

Chaos, Conflict and Confusion: Cross-Cutting Issues of Whiteness in Visual Representations of the Brother on the Downlow

Alphonso Walter Grant Ph.D.
University of Arkansas

ABSTRACT

Broadly this paper builds on the discourse surrounding destabilizing Whiteness in visual representation of the brother on the down low (DL). The term “DL”, which is short for on the down-low, is a common way to refer to men of color who live their everyday lives as heterosexuals, are often married to women, yet also engage in discreet homosexual relationships (Scott, 2010). Guided by the question: In what ways are brothers on the down low viewed in Black visual culture? Specifically, this paper is a literature review on the intersection of the emasculation of Black men and Black masculinity and discusses the sustained interaction of these two concepts within contemporary politics of identity, masculinity, and sexuality; with a synopsis of analyses of the literature presented through a lens of my lived experiences and so it is framed as such. This paper also focuses on categorization and institutionalization of Black men in visual culture. Then there is review a brief history of some knowledge and power plays of White hegemonic United States (US) culture and how Black men are structured and regulated by means of these social dynamics. This leads me to provide insights into these things by investigating them and looking closely at their social constructs. Ultimately, I explore and discuss the ways in which Black male sexuality and masculinity, broadly, and Black DL identity, specifically, is visually represented in literature in relationship to Whiteness.

Keywords: DL Identity, Black Visual Culture, Black Masculinity and Sexuality, Whiteness

Cross-cutting Issues in DL and Black Masculinities

This paper builds on the literature and seeks to explore the ways in which Black male sexualities, broadly, and Black gay male identities, specifically, is and has been negotiated in visual culture in relationship to Whiteness. “DL”, which is short for “down-low” or “on the down low” has been commonly used as a way to refer

to men of color who live their everyday lives as heterosexuals, are often married to women, yet also engage in discreet relationships with other men (Scott, 2010). I use—my subjective experiences and consciousness—to focus on the question, in what ways are Black men on the “DL” visually represented? I intentionally use the terms masculinities and sexualities throughout this paper to acknowledge how Black gay men and DLs narrate and situate their multiple identities. I agree with Neale (2013) and Nero’s (1991) definition of the term masculinities which is masculinities indicate an opposition to fixed, stable, and unchanging masculinity. Therefore, this paper discusses DLs and Black gay men as a distinct group of people who embody numerous masculinities and sexualities despite the singular identity that predominant White heteronormative culture wants to ascribe to them.

The literature identifies and examines a number of important connections within the discussion of United States Black male culture in general and the brother on the down low (DL) culture specifically to emphasize epistemological considerations, difference, marginality, and agency. These considerations have been instrumental in critiquing literature and relationships of Black masculinity and sexuality. As such, a focus on historical contexts is important to view how facets of Black communities view Black sexualities and masculinities, bisexualities and gay identities in Black men as well as the DL phenomenon. These complex conversations provide a fertile space to explore the chaos, conflict, and confusion within the underexplored curricular and pedagogical implications of visual images of Black men on the DL in art education. A vast amount of visual culture produced, consumed, collected, and interpreted over the centuries with regard to the image of Black society includes specific images, performances, films, and other visual artifacts in which Black people are visually subjugated in a narrowly limited and negative fashion, designed to appeal to White hegemonic society (Grant, 2014). These examples of visual imagery are commonly known as Black visual culture.

In past research, I discussed how art educator, James Rolling (2010) explicitly grappled with the discourse surrounding heteronormative Black identity, the Black lived experience, and the human condition in the US without stereotypical dialogue. Rolling’s (2010) work brought fresh connotation to [re]constructing narrative Black identity within arts-based [re]search (Grant, 2013). Furthermore, he created a framework for future art education scholars – such as myself – to use in order to place their own identities and lived experiences into

their interpretations of Black identities (Grant, 2013). He argued that out of chaos within, incompleteness, and uncertainty about his Black identity come order, achievement, and inevitability. Rolling (2010) encouraged his reader to become a curious viewer and not settle for instant responses to what is seen. He argued, through [re]interpretation and [re]casting ourselves, Black men learn about the art, the artist, and the spectator through self-reflection. Indeed, Rolling's theoretical concepts have assisted me in terms of my own awareness of my identities as my own consciousness of imagery is constantly evolving.

Rolling (2010) built this argument on Foucauldian premises, contending that visual culture archaeology is developed as a methodology for discursive un-naming and renaming, and emerges from the inherence and attenuation of in-scripted meanings in the reinterpretation of identity during a postmodern confluence of ideas and images. In a similar vein, art educators (Carpenter, 2005; Carpenter & Sourdoot, 2010; Carpenter & Tavin, 2010; Darts, 2007; Duncum, 2003, 2004; Freedman, 2003; Grant, 2013; Grant & Kee, 2018) discussed issues surrounding stereotypes, Black identity, and multicultural visual culture. However, none of these art educators took on representations of DL in Black visual culture.

Chaos, Conflict, and Confusion in the Visuality of Black Visual Culture

The complexities within representations of DL in Black visual culture have been under-reported, under-interpreted, and not sufficiently recognized in relationship to curriculum theory in the field of art education (Grant, 2014). There are scholars outside of the field of art education who have examined Black visual culture (Pieterse, 1992; Bearden & Henderson, 1993; hooks, 1995; Doy, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Powell, 2003; Bolden, 2004). However, none of these scholars has sufficiently examined DL identity within Black visual culture or tackled the negative impact of DL images. Additionally, the destabilization of Black visual culture in the US typically comes from negative connotations about Black people reified by the concept of Whiteness at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. B. Alexander (2012) defined Whiteness as a "self-reifying practice, a practice that sustains the ability to name, and conversely not to be named, and the power to speak without being chastised while in the process of chastising others" (p. 23). It is this essential concept of Whiteness that is woven throughout the question in this paper, in what ways are brothers on the DL visually represented?

There are other theoretical frameworks which supplement Crenshaws' (1995) theory of intersectionality, such as queer of color critique, which have emerged and shaped liminal places and spaces where discourses on Black masculinity and sexuality can be discussed. These discussions take place without homonormative racial identities and have a resistance to gazing into the world of DL and gay people of color through a master narrative. Therefore, celebrating heteronormative masculinity as progressive among gay men undermines gay efforts to resist dominant ideologies. I am not alone in characterizing DLs in a less restrictive way. Mutua (2006), for example, addressed the tension between the progressive masculinities project and Afrocentrism, which has a history of constructing a singular and exclusionary Black masculinity that is dependent on sexism and homophobia. Additionally, Collins (2004) focused on both men's and women's experiences as deeply racialized in a colonized, gender-specific narrative. According to Collins (2000), "talking about gender does not mean focusing solely on women's issues, as gender ideology must encompass ideas about both Black masculinity and femininity" (p. 6). The ways in which the visual negotiates the existence of multiple masculinities, the lives of DLs, and Black gay men are not only acknowledged, but also legitimized (Fleetwood, 2011; Mutua, 2006; Neal, 2013; Scott, 2010). For example, the normalization of sexual violence in prisons that comes back to the reproduction of prison rape culture. This happens by using visual culture antecedents such as television and cable series such as *OZ*, *The Boondocks*, and *The Wire* which treat deeply rooted racial stereotypes within Black visual culture and television with fixed notions of identity constructed in Whiteness.

As a consequence of identity constructs that result from Whiteness, Black men who classify themselves as DL or gay are seen as a *crosscutting* issue, which is a cultural line that creates further ostracism within an already marginalized Black community. For example, some Black communities view Black gay sexual identity as mitigating one's racial identity and deflating one's community standing. In short, Black men who identify as bisexual, queer, or gay are belittled because they are seen as being like women under the stereotypical White cultural positioning of White gay men as being sissies, faggots, or effeminate (Grant, 2013, 2014; Neal, 2013). Despite the similar points of view (from the racial front), Black DL men have a fear of being identified as effeminate, which may be even stronger shaming of Black gay men from some Black communities than of White gay men in facets of White communities, and that is part of the

reason they are on the DL.

According to hooks (2004), ethnic and racial differences within masculinity are important to diversifying men's studies. Framing these issues within the context of intersectionality provides ways to understand how masculinity is experienced, accepted, negotiated, and visually interpreted. She further suggested that masculinity, as practiced by Black Americans, plays upon and, at times, calls into question culturally dominant projections of Black masculinity, which are restrictive. In this way, in highly commodified cultural domains such as sports, entertainment, music, and sexual fantasy (*Mandingo*), previously marginalized groups face difficulty in attempting to reconstruct racialized manhood. As a cultural penalty for the attempt, the marginalized are shunned or taken away (emasculated) publicly. Similarly, social stigma and penalties, as suggested by Potoczniak (2007), include community isolation, violence, and prejudice when Black men do not conform to the expected masculine performance narrative. Such attempts are undermined rather than celebrated.

To ensure that the reader can follow where I am coming from, let me introduce W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness. Du Bois (1903/1981) explains the intrinsic mental state of such an understanding: "[T]his double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 3). It is this conceptual mindset that causes the mood and mindset of some African descendants to fluctuate from confusion and disbelief to understanding and compliance, and finally, from anger and rage to revolution. The burden of constantly viewing one's self through the perspective of the oppressor has been meant to create self-hate, and to some extent it did. However, it also created fortitude in some Black American men. Du Bois (1903/1981) goes on to say, "One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 3). The *twoness* of personality Du Bois (1903/1981) mentions is where I am delving into the depths of the sunken place, which is the mindset of Black male masculinities and sexualities in the souls of Black American men, where recognition breeds anger, where compliance leads to rage, and where revolutions are born. I continue to argue that the hegemonic American construction of identity and visual images of Black men in the US are fixed and unchanging, filled with stereotypes of hyper-sexuality, savagery, primitivism, and docility, and that these historical images have become infused into

facets of Black communities.

A Historical Black Context: Black Sexualities and Masculinities

The historical evidence of same-sex practice and desire in facets of Black American communities can be traced to pre-colonial Africa (Johnson, 2003; Thomas & Sillen, 1972). Nero (1991) presented a slave narrative that exposed the existence of same-sex practice during the slavery era. Similar to Hemphill (1991) I maintain, colorism and the residues of Whiteness have had a long-lasting impact on the psyche of Black Americans who are the descendants of African slaves. As such, double minded consciousness, self-Black hatred, and ignorance are the three-legged stool of homosexuality. Further, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) Black American representations in the arts and entertainment have existed within the Black communities in 1920s and 1930s (Nugent, Gates, & Wirth, 2002) such as Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes. However, discussion of LGBTQ+ people within Black American communities were often not publicly discussed on a wider scale (hooks, 2004).

Interconnected to discussions of sexuality are discussions of Black masculinities and emasculation. hooks (2004) argued, by the end of slavery “patriarchal masculinity had become an accepted ideal for most [B]lack men, an ideal that would be reinforced by twentieth-century norms” (p. 4). Collins (2004) similarly suggested, Black masculinity is negotiated through a binary understanding of the economic and political climate during the Jim Crow era. This is when Black men were seemingly emasculated, yet they were also depicted as being naturally hyper-heterosexual. However, my work takes *crosscutting* issues in DL and Black sexualities further by discussing the intersectional contours of masculinity, and how such discussions manifest through race, class, gender, and sexuality—where hyper-heterosexuality is an expectation of Black masculinity. This leads me to how heteronormativity represents sites of reinforcement of Black masculinities in the face of emasculation and their representation in Black visual culture.

At the height of the civil rights era some facets of Black communities began to frame White masculinity as homosexuality, purporting that White men were trained to be gay or fags, and depicting them as weak and effeminate (hooks, 2004). Additionally, hooks (2004), like others before her, linked this attack not on patriarchy, but on men who failed to fulfill the primal idea of patriarchal manhood. For

example, authors such as Johnson (2003), Collins (2004) and hooks (2004) suggested a connection between Black masculinity and silence, stating, such vulnerability in Black masculinity was associated with femininity. These notions inform historical and social structures of power and further made their way into problematic tropes of sexual stereotypes in Black communities. Collins (2004) suggested counter narratives towards same-sex desires between Black men are Whitenized due to the historically racist depictions of Black sexuality as hyper-heterosexual. These counter narratives to hegemonic culture become part of the Black power rhetoric. hooks (2004), on the other hand, argued that Black men have become victimized by stereotypes produced by White elites. In an effort to engage in non-hostile spaces that counter the narrative of Black emasculated men, patriarchal rhetoric by Black militants that Whitenized and feminized homosexuality acting to reinforce Black masculinity emerged (Johnson 2003). The new rhetoric sought to make White and feminine clear markers of opposition, thus identifying what Black manhood was not (Collins, 2004). Thus, contemporary Black masculinities shape a defensive stance which clearly names homosexuality as White and a disease.

Furthermore, Collins (2004) suggested that the concepts of Black masculinity and the hyper-heterosexuality of Black men continued to be shaped by the media, morphing into images of pimps, hustlers, and players. Collins (2004) further suggested that the media representations of Black masculinity position Black men as aggressive thugs who contest being weak from being dominated by “strong Black women” (p. 188-190). Collins (2004) continued that these stereotypes preserve ideological oppression and stigmatize Black sexuality, and as a result, Black gay men are not deemed to be truly Black because Black sexuality, through the eyes of the predominant culture in America, the White, heterosexual, racist one, has heretofore defined what Black men are—especially when it comes to sexuality. Such stereotypes, stigmas, and subjugations continue to be connected to weakness, Whiteness, and diseases. In other words, Black gay men or DL men are seen as being unacceptable in heteronormative societal norms. Black gay men are double- or triple- ostracized because the idea of gay men has been White-washed. So not only are Black gay men not Black men because they are not hyper-heterosexual, they are also not just gay but gay deviant. In an ultimate blow, they are also White and diseased—for spreading HIV / AIDS to heterosexual Black women.

Connected to the struggle of Black identity is the devaluation of the

feminine. Black men who exhibit effeminate traits are demeaned, disparaged, and excluded from true authentic Black spaces or Blackness, thus linking homosexuality with effeminacy. Such links to femininity suggests inferiority rather than empowerment (hooks, 2004; Johnson, 2003). From my lived experiences, my reading of Collins (2004) is that she argued, Black gay men become surrogate women. She continued to suggest that femininity as a performance of queer identity reinforces Black masculinity as an unfeminine narrative. In an effort to protect Black masculinity, the feminine performance becomes widely accepted as the identifier of homosexuality, and being effeminate excludes Black gay men from Black manhood. In turn, this is an identifier of why DL men in general do not divulge their sexual identity. Additionally, hooks (2004) argued that hegemonic ideologies about gender and sexuality continue to construct an environment that condones and connects hyper-masculinity with heterosexuality, while stigmatizing queerness and bisexuality by connecting it to emasculation and maligned femininity.

Bisexualities and Gay identities In Black Men

Written specifically about bisexual and Black gay men, Essex Hemphill (1991) focuses on the social issues regarding their identity, masculinity, and sexuality with relationship to queerness in a White heteronormative society. He discusses the hurdles bisexual and gay Black men come up against which make it difficult for them to have what heteronormative society deems as a normal life. He argues, these voices are muted and some of these men do not have the self-confidence it takes to share their sexual identity with the heteronormative world because the homonormative lifestyle they engage in is considered to be a sin. He focuses on the ways in which Black masculinity and sexuality are intertwined and discusses the shattered identities of bisexual and gay Black men due to the constructed fixed notion of Black masculinity that are rooted in Whiteness (Reid-Pharr, 2001).

McBride (2005) discusses some of the ways in which race and sexuality are vital components connected to the identities of bisexual and gay Black men. He discussed three different concepts related to the ways in which conversations about bisexuality and homosexuality take place (a) race and sexuality on occasion, (b) queer Black thought, and (c) straight Black talk. In his book, McBride (2005) explored intersections of gender, class, sexuality, and race issues: (a) race and sexuality on occasion, focuses on how gay Black men and lesbians have become part of comedy and fun rather than taken seriously for

their political realities and civil rights. (b) queer Black thought, reveals the truths of race and sexuality in the US. The essays in this section point out specific flaws in Whiteness. These papers also inform how openly bisexual men and Black gay men are disregarded at their workplaces due to racial social stigmas. In (c) straight Black talk, McBride (2005) places the subject of sexuality and race into the lens of theory and intellectualism. The collection of these essays provides the tools for the awareness of inequality in the Black community and represents how bisexual and Black gay men are ostracized in Black culture due to their sexual identity (McBride, 2005). His literature offered contemporary cultural criticism of the Black community for not accepting homosexuality as a Black cultural norm.

Woodard (2014) discussed homoeroticism within enslavement culture in the US. His literature reveals how systemic racism and Whiteness have reinforced stereotypes of masculinity and sexuality in Black men. During slavery and continuing into present day, Black Americans deal with the emasculation of Black men, sexual assault against Black men and women, and being brutally murdered. In short, Black men were and continued to be victims of institutionalized racism and psychological torture. Neal (2013) argued that Black male bodies were often thought to be in need of policing or seen as a criminal body. He emphasized Black male bodies were not actually how they were portrayed in Whiteness. Rather stereotypes of Black male bodies have been playing out in every institutional arena from art education to Black visual culture (Neal, 2013). Similar to Collins (2004), Neal (2013) also wrote about Black masculinity in which he discussed how true Black masculinity and sexuality were mainly seen in relationship to hip-hop thugs, petty criminals, and pimps. He questioned the ways in which television and media interpret DL as queer Black bodies and compared queerness to Black masculinity.

A Historical Synopsis of The DL Phenomenon

While many more White men are on the DL, the term DL is largely synonymous with Black men and conjure up a whole set of culturally distinct behavioral images. Interestingly, the term DL and ascribed attributes actually come from White culture and was one way for the White community to pejoratively label a subset of the Black community in a way that would stain Black culture as a whole (Cohen 1997, Scott, 2010). To retrace its background, DL is a term with a complex history (Boykin, 2005; and Scott, 2010). The first known person to use the term *down low* was George Hanna, who used the phrase in the 1930 song, "Boy in the Boat", about lesbian

women. The term became popular in the late 1990s in the Black community, and was used to describe any kind of slick, secretive behavior, including infidelity in relationships (Boykin, 2005). The type of Black masculinity usually associated with the image of being DL is ultimately hyper-masculine and mirrors hip-hop culture (hooks, 2004). For example, Collins (2004) suggested in her book, *Issues of Black Masculinity*, that the hyper-masculine image of Black men continues to be shaped by the media, morphing into images of pimps, hustlers, and players, which is a reflection of hip-hop culture.

For a very long time some people have been arguing that homosexuality is natural and that there are large percentages of all mammals that have homosexual relationships which could just be part of evolution. I believe that nature has a reason for homosexuality. However, Collins (2004) also suggests Black DL men avoid being labeled DL and/or being characterized as being dominated by Black men, by acting and becoming hyper-masculine and hyper-aggressive. She further suggested that White dominated media's representations of Black masculinity positions Black men as aggressive thugs who refute being weak by being dominated by strong Black women. Collins (2004) went on to claim that DL stereotypes serve to preserve ideological oppression and stigmatize Black men's sexuality. For instance, Black DL men are not deemed to be truly Black because Black male sexuality, through the eyes of White dominated media, is defined through the lens of promiscuity and heterosexuality. Similar to Collins, I think the truth is, this is just further reinforcing support for the sexual promiscuity label associated with DL.

The conflict and confusion surrounding DL Black men continues to be connected to promiscuity, untrustworthiness, weakness, Whiteness, and diseases. "Conversation about DL started in 2000, when the CDCP, published findings speculating that surges in HIV / AIDS infection among heterosexual Black women could hypothetically be attributed to, as the CDCP termed it, a "bisexual bridge" (Boykin, 2005, p. 85). As a result of this speculative rhetoric, the notion of DL Black men as the main carriers and spreaders of HIV / AIDS started to appear in White dominated media around February 2001 (Boykin, 2005).

New York Times Magazine columnist, Benoit Denizet-Lewis (2003), asserted DL men were more than a configuration of selected sexual conduct by some; DL was a methodical subculture with its own secretive "vocabulary and customs" (p. 30). Denizet-Lewis (2003) used a tone that conveyed White dominated medias' portrayal of the

pervasive behavior of Black DL men as being covert and engaging in risky sexual practices common to DL sex, such as cruising, sex parties, and sexual promiscuity in parks, and public bathrooms. Denizet-Lewis (2003) concluded his text with myriad strategically selected quotations from numerous public health organizations, which were focused on the myth that Black DL men almost always cause heterosexual Black women considerable health risk because of their risky and secretive sexual behavior. Denizet-Lewis (2003) also falsely asserted that DL is solely a Black phenomenon that is distinctly connected to fixed notions of Black cultural, societal, and gender norms. In other words, DL is inextricably associated with historically racist claims of Black sexual aberration and anxieties about Black gay men's responsibility for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Therefore, Denizet-Lewis' (2003) work backed a hegemonic racial framing of overall Black identity as marred by the figure of the DL man. For example, Feagin (2009) claimed in US culture there is a predominant White racial framing of Black men that includes an "overarching worldview that encompasses important racial ideas, terms, images, emotions, and interpretations that are animated by narratives, characters and plotlines of White superiority and Black inferiority" (p. 3). Within four years of Denizet-Lewis' (2003) article, DL became predominantly and pervasively publicly associated only with Black men. In the summer 2003 queer issue of *The Village Voice*, contributing writer and NYU professor Jason King published *Remixing the Closet: The Down Low A Way of Knowledge*. Boykin (2005) claimed, King's controversial op-ed article questioned the relationship between HIV/AIDS and DL. Indeed, the article was the first mainstream piece to openly criticize negative mainstream media depictions of DL and put a different spin on the DL phenomenon. Which creates an opportunity to discuss some curricular and pedagogical implications within the fields of visual culture and art education.

Towards Curricular Implications for Art Education

For a further look into the question, my paper considers pertinent societal issues of Whiteness and its effects on the representations of DL and Black identity in Black visual culture that should be of concern to the field of art education. Art educator, Olivia Gude (2009) stated,

through artworks, students absorb the perceptions of others—situated in other times and places, embodied

in other races, genders, ages, classes, and abilities. Through art, the self becomes vitally interested in other selves, sensing the possibilities and problems of those selves within oneself (p. 13).

Here, Gude (2009) indirectly posits, art education is the landscape where the interpretation and exploration of Black visual culture can be addressed. Additionally, she wrote, "Through quality art education, youth develop the capacity to attend to the nuances of meaning. Most significantly, engagement with the arts teaches youth to perceive complexity as pleasure and possibility, not as irritating uncertainty" (p. 13). In short, through art education, students cultivate heightened skills for understanding the meaning making in the underserved students in classrooms.

Some scholars in the field of art education base their work heavily on critical pedagogy and visual culture (see Carpenter, 2005; Carpenter & Tavin, 2010; Garoian, 1999; Freedman, 2004; Grant, 2013; Rolling, 2010). Critical pedagogy, is a form of education in which students are encouraged to question dominant or common notions of meaning and form their own understanding of what they learn. For example, art educator, Charles Garoian (1999) argued for challenging and disrupting formal Western epistemic education. He argued for the creation of liminal spaces in the classroom where critical thinking can be injected into the education process. As such, he wrote: "Critical thinking...enables students to cross historically and institutionally determined disciplinary and cultural boundaries in order to gain multiple perspectives and to participate in the discourse on educational content" (p. 49). In the context of creating liminal spaces, I assert within art education classroom environments, my personal experiences as a Black male interpreting and researching visual representations of DL grounded in critical pedagogy and critical race theory serves as examples to illustrate concepts of Black visual culture, visual culture, and theoretical examples within course lessons, assignments, and readings.

With this approach, I can create a classroom environment that is inter-contextual. Garoian (1999) writes: "classrooms are transformed into liminal spaces, sites of contestation where the struggle to learn takes place as the politics of learning is challenged with the interpersonal, interdisciplinary, and intercultural perspectives that students bring to the school" (p. 49). Additionally, Curriculum theorist Bill Pinar (2004) stated, "Curriculum theory is the interdisciplinary study of the educational experience" (p. 25). Taken one step further, by considering

study as a form of interpretation, in a previous publication, I posited “theorizing curriculum in art education is the interdisciplinary interpretation of the art educational experience” (Grant, 2014, p. 168). Lastly, to be able to see visual culture in complex, complicated, contradictory, and multifaceted ways, my students and I can cultivate and explore the underserved students which are heretofore veiled. We should examine visual culture to reveal racialized conflicts, socio-economic status, caste system, and other by-products of Whiteness and historical antecedents such as found in the Jim Crow era, the Black Power Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement. Educators and scholars have already explored visual culture in the past (Carpenter & Sourdut, 2010; Jhally & Lewis, 1992). However, more work is needed on a broader scale in order to add to and augment the prospects, challenges, probable uses, and effects of Whiteness in art education curriculum and pedagogical praxis.

While DL in Black visual culture is developing a following with gay men and lesbians, it is still considered by many to be a low point in the history of different facets in Black communities’ representations of gay men. So, I asked myself, can one productively generalize about DL and Black gay men’s lived experiences or about Black identity in light of the many *crosscutting* considerations which complicate appeals to unitary racial identities? If so, how can one accommodate these complications? If not, what alternative approach might do the useful work that one might want these appeals to do? To this point, these considerations are not just for understanding this question about multifaceted notions of Black identities or Black lived experiences or to argue about the distinctive identities of the self from a particular perspective. They are to aid in assisting understanding the ways in which I as a Black gay man learn Black self-consciousness, masculinities, sexualities, and the unfathomable interactions that I have with White hegemonic society which compel me to certain actions. One approach of viewing what my experiences’ can offer today’s world is, there are no absolute or fixed determinants to identity. This process requires a certain awareness in order to create a space where individuals are not forced to develop a double consciousness, but to be able to develop, as Du Bois (1903/ 1989) would put it, “to merge his double self into a better and truer self” (p. 3). Instead through using counter narratives to view DL and Black gay men’s lived experiences allows for a multitude of multiple individual identities and shared complexities of encumbrances.

Using my lived experiences as interpretation of my Black identities as a lens to cross-examine enables me to be legitimized in and of society.

Through the visual, we can utilize information to better inform how we view identity in educational spaces. We must be aware of how environments and individuals or environments and the organisms are interconnected and also affect the development of self-consciousness and identities (Dewey, 1897/1971). This requires that we begin, as James Baldwin (1991) argues, with our individual wounded selves. But we still have to end in a place where, together, we are working to our last breath to make a better world. For example, to understand how we learn about ourselves and how we develop self-consciousness requires an orientation to inquiry that is open, critical, and conjunctive, rather than narrow, critical and exclusive. This same orientation is beneficial in the creation of schools and the development of educational curriculum in disciplines such as art education.

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