Editorial: Whiteness and Art Education

Joni Boyd Acuff, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University

> *Whiteness is a racial discourse, whereas the category "white people" represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin colour. (Leonardo, 2009, p.169). White-ness, in this sense, refers to a set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices that place the interests and perspectives of White people at the center of what is considered normal and everyday. Critical scholarship on Whiteness is not an assault on White people themselves, it is an assault on the socially constructed and constantly reinforced power of White identifications, norms, and interests (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).*

Gillborn, 2015, p. 278

To be White in America means not having to consistently consider one's place in the world because "Whiteness frames subjectivity and prescribes what is sayable, shaping affective structures and behaviors in ways that become encoded in the body" (Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, Carpenter, 2018, p. 9). Further, the maintenance of Whiteness relies (and thrives) on knowledge, certain ways of being, orientations, dispositions being positioned as "the norm", rendering Whiteness invisible (Frankenberg, 1993; Harris, 1993; Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, Carpenter, 2018). This invisibility has impacted the ways in which we think, discuss and teach about race, especially in art education research and practice. For example, social justice art education, critical multicultural art education, culturally relevant and/or responsive art education, socially engaged art education, and critical race art education generally center the narratives of people of color because oftentimes their knowledge, lived experiences and contributions are absent and/or ignored in mainstream art education discourse, research and classrooms.

The curriculum, pedagogies and research practices undergirded by these critical frameworks support and give much needed attention to racially marginalized groups of people. The use of these frames are undoubtedly imperative to our field if we are one that desires educational equity. However, if the art education field only thinks about race when it is considering or occupied by people of color, then the implication is that Whiteness is not racialized, it is simply normal. Whiteness stays unbothered, unresearched, stable in its central position as "Others" hover around it. As a result, we have been and will continue to be in a perpetual cycle of developing pedagogical and theoretical frameworks intended solely for people of color to thrive

because, as a field[1], we have yet to explicitly name Whiteness as a central structure that needs to be disrupted. There needs to be a paradigm shift in which art educators simultaneously prioritize the interrogation of Whiteness, as well as action oriented investments that centralize voices of color in curriculum, pedagogy, and research.

To destabilize White supremacy, the art education field has to identify itself as a racialized site at all times, and especially because it is predominantly White. The Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education call for papers on the theme "Whiteness and Art Education" was an attempt at this destabilization, as it aimed to shift the critical gaze, as well as the theoretical and empirical focus, from racially subordinate groups to the racially dominant group (Delgado and Stefancic,1997; Frankenberg, 1993). Such a shift lifts some of the weight off of the shoulders of people of color doing race work and places the onus on those who benefit from systems of White supremacy, and thus have the primary responsibility to "interrupt Whiteness" (Bell, 2014).

"Whiteness and Art Education" yielded a record number of research and creative submissions. To me, the breadth of personal narratives, investigative inquiries, and immediate calls to action that were submitted was evidence that the art education field is ripe for attending to the unmarked nature of Whiteness. Such that, the conversations initiated in this volume must not be static and cannot end on the last page of volume 36 of jCRAE. The art education field has the responsibility to be intentional in its discussion about race, specifically Whiteness, and revisit it again and again with rigor and passion so that actionable steps to destabilize its normativity can be developed, enacted and sustained. To model continuous dialogue on the topic of Whiteness and art education, this mini-theme will be distributed in 3 consecutive issues that forthrightly name, center and challenge the standard of Whiteness in art education. Further, please note that the research, creative essays and artworks in each issue are not traditionally categorized and separated. All of the contributions engage with one another, comfort each other, push one another and show solidarity in intention and commitment.

Dionne Custer Edwards opens Volume 36, Issue I with an unfiltered, potent poem that uncomfortably peels back the historical silences about and sacrifices of Whiteness in American history. Then, **Courtnie N. Wolfgang** presents a fiercely raw, but articulate call for White art educators to acknowledge and accept art education as a field that is heavily impacted by and even complicit in the

1 Scholars of color in art education have and continue to call out whiteness in the field (see Acuff, 2018; Ballengee-Morris, 2013; Daniel & Stuhr, 2006; Daniel, Ballengee-Morris,& Stuhr, 2013; Desai, 1996; Desai, 2010; Herman & Kraehe, 2018; Knight, 2014; Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, Carpenter, 2018; Lawton, 2018; Rolling, 2018; Wilson, 2018)

maintenance of Whiteness and white supremacy. Wolfgang offers anti-racist arts pedagogies as a step towards being an accomplice in de-centering White orientations and ways of being that are at the forefront of art education.

Noting issues like microaggressions and the internalization of Whiteness, **Hannah Sions** and **Amber Coleman** use duoethnography and Critical Race Theory as frameworks to share and analyze personal lived experiences that illustrate the ways Whiteness emotionally and psychologically impacts students of color in our art education classrooms, specifically at the university level. Following these intimate narratives, both **Kim Cosier** and **Gloria Wilson** offer new (to art education) pedagogical and curricular tools that support preservice art teachers' journey in reflecting on and critiquing Whiteness. Introducing the concept of "warm demanders" to the field of art education, Cosier vulnerably shares her precarious effort to guide her preservice art education students to a place of race (White) consciousness. Then, describing an art-based project that she completed with her predominately White preservice art teachers, Wilson introduces film and the "circuit of culture" as a framework to bring to light the social and cultural investment in White supremacist ideologies.

Jennifer Combe shares artwork that illustrates her ongoing critical reflection and analysis of Whiteness in the arts and art education. From a critique of paint manufacturers to an experimentation with adhesive bandages, Combe's artwork aims to capture and question the complexities of race, especially the concept of "Caucasion" skin color and its connection to power in the art world. **Daniela A. Fifi** and **Hannah D. Heller** present research that attends to the impact of Whiteness on interpretive practices in art museums in the US and abroad (Caribbean). The co-authors feature Afro-Carribean art in a case study that analyzes the global impact of White supremacist culture on the arts. **Tania Cañas, Odette Kelada** and **Mariaa Randall** join forces with South African artist Sethembile Msezane in a discussion entitled "Art & Action: Displacing Whiteness in the Arts." The transcript presents musings and strategies shared by arts professionals and practitioners of color that focus on decentering and destabilizing Whiteness within the field.

Issue I of "Whiteness and Art Education" wraps with **Marit Dewhurst**'s pointed self reflection in which she wrangles with Whiteness and its inescapable privileges. Dewhurst is transparent in her writing, as she shares not only her conflicts, struggles and negotiations with trying to exist outside of Whiteness in her work in the museum and art education field, but she also shares her challenges in real time as she transparently includes editorial comments from the article review process that called out Whiteness in

her writing. Dewhurst draws from antiracist work to reiterate specific values and practices that may help the art education field move "towards a paradigm of solidarity."

Volume 36 of jCRAE forefronts a discussion about what happens to Whiteness once it has been made visible to White people. What happens to Whiteness when its normality has been interrupted? (Bell, 2014). The authors share personal reflections, paths of exploration, and even actionable items that may be able to assist the art education field in establishing a new way to talk about race and engage in transformative practices that calls out and challenges the pervasiveness of Whiteness in art education.

References

Acuff, J. B. (2018). Smog in the air: Passive positions,deracialization, and erasure in arts education. In Kraehe, A. M., R. Gaztambide-Fernández, S.B. Carpenter, (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook on race and the arts in education* (pp. 515-533). Cham, Switzerland:Palgrave Macmillan

Ballengee-Morris, C. (2013) Critical race, multicultural art education In N. Addison & L. Burgess (Eds.), *Debates in art and design education* (pp. 43-50). New York, NY: Routledge.

Bell, M. (2017). Whiteness interrupted: Examining the impact of racialized space on White racial identity. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from https://surface.syr.edu etd/769/.

Daniel, V. A., & Stuhr, P. L. (2006). *Voices of color: Art and society in the Americas. Studies in Art Education*, *47*(4), 363-377.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (1997). *Critical White Studies: Looking behind the mirror*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Desai, D. (1996). Multicultural art education and the social reality of race: A historical perspective. *Journal of Multi-cultural and Cross-cultural Research in Art Education*, *14*, 19-39.

Desai, D. (2010). The challenge of new colorblind racism in art education, *Art Education*, *63*(5), 22-28.

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in social and cultural criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Gillborn, D. (2015). Intersectionality, Critical race theory and the primacy of racism: Race, class, gender, and disability in education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 277-287.

Herman, Jr. D. & Kraehe, A. M. (2018). Toward a counter-visual education: Cinema, race and the reorientation of white visuality. In Kraehe, A. M., R. Gaztambide-Fernández, S.B. Carpenter, (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook on race and the arts ineducation* (pp. 227-246). Cham, Switzerland:Palgrave Macmillan.

Knight, W. (2006). E(raced) bodies in and out of sight/cite/site.

The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education, *26*(1), 323-347.

Kraehe, A. M., Gaztambide-Fernández, R., Carpenter, S. B. (2018). *The Palgrave handbook on race and the arts in education*. Cham, Switzerland:Palgrave Macmillan.

Lawton, P. (2018). Where is the color in art education? In Kraehe, A. M., R. Gaztambide-Fernández, S.B. Carpenter, (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook on race and the arts in education* (pp. 515 533). Cham, Switzerland:Palgrave Macmillan.

Rolling, J. H. (2018). Empire archeologies: The symbolic interaction of stereotype and new self-representation. In Kraehe, A. M., R. Gaztambide-Fernández, S.B. Carpenter, (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook on race and the arts in education* (pp. 247 264). Cham, Switzerland:Palgrave Macmillan.

Stuhr, P., Ballengee Morris, C., & Daniel, V. A. H. (2008). Social justice through curriculum: Investigating issues of diversity. In R. Mason & T. Esca (Eds.), *International dialogues in art education* (pp. 81-95). Bristol, England: Intellect Books.

Wilson, G. (2018). Navigating "crooked rooms": Intersections of race and arts participation. In Kraehe, A. M., R. Gaztambide Fernández, S.B. Carpenter, (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook on race and the arts in education* (pp. 407-423). Cham, Switzerland:Palgrave Macmillan.