How might (my) students and I demand an openness of mind and heart when faced with the N-word as a racist reminder that not all people in this country could or can engage in a practice of freedom?

Abstract: Personal journal entries recount how graduate students, and their instructor respond to a point of encounter in an online studio course at a large research institution in the Southeastern United States. Inspired by collectivist othermothering practices, the article speaks to learning from Black scholars while chronicling a shared experience and responding to an anxious now that is navigating the N-word together. The authors aim to center caring exchanges and ethical practices for the purpose of (re)building safety and hope that this article will be helpful to art educators who also encounter the N-word or have similar moments of crisis.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author: award2@fsu.edu

Othermothering Encounters with an Anxious Now

Amber Ward
Florida State University

Jesús Quintero
Florida State University

Shaquela Russ
Florida State University

Emily Dellheim
Florida State University

Kellie Fallon
Florida State University

Elizabeth Vann-Womack
Florida State University

Zackary Crawford
Florida State University

Valentina Valbuena-Lopez
Florida State University

Introduction

Othermothering Encounters with an Anxious Now

A graduate student from an online studio course recently submitted a video assignment in which he read from a monologue by a non-Black playwright and novelist that included a racial slur. This article explores how we (the students from the course and I) navigate this moment of crisis with support from others to center caring exchanges and ethical practices in learning/teaching for the purpose of (re)building safety in response to the following question:
"What are the outcomes/byproducts of living in the anxious now, in the fields of art and art education?"[1]

We encountered the slur during Spring 2022 in Creative Inquiry—a course I teach at a large research institution in the Southeastern United States offered to students across disciplines with an interest in using readily accessible materials paired with concepts to explore the world around them. In the course, students engage with resources in art education, visual art, and philosophy to understand artists as creative inquirers in relation with other humans, nonhumans, the environment, and more. As stated in the course description, the content prepares them to enter their respective fields with a commitment toward caring exchanges and ethical practices. But how do we ensure adequate pedagogies of care and ethics when crises occur?

This article reads like a series of personal journal entries and speaks to the moment of crisis and responses to it during a brief period in late March 2022. While my students are co-authors, I write in first person and include in the journal entries personal communication between the class community and between colleagues and me.[2] My hope is that this first-person account will be helpful to other art educators who face similar crises in educational spaces. At the end of each dated entry, the students and I offer theory to practice connections to process and learn from, what Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor (2020) calls, a "point of encounter."

According to Pryor (2020), a point of encounter is when one is "stumped or provoked by" (3:00-3:02) hearing the N-word during, for example, "an uncomfortable academic conversation" (3:08-3:11). "The N-word," a euphemism used throughout this article, replaces the racial slur spoken by the student. Because the N-word carries complex historical and contemporary meanings, it is worth contextualizing. Before the 1770s, the N-word was synonymous with slave, and North Americans in the United States (Black, White, and more) often used them interchangeably (Pryor, 2016) to describe the forced enslavement of African American laborers. As abolitionist and emancipationist movements grew in the North, during the 1820s and 1830s, White northerners began to deploy the slur as a racialized us-and-them boundary, form of White supremacy, and violent method of thwarting Black mobility (Pryor, 2016). During and after enslavement, some Black laborers not only borrowed the slur from White oppressors but also shaped it for themselves as a social identity and linguistic subversion (Litwack, 1961; Pryor, 2016; Stuckey, 1968). Two hundred years later, some Black people use the N-word today with various spellings and pronunciations as a sign of continued solidarity and subversion (Allan, 2007).

The "point of encounter" idea has been theorized across art education in literature on content flashpoints and disorienting dilemmas; so, we link

[1] This question, and others like it (see para. 5), can be found in the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*'s (2022) Call for Papers for Volume 43 in a theme titled "The Anxious Now and The Next Big Thing."

[2] Pseudonyms are used throughout for proper names (and more), including:
Students: "Alex," "Anne," "Bailey," "Camille," "Isabella," "Lizzie," and "Nicole" and
Colleagues: "Ava," "Christopher," "Hannah," "Helene," "Lucy," "Maggie," "Mary," and "Mia."

this idea to broader bodies of knowledge in the field to help broaden the argument beyond the N-word. Educators will encounter many moments of crisis in their classrooms, and our case offers important insights on how one could negotiate them.[3] Content flashpoints are defining moments or manifestations of learning that occur in art education (Kraehe, Hood, & Travis, 2015; Travis, 2020, 2022) in which new knowledge arises (O'Sullivan, 2005) "from the activation of power that disturbs a seemingly fixed relationship" (Kraehe & Lewis, 2018, p. 3). Our point of encounter is a content flashpoint that is bound with the N-word. Similarly, Jack Mezirow (1981) conceptualizes "disorienting dilemmas" (p. 7) as beliefs that trigger transformative learning experiences when becoming attune to the ways in which we are entangled with our distortions about problems. Our point of encounter also is a disorienting dilemma when troubling our understandings about the N-word during class and in this article.

The practice of othermothering is used as a theoretical framework to process and learn from the point of encounter in class. Black women educators in the United States, who have contributed to the collective welfare of their learning communities, often tend to students' physical, emotional, and intellectual needs (Conaway, 2007). This shared practice of mothering as mentoring originally was adopted by African American enslaved women as a means of support and survival (Butler, 2019; Case, 1997) to ensure that all children's needs were met (Bernard et al., 2012; Collins, 1991; O'Reilly, 2004)—especially those who were "orphaned by the sale or death of their mothers" (Bernard et al., 2012, p. 105) and/or excluded, by law, from formal educational systems (Dubey, 1995). Today, these othermothers, according to Patricia Hill Collins (1991), are women "who work on behalf of the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability, which embrace conceptions of transformative power and mutuality" (p. 132). Thus, othermothering is a transformative practice of Black collective care and justice.[4]

Given the recent point of encounter from class, I look to collectivist othermothering practices with reverence *and* caution because I am a White American woman attempting to work within and against the White, individualist norms of our society and the academy. I do not claim to be an othermother nor do I engage in othermothering practices. I do, however, theorize othermothering in this article and believe in the pedagogical power of community to nurture learners and their needs with help from Black scholars in the process of chronicling our shared story and responding to an anxious now that is navigating the N-word together. Thus, othermothering is used as a theoretical framework to assist me—a White teacher-as-learner—when thinking-with Black collective care and justice (Kwon, 2022) practices around a point of encounter for the purpose of creating a transformative learning experience. Before thinking-with Black scholars, it is necessary to heed Courtnie Wolfgang's (2019) call to confront (my) whiteness by acknowledging it as an unearned privilege and violent norm in art education and by working toward de-centering it in this article (and in my learning/teaching). I wonder, however: Is it enough—or even possible—to de-center whiteness when theorizing othermothering practices, knowing that White power is historically and contemporaneously entangled with Black survival?

A couple weeks before the first journal entry on March 23, 2022, I asked my colleague, Christopher, if he would consider serving as a peer observer of my

[3] We appreciate the recommendation to extend our literature review and borrow this language from a reviewer of this article.

[4] See Hyunji Kwon's (2022) relevant article that introduces shared parenting practices, or "otherparenting," in art education as "pedagogies of care-and-justice" inspired by Vanessa Siddle Walker and John Snarey's (2004) framework.

teaching on the evening of March 24th. Because Christopher taught at the same time on the same day, he agreed to observe a Zoom recording of that class later. Christopher is Black, and his racial identity is relevant to this article and the point of encounter occurring the day before my peer observation. The content below could be difficult for readers.

Wednesday, March 23

Students have three opportunities during the semester to get feedback from their peers and me on their in-process and completed artwork by way of critique. Artwork for Critique 2 was due yesterday. Alex—a White Colombian American student—posts in our class Canvas site a 4-minute YouTube video remix he made that includes footage by his theater students on the topic of beauty and a voiceover reading of a chapter, titled "Superman," in *100 (monologues)* by Eric Bogosian (2014)—a White Armenian American playwright and novelist. As Alex reads the monologue, I find myself growing increasingly uncomfortable at the unfolding conversation between a father and his young son:

> "Dad, when I grow up, am I going to be a bum… an alcoholic… a junkie… or a homo" (Bogosian, 2014, p. 6)? The end of the monologue goes like this:
> "Dad? NO WAY I CAN BE A N*****, HUH DAD, HUH?
> 'Cause you're not a n***** and Mom's not a n*****, huh? Huh?
> HUH? We're American, huh Dad?"[5]
> (p. 6, emphasis in original, asterisks added)

A flood of emotions washes over me as I wonder how the video might impact students, especially Nicole who is Black. I also have deep concern for Alex and hope that we all can learn from this point of encounter without shaming or touching wrongness in each other.

I see a Canvas Assignment Comment from Alex that accompanies his Critique 2 submission; below is an excerpt:

> "I asked [my students] to chase a video of 5 seconds, 'Chasing for Beauty' during class. We discussed afterward the findings and what is our understanding of what is beautiful…. We concluded that Beauty is the connection between the objects and the subjects. However, object and subject are both subjects and objects in a new world simultaneously. The monologue of Bogosian is my response to their work. It is a criticism against the adults, the 'fathers' of society. The answer to the Beauty in our kids' eyes is the destruction of Beauty by segregation and addiction to power."

I respond to Alex's Critique 2 in the Assignment Comments; below is part of that response:

> "Before you share your video during tomorrow's critique, I invite you to speak more to the following: 'The monologue of Bogosian is my response to [students'] work. It is a criticism against the adults, the 'fathers' of society. The answer to the Beauty in our kids' eyes is the destruction of Beauty by segregation and addiction to power.' I also invite you and everyone to watch this video in its entirety before we meet: https://www.ted.com/talks/the_n_word_in_the_classroom [Pryor, 2020]. What you presented in/as critique 2, contained a 'point of encounter' for me, and I'm still grappling with it all…. Inspired by Pryor [2020], I close with this question 'Why is talking about the N-word hard?'" (18:30)

Anne, Bailey, Isabella, Nicole, and Camille also post comments to Alex about his video, but I'm surprised that no one addresses the N-word. Am I overreacting, I wonder? Alex sends me a text message, asking if I'm available to meet for office

[5] The students and I agree that all the slurs in the monologue are harmful and hurtful. By taking up the N-word only in this article and in class, we wonder: What words and feelings have we silenced and why? To what have we given more power and why?

hours. During our meeting, he asks thoughtful questions like, "How much of my work should I explain? Am I responsible for viewers' interpretations of my work? How do we make change without being provocative?" Alex also wonders aloud about the role of his cultural identity. As a Colombian American person, he states that he feels ignorant about the historical violence imbued in N-word in this country and expresses concern for his colleague, Nicole, and how the video he made might hurt her.

Later, I stop by Ava's office for support. Ava is a trusted colleague and the Chair of the Department. When I share with her what happened, she asks how I am and how she can help. I notice that Ava is in the middle of a Zoom meeting; not wanting to interrupt any longer, I say, "Oh, I'm sure it will be fine. I'm fine." I was not fine. This was not fine. I return to my office and revisit excerpts from bell hooks to find some footing.

The author states that classrooms can be "a location of possibility" (hooks, 1994, p. 207) where we must come together with our students to insist on acceptance "even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom" (p. 207). How might students and I demand an openness of mind and heart when faced with the N-word as a racist reminder that not all people in this country could or can engage in a practice of freedom? Building safety and protection are important responsibilities of othermothers and rebuilding both are paramount in this moment for healing. Wanda Thomas Bernard and her co-authors (2012) state that othermothers are not alone in their work: "Othermothering signifies the continuity of shared responsibilities that are vital in empowering students and bringing about social transformation" (p. 107) in public and educational spheres. I'm not sure how to go about sharing responsibilities with students, for example, when the Canvas comments above seem to disregard the use of the N-word. I mention this not to shame them but rather to wonder what my role might be in co-creating silence.

Thursday, March 24

I reach out to Hannah, a colleague from outside my institution, and ask if she is available to talk about how I might best prepare for today's class. She offers some suggestions during our call, including one where students write a response to each other's Critique 2 artwork using a one-word emotion about how they are feeling. She also recommends two resources. The first is an article by Bree Picower (2012) that offers theory to practice guidance for integrating "six elements of social justice curriculum design" (p. 1) into classrooms. Hannah also recommends the Learning for Justice (n.d.) website, which states that it is "a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements and advance the human rights of all people" (para. 1). I find two additional resources on the website, including an interview with Neal Lester (Price, 2011) and an article by Lester (2014). During the interview, Lester answers questions about the complexities of using the N-word in educational spaces. Rather than policing what others say and think, he suggests that we need to critique and educate ourselves by "trying to figure out how we think and how the words we use mirror our thinking" (Price, 2011, para. 8). Similarly, in the article, Lester (2014) states that many people in this country want to trouble the N-word through critical and informed conversation. My phone call with Hannah—alongside these resources—reminds me that a meaningful conversation with students is necessary.

The students and I meet for class in the late afternoon, and they each have 15 minutes to present their artwork for our second critique with the aim of receiving feedback on it. Camille, Nicole, and Alex present before our scheduled break. Ultimately, Alex

decides not to present his video, but rather discusses it at length. His colleagues share the following words in response to his work: rupture, burst, emotional, ambivalence, distinction, and passion. I thank Alex and suggest a break, and the following exchange ensues between Alex and Nicole, after she invites him to talk.

Nicole: "[Alex], I wanted to talk to you…. Sometimes that can be hard for some people because those words *are* triggering…. It's a *bad*…. It's *bad* to say it…. But it has to be talked about. We talk about it all the time in my community—you know—Black community… but everybody is not the same. They're not going to get it the way I get it… because so many people are so angry about those words—even the homophobic term. I know you want to show this because it needs to be talked about, and I think you should but there are going to be people that are like, 'Hey, you can't do that.' Are you willing to be okay with the possibility of getting in trouble?"

Alex: "[Nicole], I think that you're nailing it…. I know that my audience is you guys. I felt, in some ways, safe to go there. But the thing you said is very important because… For example, my Latino students have obtained street language as a way of identification—slang identification…. Because Latinos also… What is our position toward all this? What is our position on the damage that is being created to the Black community?…. And what is the damage that *we* are having?…. I don't think that our communities have resolved that. But your question is much more important: 'am I, [Alex], willing to do it?' I was thinking of you…. Then I start noticing… the heaviness in my heart, 'Oh, what is [Nicole] going to think about me? What are the other people…? Am I willing to do that? Am I willing to play safe and just not do it?'…. So, my question is 'How does art inform social change when there are places that I cannot go, I cannot touch, because I'm afraid someone is going to go *back, back, back*… because I'm afraid?' I don't have an answer, [Nicole]. I don't know."

I bring the class back together after break, and the remaining students present their artwork for critique. Just before class ends, I send Nicole a private Zoom Chat Message and invite her to stay after for a conversation, which she accepts. I end the Zoom recording and ask her how she's doing. Nicole says that she's feeling tension between caring for Alex and being retraumatized by hearing the N-word. I have so much heart for how she is making room for two powerful emotions: pain and care. Nicole also says that Alex has reached out to her and that they have been in conversation—perhaps as peer mentors.

On the topic of mentorship, Douglas Guiffrida (2005) writes that Black students are more likely to seek help from other historically minoritized family, friends, and mentors than from White faculty because they can be perceived as culturally insensitive (Fleming, 1984) and unrealistic role models. This makes sense when replaying the video of today's class. Not only do I misuse hooks (1994), at one point, but also find myself whitesplaining. For example, I bring the class back together after break and state that Nicole as "the sole Black woman" in the class might feel a "responsibility, perhaps, to represent all of Black culture" which seems like too much responsibility for one person. Hooks (1994) clearly states that educators should not interfere if they see students as native informants. Whitesplaining occurs "when the experiences, stories, and perspectives of racially marginalized people are discounted, overly simplified, or explained away by members of the dominant racial group" (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021, p. 7). Here, my response to an anxious now cannot be informed by the practice of othermothering because it likely causes more harm. Good parenting teaches us to learn from past mistakes and do better.

Friday, March 25

I call my work friend, Mia, this morning for advice. We talk for nearly an hour, brainstorming ways to

respond to students. Nearing the end of our conversation, I say something like, "I just want to know what the students need from me." Mia replies, "Why don't you ask them?" A couple hours later, I send each student from class a version of the email below.

> "I'm reaching out to you and your Creative Inquiry colleagues with questions to "help make race conversations normal, constructive and successful" (NEA, 2020, para 1). Please feel free to answer one or more. Alternatively, let me know if you'd like to schedule a time to talk. How are you feeling and why? Do you need anything from me? If so, what is it and why? Do you need anything from your colleagues? If so, what is it and why?"

Anne and Lizzie both reply by email that day. Anne speaks to language as a social and cultural construct, and Lizzie discusses a desire to continue the conversation next week.

I meet with my colleagues Helene and Mary via Zoom about something unrelated that afternoon. Toward the end of our meeting, I briefly summarize what had happened before and during yesterday's class. They both suggest that I email our colleague Christopher in advance of sharing the Zoom link with him of my teaching video and invite him to have a conversation about what to expect. I email Christopher at the end of the workday. A couple hours later, I meet my work friend, Maggie, for dinner where I speak at length about the recent point of encounter. Maggie is an art therapist and suggests that I ask students to respond artistically to our last class. This thoughtful advice carries me through the weekend.

Up to this point, I have reached out to several colleagues for help, which feels like personal progress because I was raised to be independent, believing that solving problems on my own demonstrates strength. The practice of othermothering, however, teaches us that meaningful collaboration with colleagues as maternal advocacy can lead to institutional change (Bernard et al., 2012). Yet, White educators inspired by othermothering should be mindful of asking too much from Black faculty (and students) who often already are overextended in response to, in Alana Butler's (2019) words, widespread injustice inside and outside the academy. As part of the dominant racial group, it's important that I learn to balance asks and collaboration with self-education and self-critique, as Lester (2014) suggests.

Monday, March 28

Christopher returns my email at the start of the workday, agreeing to a meeting. During our conversation, later that afternoon, I have an opportunity to contextualize the teaching video and offer a content warning. Christopher recommends that I consider getting support from Lucy at our institution's Center for Teaching Excellence. He also actively listens and shares something that resonates with me, using an example from his class: "Sometimes we just have to stay in the heat of the conversation." I appreciate his advice and candor and feel like I missed an important opportunity to stay in the heat on Thursday. I begin to realize that staying in the heat is a responsibility for some and a choice for others, especially with othermothering in mind.[6]

Kimberly Griffin's (2013) research with Black women faculty speaks to some of the "energy costs" (p. 169) of othermothering; for example, one participant states that Black students often come to her "just needing stuff" (p. 177)—everything from navigating the academy to working through personal grief and loss. The participant describes othermothering as

[6] On choosing not to stay in the heat, Alex states, "We fall into a trap that we create ourselves for the need of control." The trap that Alex is referring to is our (educators') commitment to a schedule, time, grades, and more. Alex and I agree that the conversation he had with Nicole during the class break was generative and could have continued with the other members of our class community.

exhausting "cultural work," (Griffin, 2013, p. 177) that often pulls her away from other work obligations. This makes me wonder how White women might look to othermothering practices to support their Black colleagues by working together to restructure service responsibilities, among other things, to account for the demands of othermothering.

Tuesday, March 29

In the early afternoon I send Lucy an email. She responds soon after, agreeing to talk by phone. During our conversation, Lucy listens attentively and offers much-needed reassurance and advice. She suspects that our community trust has been broken, and to enable healing, she encourages me to ask the class: "What do we expect from each other to feel safe again?"

After my call with Lucy, I check my email to find that Isabella has responded to the email I sent to each student last Thursday; below is an excerpt from her:

> "Drawing upon the article you sent us, I latched on to the following….
> '***Avoidance speaks volumes*** *— it communicates to students of color that racism doesn't matter enough to warrant attention and, by omission, invalidates their experiences, perspectives, identities, and lives. White students, on the other hand, often see racism being accepted and normalized, without acknowledgement or accountability.'* [NEA, 2022, para. 5, emphasis in original]….
> I think of this class as an incredible laboratory of percolating ideas and nascent practices, and you have created this container where we could actually practice having conversations about race and identity instead of just reading about inclusive teaching."

I agree with my colleague Lucy and my student Isabella that the class needs more time to discuss the point of encounter to enable healing by, in Isabella's words, "having conversations about race and identity." Bernard et al. (2012) speak to othermothering and return to what hooks says about the potential for education to facilitate freedom; they state, "a culturally engaging, positive and welcoming environment that promotes and facilitates cultural advancement, not only for students, but also for the communities they represent, can and does lead to personal and collective transformation" (p. 113). For the first time, I realize that our responses to the point of encounter have the potential to make meaningful ripples far beyond our learning community.

Thursday, March 31

The students and I meet for class. After sharing current events and announcements, I invite them to create an artistic response to our last class, as suggested to me by Maggie the week before. They make art for 15 minutes followed by an hour-long conversation. I share transcribed excerpts from that conversation below, which is recorded for Nicole to watch later because she has a family emergency and cannot join us for class.[7]

Isabella: "I'm sorry that [Nicole] is not here, but she'll tune in. I think [Alex] brought up an interesting point about, like, if you're trying to change the status quo… if you're trying to change the way that things happen, how do you do that if you give like a [politically correct] version of something or you censor or… What's possible? And what is authentic? What is meant to make people feel uncomfortable? It's easier to skirt around and not go there, but if you don't go there, then what? What change comes

[7] Nicole's response to the recorded video is as follows: "As I watched the Zoom meeting, I felt a sense of relief. I was glad I wasn't present, not only because I felt uncomfortable with the current topic but because my peers needed to have that conversation. My professor, classmates, and I created a safe space for each other previously, so I respect everyone's opinions during the meeting and give applause to everyone, especially Camille and Bailey. They gave great feedback and I felt heard as the only black person in the class."

about? These are questions that [Alex] started to bring up that I'm curious about."

Alex: "I feel conflicted between me as a person, me as an artist, and me as a teacher. Conflicted is not the right word but…. Bogosian wrote these provocative monologues. So, when I used the N-word and the other words… I literally just thought, 'That's a good text that shows how we, the adults, have ruined the world for the kids.' But then by utilizing the N-word, it becomes something that I wasn't expecting…. It's like different voices talking to you, right? 'So, what's up? You're going to play it safe now, and you have so much need for validation?' And the other part of me is like 'no wait, I want to connect to these people. I want to be able to develop a language where I can say something.' And the other part of me, the teacher, is like… But then you hear the kids using it. Then it becomes so much about the N-word that everything else disappears. Then, suddenly I feel myself in damage control…. And again, I don't want to offend anybody."

Camille: "I've been told by many people that I am too harsh, especially with social justice issues and that I make people uncomfortable. With that said, I do think that there are boundaries within my work. I use slurs, but these are slurs that I've had to deal with myself, slurs I've been told and that I've been hurt by. I feel like sometimes to be heard you have to make people uncomfortable, but not with certain slurs…. I guess you can always speak on injustices that are happening to all communities, and I feel like you should, but I don't think we have the place to say that word if we were not marginalized by it."

Bailey: Saying "that monologue in a general environment would mean that it is going to hurt, and I think that we have to walk the line of understanding that those words are shocking for a lot of people when they come from someone who is not from that group who is marginalized…. I think it depends on who you're talking with and how you're talking about them. And I applaud you for being comfortable enough to explore these topics with us. And I think that that's something that you should be able to do in an educational environment."

Anne: "Like [Bailey] said, these words do have a lot of shock value, and it really does depend on the demographic, the audience, the context, the environment…. I'm not in the position to say whether it's good or bad, if it's right or wrong…. Language is always evolving, and when we think about semantics, a lot of times there's different definitions, different meanings for a user…. But in our current world, this word is more often used amongst the community that it once plagued as a term of like – I wouldn't go as far as to say endearment or companionship but solidarity perhaps? And, of course, that's not the origin of its historical meaning but this reclamation of oppressive language proves the power of language—for better or worse."

Bailey: "And when someone uses the hard R, it means that original connotation of the word, and I think that it's understanding like that word has developed into very different meanings over time…. I think that there's better ways of expressing the message without using the value of shock…. If your whole story is just clickbait, then there's no substance. What are you doing with your story? What are you trying to say? How are you trying to say it? How can you tell the best story possible without using that word?"

Alex: "Yeah, I agree. And just to contextualize a little bit… What I hear from you is in the context of United States… The word itself is very close in Spanish, and we actually use the word as an endearment. In Colombia we use the same word."

Lizzie: "I've struggled with this position…. As a White person, I don't necessarily feel it's my place to determine whether it's inappropriate because I think it depends. If a Black person wants to say, 'this is offensive,' I will stand by them, but as someone… who has not lived the life of an African American

person, I can't speak to how they feel. I tend to stay quiet. If [Nicole] prefers you don't use the word, then I'm going to stand behind her."

Camille: "I think it's especially hard for [Nicole] being the only Black person in the class…. I feel like it puts her in an uncomfortable situation when everyone looks to her to represent the Black community as a whole. And I feel bad."

Isabella: "I think I'm just missing a key component here. As I understand, you were reading a monologue of something that already existed. These weren't your words."

Alex: "Yeah, correct…. When I moved to United States, Eric Bogosian was presented to me as one of the most important American writers…. In 'Superman' the kid is confused and wanted to be like his dad…. Is the kid supposed to be like….? But it had nothing to do with the N-word. It was just about stereotypes. I feel like it really was for me, something that was like a theater piece…. That's when I understood this was generational. I'm facing ignorance in a contemporary sense of a new generation because my classmates are younger than me. And then I am trying to understand, as a teacher, if I am understanding the culture."

Me: "You recently shared with me that you didn't understand the gravity of the word… You didn't have an appreciation for what that word has historically meant in the U.S., and how closely it's associated with enslavement…. I was so torn when we had the break last class and you and [Nicole] were engaged in this important and meaningful conversation because I didn't feel like I had the tools to support you both…. I still don't feel prepared to be having this conversation with you all now, but I never will be. I'll never be fully prepared because it's scary…. I just regret that I didn't trust you all like I could have last week in the moment when we were all feeling the feelings…. I think another thing that I was grappling with was my own power, which speaks a little bit to what [Lizzie] said. Who am I, as a White woman and the instructor of the class, to be mediating a conversation between an [African American and Colombian American] student about the N-word? I was really grappling with what to do with that power. How to best put it to work? We can't absolve ourselves of the power that we have, but how do we best put that power to work?"

Outcomes/Byproducts: Encounters with an Anxious Now

As demonstrated by the transcript above, the students and I try to center caring exchanges and ethical practices in learning/teaching for the purpose of (re)building safety. It now occurs to me that the students and I lean on each other for support just as much as I seek help from colleagues and scholarship. The students seem to hold each other accountable but do so with love and compassion. On this, Bernard et al. (2013) state that an othermother can facilitate success and be empowering by "being tough without being demeaning" (p. 113). While I am not suggesting that our students should become othermothers, I do believe that it is beneficial to look to the communal practices of othermothering as inspiration for creating liberatory communities and classrooms *with* students.

I conclude with connections to the data by responding to questions from a reviewer of this article who writes: "I was left wondering what recommendations you had for art educators who experience similar encounters. What did you learn about yourself and your pedagogy? How did othermothering relate to the experiences you had in the classroom?" Before addressing these questions, is it important to note that the article reviewers (masked) and journal editors (Manisha Sharma and Carissa DiCindio) are becoming unexpected othermothers in this collective work, and I thank them for that. Now for the responses to the questions above. First, my recommendation for art educators, who undoubtedly will experience similar

moments of crisis, is to be vulnerable with yourself, students, and colleagues. It also is paramount to be open to growth by engaging with work from historically minoritized scholars in journal articles and via social media (Wolfgang, 2019). At the same time, and with help from another reviewer, I add that White educators should not "expect those students and peers who are most likely to be impacted by these words to take the lead in discussion, approach, and solution as to how these terms/concepts should be grappled with in an educational setting." Second, my teaching is a work in progress that thrives when in community; chronic individualism and independence are learned and often serve a White supremacist agenda in and outside classrooms. Finally, othermothering relates to the experiences I had in the classroom by recognizing not only my limitations but also a responsibility to myself, students, and colleagues "to stay in the heat of the conversation," as Christopher suggests. Ultimately, a primary outcome/byproduct of living in and exploring an anxious now, in the fields of art and art education, is an invitation to those in the dominant majority to be in fellowship with and in service to collective pedagogies while also committing to personal accountability and growth.

References

Allan, K. (2007). The pragmatics of connotation. *Journal of Pragmatics, 39*(6), 1047–1057. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.08.004

Bernard, W. T., Issari, S., Moriah, J., Njiwaji, M., Obgan, P., & Tolliver, A. (2012). Othermothering in the academy: Using maternal advocacy for institutional change. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative, 3*(2), 103-120.

Bogosian, E. (2014). *100 (monologues)*. Theatre Communications Group.

Butler, A. (2019). Quiltmaking among African-American women as pedagogy of care, empowerment, and sisterhood. *Gender and Education, 31*(5), 590-603.

Case, K. I. (1997). African American othermothering in urban elementary school. *The Urban Review, 29*(1), 25-39.

Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.

Conaway, C. (2007). Rhetorically constructed Africana mothering in the antebellum: The racial uplift tradition of Mary Ann Shadd Cary. *The Journal of Pan African Studies, 2*(1), 4-18.

Dubey, M. (1995). Gayle Jones and the matrilineal metaphor of tradition. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 20*(2), 245-267.

Fleming, J. (1984). *Blacks in college: A comparative study of students' success in Black and White institutions.* Jossey-Bass.

Griffin, K. A. (2013). Voices of the "othermothers": Reconsidering Black professors' relationships with Black students as a form of social exchange. *The Journal of Negro Education, 82*(2), 169-183.

Guiffrida, D. (2005). Othermothering as a framework for understanding African American students' definitions of student-centered faculty. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(6), 701-723.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education and the practice of freedom.* Routledge.

Journal of Social Theory in Art Education. (2022). *Call for Papers for Vol 43.* Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://www.cstae.org/journal

Kraehe, A. M., & Acuff, J. B. (2021). *Race and art education.* Davis.

Kraehe, A. M., Hood, E. J., & Travis, S. (2015). "I'm so offended!": Curriculum flashpoints and critical arts education. *International Journal of Education and the Arts, 16*(18).

Kraehe, A. M., & Lewis, T. E. (2018). Introduction: Flashpoints—the breakthrough of sociocultural difference. In S. Travis, A. M. Kraehe, E. J. Hood, & T. E. Lewis (Eds.), *Pedagogies in the flesh: Case studies on the embodiment of sociocultural differences in education* (pp. 1–14). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kwon, H. (2022). Pedagogies of care and justice: African American high school art teachers during the Civil Rights Era in the segregated South. *Studies in Art Education, 63*(3), 256–274. https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2022.2080998

Lester, N. A. (2014, April 21). *The N-word: Connected through historical disconnect?* Learning for Justice. https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/the-nword-connected-through-historical-disconnect

Litwack, L. (1961). *North of slavery: the Negro in the free States, 1790-1860*. University of Chicago Press.

Mezirow J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education Quarterly, 32*(1), 3–24.

National Education Association. (2022). *Implementing racial justice.* https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/just-equitable-schools/core-values/implementing-racial-justice

O'Reilly, A. (2004). *From motherhood to mothering: The legacy of Adrienne Rich's* Of Woman Born. State University of New York Press.

O'Sullivan, D. 2005. *Cultural politics and Irish education since the 1950s: Policy paradigms and power.* Institute for Public Administration.

Picower, B. (2012). Using their words: Six elements of social justice curriculum design for the elementary classroom. *International Journal of Multicultural Education, 14*(1), 1-17. https://Doi.Org/10.18251/Ijme.V14i1.484

Price, S. (2011). Straight talk about the N-word. *Learning for Justice,* 40. Retrieved March 24, 2022, from: https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2011/straight-talk-about-the-nword

Pryor, E. S. (2020, March 12). *Why it's so hard to talk about the N-word* [Address]. TEDxEasthamptonWomen, Easthampton, Massachusetts. https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_stordeur_pryor_why_it_s_so_hard_to_talk_about_the_n_word?language=en

Pryor, E. S. (2016). The etymology of nigger: Resistance, language, and the politics of freedom in the Antebellum North. *Journal of the Early Republic, 36*(2), 203–245. https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Jer.2016.0028

Siddle Walker, V., & Snarey, J. (Eds.). (2004). *Race-ing moral formation: African American perspectives on care and justice.* Teachers College Press.

Stuckey, S. (1968). Through the prism of folklore: The Black ethos in slavery. *The Massachusetts Review, 9*(3), 417–437.

Travis, S. (2020). Flashpoints of artist identity formation. *Art Education, 73*(5), 16–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2020.1781438

Travis, S. (2022). Confessing critical frictions in the arts and education. *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education, 39*(1). https://doi.org/10.2458/jcrae.5384

Wolfgang, C. (2019). The White supremacy of art education in the United States: My complicity and path toward reparation pedagogy. *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education 36*(1), 14-28. doi: https://doi.org/10.2458/jcrae.4938