitors posting to Instagram from the gallery. (Photo credit: Tim Perdue)

of us spend too much time taking pictures. But, if you have to have an addiction, taking pictures isn't really a bad one to have" (J. Johnson, personal communication, February 6, 2015).

In addition to the feedback participants receive from other users, JJ editors select images each day to highlight, just as CMA did with their photo hunts. When Johnson and Kuster noticed members of JJ using the hashtag #CMAphotohunt, they contacted the museum about a possible partnership. Kuster, who worked as a photo editor at *Playboy* for nearly two decades, reported that the museum

was very collaborative. . . . Taking all my experiences [into account], typically museums have a high brow perspective; 'We are the arbiters of good taste and we'll tell you what's good.' But they were very impressed when they saw the level of talent displayed in our community. (K. Kuster, personal communication, May 12, 2016).

From her perspective, CMA Director Maciejunes noted how JJ's work paralleled the museum's commitment to celebrating and enabling participation in the creative process (personal communication, February 6, 2015). Speaking about the exhibition, Maciejunes lights up. She recognizes that she and her staff had

something to learn from JJ and the engaged following they amassed.

From Pixels to Paper

During the Fall of 2014, CMA and JJ Community collectively organized four challenges inspired by images from *The Photo League: street, portrait, black & white, and community*. Collectively, these forums generated 45,000 submissions from approximately 5,000 photographers in 89 countries. A jury process through the JJ Community yielded about 600 images with 320 finalists selected by Tyler Cann, CMA's Curator of Contemporary Art, and independent curator Lisa Kurzner. Of those, just over 100 photographs were printed and mounted for display, this time in one of the museum's main galleries (see Figure 2). Final selections that were not printed were included in a slideshow that played as part of the exhibition.

Merilee Mostov, CMA Chief Engagement Officer, heard from participants that seeing their work hanging in the museum filled them with a sense of pride, different from what they had achieved through their digital postings and interactions. "You made my dreams come true," one participant told Mostov, who suggested seeing their work on the walls of the museums "links people to the museum, each other, and the

community” (personal communication, February 10, 2016).

Kuster reiterated these sentiments and spoke to the importance of these images in the museum context.

I’ve always known that there’s something about an image printed and put on a wall. It takes on a new importance and excitement, especially in the digital age. On our phone it seems disposable. There are always more. But when you stop and print and frame and hang it, people stop and say, “This is important.” (personal communication, May 12, 2016)

Kuster’s comments support the notion that as we clutch our phones like security blankets, we still find comfort in tangible objects and images selected and

displayed in museums (Davis, 1995). The fact that photographers traveled to Columbus to see their work on display at the museum supports this notion. Jill Shomer, a writer, photographer, and magazine editor from New York, for example, made the trip to Columbus to see her work at the museum although she has over 40,000 people following and responding to her Instagram feed. Tim Needles, an art educator from Long Island, also made the journey. Needles had someone take a photo of him in front of his image hanging in the museum (see Figure 3) and posted it on Instagram® in what Kuster described as a self-reflexive feedback loop (personal communication, May 12, 2016).

Lingering Factions

The partnership between JJ and the CMA represents a challenge to the hierarchy between photographs displayed in galleries and museums and those available to people every day on their smartphones. However, not all factions of the art world agree that these images hold equal artistic merit. CMA took a creative and curatorial risk hosting this show. At the time of *#MobilePhotoNow*, the International Center of Photography (ICP), had yet to honor Instagram® photographers with time and space in their galleries (Pollack, 2015). ICP seems to be moving in that direction under new leadership, though some, including *New Yorker* critic and ICP guest curator at ICP Vince Aletti, oppose the move:

Instagram® could not interest me less. . . . Instagram® is an exciting way for people to communicate, but it is so ephemeral and so of the moment. How do you build a show around that, and why would anyone want to see a show about that when they can sit at home and scroll through their feed? (as cited in Pollack, 2015, para. 8)

As if anticipating such criticism, CMA Director Maciejunes noted in an interview about the exhibition, “We are a serious museum and we do serious work. I think this shows mobile photography is reaching a new level of creativity and I think we’re all



Figure 3. Tim Needles self-portrait with his photograph (top right in red) displayed at The Columbus Museum of Art as part of *#MobilePhotoNow*. (Photo credit: Tim Needles)

going to need to take this seriously in the art world” (Hutmacher, 2015).

#*MobilePhotoNow* stands as a suggestion that the camera phone ought to be considered as the next evolution in a long list of cameras including the Brownie, Polaroid, 35mm, and DSLR. Fred Richten, Dean of the school at ICP seems to agree, “I respect enormously the 20th-century traditions, but I don’t see the issue being which technology you use. . . . The question is whether you are making impactful images—not how you got there to do that” (cited in Pollack, 2015, para. 7).

Mobile Photo Meets Art Education

Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) was arguably successful in bringing studies of art history, interpretation, and theoretical analysis to bear on the studio production that dominated mid-20th century art classes. The movement was built around the work of various arts professionals including art historians and critics. However, little progress was made to inform students of the role curators play in museums and the world of art at-large. Even as art educators have moved beyond DBAE to adopt more comprehensive approaches to teaching and learning, curatorial practices have been largely ignored. Social media applications popular with users of all ages, like Instagram[®] and Pinterest,[®] can offer art educators easy entry into the study of curatorial activities.

Within the context of Web 2.0 social practices, use of the term *curate* has grown and is now used routinely, in everyday discourse, to apply to “any aspect of collecting and displaying tangible or intangible material culture” (Edmunson, 2015, para. 1). O’Neil (2014) notes it is human nature to collect and categorize. She suggests the use of social media-based curatorial practices by individuals and groups with shared interests highlight “how the citizen curator and their counterparts in cultural institutions have much in common in their practices and interests” (p. 2). The question that emerges for art educators relates to how they might engage students about the processes and implications surrounding their curatorial practices and help them consider their actions in relation to those of professional curators.

Tyler Cann, CMA’s Curator of Contemporary Art, suggests engaging students in curatorial practices can be as simple as asking them to “put two images next to each other, on a screen or a wall” (personal communication, May 18, 2016). He suggests educators should encourage students to, “Choose images carefully, so that you have a point. Get the students thinking about their similarities and differences. How does having them next to one another change their meaning? What do the images say to each other?”

In fact, many students already do this on their Instagram feeds where teens report making ongoing changes to the images they display (Dougherty, 2016). While most adult users continue to add an endless stream of images to their profiles, younger Instagrammers continuously delete and rearrange the images on their pages keeping as few as a dozen images at a time. One teenaged user told me, “People sometimes pick a theme. Mine used to be pink, but I’m transitioning to red and orange” (R. Spurgeon, personal communication, May 16, 2016). Setting and working within parameters such as this pushes Instagram from mindless amusement to a design challenge that echoes Cann’s description of curatorial activity.

According to a Pew Research survey (2015), 73% of teens in the U.S. possess smartphones. A great number of them are using Instagram and other photo sharing applications. Art educators can tap into that activity and help students reflect on their participation with this simple process based on JJ Community challenges.

- As a class, pick a theme and determine how long a challenge will remain open.
- Post and tag images related to the theme using a common hashtag.
- Vote on the best images in each theme. Discuss the results of the vote and collectively determine criteria for final selections for an exhibition.
- Display the show, in virtual or in real space, and solicit feedback.

This is just one straightforward example of how art educators might engage students in curatorial practice using Web 2.0 technologies.

Mobile Photo Moving Forward

In 1987, Blandy and Congdon (1988) launched the exhibition *Boats, Bait, and Fishing Paraphernalia: A Local Folk Aesthetic* at the School of Art Gallery of Bowling Green State University (Bowling Green, OH). The exhibition was intended to position functional objects related to fishing as objects of art. It was also a means of attracting new visitors to the gallery and “suggesting new ways of encouraging aesthetic contemplation, supporting a community based aesthetic and recognizing art in daily living” (Blandy & Congdon, 1988, p. 245). #MobilePhotoNow used the popularity of mobile photography to meet these same goals.

Like many museums today, a primary operating objective of the Columbus Museum of Art is increas-

ing community outreach and engagement, reaching into the community and inviting the public into the museum (Hein, 2000). Using a popular creative platform like Instagram® to achieve this goal builds on the inherently participatory nature of social media. Art educators interested in aligning their teaching with contemporary cultural and social practices should take note of changes in how museums and curatorial practices operate as a result of these developments. #MobilePhotoNow offers one model art educators can channel to explore such practices with their students.

Notes

Special thanks to Kevin Kuster, Tyler Cann, Merilee Mostov, Jennifer Poleon, and Tim Perdue for help with this article.

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Since handwriting
is individually
unique, it clearly
points backward
to me as its human
creator. The
consumer here is
less clear, to be
determined by the
eventual context
and medium of
encounter.

all the *f* words we used to know

Mindi J. Rhoades

The Ohio State University

Photos of handwritten list of the 2,000+ F words listed in the 1996 version of *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (Deluxe Edition)*, published by Gramercy Books of Random House Press in Avenal, New Jersey. Verb tense conjugations and plural nouns are omitted.

An analysis briefly contextualizes this artwork in relation to semiotic theory, contemporary text-based and word-based art and arts practices, social theory, and art education.

Correspondence regarding these works of art may be sent to the artist: rhoades.89@osu.edu

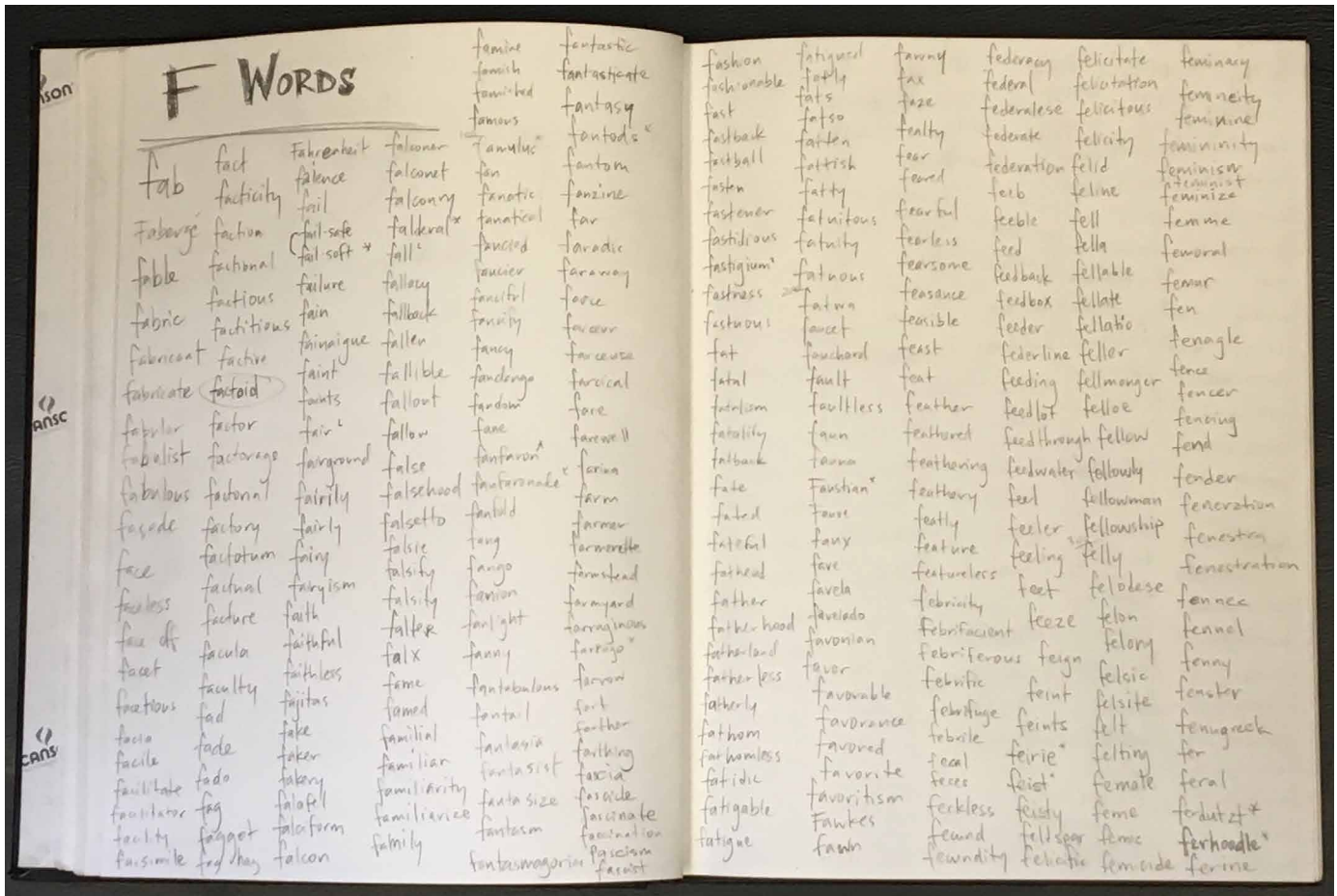


Figure 1. all the f words (fab to ferrine)

As a former high school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, I embraced the domain, the structure, craft, and aesthetic aspects of words. I love everything about words. I love teaching and learning about texts, as consumers and composers, as meaning-makers. ELA shares similarities with meaning-making processes in other arts, without being directly analogous. Using words—language itself—not just as the medium but also as both subject and object of art activates the complex, critical-creative, and transdisciplinary processes of meaning-making.

object + word + image = written text

The blending of text and art has a long history. In what may be the oldest written language, Egyptian artifacts from 3,300 BCE document the early use of hieroglyphics, a logographical language system that developed alphabetic features over its 3,600 years of active use. Approximately two centuries later, examples of recognizable Chinese logographic script

appear, and then evolve, with pictograms assuming more abstracted shapes, developing more complexity in meaning and aesthetic refinement across its long history spanning into today's current written Chinese (Lo, 1996-2012). In 4th century Greece, scholar and poet Simias of Rhodes produced the first Western piece of text-based art: a poem about an axe written in the shape of an axe (Ross, 2014), or what we now call *concrete poetry*.

With the dawn of Islam in the 7th century, Arabic script becomes a medium for aesthetic expressions and representations of the divine and moral aspects of power and beauty. The Islamic discouragement and rejection of figurative representations of humans, or "aniconism," transformed Arabic calligraphy into a medium for integrating "artistry and scholarship" and spirituality, weaving form, content, and meaning into a transcendental whole (Reza, n.d.). In Western Europe by the medieval period of the Renaissance, texts combined with visual embellishments become

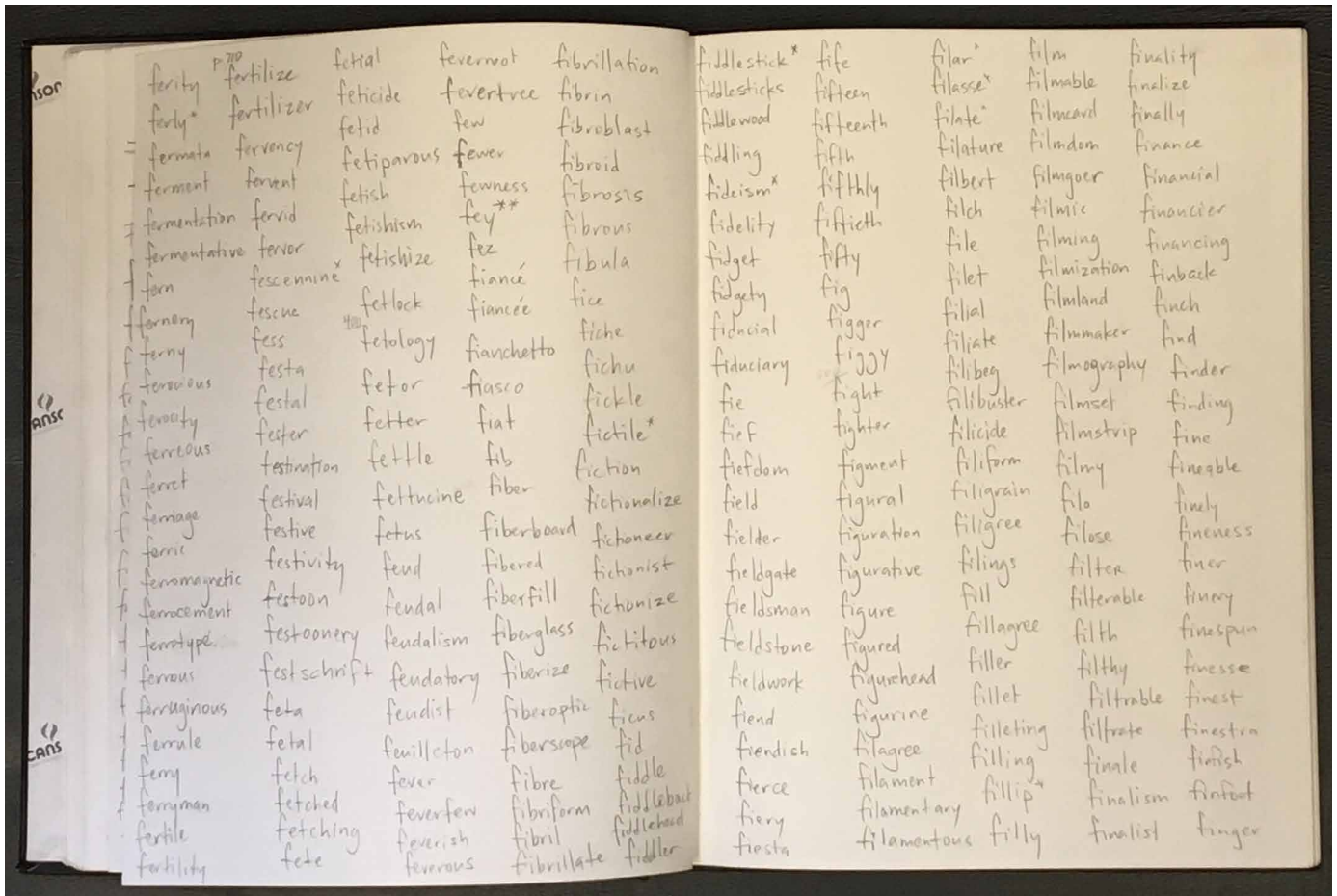


Figure 2. all the f words (ferrity to finger)

increasingly popular and widespread. Starting with illuminated manuscripts of religious texts, the decorative and then informative practice eventually spread into academic and more popular texts and publication forms. An increasingly literate and liberated public appreciated accessible written content combined with aesthetically appealing and inspirational imagery.

from language to art

The study of English itself begins officially in the 16th century with the first grammar books written in English not Latin, proceeding to add the study of literature and writing over time. The deliberate inclusion and study of text in/as art has a more recent though relatively robust history, spurred into action partially by the field of semiotics. Linguist Charles S. Pierce (1998) theorized a three-part relationship between a word (*sign*), the object of the sign (*signifier*), and someone capable of recognizing and “understanding of the relation between signifier and signified” (*inter-*

pretant) (Ogden, 2016, para. 6). Building on this, in the early decades of the 20th century, multiple individual artists and collectives began experimenting with language as a material for artmaking. In 1911, Georges Braque began stenciling letters and numbers into his paintings, quickly followed by Picasso (Galenson, 2008).

By 1915, dadaists were pulling language apart, reorganizing its components into deliberately disruptive and nonsensical arrangements. Then they began using text in their other works: paintings, collages, sculptures. The semiotic work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1915), with its arbitrary, inseparable link between a representation (*signifier*) and its referent/meaning (*signified*), influenced artists including Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp to explore further the relation of text and art.

In Magritte’s *The Treachery of Images* (1929), juxtaposing the visual image of a pipe with text announcing that it is not a pipe visually exposes a key conundrum



Figure 3. all the f words (fingerboard to flattish)

of semiotics and communication: the irrational relationships between an object/concept and how we language, or thing-ify, that object (Jaworski, 2015). Other artists began playing with this text/image intersection. Though very incomplete, an initial list includes artists like Ed Ruscha with his onomatopoeic pop paintings like *Oof* (1962/1963); Tom Phillip's *Humament* (1966-ongoing), his series of hand-altered printed copies of a Victorian novel; Yoko Ono's *Painting for the Wind* (1961) and *Grapefruit* (1964); and, directly referencing Magritte, Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965) piece combining an actual chair, a full-size photograph of the chair, and an enlarged photograph of the dictionary entry for *chair*.

language as im/material

Artists increasingly explored the im/materiality of language, translating it into multiple media then applying arts-based processes to it, like reproducing, objectifying, appropriating, disrupting, conceptual-

izing, embodying, transgressing, re-imagining, etc. (Jaworski, 2015). Conceptual artists worked with language and ideas as art. Sol LeWitt's (1967) instructions in *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* and Lawrence Weiner's (1968) *Declaration of Intent* both emerge contemporaneously. Concurrently, On Kawara's aesthetically minimalist two-color *Date Paintings* (1966-2014) documented time and existence, recording it in the simplest terms possible. Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, and the Guerilla Girls continue to employ alphanumeric texts *as* and *with* visual representations, often adopting the language and tropes of advertising or public informational materials, working through media from paper to granite to digital signs. Similarly, Glenn Ligon's quotations from famous African American writers, speakers, and artists in black oil stick on plain white doors begins in crisp clarity, then, through the process of stenciling, they transform into increasing blurriness, crowded into a dark chaos (Wetzler, 2011). Outside the purview and limits of the



Figure 4. all the f words (flattop to fly)

official art world, graffiti continues to be one of the most timeless, popular, accessible, and internationally visible forms of text-based art, using names and words as public aesthetic representation, pronouncements, and celebrations.

art + verbs = translation

Although this handwritten list of words from a dictionary (see Figures 1-11) offers multiple intertextual art references, the most prominent is Richard Serra's (1967-1968) *Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself*. In the sketchbook-bound, two-page, four-column spread pictured in the photograph, Serra presents a handwritten list of 84 infinitive versions of transitive verbs, including *to roll*, *to splash*, and *to join*, interspersed with 24 possible contexts, or forces capable of impacting materials, including *of tension*, *of inertia*, and *of reflection*. Seaberg (n.d.) calls Serra's *Verb List* a language-based drawing, noting it became Serra's *To Do* list for experimenting with nontradition-

al sculptural materials and processes, often resulting in artifacts he exhibited. Similarly, *all the f words we used to know* is a record of the temporal process, the "residue of a particular activity" (Seaberg, n.d., para. 2), in this case translating precise and mechanically reproduced text painstakingly into handwritten, imperfect graphite traces. Like Serra's list, *all the f words we used to know* relies more on referencing and documenting the process of an activity and less on formal qualities like technical skills and elements and principles of art and design (Carpenter, 2005).

i write me

In some ways, although this work looks clinical and sterile and purports to represent *all the F words*, it betrays itself. It betrays parts of me, exposing us however inadvertently. This work is produced by and caught in the intersectionality of *my* identities, of the universal with *my* particulars (Collins, 2015; Wilson, Shields, Guyotte, & Hofsess, 2016). This work clearly

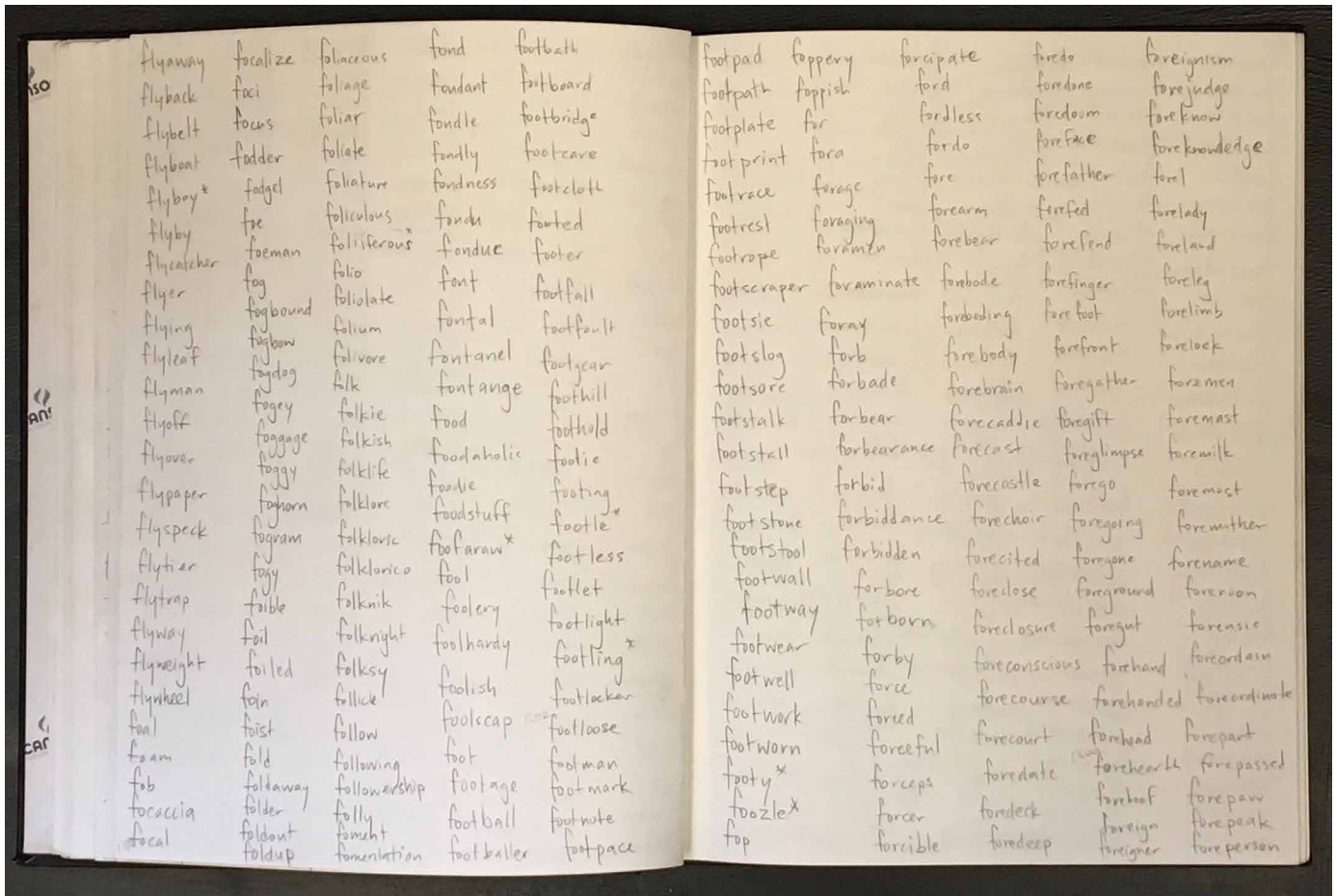


Figure 5. all the f words (flyaway to foreperson)

demonstrates *the double arrow of indexicality*, a semiotic principle that all signs “on some level, indicate both the creator and consumer,” simultaneously “pointing backwards to its origins, and forward to its addressees” (Jaworski, 2015, p. 79). In this case, since handwriting is individually unique, it clearly points backward to me as its human creator. The consumer here is less clear, to be determined by the eventual context and medium of encounter.

The arrow pointing to me becomes a timeline into my past, indicating the entwined roots of my love of text and arts. My working class family valued education and revered words—reading, learning, writing, and playing with them. My parents bought a hardbound set of *Encyclopedia Britannica* volumes the year I was born, an extravagant expense prominently featured in our small living room throughout my childhood. Several years later they both gave each other dictionaries for Christmas. Another year, they exchanged identical copies of a Shel Silverstein

book. Our home reference books provided us with useful materials for school projects and word games; they also provided a place for intellectual exploration. I needed no reason to pull one from a shelf and browse aimlessly, from one entry to the next, skipping around, following endless pathways in a chase to satiate an unquenchable curiosity.

Although I could read, write, and spell before I started elementary school, by second grade my handwriting remained a nearly indecipherable mixture of small cramped letters, slanted at different angles and crammed together unevenly. Instead of nagging me to practice, my parents lured me in, buying me a calligraphy set with pens, inks, paper, and a lettering guide. I was captivated, spending hours drawing letters and words that increasingly resembled their sources. Pages and pages of words and names. Writing became a creative undertaking, an art. My handwriting greatly improved (as did my forgery skills).

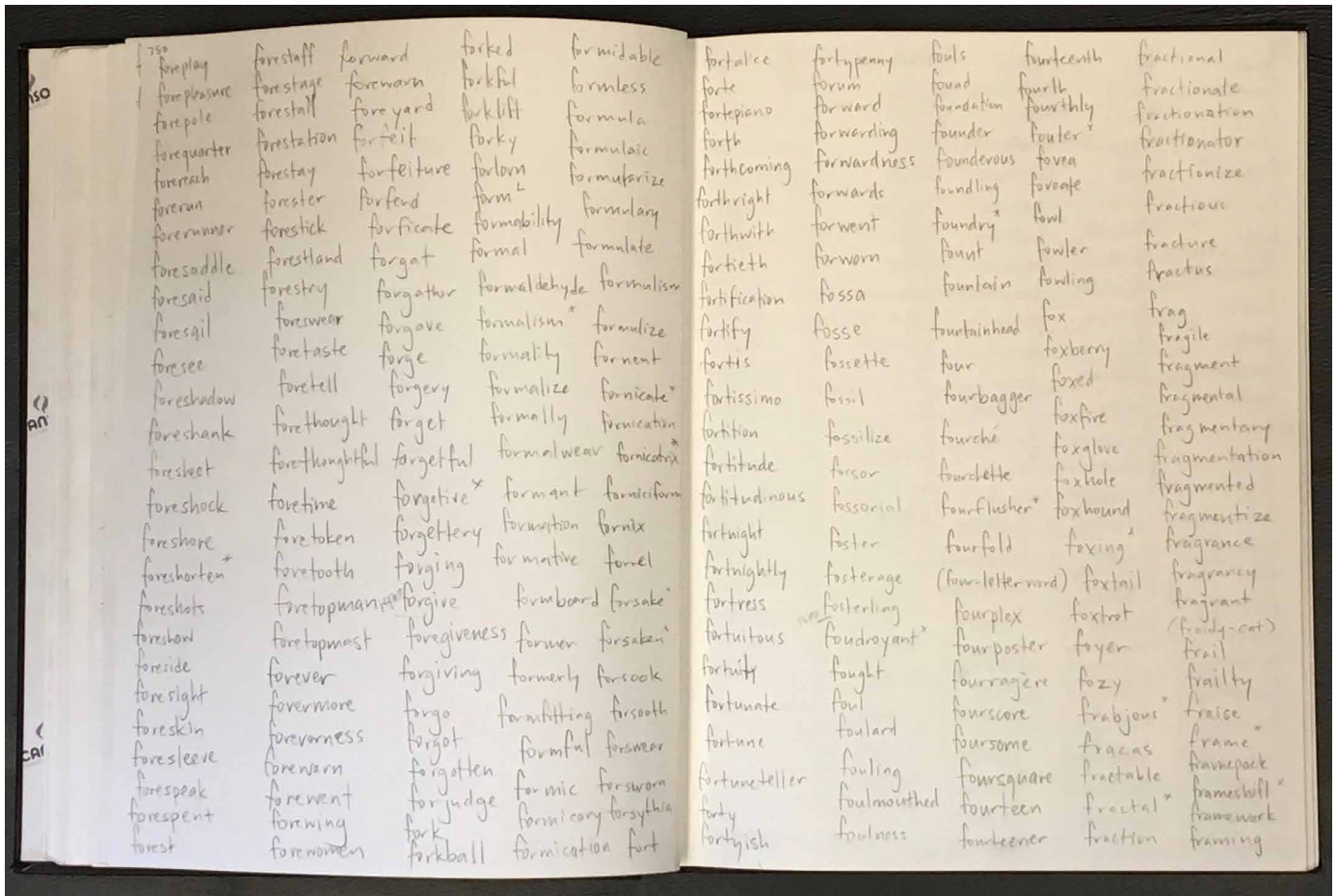


Figure 6. all the f words (foreplay to framing)

Outside of school, I spent hot Georgia summers surrounded by even more words. I stayed weeks at a time with my grandparents, working in their small family printing company—typesetting, developing plates, running presses, cutting paper, filing. I was enveloped by papers, words, images, and family all mixed with the rhythmic sounds of machinery and the persistent smell of ink and oil. We turned other peoples’ ideas into words and images, fashioning them into informational tools and useful objects.

This love for language led to an undergraduate degree in English, to a Masters’ in English Education, and eventually to becoming a high school English teacher, albeit one concerned with the overlaps and creative possibilities for combining language and arts. Students blossomed with creative, open-ended response choices for activities and assignments: they read and updated and illustrated folk and fairy tales; created, printed, and distributed a senior newspaper;

filmed scenes from novels; built multiple models; and created/curated musical compositions.

These creative language and arts integration opportunities invited students to make personal connections with class readings, to extend or disrupt them, to find ways to insert themselves into seemingly settled texts, including classic and contemporary novels, plays, stories, and poetry. This approach honored students’ agency, interests, and experiences as valuable assets, encouraging the continued cultivation of a communal collection of knowledge (Giroux, 1988; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008; Ryan, 2011; see also Friere, 1970/1972). This combination of language and arts recalls Smith-Shank’s (1995) vision of a semiotic art education where learning is a process of linking, expanding, and understanding texts—an ongoing inquiry that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

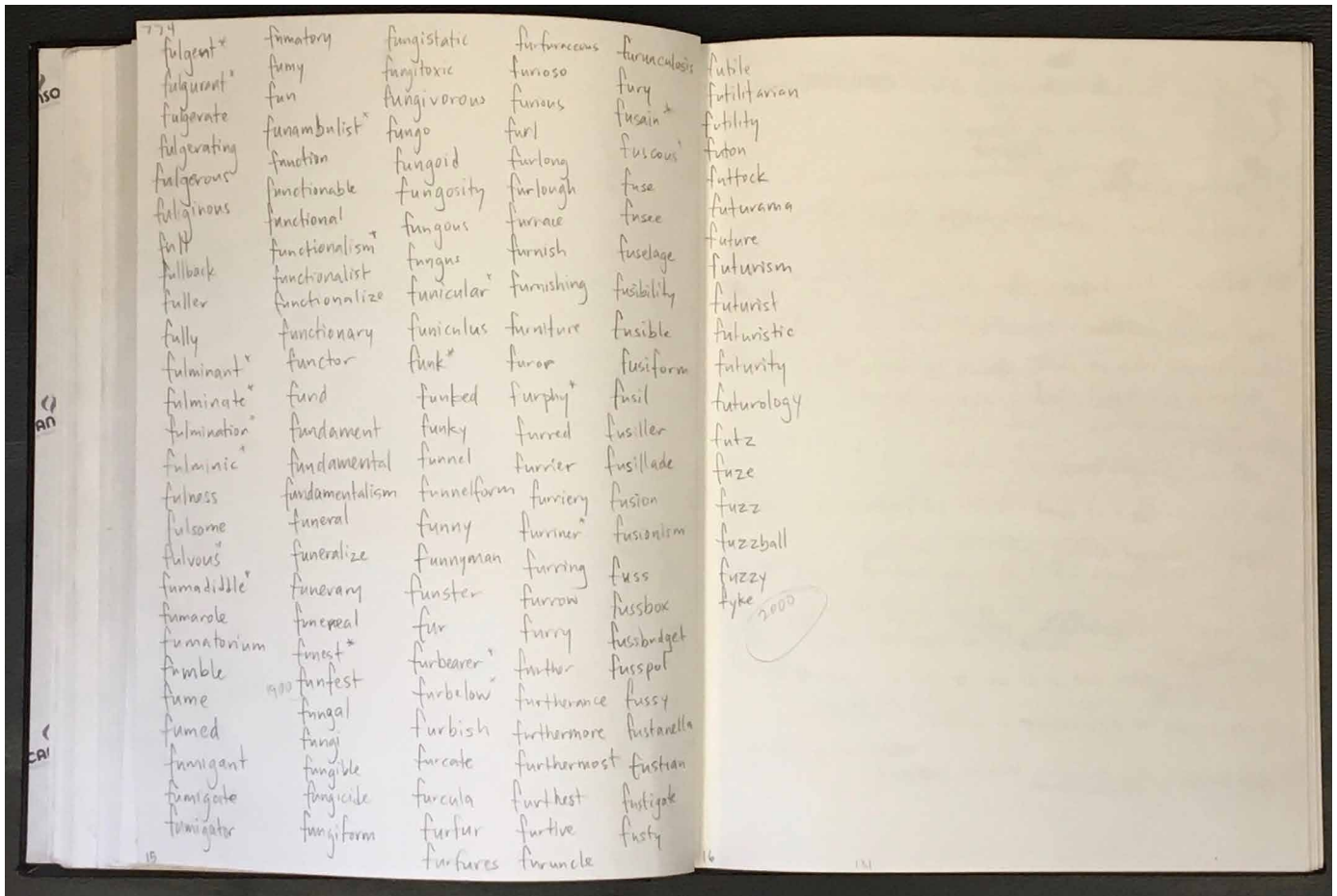


Figure 8. all the f words (fulgent to fyke)

favorites

Along the way, I found *favorites* (see Figure 9). Some are based on definitions. A *fail-soft* is a system with built-in allowances for failures that keep them from being catastrophic, sustaining vital functions and reduced operations until remedied. *Firnification* is the process of snow transforming into ice. A *furphy* is Australian slang for a rumor or an unbelievable story purportedly based on fact from reputable sources. *Freedman*, *freedwoman*, and *freeman* are linguistic signs of the long struggle for equality in this country, a term signaling a contradiction to the assumption of slavery, designating a different way of *being* for many people.

Some are arts-related terms. *Foreshorten*, *foundry*, and *frieze* were obvious, but others were not. A *flong* is a papier-mache mold dating to the 1820s developed as a plate for relief printing. *Frottage*, commonly a sexual reference, is also the process of creating a design on paper by placing it over an uneven surface and “rub-

bing” it with pencil, charcoal, etc. A couple relate to colors: *fuscous* meaning dark-hued or brownish-gray, and *fulvous* being reddish-yellow or tawny.

I chose many based on an ineffable combination of sound, definition, and current relevance. Many of my favorites share commonalities of confusion, error, and nonsense: *falderal* (nonsense or foolish talk), *ferdutzt* (confused, bewildered), *flubdub* (nonsense, pretentiousness), *flumaddidle* (worthless frills), *fribble* (use wastefully or foolishly), *frippery* (unnecessary ornamentation), *ferhoodle* (to confuse or mix up), and *foozle* (botch or bungle).

processing the process

all the f words we used to know comprises photos of the handwritten list of the 2,000+ f words in the dictionary, complemented by a handwritten shorter list of 110 favorites. Verb tense conjugations and plural nouns are omitted.

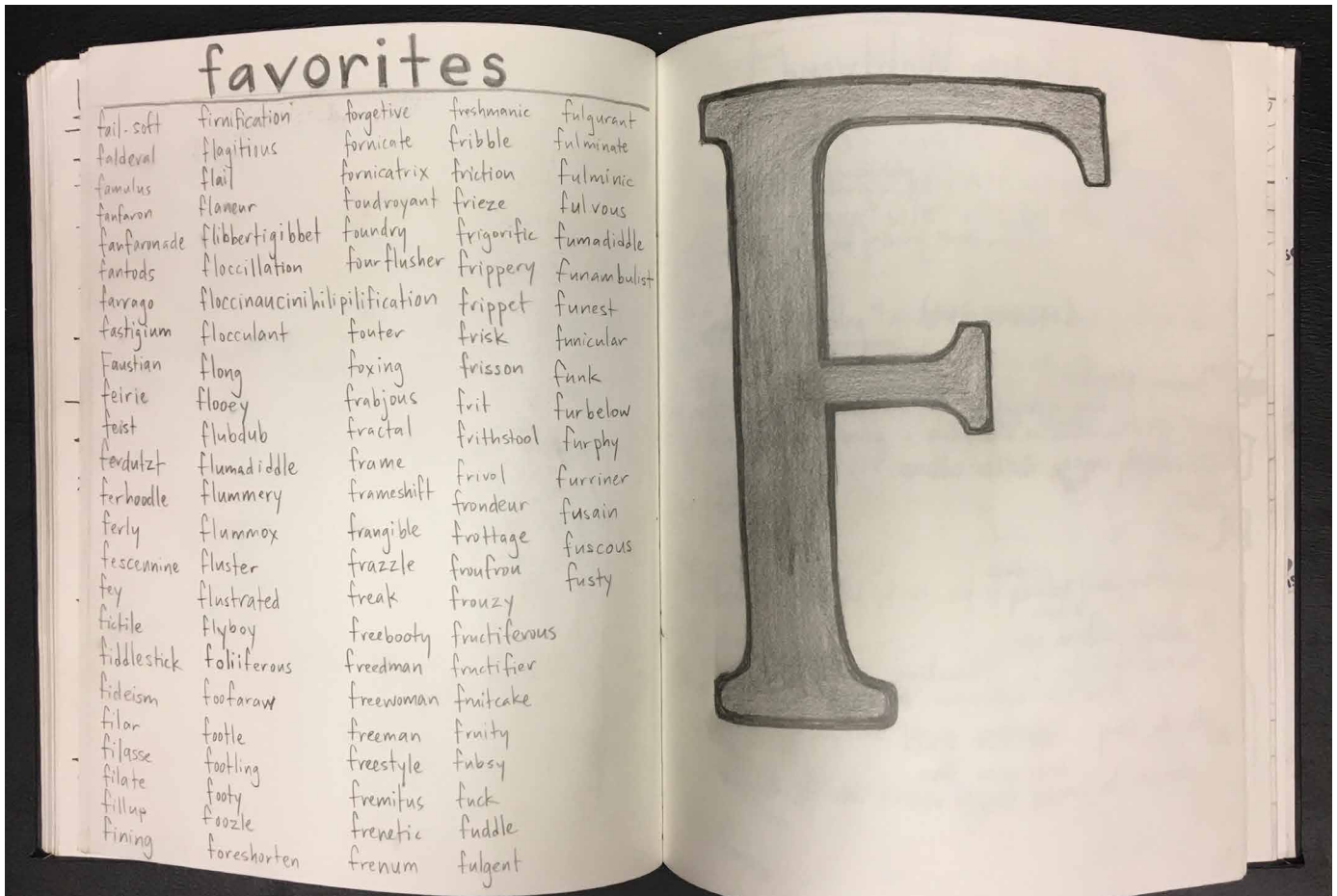


Figure 9. all the f words (favorites)

In writing these words, I am trying to claim them. I am surveying and studying them, repeatedly. In cycles. In waves. Moving my hands to trace their letters. Stuttering through their pronunciations. Picking them up and watching them slip through my fingers so I must reach for them over and over. It takes a lot of work to own a word, and there are so many words available. Learning them all is an ambitious and unlikely goal. They aren't all here. Increasingly, this dictionary is a relic, a reminder of an object-focused past, outdated. Today, language and texts in many ways are inherently more suited for the dynamic capabilities of digital media—rhizomatic, evolving, expanding—with free dictionaries for most languages instantly available online.

In the process of creating this work, I learned multiple things. Like the repetitive brush strokes of painting, the process of copying words can slip into the meditative, occupying the body, freeing the mind to float, following the words like waves into a flow of

ideas, associations, more words. I am reminded of the self-referential trap of language: to define it, we have to use it. I think about its unachievable impulse toward faux precision, the obsession that words and meaning can be fixed, that they can be exactly what we want them to be. Reading the dictionary reminds me of the imprecision of language, its instability, its slipperiness, despite our best efforts to control, contain, and master it. Like J. Alfred Prufrock, the protagonist in T. S. Eliot's (1917) famous poem, it is impossible to say just what we mean, misinterpretations are unavoidable. Approximations of meaning may be the best we can do. In this way, although we like to believe language offers a more universal means for sharing and making meaning, perhaps it is more like art: open-ended, subjective, contextual, interactive, complex. In art education we might consider ways we can engage and explore these similarities and differences as tools with our students and within our own work. We might ask more of language, using it as an artistic medium itself,

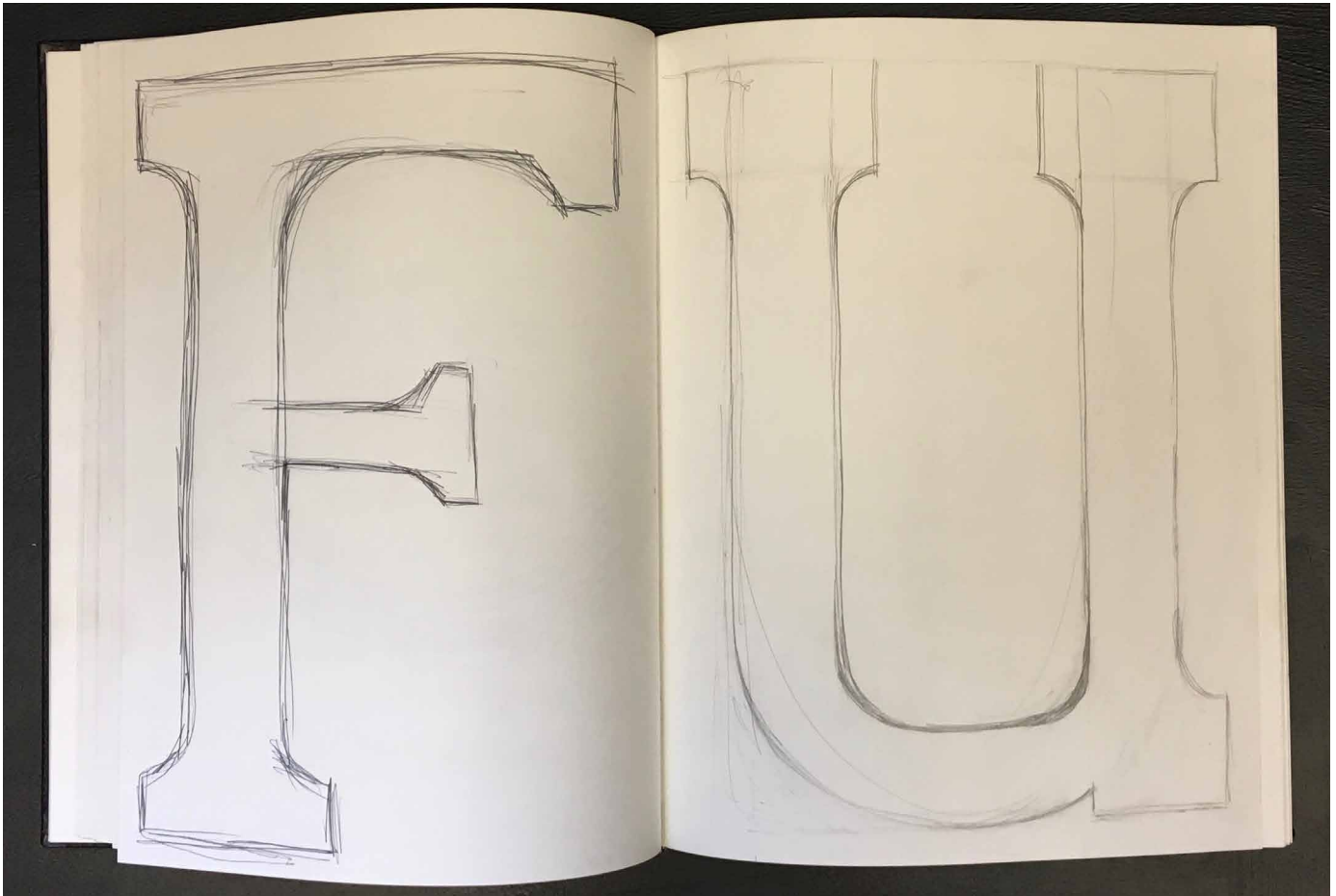


Figure 10. all the f words (FU)

as a tool for artmaking, as content, and as subject. We can make increasingly rich intertextual, theoretical, and practical connections.

As I continue to reflect on this piece and its production, I sense possibilities for extension. I think of Ann Hamilton's work commingling art, language, objects, interactions. I think of using digital media to record the process of creation, rewriting the list while recording audio and video, spelling the words, pronouncing them, maybe reading the definitions as I write. I think of documenting the act of writing, following the writing instrument closely, recording the hand in motion. I think about ways to capture more of the physical: the sound of a pencil tip moving across rough tooth paper surfaces. Alternately, I can choose a more digital route, using the recording capabilities of a tablet computer and applications meant to capture each movement in the creation of an image, like a recording of an image emerging spontaneously on the surface, extending across time.

en fin (finally)

As a handwritten list, *all the f words we used to know* represents and documents a return to the creative and educational potential, as well as the pleasure, of actively engaging in learning through arts-based approaches (Dewey, 1938; Edmiston, 2014; Eisner, 2002a, 2002b; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay, 2004). More specifically, this work involves reconceptualizing language arts, transforming it from a subject into an active process. In languaging art, there are near-infinite choices for source texts and near-infinite ways to translate, rewrite, or re-present them. While *all the f words we used to know* is an artwork itself, it also offers a simple and easily-modified blueprint for engaging with language deeply as object and as a medium for learning and artmaking.

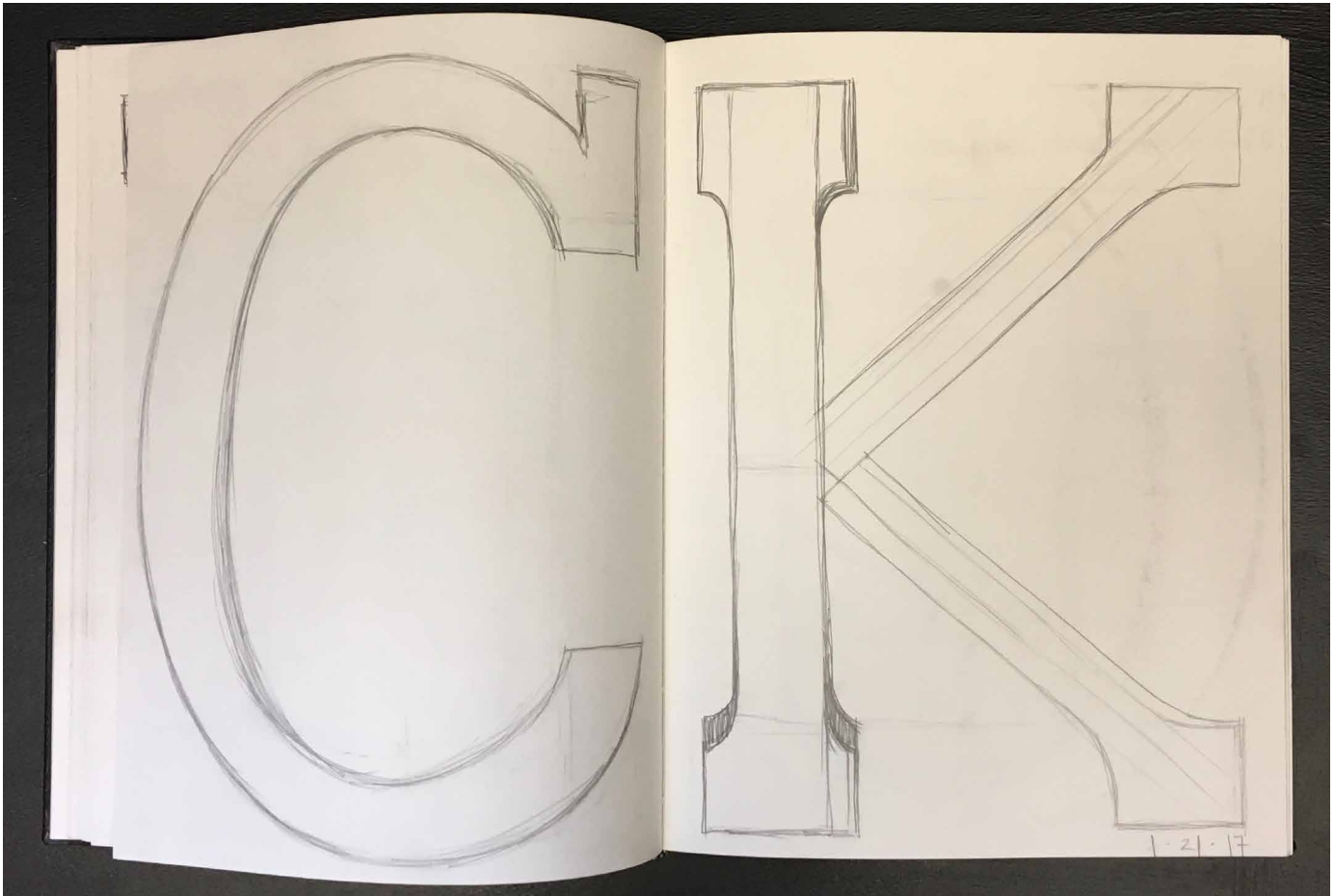


Figure 11. all the f words (C K)

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