

Whiteness, Artist Identities, and Artworld Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers a research study into the artist identity formation in young people engaged in a teen arts internship program at a contemporary arts center in post-Katrina New Orleans using the construct of whiteness to examine access to artist identities and artworld spaces. Art has always been embedded into the cultural and spiritual practices of people's everyday lives. Yet, modern and contemporary artworld identities and spaces have been shaped by exclusionary and oppressive practices. In the city of New Orleans, there is a persistent presence of African American art and cultural practices that thrive outside of artworld institutions. And yet, as this study demonstrates, artworld identities and spaces within the city of New Orleans and beyond, even when they espouse social justice orientations, often remain within the milieu of whiteness and related power structures.

Keywords: art education; arts education; artist; racism; whiteness

Whiteness, Artist Identities, and Artworld Spaces

At the 2018 Art Education Research Institute (AERI) panel, "Race and Racism in 21st Century Art Education," with Joni Acuff, B. Stephen Carpenter, Amelia Kraehe, Michelle Bae Dimitriadis, and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, the panelists circulated a series of prompting questions around race in art education research. One of these questions was: "How do we study race when it is masked in art education?" This question is key because it points to the insidious nature of the perpetuation of racialized oppression in art education. In this paper, I consider this question in conjunction with the following prompt from the call for papers for this special issue of the *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education*: "What are the visible and invisible structures that reproduce white supremacy and privilege in art education?" Both questions speak to that which is visible and invisible in terms of racialized injustices in relation to art education and point to the ways in which whiteness, as a structure of racialized oppression, functions in often hidden ways within conceptualizations of artist identities and artworld spaces.

Race, Racism, and Art Education

There is a growing body of scholarship related to the ways in which

racialized structures of oppression such as whiteness function within art and art education. The 2018 AERI panel on “Race and Racism in 21st Century Art Education” coincided with the release of *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education* (Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernandez, Carpenter, 2018), an edited volume that explores the ways in which race and racism are embedded within the arts in education. In addition, recent scholarship has addressed the intersections of racialized identities and art education (e.g., Kraehe, 2015; Acuff, 2018; Rolling and Bey, 2016; Wilson, 2017) and confronted the reluctance to address race and racism in art education (e.g., Desai, 2010; Lee, 2013; Knight, 2006). Through the work of these and other scholars, it is evident that racialized structures of oppression such as white supremacy are embedded within structures of art education, often in hidden ways.

Racism is not only rooted in attitudes, ideas, and bodies, it also permeates social structures, institutions, and is embedded within the visible and invisible modes of the ordering of social worlds, particularly in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Ideologies about race in the United States have been pervasive, “making it nearly impossible to imagine nonracialized ways of thinking about identity, longing, and difference” (Haney López, 2006, p. 87). Haney López (2006) defines race as “the historically contingent social systems of meaning that attach to elements of morphology and ancestry... [a] definition can be pushed on three different levels, the physical, the social, and the material” (p. 10) as he describes the ways in which race and, especially whiteness have been constructed through the legal system in the United States. Race and racism have been instrumental in shaping oppressive structures in the United States (Hughes, 1933; Roediger, 1991; Williams, 1991). Hence, it is relevant to acknowledge the material and discursive realities of the inequities tied to racialized identity categories and to acknowledge that race is an ever-present social force that shapes positional identities in the United States and beyond. As such, structures that utilize whiteness as a tool of oppression and injustice are inextricably linked to many aspects of society, including art education.

Dyer (1997) describes whiteness as “everything and nothing” (p. 45) because it is insidiously pervasive—to the point where those who are White-raced are often oblivious to the oppressive ways in which whiteness functions. Even within discourses of anti-racism, multiculturalism, and social justice, there remains a reluctance on the part of White people to acknowledge their responsibility and complicity in the maintenance of systems of oppression (Sullivan, 2006, 2014; Yancy, 2008, 2012, 2015). Sullivan (2014) contends that practices and discourses such as “dumping on white trash” (p. 23), “demonizing white ancestors” (p. 59), “color blindness” (p. 85), and “white guilt, shame, and betrayal” (p. 117) are deployed by white

people as attempts to be absolved from responsibility for racism. In the field of art education, this stealthily oppressive quality of whiteness often functions through a “colorblind racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, & Embrick, 2004 as cited in Desai, 2010) that avoids the acknowledgement of how racialized systems of oppression function to reproduce inequitable outcomes within structures of the arts and education (Desai, 2010; Lee, 2013; Knight, 2006).

Racialized inequity in the arts and arts education is prevalent and deeply entrenched within these structures of oppression around whiteness (Kraehe, 2017; Kraehe, Acuff, & Travis, 2016). Consequences of inequity in the arts and arts education include the fact that within artworld spaces, the conceptualization of artist identities is often restricted to those with rarified talents and skills, those with access to elite education, and those who are aligned with powerful social networks. Although artistic practices and artistic identities exist outside of the capitalist power structures of the artworld, because such structures in the United States are deeply intertwined with white supremacy, conceptualizations of the artist within the capitalist system are frequently conceived within an image of whiteness. As such, participation in the development of an artist identity and engagement in artworld spaces are often restricted around privileged racialized and class identities.

A Study of the Formation of Artist Identities in Artworld Spaces

In this paper, I describe a research study about the identity work of young people engaged in a teen arts internship program in summer 2016. The program was held at a contemporary arts center in post-Katrina New Orleans and it used the construct of whiteness to examine access to artist identities and artworld spaces. Art has always been embedded within the cultural and spiritual practices of people’s everyday lives. Yet, Western modern and contemporary artworld identities and spaces have been shaped by the exclusionary practices informed by whiteness. In the city of New Orleans, there is a persistent presence of African American art and cultural practices that thrive outside of artworld institutions. And yet, as this study demonstrates, artworld identities and spaces within the city of New Orleans and beyond, even when they espouse social justice orientations, often remain within the milieu of whiteness and related power structures.

Using portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and social practice theory (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), this study examined the identity work of young people engaged in a social justice-oriented teen arts internship program.

Portraiture methodology is a form of qualitative inquiry used in educational research that draws upon aspects of ethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, and arts-based methods (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture methodology is well-suited to research that examines educational experiences in terms of aspects of identity such as race and its intersections with class, gender, sexuality. The theoretical perspectives of critical race theory (e.g., Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Williams, 1991) and critical whiteness studies (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dyer, 1997; Roediger, 1991; Sullivan, 2006, 2014; Thandeka, 2000; Yancy, 2008, 2012, 2015) are useful lenses for understanding how white racism functions within all aspects of society, including the arts and education. Indeed, several educational researchers have advocated for combining portraiture methodology with critical race theory in educational research (e.g., Chapman, 2005; 2007; Dixon, 2005; Dixon, Chapman, & Hill, 2005; Ewing, 2016; Harding, 2005; Keene, 2014, 2016). Social practice theory considers how identities are developed and mobilized within practices both personal and social (Holland et al., 1998). Social practice theory has been widely applied to understand the complex processes of identity formation within educational contexts (e.g., Calabrese Barton et al., 2013; Hatt, 2012; Leander, 2002; Lei, 2003; Wortham, 2004). Through the lens of this teen arts internship, the objectives of this study were to utilize a critical arts-based portraiture methodology to investigate contextual influences on identity work, narrative-based and activity-based practices of artist identity work, and consequences of artist identity work in young people. Methods employed in this study included observational field notes, interviews, and photographic documentation of artifacts and artworks created throughout the internship.

In this study, I examined the experiences of young people who identify as artists as they engaged in an internship specifically designed to help them explore themselves in this role, as they considered how and why they create art, and experimented with the implications of being artists. As a former New Orleans public school art teacher, when I first set out to do research into artist identity formation in teens in New Orleans, I had intended to examine these processes by studying the experiences of young people from marginalized social identity positions, particularly Black teenagers attending New Orleans public or charter schools. However, I decided, as a White female researcher, to follow Nader's (1972) concept of "studying up"—to conduct research not only on those who are marginalized, but on those who are in positions of privilege. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009), who has done research with students in elite settings including boarding schools and specialized arts high schools, argues that "studying the experiences of students in the most privileged educational

settings sheds light on the social and cultural dynamics that shape inequality across the educational system” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009, p. 1). Thus, I determined that as a researcher who was in a position of relative social power based upon race, class, educational status, and /or other factors, that I should examine systems of inequity, such as the whiteness inherent within contemporary institutions of art and conceptualizations of the artist, by studying privileged youth.

In relation to the population of New Orleans as a whole, the intern population included disproportionately more White teens than teens of other racial identifications. In 2015, the total racial demographics of the population of youth under 20 years of age in New Orleans was 68% Black, 21% White, 6% Hispanic, and 3% Asian (Perry, 2016). Of the 18 interns in the program, 61% (11 interns) identified as White, 28% identified as Black (5 interns) (including one intern who identified as biracial—Black and White) and 11% (2 interns) who identified as Hispanic or Latina. There were 5 interns who identified as male (including 1 intern who identified as transgender male) (28% of the interns) and 13 interns who identified as female (72% of the interns). There were 6 interns who openly identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community (33% of the interns). In the wake of school desegregation efforts of the 1950s-1990s, a majority of White and /or middle-class families with children either left the city of New Orleans for the surrounding suburbs or enrolled in private schools within the city (Bankston & Caldas, 2002) with 22% of all children in New Orleans and a majority of White students in New Orleans attending private schools in 2017 (Weixler, Barrett, & Harris, 2017). Most of the interns in the study attended private schools, highly selective public schools, or were homeschooled, in general alignment with White racial identification and upper middle-class status. Participation in this internship program itself is an indicator of how, as Lackey and Murphy (2011) note, middle class parents often enroll their children in “out-of-school art education to foster socialization and cultural capital” (p. 3). Such socialization and cultural capital-building coalesces around a climate of whiteness and efforts to claim upper middle-class status.

While the central research questions for my study did not specifically focus on race, racism, or whiteness, through my observations and interviews with the study participants, I began to see how whiteness played a major role in the internship, and how this internship was representative of broader concerns in the field of art education around (in)equity tied to racism. One view of the data I collected in my study revealed much about the patterns of artist identity formation in teenagers. Yet, upon further

reflection upon these data, I began to see that many of these narratives also functioned as master narratives, reinforcing status quo views of what it means to be an artist, who is invited into the artworld, and who feels comforted by the so-called safe spaces of the arts. And, although such critical race and critical whiteness analysis was largely invisible and absent from verbal narratives of the interns, I observed that their conceptualizations of the artist and the artworld were largely predicated on whiteness. In the following passages, using examples from this study, I explore two central themes in relation to whiteness in art education: 1) Whiteness, Identity and Discourses of The Artist and 2) Whiteness, Belonging, and Exclusion in Artworld Spaces.

Whiteness, Identity, and Discourses of The Artist

Many different discourses circulate about what it is to be an artist (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008). In Western society, art is often conceptualized as the purview of the elite, with the artist conceived in the image of a White male genius (Soussloff, 1997, 2006; Wittkower, & Wittkower, 1963). These conceptualizations of the arts and artists solidify the idea that the arts are the purview of the elite and the so-called talented perpetuating exclusion of others. Thus, within arts discourses, whiteness functions as a visible and invisible structure of exclusion and oppression. As Gaztambide-Fernández (2008) points out, there is extensive instructional material in how to teach art and how to train artists in the techniques of their artistic media. However, “there is little theoretical or empirical work addressing the educational experiences of young students in the arts” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008, p. 235) in relation to aspects of sociocultural identities such as race and class. Gaztambide-Fernández (2008) thus recommends that there be more research into the sociocultural experiences of artist identity formation in youth, stating:

This research might consider, for instance, how young artists construct their own ideas about what it means to be an artist and of their own social roles and responsibilities. Different educational contexts and experiences likely shape the meaning students make of their identifications as artists and of their roles as cultural workers differently, and these processes are likely to be greatly influenced by dynamics of race, class, gender, and sexuality in complicated ways. (p. 252)

Conceptualizations of the artist are influential in shaping artist identity formation in youth. Gaztambide-Fernández (2008)

theorizes four ways in which the artist has been presented in society: artist as “civilizer” (p. 242), one who creates art for art’s sake and contributes to the development of civilization; artist as “exalted creator” (p. 241), a creative genius set apart from the rest of society; artist as “border crosser” (p. 245), an activist who has the power to transform society through their work; and artist as “representator” (p. 247), one who represents everyday people through art. The development of artists in educational contexts is often preceded by institutional actors identifying particular students as artistic or talented in the arts. Through these identifications within institutions of arts education such as schools and museums, access to arts education is often aligned racial and class-based privilege (Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai, 2013; Kraehe, 2017). When artistic talent is viewed as an inherent identity characteristic rather than a socially constructed one, it limits access to the development of artist identities to the few. This rarefication of artist identities places limitations on who can access an artist identity, but also circumscribes who an artist is and even what art is. Narrow conceptualizations reinforce mythologies around “the arts as ‘white property’” (Gaztambide-Fernández, Kraehe, & Carpenter, 2018, p. 1; see also Harris, 1995) belonging to the creative, individualist, genius artist who is historically framed as a White male (Travis & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2018). This imagined vision of who an artist is or should be is restrictive and may lead to artist “identity foreclosure” (Charland, 2010; Marcia, 1966; Rolling & Bey, 2016) or a dismissal or a giving up of an artist identity before fully exploring the possibility that one could adopt or adapt such an identity.

As the young artists in this study told their stories and participated in discussions with others throughout the internship, they utilized common conceptualizations about artists that placed them within the tradition of the life story narrative of the artist (Soussloff, 1997, 2006; Wittkower, & Wittkower, 1963). These discursive conceptualizations of what an artist is permeated discussions and were fully integrated into how the interns viewed themselves in relation to an artist identity. The interns’ repeated conceptualizations about artists throughout the study included: the artist as talented, the artist as creative, the artist as passionate, the artist as emotional, and the artist as activist. In narrative depictions of artistic motivation, the interns often depicted the expression of oneself through artistic means as emanating from sources beyond the conscious control of the artist. For example, artistic inclinations were viewed as stemming from talent, passion, emotions, and/or inherited through familial ties, as when Alex,¹ a White transgender male intern, simply stated of art: “it’s my passion.”

1 Pseudonyms were utilized for youth research participants.

Discourses around “passion” and the arts are often represented as an aspect of “talent,” yet, as Gaztambide-Fernández, Saifer, & Desai (2013) assert, such passion and talent is often an indicator of the ways in which artistic identification is linked to socioeconomic status. This and other depictions of what artists do and what motivates what they do deployed mythologies that characterized artistic inclinations and activities as beyond the control of the artist and attributed to seemingly inherent characteristics like passion and talent.

As the young artists used these ways of talking about artists, they were not only trying to describe what an artist is, but also negotiating their own identities as artists. Most of the interns named themselves as artists directly. Others were more ambivalent about whether they felt that they could claim an artist identity, questioning whether they felt that they existed within the realm of “artist.” This analysis is focused on the way the interns talked about themselves as artists and the influences on their development as artists. The interns represented various conceptualizations of what an artist is and does and considering how they connect with these ideas—how they consider whether or not they are artists using terms like “artsy” and “creative.”

Often, the interns situated their artist self as a radical self. Part of the reasoning behind this lies in the discourses around artists as outside of the mainstream. This situating of oneself outside of norms seemed to facilitate an allegiance with activism or for using art to stand against oppression. Yet, these allegiances with the avant-garde serve to reinforce alliances with whiteness in the context of the capitalist artworld (Haiven, 2018). Here, they situate themselves as a “‘certain kind of person’” (Gee, 2000-01, p. 25), an artist, through their experiences and affinities with the arts. The irony of the individualistic model of the artist is that you need to be like other artists in order to be considered an artist. Many expressed a confident audacity in calling themselves artists. Jasmine, a Black female intern, felt confident in calling herself an artist, saying:

I consider myself an artist because I make art to teach people about different things and hopefully connect with them and understand how I feel and hopefully broaden other people’s perspective on the world and help them realize it’s not just them. There’s other people.

For the most part, the interns in this program did not seem to feel particularly insecure in calling themselves artists, although there were some exceptions. Rose, a White female intern, said, “I don’t

know if I consider myself an artist. I think I'm starting to." This intern pondered whether others would ask, "What gives you the right to be an artist?"

Some of the interns expressed a more expansive view of what an "artist" is and thus felt more confidence in claiming such an identity. When asked to elaborate on his definition of an artist, Tristan, a student who identified himself as biracial (Black and White) said that an artist is "someone who inspires people without actually trying to. You're just doing what you do and people like it just because it's you. It's just pure you." This wider understanding of the concept of the artist opens up the potential for anyone to participate in artistic practices and offers a view of art, creativity, and cultural production that is more fully integrated into everyday life. Tristan reiterated this view as follows: "Everyone is an artist in a way. If you're creating something and people are getting things out of it. If you're helping people out in a certain way, you're an artist. Plain and simple." However, while Tristan expressed these open-ended views of what an artist is, some of the others were less confident in their appraisals of their potential to claim an artist identity.

Along with negotiating and narrativizing one's artistic identity, the interns were simultaneously engaged in negotiating aspects of their sociocultural identities. The entanglement of sociocultural identities and artist identities through discourses of the artist framed through a racialized capitalist system influences access to the claiming of artist identities. Hence, in the modern and contemporary artworld, the formation of artist subjectivities is often situated within discourses of whiteness.

Whiteness, Belonging, and Exclusion in Artworld Spaces

At various points, the interns addressed the dual themes of belonging and exclusion in relation to their artist identities and artworld spaces. In describing the constructed nature of how things become viewed as art and how people become viewed as artists, Danto (1964) states that "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" (p. 580). Becker (1982) further defines the artworld as "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (x). While the practice of artmaking is not exclusive to any particular group of people and the artworld does not only consist of White artists, the artworld still functions as a system that upholds whiteness. In the case of the arts internship, as Lackey and Murphy (2011) state: "While non-school settings do hold vast potential for re-thinking and invigorating art education, they simultaneously provide fields of play that permit

those who already hold power and resources opportunities to activate privilege and maintain inequities in informal ways” (p. 4). Hence, while opportunities to participate in arts internships and other out-of-school arts education programming can offer the potential for critical engagement with artmaking and artistic identity development beyond that which is offered in school settings, such programming is often inequitably available in practice (Kraehe, 2017).

In this study, I conceptualize the artworld as a *figured world* (Holland et al., 1998). In the development of social practice theory of identity and agency, Holland et al. (1998) use the term *figured world* to describe culturally specific contexts in which identities are situated and given meaning. They define a figured world as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Within figured worlds, identities act as “the imaginings of self in worlds of action” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5). Through participation in figured worlds, identities are developed and enacted as people define themselves, are defined by others, and seek to reinforce these identities through lived practices. A practice orientation to understanding identity helps make evident how artist identities are formed and expressed within intersecting contextual figured worlds.

Like the artworld, the nature of a figured world is that it is a bounded system—albeit a flexible and ever-changing one. Whether one belongs or not is ever-changing, too. And, whether one wants to participate or not is also up for debate. Artistic environments such as specialized arts schools or other programming such as this internship were often described by the young artists as “safe spaces,” “accepting,” places where you can “be yourself,” terminology often used to excuse such spaces from being considered non-inclusive, but this sense of “belonging” in the arts is really mostly applicable to people who already hold some sort of privileged positionality (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017). In conceptualizing social justice art education, Garber (2005) encourages art educators “to confront ‘White’ as a cultural space” (p. 15) within the context of art education. Dwyer and Jones (2000), in theorizing “White socio-spatial epistemology” (p. 209), describe some of the ways in which whiteness creates both conceptual and physical distance and boundaries as evidenced physically through entities such as segregated housing and schools, but also through psychological and social distance and boundaries. Relatedly, the artworld is a cultural space defined by whiteness and as such it functions as a space of racialized exclusion, boundaries, and hierarchies.

I asked some of the interns about their impressions of the space of the contemporary arts center. As some interns had more

familiarity with the contemporary arts center, they more easily adapted to the location and felt a sense of “belonging” in the space. Lucy, a White female intern, said the following about being in the contemporary arts center: “It’s definitely a very artsy place. I think it has a really good atmosphere and a very creative atmosphere that’s really nurturing if you’re trying to make art.” Of being in the space of the contemporary arts center, James, a White male intern, said that when he first came to the contemporary arts center, he was “shy,” but that with time, he said: “I really feel almost at home here.” Both Lucy and James had spent a significant amount of time at the contemporary arts center because of their involvement in multiple teen arts programs. Thus, they were able to provide vivid descriptions that captured both the physical space as well as the experience of being in the space and how being in the space has influenced them in their goals of becoming artists. Yet, as Sullivan (2006) writes, “space, race, and place are constituted transactionally such that space is raced and that bodies become raced through their lived spatiality” (p. 143). Hence, depictions of space are inevitably filtered through a racialized perspective.

The figurative space of the contemporary arts center and the teen arts internship is as relevant as the physical space in contributing to the young artists’ senses of themselves. Many of the interns expressed that they felt as if the teen arts internship was a “safe space.” For example, when I asked Alex, a White intern about what he liked about this internship program, he said:

It’s a very safe space. I feel like everyone can talk to each other and not feel like they’re going to be judged by anyone. I feel like that’s a very cool thing about it because we all have very similar mindsets because we’re all artists.

However, some interns did not feel the same way about the program and expressed difficulty in connecting with others in the program.

Although Tristan understood the importance of the social aspects of artmaking and artistic identity development, he did not feel as if the arts internship program was helping him share in the experiences of other artists and connect with other artists. Tristan thus described his discomfort in the space:

In this internship, everyone is extra quiet and it’s hard to talk to everyone. I find myself leaving this room to go downstairs to the camp and talk to the people that I already know camp counselors because it’s so hard

for the other interns to open up and it's so hard for me to open up as well. It's so awkward in here. It's so awkward. I remember one time I was like, "Okay, I'll come upstairs and eat lunch with them for once."

I was sitting there trying to talk and every time, someone would speak over me and they would change the subject before I would get my words out. I was just like, "You know what, I'm just going to leave." That's how it was. Even though we're all open and we all share the same opinions, it's not the same because I don't know them as well as I know other people. Even though we share similar views, we don't share the same common interests. I need to be able to share common interests and talk about things that I always talk about.

Tristan's perspective was in contrast to the way many of the White interns felt about the program. It is significant that Tristan not only felt awkward in this space that was deemed safe for some, but not necessarily for others, but that he also felt compelled to leave the physical space of the internship classroom (and the figured world of the internship) in order to feel more comfortable and to connect with others with whom he shared "common interests." When I asked Tristan if there was anyone in the group that he felt that he connected with, he said: "Lauren. That's the only person that I've really been able to talk to because she hasn't had anyone to talk to either." I replied that "I noticed when she read her poem today, she used the word 'isolated.' That made me curious." Tristan then said, "Even though we do connect, she does isolate herself a little bit." Although I suspected that the climate of whiteness within the internship space may have contributed to Tristan and Lauren's feelings, as the White female researcher, I did not want to assume that this was the reason that Tristan felt "awkward" in this space. Hence, I probed Tristan with open-ended follow up questions as to why he and Lauren might have felt awkward and isolated. However, he did not offer any explanation for this.

Although I felt that there was likely a racialized component to these feelings of awkwardness and isolation because Lauren and Tristan were among the very few Black participants in the internship, I did not press Tristan to state that to me, presuming that he might not feel comfortable saying that to me because of my positionality as a White female researcher. However, upon further reflection, I have questioned my own reluctance to bring up the possibility of a racialized interpretation of the situation with the intern within this interview setting. As Sullivan (2006, 2014) asserts, White people are socialized to avoid discussions of

race and even though I aim to address race within my scholarship, I still find it difficult at times to fully engage in discussions of race and racism with others. The insidious nature of whiteness is that it is invisibly embedded within such spaces to the point where it becomes unspeakable. In doing research about race, the complex interchange between researcher and participant racialized positionalities is always at work, influencing what is spoken and unspoken within the context of the research (Widdance Twine & Warren, 2000).

Upon further analysis of these perspectives from the data that contradicted the dominant narrative of the arts internship as a welcoming space for all, I saw these feelings of awkwardness and isolation as reminiscent of the phenomenological concept of disorientation in relationship to the existence of racialized bodies in space both within oneself and in relation to others (Ahmed, 2008; Fanon, 1952; Yancy, 2008, 2012, 2015). Indeed, “many spaces that seem free of the impact of race and racism often subtly and invisibly privilege white over non-white people” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 143). As Ahmed (2008) writes, “an effect of being ‘out of place’ is also to create disorientation in others: the body of color might disturb the picture—and do so simply as a result of being in spaces that are lived as white” (p. 160). Hence, it is necessary to “consider racism an ongoing and unfinished history, which orients bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space” (Ahmed, 2008, p. 111)—particularly in spaces that have been historically designated as “white spaces” such as museums and similar arts institutions.

Conclusions

Institutional sites of art education—K-12 schools, universities, museums, community arts centers—even with their increased interest in social justice perspectives, must strive for a multidimensional equity (Kraehe, 2017). Several factors contribute to exclusionary practices within artworlds. As demonstrated in this research, many young people who come to be orientated towards the arts feel as if they have found “safe spaces” where they can “be themselves” even when they may have felt alienated or isolated within other spaces. Yet, as this study demonstrates, the development of an artist identity is a multi-layered socially constructed process, discourses about “artists,” “the arts,” and “talent” continue to reinforce notions of exclusivity and restrict access to the formation of an artist identity to a select group, often those who are already privileged, and, often those who are White and male, perpetuating the perspective of “the arts as ‘white property’” (Gaztambide-Fernández, Kraehe, & Carpenter, 2018, p. 1).

Researching the experiences of artist-identified youth revealed much about identity formation in young artists. And yet, in doing this work, I continually returned to the thought of “Who’s not here?” I knew that I also needed to look at the big picture of who has access to this opportunity to develop themselves as artists in this setting at all. This program was technically open to all, but was it really equitably available if there was not widespread participation by individuals of color and individuals who were not of privileged class status?

Jordan is a Black male who attended the internship sporadically and yet his narrative, in its absence, is one of the most important ones of the entire study. At one point, I heard Jordan talking to the education coordinator about having difficulty finding a place to park his bike so that he could attend the internship and this exchange revealed something about why it was so difficult for him to get to the program regularly. Jordan’s portrait in the study was incomplete because he stopped attending the internship program after only a few sessions. And yet, these attempts at participation indicated that he wanted to be present but was unable to be due to various barriers and obstacles. In addition to the example of Jordan who only attended sporadically, this study was unable to attend to the excluded perspectives of the other young artists in New Orleans who were not included in this internship at all. Considering Kraehe’s (2017) arts equity framework is relevant here—because of inequitable distribution of resources like transportation, or time, or money, it is even difficult to enter out-of-school art programming in museums and community arts centers.

And while, the mere participation of young people of color in such programming is not enough to address the issues of whiteness within the artworld, cultural arts organizations that offer such programming for teens could extend further resources to support artistic development for members of marginalized communities. Further, although the focus of this study was an internship within an art institution, much of the identity work of young artists happens outside of such artworld institutions—in schools and communities. Therefore, more research into how artist identity work happens in school and community settings is needed. While this study focused primarily on young people for whom an identification as artists was already in their purview, further research into artist identity formation in youth from cultural perspectives outside of western notions of art and artists is warranted.

It is not to say that one would need to participate in any particular arts education program in order to be an artist and lay claim to

act of “transformational resistance ... a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 319) and “possible futures [in the arts can] emerge through the interplay of schooling, social class, and subjectivity formation” (Gaztambide-Fernández, VanderDussen, and Cairns, 2014, p. 110) through participation in arts education.

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