CENTER OF GRAVITY: LIFE HISTORY CASE STUDIES OF THREE AFRICAN AMERICAN ART TEACHERS RECONCILING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

by

GLORIA J. WILSON

(Under the Direction of Carole Henry)

ABSTRACT

With respect to the discipline of art education, there is an understanding that a smaller percentage of art teachers of color exist than in the overall general teacher workforce (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004). The following life history case studies of three African American art teachers, examine—through personal narratives—how each experiences and reconciles their social and professional identities of African American/artist/teacher. Aiming to locate their life stories as they operate in particular social, historical, and institutional circumstances, the task with each participant in this study was to understand and render elements of their lives in context. Looking at the career decisions African Americans have made about teaching as a profession, when a multitude of options are available and more specifically, those who have embraced teaching art, this study reveals how Black Americans have in fact, negotiated full participation in spaces where they are often discussed as under-represented.

Employing counter narratives of agency and resiliency through creation of written portraits, this study revealed how each participant negotiated and embraced these multiple identities. Applying methods of narrative analysis and portraiture and using an Afrocentric paradigm in tandem with theories of agency (social cognitive theory) and social identity, the
researcher gaze is turned toward an affirmation of forces that surround and embrace these
individuals through an initial exploration of the anthropological concept of fictive kinship. In
doing so, a case is made for the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy and
mentorship.

INDEX WORDS: identity, art education, African American, art teacher, artist, teacher, life
history, arts participation, race, racial identity, Afrocentrism, Afrocentric, agency, narrative, case study, social cognitive theory, social identity theory, group identity, culturally responsive, fictive kinship, portraiture, method, methodology.
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DEDICATION

To my parents Henry Joseph Wilson and Gloria Rosario Wilson, my beloved sister, Mary Ellen Rosario Wilson Thomas, and Miles Elijah Thomas. Each of you has inspired me to continue to live with courage and compassion.
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This work is not mine alone. It has been the collaborative efforts of many minds, voices, ears and hearts. There but for the grace of God, I followed the path that was set before me in beginning this work. To my beloved big sister, Maryellen Rosario Wilson—I know you have always been by my side, especially on the days I didn’t believe I could go on. I came into this world, and you were already there. You were with me when I decided to undertake this journey, and though you are unable in physical manifest to experience this small victory, you are ever present. There isn’t a single day that goes by that I don’t think of you. I miss you dearly. My beloved parents Henry and Gloria Wilson, my biggest cheerleaders. I adore you both for always believing that I was stronger than I could imagine myself to be. Your example has shown me how to remain humble. Though outwardly you live modestly, you both reside in a spiritual wealth unknown to many.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

“Human plights, though they may always express themselves locally in time, place, and circumstance, are nonetheless an expression of some more universal history. To ignore that more universal history is to deny the legitimacy of the broader culture.”

Jerome Bruner, 1996, p. 69

Visualize a sphere that contains the sum of human knowledge gained by formal learning experiences. By the time you complete primary school, your knowledge expands a bit—the sphere begins to slowly fill from the center outward; by the time you complete compulsory schooling, you know a bit more and the sphere continues to fill. With a Bachelor’s degree you acquire a specialty, and at this stage the “knowledge” within the sphere continues to expand, yet it changes shape and path, typically charting a specific course. A Master’s degree deepens that specialty—reading specific literature and performing research, guides you to an edge of human knowledge. In other words, you are now at the boundary of a specific part of the sphere. Once you are at the boundary, you focus and push against the boundary for a few years, until one day that boundary yields just a little. The tiny dent that you have created is the equivalent of the Ph.D.

As doctoral students, it is expected that we are to be curious about “a thing” and learn all that we can about it. It often helps to be deeply curious about particular phenomena. For me, the
roads had already been paved, and there were many paths to take; deciding on a direction was the challenge. Before coming back to school for a terminal degree, I spent 14 years as a K-12 classroom teacher. This research study comes from the belly of those experiences. I presented my proposal to my major professor Carole Henry, and she encouraged me that I was on an authentic path.

Allow me to give some context.

I experienced my first four years of teaching as a middle school art teacher in a predominantly African American inner-city school. The next nine would be spent in a rural high school in a predominantly White, working class community. I would spend my final year in a rural environment where many of the existing families lived without indoor plumbing.

Facing many of the challenges associated with teaching in low-resource environments, one discovery became authentically clear—environments with few supports (economically, socially, psychologically, and politically, for instance) become invisible. I open this narrative with the following quote made by one of the students in my inaugural class—she was a beautiful dark brown-skinned 12-year old art student:

“Ms. Wilson, Black folks don’t make art.”

The year was 1996. The place was Mobile, Alabama in an area of town known as Maysville. Her statement that day forever left an impression in my mind. Little did I know, this quote, made almost 20 years ago, would set the trajectory of the future work I would undertake as an artist, educator, and researcher. What prompted her sobering response? A discussion I attempted to have with my students about “famous” artists. Aiming to gain a sense of my student’s prior knowledge base, I began with questions such as “What is art?” and “Who is an artist?” Many of my students could engage me with names and works of individual White artists
deemed great by the mainstream art world—the likes of whom might include Vincent van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo. Looking out over the sea of brown faces staring at me, I prompted my students to name a few artists, which might reflect their own rich ancestry. “What about some artists who are Black?” I asked. I remember vividly standing at the front of my classroom as my students looked at each other, amused. And then there was a brief silence before one of them shouted, “Ms. Wilson, Black folks don’t make art!” This was followed by raucous laughter.

This realization—my students’ unawareness of the existence of African-American artists and perhaps, other artists of color—was the beginning of the reflection of my own journey of becoming an artist/art teacher. I theorized reasons for this “lack of awareness.” Though, one glance around my classroom displayed evidence of the existence of artists of color. I dedicated time and space to display the likes of William H. Johnson and James Van Der Zee among the more notable Vincent van Gogh’s and Wayne Thiebaud’s. It became clear, the invisibility of artists of color in my own formal schooling experiences. All but one of my own art teachers had been White, and the textbooks used in their curriculum reflected a worldview represented through images mainly created by White male or female artists. Thinking about my students that day, I realized that they could not conceive that Black people could be artists. I theorized the response I received that day as not unique to my classroom. I sensed that it persisted beyond those four walls.

**Subjectivity Statement**

Before I continue, I must reveal a few important things. A factor influencing this work is my personal identity as a person of African descent. I view my point of cultural reference as multiple and therefore complex. A Filipino/Spanish/Chinese/Black American woman, I realize
that various Asian, Hispanic, and African cultures constitute my ethnicity. Although I have sometimes self-identified and have often been identified by others as “Black,” I do not entertain romanticized visions of a uniform, homogenous African American identity or community and in fact, am very conscious of a privileged status within a non-dominant group. I also acknowledge a period in history when bi-racial members of my own family could not identify as anything other than Black or Negro (Miller, 2010).

Having an awareness of a “minority” ethnic status within American society, in the teaching work force and more specifically, within the field of art education, I have had to search for ways to negotiate my own identity as an artist and art teacher and find encouragement in order to serve as a supportive role model for those I encounter. Attending many national, regional, and local conferences, I am familiar with a landscape, which further confirms a narrative of underrepresentation. I also understand the unfortunate reality that some who have the least amount of success (in school and beyond), are often culturally different from the dominant or mainstream group (Ford, 2010) necessitating that policy makers and educators recognize, affirm, and respond to the cultural differences and associated needs.

Being at the center of many identities, allows me a panoptic lens—a lens that enables a personal way of knowing and being. This journey has involved me as woman, researcher, as educator, as student, as middle-class American. I stand at the crossroads of many social and cultural forces, and in this case, I am forever locating myself. This identity has to be perceived as multiple, and amidst this multiplicity, my life’s work has been to achieve an understanding of the broader world through teaching such that students are able to make broader connections within their own worlds. I have chosen to do so in concert with a larger community always in the making and always in flux—a community that may some day become truly democratic.
Reflecting on 14 years of K-12 teaching, I always understood that I would need to engage my students of color, by supplementing the mandated curriculum by including and showing them reflections of themselves through artwork created by artists of color; this would prove beneficial for my White students as well. I did not limit their viewing only to subject matter of African American figurative works, but also included works that were not overtly stereotypical. In addition, I prepared lessons I believed not only to be skill- building, (i.e. elements and principles) but also to be culturally relevant, with broad themes that covered topics such as identity. Seeing students’ excitement served as encouragement that they were finding meaning in their learning. Additionally, I brought in artwork of my own, which would give them first-hand experience with the work of an artist of color—though I will say, my African American students accepted me into the fold as a member of a “Black” community. The significance of this detail will be addressed later.

Always using the panoptic view, I was able to see how various institutional and cultural practices impacted outcomes. For instance, how local, state and federal educational policies guided pedagogical practices And moving “out of the classroom” into an informal learning environment mediated by a de facto visual culture—one that necessarily delivers an often skewed “multicultural education” for the masses, which brings about a necessary conversation about the intersections of race, and institutional and cultural practices. My positionality serves to illuminate this epistemological perspective and my personal ways of knowing. My curiosity has led me to this question: How do I speak to a deeper humanity, using race as an opening to get to that? It is here where I began to unpack the deeply complex intersections of research and its sometimes “unseeing” eye.
Black Americans: The Arts and Education

When reviewing the literature, it becomes apparent that in the United States, Black Americans, as teachers, artists, and audiences of the arts have become significant as negative numbers. Historically, the researcher gaze has focused on the underrepresentation of African Americans in many spaces in U.S. culture. For several decades, shortages of teachers of color have been featured prominently as a big concern for the nation’s schools (Casey, 1993; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Madkins, 2011). With respect to the discipline of art education, there is an understanding that a smaller percentage of art teachers of color exist than in the overall general teacher workforce (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004). Feminist discourse (hooks, 1995; Wallace, 2004) has addressed arts participation by Black Americans—particularly those who create works of art—illuminating that the issue of underrepresentation of work created by Black artists is only one of several issues requiring attention. hooks (1995) maintains that while there are Black artists whose work is widely heralded and receives attention on a number of fronts, both within and outside the mainstream, “Their art rarely receives serious consideration by art critics” (p. xv), citing that often critiques of the works of Black artists are descriptive rather than interpretive. Here, hooks highlights that control of the “cultural production” (p. xv) of writing about art is often still held by White male artists and critics.

Add to this, contributions of the “rare” Black art critic are often less commonly awarded serious consideration in the overall discussion of aesthetics; and further, there are so few rewards to be had for such work, especially at the risk of having these ideas appropriated or go unacknowledged by those who enjoy more power within the existing structure. Additionally, the scholarship of Harris (2003), Powell (2002), Wallace (2004) and Golden (1994) provide some
historical insight into the experiences of Black people within the world of art and visual culture, revealing a highly problematic representation of Black Americans in the history of fine art and visual culture since the mid-nineteenth century in America.

hooks (1995) suggests, “If black children were daily growing up in environments where they learned the importance of art and saw artists who were black, [a] collective black experience of art would be transformed” (p. 3). Here, we might look to the aims of education (for instance, compulsory schooling that is mandated for all) and what that means for how we are able to educate and be educated. Specifically, studies of the impact Black teachers as role models have on Black students are prominent in the literature (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Dilworth, 1990; Hawkins, 1992; Stewart, Meier, & England, 1989). Often these teachers serve as support systems to guide students to the success they all desire to achieve. Research on role modeling encourages a discussion surrounding the shortage of teachers of color not only in urban and suburban public schools, but also in higher education. Studies observed that increasing numbers of students of color in the United States will have even fewer ethnic role models among their teachers than previous generations (Lewis, 1996). In addition, Witty (1989) states:

The absence of a representative number of minority teachers and administrators in a pluralistic society is damaging because it distorts social reality for [students]. Schools are intended to help [students] develop their fullest potential, including the potential to relate to all other human beings in a manner which is free and constructive. (p. 39)

If we consider the assertion that teachers perform an exceedingly important role in shaping the social, educational, and moral development of students as well as their communities, then it follows that the needs of an increasingly diverse democratic society must be examined

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1 See next section on “Sensitivity to Racial Designations”
and addressed by a teaching force that is proportionately, or representatively, diverse (Green, 2004). With this argument as a guide, teachers of color become extremely important, and children need to see that teachers of color not only exist but also can achieve positions of leadership. Black art teachers, I am confident, are no less important in this discussion, especially in connection to the art world.

Student access to arts education and the quality of such instruction in the nation’s public schools continues to be of concern to policymakers, educators, and families (Ruppert & Nelson, 2006). Recent surveys funded by the National Endowment for the Arts reveal that arts participation—both in attendance and creation—has declined most significantly over the last quarter century among African Americans and Hispanics (Rabkin, N. & Hedberg, E.C., 2011). To this, U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2012) responded, “Most troubling is an ‘equity gap’ between the availability of arts instruction as well as the richness of course offerings for students in low-poverty schools compared to those in high-poverty schools, leading students who are economically disadvantaged to not get the enrichment experiences of affluent students” (retrieved on July 17, 2012 from: http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/04/ed-releases-new-report-on-arts-education-in-u-s-public-schools/).

Ladson-Billings (2009) cited that schools in urban environments, largely inhabited by “poor children of color” (p. 3), do not have the same educational resources offered students in low-poverty schools. Additionally, drawing on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the nationally representative Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its supplement, the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), (Ingersoll & May, 2011) report that minority teachers are overwhelmingly employed in public schools serving high-poverty, high-minority, and urban communities, and in fact are two to three times more likely than white teachers to
work in such hard-to-staff schools. Overall, minority teachers’ careers have been less stable than those of white teachers, and included more job transitioning; in recent years, minority teachers are more likely to have migrated from one school to another or to have left teaching altogether. This is the largest and most comprehensive data source available on the staffing, occupational, and organizational aspects of elementary and secondary schools. The U.S. Census Bureau collects the SASS data for NCES from a random sample of schools stratified by state, public/private sector, and school level (NCES, 2012, http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/).

In their analysis of race and ethnicity in arts-participation, the National Opinion Research Center’s (NORC) research team (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011) tested and ultimately confirmed the validity of an assumption made with prior Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) data, that “participation in arts lessons and classes is the most significant predictor of arts participation later in life, even after controlling for other variables” (p. 9). Given these statistics, it is little wonder why arts-participation among African Americans has suffered the greatest declines. If, as SPPA data reveals, arts education is the most significant predictor of arts participation later in life, and that high-poverty schools—largely inhabited by children of color—receive fewer educational resources, could it not stand to reason that many African American children are getting fewer hours of arts-rich experiences, and therefore, are less inclined to participate in art later in life?

Galbraith and Grauer (2004) estimate that there are approximately 50,000 practicing art teachers within the United States. Of these, (art) teachers of color represent a mere 10%. While this percentage is just below that of the national average of the general K-12 teaching force, where teachers of color represent 13%, it remains too substantial to ignore. As such, Black art teachers have become significant as negative numbers within the general population of people
underrepresented in the arts. Again, the “researcher gaze” focuses on their absence, in light of their presence. Unable to find any empirical studies specifically examining Black art teachers in K-12 environments, I set out to embark on a study examining the lives of this understudied group.

Placing their absence at the center of analysis motivates a discussion of ways Black people have historically been included and excluded from these spaces and prompts further examination how African Americans, currently present in these spaces make the decision, despite challenges to pursue a career teaching art, and participate fully. We might begin to understand how Black people have, in fact, negotiated full participation in spaces where they are often discussed as under-represented by looking at the career decisions they have made—specifically about teaching art as a viable profession. The purpose of this study and the discussion I would like to offer, in this case, is what Perry (2003) describes as a counter-narrative—a story which provides an alternative lens.

Counter-Narratives

Perry (2003) discusses the influence of counter-narratives in the construction of identity, specifically as it relates to Black-Americans, giving critical argument that the media, in its various manifestations, is centrally implicated in the formation of identities. Perry (2003) further discusses the historical ideologies of African American inferiority—particularly as it relates to literacy—and ways which counter-narratives of the achievement of African Americans were passed on informally and formally in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU’s) and churches, in order to establish a collective identity of African Americans as a literate and accomplished people. Perry continues, “not only were these stories reflective of who African Americans were, but they also ushered in and reconfirmed that identity” (p. 93). These counter
narratives were offered as a means of resistance to the narratives advanced by a “dominant ideology of White supremacy and Black intellectual inferiority” (p. 91). Additionally, she challenges whether “greatness” has been defined through a Eurocentric lens. That is, perhaps we are overlooking the ways in which African Americans are intelligent. I am interested in creating a counter narrative—which acknowledges a problematic historical past—through examination of the experiences of African American art educators and their decisions to embrace “artist” as an identity, consider art as an academic pursuit beyond high school, and subsequently choose a career as an art(s) teacher. My study adds to the limited information on this population by developing an understanding of how Black art teachers think about themselves as both artists and teachers and further, how they negotiate and reconcile these identities to find what I deem their “center of gravity.” In order to create holistic portraits of an often-stereotyped group, counter-narratives serve to challenge prior narratives of absence, which allows me to produce research that inspires readers and audiences a more inclusive view. It enables me to create inspiring portraits that do not pathologize participants but rather search for goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot) that demonstrate a capacity to withstand, nimbly respond, and adapt.

**Purpose**

As identified in the problem statement, this study grew out of the recognition of limited research on African American art teachers currently in the K-12 workforce. My goal was to move beyond a limited understanding of the lived reality of Black art teachers working in K-12 environments to obtain a deeper understanding of these educators who, despite possible adversity and challenges, have chosen to teach and to remain in the profession. However, examining factors, influences, perspectives and experiences contributing to the persistence of Black art teachers was merely a starting point. I not only wanted to discover contexts, experiences and
perspectives of these educators but also to uncover possible common dimensions, which might exist within the lived realities of these teachers. I wanted to develop a more comprehensive vision of three Black art teachers’ life experiences in an era of attrition, turnover, and declining arts-participation. These goals guided my construction of this study as life history researcher. Using life history approaches my assumption is that, beginning with the process of telling collective stories, life history research can reveal the history of a nation. This can be both liberating and healing and can forge connections between disparate groups (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Sensitivity to Racial and Ethnic Labels

The terminology used to characterize individuals in this study include, African American, Black, and Black American. I also use the term people of color to refer to people in these groups, other than Euro-Americans. I acknowledge the variance in terminology as well as the fact that members of each of these groups may prefer to be called by another designation (for commentary, see Nieto, 1992). Certainly the use of varying terms and the lack of consistency in the use of terms among publications, make the process of writing about and discussing race more arduous.


Preferences for terms referring to racial and ethnic designations change often; preferred designations are as varied as the people they name….over time, designations can become dated and sometimes negative. Use commonly accepted designations, while being sensitive to participants preferred designation. (p. 75)

During this study I respected each participant’s preferred racial designation. I asked each
participant in my study which designation they preferred, particularly because preferred designations are debated within groups. I have chosen to use terms that are widely accepted and commonly used (i.e. Census categories) when referring to racial groups. I am not suggesting that these terms are the only terms that should be used nor am I trying to impose my word usage on others. The term African American will be used interchangeably with Black throughout this study as referenced researchers have used Black and/or African American in defining their samples. Reflective of the social justice orientation, I have also chosen to give equal importance to racial designations, signified by the use of Black, White, Multiracial, and so forth, rather than black, white, multiracial as designated with lowercase lettering, except when directly quoting another author.

These life history case studies sought to deepen current understanding of experiences/identity from the perspective of Black art teachers who have persisted by developing portraits of each teacher through life history interviews. Guided by elements of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), and life history research methods (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), my aim was to understand the views, realities and constructs of identity by examining three African American art teacher’s experiences during various stages of their lives through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data was triangulated from these diverse sources as I looked for emerging patterns and themes amongst participants who have fully embraced the Black/artist/teacher identity within their chosen professions despite widespread attrition in the education workforce, in addition to statistics that indicate a decline in arts participation.
Definition of Key Terms

Concepts easily lend themselves to a variety of broad and sometimes vague definitions. I provide key vocabulary used in this research as a means of clarification, though I do not aim to imply that these definitions are the only available definitions of the following terms. The definitions are:

1. **Afrocentricity**: a paradigm based on the idea that African people should re-assert a sense of agency in human history in order to eliminate the illusion of marginality (Asante, 1991); I also refer to this as “Black-centered.”

2. **Agency**: the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life is the essence of humanness (Bandura, 2001).

3. **Culturally responsive pedagogy**: a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

4. **Ethnic identity**: an aspect of an individual’s general identity, describing it as a multidimensional construct that includes feelings of ethnic belonging and pride, a secure sense of group membership, and positive attitudes toward one’s ethnic group (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996).

5. **Portraiture**: a method of qualitative research that seeks to illuminate the complex dimensions of human experience and organizational life, seeking to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of those who are studied. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

6. **Race**: a concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies (Omi & Winant, 2004).
7. **Sociostructural**: a term used in the social sciences to refer to patterned social arrangements in society that are both emergent from and determinant of the actions of the individuals (Bandura, 2000).

8. **Sociohistorical**: relating to, or involving social history or a combination of social and historical factors (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

9. **Visual culture**: the sum of all humanly designed visual images and artifacts, including what has been traditionally defined as “fine art” as well as popular cultural forms. (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004).

**Charting a Path**

When I began this research project, I aimed to find veteran African American K-12 art teachers who were also actively practicing artists. As mentioned earlier, in light of recent statistics indicating a decline in arts participation among African American adults (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011), I was interested in what I might find through in-depth life history case studies of those African Americans who I consider “full participators” in the (visual) art world—those who had made the decision to embrace “artist” as an identity, consider art as an academic pursuit beyond high school, and subsequently choose a career as an art(s) teacher. While there is no shortage of studies related to the negotiation of the dual identities (artist/teacher) of the art teacher (Adams, 2007; Hatfield, Montana, & Deffenbaugh, 2006; Robinson-Cseke, 2007; Shreeve, 2009; Thornton, 2011; Zwirn, 2006), when attempting to find studies critically examining racial identity negotiation within this context, few if any, can be found.

In general, understanding how individuals come to make the social and professional decisions they do is complex. Factors such as socioeconomics status and educational experiences play a key role in identity development. More specifically, when attempting to examine the
experiences of Black Americans who have chosen to adopt a professional identity, the equation becomes further complicated. I draw on research on stereotypes and cognitive psychology (in order to build on an analogy (Harris-Perry, 2011), to describe how Black Americans are necessarily forced to negotiate among challenges associated with identity. This analogy arises out of the concept called field dependence.

Field dependence studies show how individuals locate the upright within their surroundings. In studies conducted in the 1940’s (Witkin, 1949), subjects were seated in a tilted chair within a constructed tilted room and then asked to align themselves vertically. Some subjects perceived themselves as straight only in relation to their surroundings. Researchers were amused that some could be tilted as much as 35 degrees and perceive that they were perfectly straight, simply because they were aligned with surroundings that were equally tilted. Few subjects managed to align themselves more or less upright regardless of how tilted the surroundings were.

I am suggesting that African Americans, attempting to define themselves in a hegemonic art world are existing in crooked rooms; they are attempting to figure out which way is up in a culture that often rewards the shedding of racial markers that display a self-determination. Bombarded with distorted images of their humanity, I wondered how those who have found success in this culture might manage to align themselves in ways to challenge the distortions. In order to begin to understand the lives of this group, and how their strategies sometimes tilt in ways that accommodate stereotypes about them, I wanted to consider the factors influencing their career decisions. I began an investigation through life history interviews in order to understand holistically how Black art teachers, as full participators in the art world have tilted themselves in order to find their “upright.”
I spent my time talking with others about my work in hopes of finding teachers who exhibited qualities or resilience and dedication to the field (art and education); what I found was a willingness from many artist/teachers, of whom I would choose three because of their long-service to the fields of art and education and their common connections to an ever-evolving arts scene in and around Atlanta, Georgia. With the goal of uncovering how African American art teachers come to understand themselves as artists and teachers of art, this research has examined the experiences of three remarkable individuals who lives have been influenced by a multitude of factors, gently nudging them along, enabling them to chart a challenging yet victorious path—they have found their center of gravity.\footnote{I embraced the use of this phrase after completing my data analysis and representation of my discoveries. I felt that it would work appropriately as a metaphor working in tandem with the “crooked room” analogy.}


CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In concert with the opening quote by Jerome Bruner (1996), this review of literature\(^3\) attempts a thoughtful and holistic picture of this understudied group, beginning with a look at the historical practices of stereotyping within the world of visual culture. Using this as a starting place gives insight about constructions in our social world, thereby leading to understand the necessary actions taken by African Americans to resist or embrace these monolithic representations. These “necessary actions” might range from making the simple decision to wear a formal business suit when showing up to give a lecture versus a casual pair of slacks and shirt to a more thoughtful and complex decision of becoming a medical doctor instead of an art teacher.

In order to answer the following research questions: *What forces guide an African-American art teacher to conceive and maintain an artist identity?*, *What role does social identity play in structuring their career pursuits as artist/teacher?*, and *How does race (a racialized identity) inform and shape their art practices/pedagogy?*, I reviewed literature beginning by looking at

\(^3\) First, I searched online databases, such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, JSTOR, for scholarly journal articles and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses to identify relevant dissertations and theses using a combination of relevant subject search terms including: African Amer*, Afrocentric*, agency, art, art education, identity, teach*, race, racial, profession*, visual art, career decision*, study, research. Next, I searched for specific authors once I had identified particular theorists who focused on identity and agency specifically focused on African Americans hoping that this search might yield additional articles. Then, I reviewed the reference lists from the articles I identified for additional sources. I ultimately identified 11 relevant peer-reviewed articles and dissertations. I read through each source, wrote a summary, categorized it, and then analyzed and critiqued it according to a framework for analyzing research developed from the American Education Research Association’s Proposal Peer Review Guide.
African Americans as artists and the ways in which they have responded to racial discourses, in general and then specifically how these discourses impact the way African American youth respond to future career decisions. Because the present study examines the lives of art teachers, I first wanted to search the literature about African Americans and teaching in general—including their decisions to teach and the barriers restricting their pursuit of teaching. I also looked at studies highlighting the importance of the role and impact of the African American teacher in the classroom. Finally, I looked at studies addressing identity negotiation among art teachers, and the challenges associated with combining the careers of artist and teacher. Rounding out my review is a look at the intersection of race and professional aspirations in art, in general, and more specifically, at the empirical work examining the lives of African Americans as “teaching artists” in the academy.

If the assumption that one’s introduction to the world (beginning at infancy) is necessarily impacted by social forces that guide all future decisions, it is reasonable to believe that these forces impact the ways African Americans can imagine themselves in the professional world. I view visual culture as a pedagogical site and social force imparting a ‘curriculum’ of sorts. This informal site of knowledge transmission acts as “teacher” and is worthy of consideration as a factor giving direction to the masses.

**Visual Culture “Pedagogy”**

I use the term pedagogy here as a way to describe the historical strategies used in visual culture in order to “educate” the public. Whether conscious or unconscious, decisions are constantly made and images created, which necessarily impart messages. Those messages tell stories, whether helpful or harmful. In American society, stereotypes have been perpetuated through forms of visual culture including but not limited to film, television, print (newspapers
and magazines), and traditional forms of art such as painting (Dyer, 2006; Harris, 2003; Seiter, 1986; Smith, 2011). Historically, the practice has been used most by the dominant culture as a way of suppressing the non-dominant population. In her article, “Stereotypes and the Media”, Ellen Seiter (1986) introduced the use of the term stereotype by scholars in social psychology and mass media. She highlights that sociological theory suggests stereotyping as a way of organizing, and then making sense of the information in various ways. One of the implications of this breakdown is “there is no way of making sense of people, or of constructing characters, that is somehow given, natural or correct” (p. 354). Art scholars and critics have offered compelling insight into the profound psychological impact of visual stereotypes on the African American community (Harris, 2003; Powell, 2002).

The scholarship of Harris (2003) and Powell (2002), and others such as Wallace (2004) and Golden (1994) provide some historical insight into the experiences of Black people through the world of art and visual culture. According to these scholars, the representation of Black Americans in the history of fine art and visual culture since the mid-nineteenth century in America has been highly problematic (Golden, 1994; Harris, 2003; Powell, 2002). Rather than a critical exploration of both the significance and complex realities of a Black experience, these representations were more often caricatures of Black Americans.

Often criticized as a problem of stereotyping is the racism in such films as D.W. Griffith’s Birth of a Nation (1915)—a film that inspired controversy owing to its portrayal of African American men (played by White actors in blackface) as unintelligent and sexually aggressive towards White women and the portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan as a heroic force. Strategies of such criticism fall short of questioning racial representation and its historical systemic contexts and ideologies. These systems, Golden (1994) argues, “remain [invisible] of
their full impact of racism within the socially and culturally sanctioned art traditions” (p. 87).

These less-than critical positions neglect to reveal positively the power and transformative role of the Black Americans’ presence in American culture. Additionally, legally sanctioned (de jure) forms of segregation denied Black Americans a voice in most spheres of social and political life and occurred nearly a century following a brief period of Reconstruction after the Civil War (Omi & Winant, 2004).

Visual and media culture provides significant statements and insights about our social world, giving way to visions of gender, race, and class or complex aesthetic structures and practices, providing significant contributions to education (both formal and informal). Share (2002) cautions though, “Media culture can also advance sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice, as well as misinformation, problematic ideologies, and questionable values” (p. 16). Further, Holtzman (2000) points out:

The shifting meaning of race throughout U.S. history provides important clues to [a definition of race]. It is not biological, nor is it primarily based on skin color. As we look at history we will see that it is not necessarily based on ethnicity or one’s country of origin. Rather race is constructed socially, politically, and economically. Various racial categories have been created or changed to meet the emerging economic and social needs of white United States culture. Racial categories artificially emphasize the relatively small external physical differences among people and leave room for the creation of false notions of mental, emotional, and intellectual differences as well. (p. 159)

As U.S. history has unfolded, there are at least two things about race that are clear. The first is that the racial classifications are constantly shifting. Miller (2010) gives an historical overview of the changing racial classifications on the U.S. census from 1870-2000. He notes,
“Over the course of the nearly 220 years—since the employment of the first U.S. census—the racial classification of African Americans has shrunk and expanded much like the body of an accordion” (p. 41) receiving classifications of Black, Negro, and African-American interchangeably though the years. In other words, Black Americans have not only been named, but also renamed by a dominant culture since their arrival to U.S. shores (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Historical Overview of Changing Racial Classifications on the U.S. Census From 1870-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>White, Black, Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>White, Black, Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>White, Black, Mulatto, Quadroon, Indian, Chinese, Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>White, Black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>White, Black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>White, Black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>White, Negro, Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>White, Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>White, Negro, American Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian, Part Hawaiian, Aleut, Eskimo, Other, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>White, Negro, American Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Hawaiian, Part Hawaiian, Aleut, Eskimo, Other, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>White, Negro or Black, Indian (American), Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>White, Black or Negro, Indian (American), Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Asian, Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, Eskimo, Aleut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>White, Black or Negro, Eskimo, Aleut, Asian or Pacific Islander, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Vietnamese, Asian, Indian, Samoan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>White, Black, African American or Negro, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Indian, Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Korean, Guamanian or Other Pacific Islander, Filipino, Micronesian, Samoan, Other Asia, Other, Some Other Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Other, Some Other Race</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses from 1790 to 2000*. 

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Despite the inconsistent racial categories for African Americans, the identity of African Americans has traditionally been viewed as, “either a stable trait that is not influenced by situational demands or a meaningless [social] construct that is influenced by situational demands solely based on properties of being a group construct” (Shelton & Sellers, 2000, p. 28). This viewpoint seems to contradict the reality of the historical changing of a racial categorization of every group of American citizens other than Whites. If racial categories were uniquely based on social construct properties, the White racial category might have also undergone significant categorization changes over the years, and it has not (Miller, 2010).

The second is that being non-White in the United States has been dangerous emotionally, mentally and physically. We have, by and large, been underinformed and sometimes, misinformed about the impact of race and racism in our history. Holtzman (2000) argues, “Misinformation is the foundation of oppression. When applied to race, it has meant that during various times in our history, U.S. citizens who have considered themselves white have operated from the misinformation that people of color are inferior to them” (pp. 159). Subsequently, this misinformation turned into public and private, collective and individual laws, policies, attitudes, and behaviors that have excluded, discriminated against, injured, and killed people considered nonwhite.

Harris (2003) notes, “Race is pandemic in the history, structure, institutions, assumptions, values, politics, language, and thinking of the United States. It is so deeply embedded in the American consciousness that much of our language and imagery operates from racial assumptions that seem natural and therefore resist critical inquiry” (p. 2).
African American Response to Racial Discourses

Throughout American art and visual culture, Black people have both embraced and resisted ways of representation. The very nature of how the Black “body” has both been visible and invisible within and in the creation of these representations, has necessitated complex and varied responses to this phenomenon (George, 2002). Tracing these moments since mid-nineteenth century, Harris (2003) examines an African American experience and its relationship to visual media. Further, scholars (Harris, 2003; Powell, 2002; Wallace, 2004) have responded to dialogues about Black artists and how they have participated in art-making, indicating that these artists have created artwork as a means for assimilation into the established art world, self-determination for the advancement of a heterogeneous identity, and as a method of resistance and reawakening to injustices of the past.

Historically, many Black artists have labored to remove the equation of race in the defining factor of their artistic output, yet they never lose sight of their racial identity (Golden, 1994; Harris, 2003; Powell, 2002; Wallace, 2004; Woods, 2011). As such, from mid-nineteenth century to present, Black Americans have responded to racial discourses and the oppression they have endured in various ways since their forbearers arrived in the Americas. This response has taken physical, semantic, social, and visual form. To this end, visual artists have acknowledged these discourses in ways that have both embraced and rejected stereotypical representation. These images of Blacks often affected Black self-perceptions and might have set the precedence for the development of W.E.B DuBois’s (1903) theory of double consciousness—that blacks often perceived themselves through the generalized ridicule of white America—at the beginning of the twentieth century (Omi & Winant, 1994).

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Assimilation approaches used by some Black artists were adopted as a means for solidifying a position within the artistic elite. Additionally, self-determination practices allowed artists to imbue their Black subjects with what Powell (2002) describes as a more “truthful humanity” (p. 26). Many artists were producing work depicting a more sophisticated representation of Black life at the turn of the century.

Scholars (hooks, 1995; Wallace, 2005) have discussed the problem of African American underrepresentation in the art world as an issue of “Black identification with art—not enough images, not enough visible Black artists, and not enough prestigious galleries showing their work” (hooks, p. 3). Additionally, hooks (1995) raises concern with attitudes and ways of thinking about art that Black people from different class positions hold, which she stresses, “are rarely talked about” (p. xiv).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) acknowledge, “qualitative information is essential, both in its own right and also in order to make full and proper use of quantitative indicators” (p. 2). As such, given only the quantitative data from the SPPA, it is difficult to ascertain attitudes, which raises the need for in-depth qualitative studies examining how Black people from different class positions think about art.

Discourse of Underrepresentation: African Americans in Visual Arts Studies and Professions

Recognizing African American underrepresentation in visual arts studies and professions, Charland (2010) conducted a study exploring how African American youth conceptualize art as a pursuit, and "artist" as a possible identity. This study examined African American adolescents’ attitudes and behaviors toward visual art as an area of academic study and career aspiration. Overall findings of this study suggest the decision to participate in visual arts studies in college
and visual arts professions in adult life is the product of multiple factors, including the influences of family, community, peer group, mass culture, and K-12 schooling.

During the study, data was collected from fifty-eight students in four Mid-western high schools. This sample reflected a variety of student cultures and perspectives ranging from high achieving to those struggling to complete their courses satisfactorily. The sample was deliberately not “skewed toward students known to self-identify as artists” (p. 118). Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and small group discussion. Students came from a range of middle-income homes.

Findings of the study revealed 20% of the participants had no recollection of making art as children (elementary school). Those who were exposed to art in middle school remembered more about artwork they created at home rather than work they made during class. A number of participants remember earning praise for their ability to follow instruction rather than for quality of work. Among these participants, none expressed a desire to participate in the professional art world. Additionally, participants in the study were asked during interviews to recount stereotypes that they felt White people sometimes attributed to Blacks, and then later were asked to relate common stereotypes people have of artists. A listing of descriptors were compiled and documented. Compelling were the findings in the data, which revealed an overlap between participants’ understanding of society’s negative stereotypes of artists and stereotypes of African Americans suggesting, “an African American adolescent who assumes the mantle of artist willingly takes on social stigma aligned with negative racial stereotypes as well.” (p. 125)

Throughout interviews and discussions, participants revealed that their career aspirations were largely guided by the following factors: family expectations, community values, and cultural models of success. Their rationales for why there were not more African American
artists revolved around community cultural traditions. Perceived as a “White” activity, or at least not an African American one, they knew of no cultural traditions that passed art knowledge from one generation of African Americans to the next. This study, while significant, is the lone study I am aware of that examines how Black youths conceptualize art as a career pursuit and “artist” as an identity. Unclear in this study, were the number of students who actively participated in arts-related activities throughout their lives (i.e. formal art classes), which may have added an additional measure of understanding how these students might conceptualize art as a career pursuit and artist as an identity. A similar study using a larger sample size would be relevant to add to the limited research in this area.

**Career decisions among African American Adolescents**

Here, understanding the relationship between ethnicity, support, and contextual factors affecting career decisions among African American adolescents is a salient concern, specifically as it relates to the field of education as shortages of teachers of color have been featured prominently as a major issue for the nation’s schools.

Gushue and Whitson (2006) examined the relationship among support, ethnic identity, career decision self-efficacy, and outcome expectations in African American high school students. Applying Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive career theory, this study (Gushue & Whitson, 2006) examined the influence of two potential sources of strength—ethnic identity and parent/teacher support—on the cognitive variables of career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations in African American ninth-grade students (N =104). The results indicated that parental support is positively related to career decision self-efficacy and teacher support is positively related to career decision self-efficacy and career outcome expectations. These findings are similar to findings from Charland’s (2010) study where participants revealed that
their career aspirations were largely guided by family expectations and community values. No relationship was found between ethnic identity and either self-efficacy or outcome expectations (Gushue & Whitson, 2006). Researchers in this study suggest that positive feedback from those people who are important to a student can help to offset the influence of racially or culturally based occupational stereotypes.

In the recent past, the career development of African American adolescents has been of major concern in light of literature delineating numerous challenges that affect their personal, educational, and career development (Cheatham, 1990; Constantine et al., 1998). To this, Constantine, Wallace, and Kindaichi (2005) examined the extent to which perceived occupational barriers and perceived parental support predicted career certainty and career indecision in a sample of 151 African American adolescents in a large urban high school in the northeastern region of the United States. Perceived occupational barriers were positively predictive of career indecision, and perceived parental support was positively associated with career certainty.

The results provided support for the value of considering contextual variables, such as perceived occupational barriers and perceived parental support, in the career decision-making processes of African American adolescents. Findings also highlighted the importance of social cognitive career theory in conceptualizing career-related issues in African American high school students as early adolescence is a critical period for choosing one’s career. Parental and family influences are especially valuable. Constantine, Wallace, and Kindaichi (2005) suggest that parental influence is especially important to African American students as they begin to consider various careers. This influence remains important throughout their career development.
As such, the absence of parental and family support may negatively impact the decision making process for some students.

Several potential limitations exist in this study. Generalizability of the findings is cautioned because the study’s participants may differ somehow from other African American adolescents residing in an urban city in the northeastern United States. This study might be replicated with African American adolescents living in other parts of the United States and who may represent a broader range of ages and socioeconomic statuses. Additionally, continued research that goes beyond internal psychological processing (Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005) issues and addresses the intersecting experiences of African American families in U.S. society, labor market forces, and the construction of the meanings of work among African Americans is vital to expanding the current understanding of African American adolescents’ career development (Cheatham, 1990). One such career—teaching—has received mixed interest among African Americans since the era of desegregation.

**African Americans and Teaching**

Research suggests the need for more culturally and linguistically diverse teachers in the K–12 public school classroom (Baber, 1995; Boutte, 1999; Nieto, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). The assumption is that in light of the continued changing ethnic, racial, and cultural demographics in the nation’s schools, an increasing number of scholars and practitioners have made the call for teaching practices that are informed by cultural knowledge possessed by students (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In a society with as much sociocultural and racial diversity as the United States, a lack of curiosity about alternative approaches to teaching and learning results in continued unequal education practices and social injustice (Gay, 2010).
Currently and historically, the public school teaching population is and continues to be largely European American (see fig. 2), while the public school student population continues to grow ethnically and linguistically diverse.

![Figure 1. Profile of K-12 Teaching Force (NCES, 2011)](#)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students of color comprised approximately 35% of the total student population in the United States during the 2002-2003 academic year. Recent research also finds that “one in three school children is now from a nontraditional racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic background” (Rushton 2003, p. 168). Conversely, teachers of color represented approximately 13% of the total teacher population nationwide during the 2002 to 2003 academic year. These data suggest that minority teachers have become an endangered species (Cole, 1986; Irvine, 1988) in the teaching profession.
Research has examined this issue from a deficit perspective for a number of years through examination of underrepresentation (Cole, 1986; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Irvine, 1988; King, 1993; Perkins, 1989), recruitment and retention measures (Achhistein, Ogawa, Sextion, & Freitas, 2010; Alston, 1988; Torres, J., Santos, J., Peck, N., & Cortes, L., 2004; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), and potential barriers restricting African Americans from pursuing a teaching career (Etheridge, 1979; Gordon, 1994; McNeal & Lawrence, 2009; Smith, Mack, & Akyea, 2004). Yet few studies have examined the perspectives of African Americans who are presently teaching (Morris, 2001). More recently, researchers have begun to examine decisions to teach among African Americans (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Smith, Mack, & Akyea, 2004; Williams, Graham, McCarey-Henderson, & Floyd, 2009).

In a case study conducted by Williams, Graham, McCarey-Henderson & Floyd (2009), researchers collected data from 33 African American teacher education candidates who were enrolled in a teacher education program. Twenty of these students held the classification of junior, and 13 were classified as seniors. Additionally, 14 of the participants were men, and 19 of the participants were women. The participants represented various academic majors within education including English, math, music, foreign language, and elementary education. Researchers of this study conducted a series of focus group interviews with participants over the course of two semesters, allowing participants to voice their perspectives, perceptions, and experiences, citing this method of research as appropriate “when the participants are homogenous, the data to be gathered are qualitative, and the discussion organized” (p. 351). Researchers conducted a total of four focus group sessions. Four areas of concern informed the study: motivations for teaching, candidates’ perception of the variables that influence recruitment and retention, candidates’ perceptions of licensure, and readiness for the urban classroom.
Discoveries of the study revealed several motives cited by participants for choosing teaching as a profession: familial influence, opportunity to serve, and an opportunity for transformative transference—the desire to be a life-changing individual in someone’s life because of one’s own experience with that type of individual. The data gathered from the participants evidenced the impact of communication and licensure perceptions on their recruitment to the profession as well as their decision to remain with the profession. Candidates appeared to believe that listening and passionate and resourceful faculty and staff members mattered significantly and contributed to a family-like atmosphere they appreciated and needed. They discussed the value of having advisors that bridged gaps as well as a campus environment that was culturally relevant and uplifting. It appeared that this variable was far more than peripheral—it was fundamental.

Additionally, the participants cited challenges with licensure exams as areas to address as it related to the retention of teacher candidates. Though they often cited the Praxis I (PI) as an appropriate “weeding” tool for those entering the field, they held mixed opinions on the Praxis II (PII) specialty area exams as gateways to their capstone student teaching experience as their institution used them. Across cohorts it was apparent that participants saw this as a weakness in the institution’s program design and believed it contributed to the attrition rates of candidates in secondary programs.

When considering the research question on candidate perception of urban classroom preparedness, the data collected evidenced varying degrees of comfort with the areas of special education, English language learners, ethnic and cultural diversity, and general pedagogical practice. Candidates seemed more than familiar with the dynamics of the urban classroom and the opportunities and challenges presented in working in urban settings. As for their
perceived preparedness to teach effectively in those settings, however, the responses were less confident and clear cut. There is a need for additional studies or larger scale studies to determine whether the trends discovered in this study are consistent among this population at large.

In a study examining perceived barriers restricting the pursuit of teaching as a career choice among African American males, Smith, Mack, and Akyea (2004) surveyed 38 African American male honor students from five high schools in a school district in Gary, Indiana. Participants were asked to complete a survey regarding their interest in teaching as a career choice. Findings of the survey revealed that while 50% of the participants surveyed would consider a career in teaching, not one identified teaching as their primary career choice. The reasons noted for not considering a career in teaching were varied, however the responses centered around “low salaries and negative personal experiences with schooling” (p. 80).

These findings are consistent with what Ladson-Billings (2011) highlights about the school experiences of many African American boys, which, she contends, consists of a curriculum of control and discipline rather than much needed focused attention on academic achievement, student learning, and creating culturally responsive teaching environments. African American males are commonly placed at risk of academic failure early in their school years and pushed out of school before graduation (Ford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011).

Similar findings are revealed in a mixed methods study conducted by Bianco, Leech, and Mitchell (2011). Researchers examined factors that influenced 11th and 12th grade African American males' (N = 5) consideration of a teaching career and explored the impact of a pre-collegiate pathway to a teaching program. Findings from the study reveal the complexity of effective recruitment strategies while also demonstrating how successful programs have the capacity to encourage young African American males to reframe their thinking and see
themselves as successful future teachers. In response to the urgent need to increase the representation of teachers of color in the teacher pipeline (including African American males), university faculty from an urban institution partnered with a large urban school district to create and pilot a course, "Introduction to Urban Education" during the 2010-2011 academic year. Thirty-three juniors and seniors were enrolled in the class, with 17 African American students (12 females and 5 males) and 16 Latino/a students (10 females and 6 males). The course was co-taught by university faculty and a high school teacher, both of whom were teachers of color. The course met twice a week for a 90-minute block period.

Data were collected from all students enrolled in the course ($N = 33$) through interviews and an online survey, however this study focused only on African American males ($N = 5$) in the course. An area of weakness in this study is that only five students from the class were included in the analysis. Including more students in the analysis might have yielded different results. In addition, a larger sample, including African American males from varied contexts and different schools, would be necessary in order to generalize findings. Because no pretest was given prior to surveys and interviews, it is difficult to know if the results were from the students' interactions and experiences in the course.

**Teachers of Art: Dual Identities**

Given the findings of the previous studies, which demonstrate the complexity of factors impacting the decisions of adolescents considering a career in teaching, it is worth examining the challenges associated with choosing a career as an art teacher. As indicated previously (Charland, 2010), attitudes associated with stereotypes of artists abound, making it increasingly difficult for African American adolescents to aspire to a professional career in the visual arts beyond high school. In this review, I investigate studies examining the lives of art teachers,
including the challenges associated with negotiating the artist/teacher identity. I begin by looking at the ways in which “artist” has been defined.

Many criteria have been use to define who an artist is. Definitions vary depending on factors such as educational qualifications and the amount of time spent working as an artist or the informed opinions of art critics, art gallery curators, and grant committees or contemporary recognition by institutions within the art world. These are all valid considerations in any formal definition of what the title ‘artist’ designates. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) International Art Association, for example, has produced an all-inclusive definition of the artist that includes:

any person who creates, or gives creative expression to, or re-creates works of art; who considers his/her artistic creation to be an essential part of his/her life; who contributes to the development of art culture; and who asks to be recognized as an artist, whether he/she is bound by any relations of employment or association (UNESCO, 1980, retrieved from [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13138&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13138&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html))

This definition demonstrates the multiple ways in which the occupational title of artist can be interpreted, yet it tends to focus on individual studio practice rather than on the many other activities that may fall under this occupational category. While many artists think of themselves simply in terms of what their creative medium is and its material, other artists employ a range of descriptions that incorporate different standards and expectations. For example, artists may work as curators, historians, collectors, and/or teachers. Many professional artists (Bain, 2005) indicate financial stability as justification for choosing “teacher” (p. 40) as an additional identity.
To these ends, another definition of art exists and was once thought controversial. The process of determining what is art was articulated by Dickie (1974) in his institutional theory of art. To Dickie an artwork was a status conferred on an artifact by the network of people and conventions involved in the art world thereby treating the work as a candidate for appreciation. What this theory does is place the definition in a social context. The context in this case includes not only the art world, i.e., various institutions (galleries, museums, the art press, universities) and authorities (artists, curators, museum directors, art critics), but also the public, which, consciously or not, accepts the social convention of an art world. This theory helps to account not only for the novel products of contemporary art but also for a vast body of objects from medieval, ancient, and tribal cultures which were intended by their original makers to be ceremonial or utilitarian objects instead of art objects (whereas, today, the art world "intends" them as art objects).

Thoughtful consideration of the aforementioned definitions of art/artist guides an understanding the dilemma experienced by those who choose a career identity as an art teacher. Offering insightful research on the role of identity formation and career decisions among art education students and practicing art teachers in K-12 environments, Zwirn (2006) illuminates the challenges of the “artist educator model” (curricula commonly found across post secondary learning environments—for instance, in art education programs), whereby the practicing art teacher is charged with finding a balance to maintain an artist identity while engaging in the practice of teaching art (Anderson, Eisner & McRorie, 1998). Typically, the artist educator model exposes students to theories and practices of teaching art while offering continued opportunity for studio practice. However, once hired to teach in their own classrooms, some practicing art teachers necessarily devote many more hours to teaching than to practicing their craft and may fall victim
to being perceived as not being serious artists; thereby stigmatized by the idiom, “those who can *do*; those who cannot *teach*.”

Often, art teachers, like teachers of certain other subjects such as drama, physical education and home economics, are rarely to be found holding senior posts in schools. Because teachers are not a homogenous group, they are differentiated, at the secondary level for instance, by subject specialisms and by the relative status of those specialisms. The existence of a status hierarchy of school subjects, which advantages the so-called ‘academic subjects’ is particularly important in this respect. In times of reduction, low status subjects, such as art, tend to receive the ‘hardest knocks’, often because they lack representatives in positions of power who can direct resources and influence decisions to their advantage (Ball & Goodson, 2002).

Many studies can be found examining the lives of K-12 art teachers in various contexts (Anderson, 2000; Grauer, Irwin, & Zimmerman, 2003; Stout, 2002; Unrath, Anderson, & Franco, 2013; Zwirn, 2006), yet few exist that specifically examine their identities based on social memberships and interactions within and among groups beyond that of artist/teacher (i.e gender and race). In *The Flower Teachers: Stories for a New Generation*, Stout (2002) conducted case studies of 30 art educators in locations throughout the United States. She focused on a specific group of art teachers who began their careers during the 1960s who were either at or near retirement at the time of their interviews. This volume included life histories, case studies, personal philosophies, and, in general, “things I know for sure” offerings from each of the art educators interviewed. Further, highlighting changes in the classroom and school environment over the past forty years is *Women Art Educators V: Conversations Across Time, Remembering*. 

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Revisioning, Reconsidering, edited by Kit Grauer, Rita Irwin, and Enid Zimmerman (2003). Essays included in this volume highlighted the role that reflection and/or autobiography can play in a teacher’s approach.

Adding to existing literature, Hatfield, Montana, and Deffenbaugh (2006) addressed the duality of identities art teachers experience by studying the lives of 11 art teachers in depth, and asked how they experienced their professional identities as art teachers and artists. As of this writing, I was only able to locate a single article examining ways in which art teachers have experienced their “gendered” identities. In order to understand the nature of the identity phenomenon, Zwirn (2006) examined gender issues and ways in which a specific group of male and female art education students and K–12 public school art teachers made meaning of their professional aspirational identity.

Race and Professional Aspirations in the Visual Arts

Absent, yet salient in these studies is an understanding of issue(s) of race and the role it plays in participation and professional aspirations in the visual arts. As mentioned earlier, based on findings from the 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, arts education in childhood is the most significant predictor of both arts participation and personal arts creation throughout the rest of a person’s life. However, it is premature to conclude that arts education of merely any kind or in any dose will precipitate higher levels of arts participation. The effects of arts education may depend on the kind, the quality, the intensity, and the longevity of arts education experiences. In their final analysis, National Opinion Research Center (NORC) researchers at the University of Chicago tested and ultimately confirmed the validity of an assumption made with prior SPPA data, that participation
in arts lessons and classes is the most significant predictor of arts participation later in life, even after controlling for other variables (Rabkin & Hedberg, Arts National Endowment, 2011).

To this extent, survey results reveal that the decline of childhood arts education participation among African American children, since 1982, is substantial—49%, while among White children is relatively insignificant at less than two percent. In this case, researchers define arts participation to include these “benchmarks”: attendance at jazz, classical music, opera, musical theater, ballet and other dance performances, and visits to museums and galleries (see fig. 2).

Figure 2. Decline of Childhood Arts Education. (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011)
Data has also been collected about personally creating and performing art, consuming the arts through media, owning art, taking classes or lesson in the arts, reading literature, and visiting historical sites (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011). Here, I argue that more research is needed to identify the kinds of arts education experiences that are most likely to inspire students to pursue further or deeper engagements with the arts into adulthood.

Attention has been given to underscore the legacies of African American artists/teachers in the works of few scholars. Bringing to life the stories of twelve African American artists who teach at colleges and universities that have been traditionally viewed as White institutions, Jenoure (2000) explores the experiences of Black artists/teachers in the academy in order to understand how members of this community “navigate paths into and through an often unwelcoming, uncomprehending, and unsympathetic environment” (p. ix). Echoing the tenuous history Black people/artists have had in the art world, this research uncovers narratives revealing ways in which these teachers make meaning of their experiences in artistic, sociopolitical, and emotional terms. Based on her analysis of these narrative life histories, the researcher proposes what she calls “creation pedagogy” (p. 197). Inspired by the writings of Maxine Greene and Gloria Ladson-Billings, Jenoure (2000) calls for educators to be concerned with promoting learning that is responsive to the learning needs of a pluralist society in order to develop a critical engagement with and consciousness of diversity and learn to value and support the many ways that people live and make meaning, particularly through arts education.

In a more recent study, Bey (2011) illuminates the teaching careers of two notable African American artists—Aaron Douglas and Hale Woodruff—and the challenges these art educators faced in the early 20th century. The researcher examined archival materials from two historically Black colleges in order to understand the pedagogical practices of university African
American art educators. This study examined artists who spent their tenures teaching African American students while facing challenges and limitations due to hardships of a racially segregated South. While the artists examined in this study are prominent artists in African American art history, Bey (2011) notes that their careers marked the beginning of a legacy of African American art educators. These studies, while significant, remain few in the field of art education, yet contribute to a necessary understanding of the careers and experiences of African American visual art teachers in the academy; no such studies exist specifically examining Black art teachers in K-12 environments. The additional dimension of race is salient in any discussion of the intersections of identity and career aspirations.

**Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

The undertaking of the literature review revealed a deficiency in empirical work, specifically related to African American art teachers in K-12 environments. As such, I attempted to locate theories, which I felt most closely aligned with three research questions: What forces guide an African-American art teacher to conceive and maintain an artist’s identity? What role does social identity play in structuring his/her career pursuits as artist/teacher? How does race (a racialized identity) inform and shape their art practices/pedagogy?

Since identity was primary focus of this study, I chose to use Afrocentrism as a lens to frame the study as a whole; a paradigm which uses both a language of victory and critique, I found it fitting to use within the context of a life history case study approach using portraiture as a means of analysis and representation. Further informing my perspective, social cognitive theory (Bandura) and social identity theory work (Tajfel, 1982) in tandem with an Afrocentric perspective to explain how some individuals identify with a collective social group in order to adopt an agentic view of their lives.
Unique to the individuals in this study was a desire to commit to and engage in work that is often not rewarded with great accolade. I recall many conversations had with my own former teachers whereby discouraging remarks were made about “teaching” as a career choice; “Don’t do it, Gloria,” they would all say. Pair that with a strong desire to be an artist—an option not well-promoted or received in many a Black community (Charland, 2010), it is no wonder why choosing to be an art teacher does not come highly regarded. In what follows, I detail each framework, giving context for the use of theories of identity and social interaction in this study.

**Afrocentricity.** Maxine Greene (1995) discusses plurality as “the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (p. 156). Here, she suggests that although we are on a common ground, we have different locations on that ground, and each one of us “sees” and “hears” from a different location (p. 156). If we believe that the reality of who we are arises out of a *sum total* of our appearances to all who view us, the Afrocentrist then, must look to questions of location, control of the hegemonic global economy, marginalization, and power positions as keys to understand the underdevelopment of African people. What is today broadly called Afrocentrism evolved out of the work of African American intellectuals (Asante, 1991) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and has flowered into its modern form due to the activism of African-American intellectuals in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and in the development of African American studies programs in universities, reaching its peak in the 1990’s. To this extent, I saw it fitting to design this study from an Afrocentric paradigm as a lens to make visible and audible African American voices that have, and continue to contribute to our Western community.
I argue that Afrocentricity contains both the language of critique and achievement as it lies on the assumption that the main problem of African people is an unconscious adoption of a Western worldview. It is a concept based on the idea that African Americans should re-assert a sense of agency “in order to achieve sanity” (Asante, 2009; http://www.asante.net/articles/1/afrocentricity/). Another key assumption of the Afrocentrist is that all relationships are based on centers and margins and the distances from either the center of the margin. In other words, when Black people view themselves as centered and central in their own history, they see themselves as agents, actors and as participants, rather than as marginal on the periphery of political or economic experience.

Coined the founder of Black studies in the United States, Molefi Asante (1991) contends, “[Afrocentricity] establishes a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person….It centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world” (p. 172). Here I make an argument for my use of life history research in conducting the present examination of African American art teachers as Goodson and Sikes (2001) note, “lives exist at the intersections and on the sites of multifaceted struggles for selfhood and identity. By their very location, then, [life histories] are a supremely suited means to provide windows into the complexities of our social being” (p. 61). (Life history research is further discussed in Chapter 3).

African American scholars (Du Bois, 2005; Gates, 1988; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard 2003) have identified themselves with positions that were emphatically Afrocentric, examining notions of Black American intellectualism and the promotion of high achievement among African Americans. Cheatham (1990) argues:
Americans of African descent share a sociocultural history and experience based upon negative attributions to race and color. Beyond that legacy, in response to slavery's enforced isolation and disenfranchisement, the forbearers of African Americans evolved systems and relations specific to their needs. Furthermore, it is concluded that these evolved forms undeniably had their genesis in African form and tradition. (p. 335)

For Africans of the diaspora, Sefa Dei (1994) suggests, “Afrocentricity calls for a critical examination of the contradictions lived out at the juncture of being Black in a White-dominated society, and how an Afrocentric worldview can assist them in dealing with questions of race, class, and gender” (p. 4), stressing the importance of cultivating a consciousness of victory among those descendants of the African diaspora, as opposed to dwelling on their oppression (Mazama, 2001). Accordingly, Goodson and Sikes (2001) explain “[a] social script of expectations, which each of us comes into the world with, creates different [roles] for different people. For the rich White male, the social script written before birth may prove acceptable and will be lived and recognized as such. For those of other class, race and gender, the script that is written by society will be more oppressive, and the life may be lived as an attempt to deconstruct the social script” (p. 61). To this, it is fitting to recognize Afrocentrism as an appropriate lens, suggested by Nantambu (1996), “[representing] the most potent challenge to the European power structure in the past 100 years” (p. 47), as its aim has been to give those affected by the African diaspora a “victorious consciousness” (Mazama, 2001, p. 389). Asante (1991) adds, “as an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of the ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as key players rather than victims” (p. 172).

Additionally, Gates (1992) suggests “the challenge facing America in the next century will be the shaping, at long last, of a truly common public culture—one response to the long-
silenced cultures of color” (p. 176). He argues that education might act as an invitation into a conversation in which we learn to recognize different voices, each conditioned by a unique perception of the world. Finally, he declares, “after all, common sense says that you don’t bracket out 90% of the world’s cultural heritage if you really want to learn about the world” (Gates, 1991, p. 712).

Molefi Asante (1980) described Afrocentricity as an indispensable perspective on the centrality of Africa and Black studies. According to Asante (1998), Afrocentricity means “literally placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior.” Obenga (1995) explains, “Afrocentricity is not merely an intellectual work of negation [against Western thought], but, as is always the case with every critical endeavor that cares to be firm or constructive, it is a principle that rests on the human capability of self-understanding” (p. 10). In this context, Afrocentricity offers a social, economic and political framework that positions Africa and African Diasporic issues at the core of its vision and work, and it seeks to reclaim and uncover the suppressed contributions of African people, while working for the continued improvement of Africa, the world, and people of African descent and the broader human population/family (Wiggan, 2010). I argue, that in order for this paradigm to be fully conceived, it requires not only that African Americans understand themselves, but also that all other racial beings develop an awareness and deeper understanding in order to liberate themselves from an oppressive mindset.

Agency. With comparable aims, social cognitive theory (SCT) adopts a perspective—referred to as agency—in which individuals are producers of experiences and shapers of events. Among the mechanisms of human agency, the pervading belief is one of perceived personal efficacy. Perceived efficacy plays a key role in human functioning because it affects
behavior not only directly, but also by its impact on other factors such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and perception of barriers and opportunities in the social environment (Bandura, 2000).

Social cognitive theory distinguishes among three modes of agency: personal agency exercised individually; proxy agency in which people secure desired outcomes by influencing others to act on their behalf; and collective agency in which people act in concert to shape their future (Bandura, 2002). Bandura (2001) states, “The capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life is the essence of humanness” (p.1). To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions. The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times (Bandura, 2001; Bruner, 1996). Bruner (1996) describes an aspect of selfhood, agency, as “a sense that one can initiate and carry out activities on one’s own” (p. 35). This conception generally implies individual choice and action, and more specifically, in the context of education, it suggests the attitudes and beliefs students have about their own learning.

Theorizing and research on human agency has centered almost exclusively on the direct exercise of personal agency and the cognitive, motivational, affective, and choice processes through which it exerts its effects. In many activities, however, people do not have direct control over social conditions and institutional practices that affect their lives (Bruner, 1996). To this, many of the things they seek are achievable only through socially interdependent efforts. Hence, people have to “work in coordination with others to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own” (Bandura, 2001, p. 13).

Social cognitive theory distinguishes between three types of environmental influences, which operate through socially interdependent effort (Bandura, 1997; 2001), including the
imposed environment, selected environment, and constructed environment. Bandura (2001) specifies, “These different environmental structures represent gradations of changeability requiring the exercise of differing scope and focus of personal agency” (p. 15). Bandura refers to these socially interdependent efforts as sociostructural influences. These social structures may include, but are not limited to, these social systems: economic, legal, political, and cultural. In addition, family, religion, law, and class are all social structures. The "social system" (p. 14) is the parent system of those various systems that are embedded in it.

Bruner (1996) further discusses the dualism of a constructed self-system, which is both inner and private yet also ego-involved, outward, and extended and is defined by schools and school learning. He asks us to consider possible constraints affecting agency: whether one’s success and failure, the principal nutrients in the development of selfhood, is decided by “self” alone and if not, that we might take a look at aspects of the culture of education and how it contributes to a student’s conception of agency and that student’s chances for coping in the world in and after school.

Raising the complex issue of racism paired with social class entitlements and power structures, Bruner (1996) highlights troublesome features of opportunity that impede the lives of children, specifically—and especially those in poverty. As researcher of this study, I aim to expand on the conception of agency, through ideas grounded in social cognitive theory.

**Self-efficacy.** Building on Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory, Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) developed social cognitive career theory (SCCT). SCCT suggests that career behavior is a result of interaction between self-efficacy, outcome expectation and goals. Self-efficacy as defined by Bandura (1986) is, “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance” (p. 391). Thus,
the focus is on the strength of the individual's belief that they can successfully accomplish something and this belief is more powerful than interests, values or abilities.

Studies investigating application of the main hypotheses of SCCT show how, for example, (1) self efficacy affects career choice of men and women differently (Betz & Hackett 1981; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987); (2) perceptions of barriers, social and economic disadvantage can limit and even exclude individuals' consideration of careers (Albert & Luzzo, 1999) and low self-efficacy is associated with avoidance of particular academic areas and related careers (Betz, 2004); (3) beliefs about personal agency and capabilities can affect the initiation and sustainment of action to achieve goals and (4) environmentally situated factors such as familial dysfunction can account for variations in self-efficacy functions (Ryan et al, 1996). Authors such as Chartrand and Rose (1996) and Harmon (1994), have argued the need for career theories to take account of the career histories of 'at risk' groups, and proposed that SCCT offers a more plausible account of the career life histories and imperatives for helping these groups.

**Group identity development.** Social identity is a person’s sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Tajfel (1982) proposed that the groups (e.g. social class or family) to which people belong are an important source of pride and self-esteem as these groups give us a sense of social identity and sense of belonging to the social world. With the purpose of understanding how individuals make sense of themselves and other people in the social environment, social identity theory suggests that group identity development is a cognitive process that uses social categories to define self (Korte, 2007; Turner, 1982). Individuals derive a portion of their identities from their memberships and interactions within and among groups (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel, 1982). Categories can be based on nationality, skin color, common history and oppression, and ancestry. Individuals vary in the degree to which they identify with a
group. Consequently, variance exists in the commitment to roles and behaviors associated with that identity (Thompson & Akbar, 2003).

Racial group identity is only one of several possible social identities. Not all African Americans place the same importance on racial identity (Cross, Strauss, & Fhaghan-Smith, 1999). Because traditional theories of identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966) address identity through a personal identity perspective, explaining identity development from a Eurocentric, individualistic perspective, they do not fully explain the development of an individual’s group or social identity (i.e. race, gender, sexual orientation, class). Psychologists have begun to look at sociocultural forces that affect identity. Consequently, traditional theories may not apply to women, non White European racial/ethnic groups and for collectivistic cultures whose family systems, cultural norms, and developmental milestones may be different than traditional Eurocentric cultural patterns (Ferguson, 2006).

Most individuals identify with various social identities, although only one may be salient for any one person at any given time. Salience of a social identity may be influenced by context, privileges and power associated with one or more social identities, and awareness of the existence of a social identity. Some multicultural identity models suggest that identity development is a linear process (Constantine, 2002; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000); however, the integration of multiple social identities may be more reflective of a process of negotiation between inner and outer world conflict(s) associated with one or more social identities. For example, individuals can feel positively about one social identity due to their own personal regard for that identity, but also feel neutral or negative about another social identity due to the negative and oppressive attitudes they receive from their family, community members of other
social forces. This experience may cause an individual to unevenly identify and integrate their multiple identities (Ferguson, 2000).

Given the complexity of “identity” in the present study, as researcher, I determined it necessary, in order to examine, analyze, and understand the phenomena, to use multiple theories of identity and social interaction, with the aims of broadening the existing literature of African American arts educators. These theories provide a lens through which identity can be examined and considered as a factor affecting Black Americans’ participation in arts experiences. By examining the life experiences of veteran Black art teachers, we might gain an understanding of how individuals within a non-dominant group navigate, negotiate, and ultimately structure their pursuits to become agents of their “possible” selves.
Pilot Study

In June 2012, I initiated a pilot case study (Stake, 1995) in order to understand how an African American art teacher conceptualized an artist identity and selected art teaching as a career pursuit. In the previous chapter, I discussed the issue of identity negotiation among those who choose to teach art. Given the challenges often associated with being an art teacher, Thornton (2011) proposes two primary conceptions of art teachers and discusses their interrelationship. These conceptions are considered positive, professional representations of art teachers. Additionally, he suggests that teachers associated with these concepts can be found at all levels of art education and are as follows:

*Concept 1: An artist teacher is an individual who practices making art and teaching art and who is dedicated to both activities as a practitioner.*

*Concept 2: A teacher of art is an individual dedicated to the artistic development of students who does not necessarily practice as an artist.* (Thornton, 2003, p. 120)

In my pilot study, I chose to use Thornton’s (2003) first concept of art teacher. I selected the participant for this study using a form of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) in order to identify a participant whom I felt affirmed an artist identity, both through art-teaching and art-making. I was able to locate my participant easily, as she was a fellow graduate student in my qualitative research methods course. I used this opportunity (both the research class and access to
a willing participant) to develop my interviewing skills and preliminary protocol for this
dissertation study. Using a criterion sampling strategy, I selected a participant who exhibited
these criteria:

1. Self-identified as Black or African-American
2. Currently teaching art in a K-12 environment
3. Has taught for at least 10 years
4. Currently making and/or exhibiting their artwork
5. Interested in working with the researcher on this project

Primary data collection took place in June 2012 and consisted of an hour-long interview,
using a combination of open-ended and conversational approaches (Patton, 2002) with an
African American art teacher, who had taught for 20+ years and actively worked as a studio
artist exhibiting her work in a web-based community. I used an interview guide in order to
remain free to establish a conversational style, but with particular focus on these four areas of
focus: 1) professional identity 2) social (racial) identity 3) art-making practices and 4)
pedagogical practices, allowing the participant to guide the conversation. Additional probing
questions were used when I needed deeper understanding of a topic. I would later adapt this
interview guide for my dissertation (Appendix C). The interview was conducted using digital
recording software on a laptop in the art studio of the participant. Additionally, I observed for
two hours in the participant’s art studio and took written field notes from my observation.
Finally, I reviewed a visual/verbal journal and artwork created by the participant. A limitation of
this pilot study was that it took place during the summer—a time when most K-12 schools are
not in session—restricting my ability to observe the participant as practitioner in her classroom
environment. Additionally, a time constraint was imposed, as my study was partial fulfillment of coursework in a university class, allotting only three weeks from inception to completion.

**Preliminary Understandings of the Case**

The understandings of a participant’s life in context can never be complete; however it was my intent in this pilot study to honor, within the constraints, the richness and complexity of a lived life. Inductive analysis of the interview transcript through open coding allowed me to develop possible categories. Through content analysis of the interview, field observation in the artist’s studio, and examinations of the participant’s journal and artwork, patterns and themes emerged (Patton, 2002). Field observation in the artist’s studio as well as close observation of the artist’s journal and artwork allowed credibility through thick description. Important discoveries were made at each step of data analysis as the participant revealed a rich history of experiences contributing to her identity as an artist and art teacher. Three overarching themes emerged from analysis: (1) a sense of agency, (2) social responsibility toward students, and (3) spiritual reliance. These themes are similar to findings from other studies (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Smith, Mack, & Akyea, 2004; Williams, Graham, McCarey-Henderson, & Floyd, 2009) of African American teachers, in general. In this pilot study, the participant recounted her narrative and in reflection, was reminded of experiences that she had not seriously considered before. In her own words:

> you’ve made me think and pour out things that I didn’t even remember existed…once you put it into words, and even as I’m sitting here and looking at my paintings, you know, it all starts to form into something because you’ve given me that experience of reflection (June 23, 2012, lines 601-604).
Though born in New York City—a place far removed from the heart of struggle in the Deep South—she reveals that she was born in 1964, the same year that the Civil Rights Act was passed; a brief mention of a childhood memory of a photograph of Martin Luther King in her mother’s living room, is telling of the power of visual images. Reflecting on the interview process that day, my only regret is not probing further, the significance of that image in her mind’s eye. I can only suspect that the photograph of such a notable figure, placed prominently in the house, has a deeper meaning. This image, placed within the context of our interview, may represent the recognition of a common dream—one of equity and equality.

This pilot case study highlighted a critical need to continue examining the experiences of Black art teachers throughout this country. Despite their presence in the field, there exist few publications that discuss specifically the life experiences of this group of teachers. Critical case studies examining the role of race in the experiences of Black art teachers and other art teachers of color could add to our understanding of these groups as participators in the art world.

After reviewing the literature and conducting this pilot study, three theories in particular emerged to influence my orientation on this topic: Afrocentrism (Asante, 1991), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002), and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982). In what follows, I briefly outline each concept/theory as I see its relationship to the phenomena I aimed to understand, beginning with Afrocentrism and then, moving to agency and self-efficacy (social cognitive theory), and finally to group identity development (social identity theory).

**Paradigm and Assumptions**

The constructivist paradigm emphasizes that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them (Mertens, 2010). The basic assumption guiding a constructivist paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research
process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. Qualitative research assumes that reality is constructed, multidimensional, and ever-changing; there is no such thing as a single, immutable reality waiting to be observed and measured. Thus, there are interpretations of reality. For this study, my aim was to offer an “interpretation of someone else’s interpretation of reality” (Merriam, 1995, p. 54).

As a constructivist researcher, my stance and goal was to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning by examining the lives of three K-12 Black art teachers, in order to understand how they think about themselves as Black/artist/teachers. Here I draw inspiration from the conceptual framework of a/r/tography (Sullivan, 2004)—artist/researcher/teacher—not in its strictest sense, but as a way to exemplify the interconnectedness of multiple identities, always informing one another. As such, using a qualitative research design allowed me to get at the inner experiences of participants, to determine how these meanings are formed in and through a specific culture. This study aimed to add to the limited information known about the lives and experiences of this population.

**Research Questions**

In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, the research questions determined the methodological approach for this study. The research questions are:

1. What forces guide an African-American art teacher to conceive and maintain an artist identity?
2. What role does social identity play in structuring their career pursuits as artist/teacher?
3. How does race (a racialized identity) inform and shape their art practices/pedagogy?
An Overview of the Study

The numbers of Black art teachers have become significant as negative numbers within the general population of people underrepresented in the arts. Researchers estimate that there are approximately 50,000 practicing art teachers within the United States (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004). Of these, teachers of color represent a mere 10%. This percentage is below that of the national average where teachers of color represent 13% of the general K-12 teaching force, yet it is too significant a number to ignore. As such, research has focused on their absence, in light of their presence.

In order to understand how Black art educators think of themselves as artists and educators, I engaged in a qualitative case study that examined three Black art teachers and their commitment, resilience and agency in embracing and negotiating identities of “Black/artist/teacher”. Participants were selected not only because of the researchers’ background as an art educator, but also because of the K-12 Black art teacher’s apparent underrepresentation in the field (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004) and body of academic research. The three art teachers who are participants in this study were also selected because of their many years of service and participation in the fields of art and education.

Methodology and Research Design

Case Study. This study is designed as a series of three life history case studies with each participant representing a “case.” Stake (1995) defines case study as the study of a bounded and integrated system, and the study of a single entity or unit that possesses boundaries. He explains, “Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (xi). Acknowledging the complexities, problems and concerns associated with case study that researchers would have when conducting
one—many of whom are researchers who advocate quantitative studies—Stake reminds us that case study is a subjective form of research, which often generates more questions than it answers.

Although Stake (1995) acknowledges that the greater body of social knowledge is seldom greatly impacted by a single case study, he still contends that case study has an appeal to human beings because of their “innately curious nature, and to researchers because of their tendency to inquire” (p. 46). For this study, the single case or bounded system (Stake, 1995) will be one of “K-12 African American art teacher.” My role as researcher in this study is that of storyteller, and my aim is to describe in depth, how African American art teachers conceptualize and experience their identities, simultaneously as: African American, artist and teacher. Further, I aim understand the social factors contributing to their determination and agency. I used qualitative methods of interviewing, field observation, and document analysis in an aim to better understand this phenomenon.

Rationale

Life History Case Study. We cannot sum up a life by one incident; each of us lives rich storied lives placed in context. The telling of personal stories can be liberating. We can suddenly remember something wonderful that happened in our childhood and the telling of it can bring great joy. Additionally, we can uncover a painful memory or family secret and the telling of it can bring healing and emotional recovery. As we share these memories with other people, we often find common bonds and connections. Those are the human connections that bind us with understanding and compassion.

Taking the advice of Kathleen DeMarrais (June, 2012), a qualitative research professor at the University of Georgia, I decided that a life history case study approach would be suitable as a
method of inquiry. After conducting my pilot study in her *Case Study* course, it became apparent that a life history approach would allow me to dig deeply into and portray the lives of my participants lived experiences. Simons (2009) explains, “In one way or another all portrayals of individuals in case study research are about lived experience” (p. 75). Goodson and Sikes (2001) note that life historians use life history method for the following reasons:

1). It provides evidence to show how individuals negotiate their identities and, consequently, experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live.

2) It acknowledges that there is a crucial interactive relationship between individuals’ lives, their perceptions and experiences, and historical contexts and events. (p. 2)

In social and educational research, life history has a research history of its own that is well documented in the qualitative research literature and used in education in the study of teachers’ lives (see, for example, Casey, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Conflicting precedents exist for any label, and it is important to recognize that others will not use words or the methods exactly as I do. Life history, along with other designations such as personal history (Carter, 1993) and oral history (Etter-Lewis, 1993), are often classified under the practice of narrative or biographical methods. In this study, I acknowledge Knowles (2001) definition of life history research as:

[acknowledging] not only that personal, social, temporal, and contextual influences facilitate understanding of lives and phenomena being explored, but also that, from conceptualization through to representation and eventual communication of new understandings to others, any research project is an expression of elements of a researcher’s life history. (p. 10)
As acknowledged in Chapter 1, my interest in this study arose from my own life experiences as an artist and art teacher. I recognize that my own values, beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and physical, social, and contextual characteristics shape who I am, as well as my passions, commitments, and motivations that drive me and are all very much present as I assume and carry out my role as researcher. As such, using a reflective stance (Knowles, 2001), I expect that a life history case study design will provide rich, in-depth understanding and documentation not only of my participants lived experiences, but also my own.

In order to amend confusion between using the terms “life story” and “life history,” I turned to Goodson and Sikes’ (2001) distinction between the two. They describe the life story as: the story we narrate about the events of our lives. This story often refers mostly to the inner dialogue, which we have called ’our reflexive project of selves’. The life history, on the other hand, is collaboratively constructed by a life storyteller and life story interviewer/researcher. Therein the aspiration is different from that of the life story. The aim is to ‘locate’ the life story as it operates in particular historical circumstances. (p. 62)

Each participant in this study responded to inquiry about their lives by telling stories, which I then sequenced in order to create life histories. These life histories would develop using Dollard’s (1949) approaches for assessing life histories as a guide. In other words, by taking my participant’s own words, I constructed their life stories chronologically, including social, cultural and historical influences in order to give context for their aspirational decisions.

Through life history inquiry, as Knowles (2001) sees it, we gain insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans. This is most obvious when these experiences are placed within context. It is about understanding a situation, profession, condition, or institution through coming to know how individuals walk,
talk, live, and work within a particular context. It is about understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place. It is about understanding the complexities in a person’s day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in that life so that insights into the broader, collective experience may be achieved.

Knowles (2001) points out, “Lives are understood within their respective and collective contexts and it is this understanding that is theorized” (p. 11). As well, according to Goodson (1995), life history research represents “stories of action within theories of context” (p. 98). The life history accounts presented in this study represent both my interpretation of the research participants’ lives, and my theorizing about those lives in relation to broader contextual situations and issues.

Life historians often encourage involvement with fewer rather than more participants (Knowles, 2001; Sikes, Measer, & Woods, 1985). Making the decision to research from a life history perspective, I have opted for depth over breadth. My inquiry places me with a small number of individuals for an extensive exploration, rather than with a large number for more superficial engagement. My task with each participant in this study was to try to get as close as possible to understanding and rendering elements of a life as it is influenced by and intersects with pervasive and subtle forces or influences of context. Context then, became the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it was used to place people and action in time and space as a resource for understanding what they say and do.

In contemporary life history research, a reflexive stance is expected and as such, my own “self” as researcher is visible in the text. I was every bit as vulnerable, as present, as those who participated in this work. I acknowledge an “intersubjective” (Knowles, 2001, p. 14) realm of being and meaning that places me squarely in the research frame. Behar, notes (1996), “In
current anthropological and feminist writing….we are seeing efforts to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (p. 174). As such, my method of representing the lives of my participants aligns closely with forms of feminist writing by illuminating their experiences through stories told directly by them, aiming to locate their life story as it operates in particular historical circumstances. Life history research across disciplines is based on the fundamental assumption about the relationship of the general to the particular, and that the general can be best understood through analysis of the particular. Thus, my interest in using case study was not meant as an attempt to learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because I wanted to learn about particular cases, understanding that the true focus is the “particularization” and “uniqueness” of the case (Stake, 1995, p. 7).

Case Selection. During the spring of 2012, I was invited to present at an arts conference in a Southeastern public school district. Participants in my workshop represented all levels of practice as full-time visual art teachers—elementary, middle, and high school. Nineteen participants enrolled in the workshop; fourteen were African American; five were White. Giving context to my interest in the present study, I highlight this experience as a workshop presenter as my first having an audience where African American art teachers outnumbered White art teachers. Initially, I was surprised to see so many “brown” faces at an art education conference. In my 14 years as an art teacher, attending many regional and national conferences, I had grown accustomed to being one of few among the groups. Often, attendance in art education conferences revealed a reflection of the general workforce—White female art teachers. A sobering reality was the realization that the participants in my conference session that day worked in the neighboring urban school district—reflecting the data from the most current
National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) report—that minority teachers are overwhelmingly employed in public schools serving high-minority and urban communities (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Reaffirming my interest in further examining the lives and experiences of this understudied group (Casey, 1993), I began discussing my research interests among the session participants. Many volunteered names of art teachers from other districts who fit the criteria for my study. Sampling procedures are discussed in the following section.

**Characteristics of the Case.** I selected the participants for this study using a form of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) in order to identify participants for whom I felt affirmed an artist identity, both through arts-teaching and art-making, thereby embracing what I defined as *full-participation* in art. Using a criterion sampling strategy, I selected participants who exhibited these criteria:

1. Self-identified as Black or African-American
2. Currently teaching art in a K-12 environment
3. Has taught for at least 10 years
4. Currently making and/or exhibiting their artwork
5. Interested in working with the researcher on this project

**Informed Consent Procedures**

Participants were invited to participate via email. A copy of the participant consent form was included in the email (Appendix A) as an attachment, outlining the details of the study, allowing participants to review the purpose of the study, data collection methods, and time commitment. Participants could agree to participate via email response, and upon initial meeting for the first interview, participants were allowed to review and sign consent form before the
interview began (Appendix B). Details of the consent process, as stated in the form, included an explanation that participation in this study was strictly voluntary and participants could choose to leave the study at any time. The consent form included ethical protocol, which outlined precise procedures for the collecting and reporting of data, which would be further discussed on the initial interview visit. My contact information was included in the consent form in order to establish grounds for an open working relationship with the participants.

**Credibility of the qualitative data**

As a qualitative research study, credibility needed to be established. I aimed to accomplish this through peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation of data (interview, observations, artists statements and teaching philosophies). In collecting and analyzing these documents, I kept in mind Mertens’ (2005) suggestion that “the use of extant materials must always be tempered with an understanding of the time, context and intended use for which the materials were created” (p. 389), especially legitimate differences in interpretation, which should not be overlooked. Additionally, Mertens states that when differences in interpretation occur, “Such diversity should be preserved in the report so that the ‘voices’ of the least empowered are not lost” (p. 426). Maxwell (2005) further supports this idea and warns that there is a need to “rigorously examine both the supporting and the discrepant data” (p. 112) in order to determine if the conclusion needs to be modified. Maxwell also points out the importance of rich data. In order to get rich data from long-term observation and interviews, verbatim transcripts are necessary and detailed descriptions in field notes as well as the use of video and audio recording are important.

An important threat to qualitative validity is researcher bias. Although all researchers are biased to some extent, acknowledgement and awareness of these biases through
explaining possible biases, for example in a subjectivity statement, can help to address this issue. Maxwell (2005) writes, “Explaining your possible biases and how you will deal with these is a key task of your research proposal” (p. 108). Mertens (2005) also suggests considering:

To what extent did the researcher/evaluator engage in self-reflection throughout the study? How was this accomplished? Did he or she make note of initial hypotheses and feelings and revisit them throughout the study? Did he or she include data from the reflective exercises in the report of the findings? (p. 195)

Reflexivity in research is essential for the development of empathetic research practice. Reflexivity in research is “tied to issues of (inter)subjectivity and the importance of acknowledging one’s stance or position as researcher” (Knowles, 2001, p. 30). It is also about developing and operating from an ethic of care for research participants and relationships established as part of a research endeavor. Being reflexive in research leads to heightened awareness of self, other, and the self-other diclectic. Understanding in the experiential sense—from the perspective of a research participant, what it means to be engaged in “researching the personal”—is critical for the development of sensitive and responsive researchers.

The research relationships with participants are a key factor in addressing validity issues. Although I already have a relationship of mutual respect with the professors of my committee and the participants agreeing to participate in my study, this does not mean that I need to be any less aware of how this relationship might influence my study. Since I shared a professional relationship with all parties involved, I felt confident that I would be comfortable addressing any issues that should arise in regards to ethics, control of data and access to the setting.
Data Collection Methods

As a life history case study, this study used qualitative data collection methods. Merriam (1998) reviews standard procedures for collecting data in a case study. She outlines the process of conducting interviews, being a careful observer, and collecting useful documents. I conducted three one-on-one interviews with each of three K-12 African American art teachers. In addition to interviews, this research also includes one observation of two participants teaching in his/her art classroom (I was unable to observe in one participant’s classroom, as the school district declined the IRB proposal with little explanation), one observation of each participant in his/her studio art environment, and an examination of documents (a written teaching philosophy and artist statement) to address the following topics related to my research questions: 1) How does an African-American art teacher conceive and maintain an artist identity?, 2) What role does social identity play in structuring their career pursuits as artist/teacher?, and 3) how does race (a racialized identity) inform and/or shape their art practices and pedagogy. Toward the end of my data collection, it occurred to me that while I was creating written portraits of my participants, I wanted to also offer them an opportunity to participate in the construction of a holistic portrait by asking them to choose a personal work of art which they felt best represented themselves—essentially I was asking them to submit their version of a self-portrait. Each written portrait is supplemented with their visual portrait.

The data analyzed for this study consisted of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge obtained through the interviews. Additionally, I analyzed their written statements as a form of triangulation to maximize representation and understanding (Stake, 1995). The representation of the data includes detailed descriptions of participant’s activities and actions, recorded from one-on-one interviews and observations.
conducted in participant’s classrooms and art studios; I also extracted excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from their artist statements and teaching philosophies. (Patton, 1990).

Guided by elements of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), this research aimed to deepen current understanding of life experiences from the perspective of Black art teachers who exhibit characteristics of self-determination and agency, by developing written portraits of their lives. The blended methodologies of life history methods (Knowles, 2001), narrative inquiry (Riessman, 1993) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) were used to guide the analysis and representation of the histories of my participants, and allowed a space to place my subjective voice as researcher.

Working in tandem with life history approaches, portraiture is “designed to capture richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 3). The goal is the rendering of a comprehensive, life history account of each person, individually, after coding for themes and triangulating the data along these themes, generated by the analysis. The following chart, gives an overview of each data set and the research question it will facilitate answering:
Table 1

*Research Questions & Data Collection Methods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Studio Observation</th>
<th>Classroom Observation</th>
<th>Artwork</th>
<th>Artist Statement</th>
<th>Teaching Philosophy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What sociostructural forces guide an African-American art teacher to conceive and maintain an artist identity?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What role does social identity play in structuring their career pursuits as artist/teacher?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does race (a racialized identity) inform and shape their art practices/pedagogy?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X= primary data collection method  \hspace{1cm} x= secondary data collection method

**Individual Interviews.** In just about any book on qualitative research methodology, considerable attention is given to the development of interview guidelines; indeed, some (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990, 2002) present detailed and highly structured typologies specifying categories of questions to include in research interviews. Knowles (2001) describes the life history interview process as a “guided conversation.” (p. 72). Given the heavy investment of time and energy required for substantial life history work, developing questions to frame a series of conversations is paramount, suggesting that questions need to be sufficiently broad to allow space to roam, but not so broad or vague that the focus of the research is easily lost or participants are uncertain about how to respond.
Life history researchers (Casey, 1993; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Knowles, 2001) suggest varied ways of developing interview protocol to guide the conversation. In a life history study carried out by Casey (1993), the interview protocol was designed in the most open-ended way the researcher could envision. Casey’s goal of eliciting natural and unprompted responses from her participants encouraged her to develop only one guiding statement: “Tell me the story of your life” (p. 17), admitting, “[the interview guide] was extraordinarily successful in achieving that end, to my distress when faced with the job of analyzing what were, as a result, very unruly manuscripts” (p. 18). In an attempt to reduce the challenges faced when using such a broad “prompt,” as researcher, I designed an interview protocol, which aims to provide a clear focus of the research in general and the purposes of the conversations, in particular (Appendix C). I acknowledge that, when developing questions to guide life history conversations, the most important thing to keep central is the focus or purpose of the research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Knowles, 2001). Knowles (2001) argues, “Research conversations are intended to elicit information and insights related to the focus of inquiry” (p. 74). To this, I identified areas to cover that constituted the main focus of the research.

The interview was be the primary source of data collection for this study, and since life history interviewing specifically focuses on how people make meaning of their lives, the research was dependent on each participant’s recollection of past events as a process in order to connect and understand their lives with the contexts in which they are situated. Knowles (2001) explains, “Lives are never lived in complete isolation from social contexts” (p. 22). To be a human being is to have connections with others and the collective societal influences and institutions, be they historical, political, economic, educational, religious, or environmental (i.e., physical landscape, climate, etc.). To be human is to experience the “relational,” no matter how it
is defined, and at the same time, to be shaped by the “institutional,” the structural expressions of community and society. To be human is to be molded by context. In addition, this research will be focused on each subject’s perceptions of these events and contexts. The interview is of prime importance. Patton (2001) explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. (p. 341)

Life history interviews are not based on gathering information from a large number of respondents and trying to get reliable and valid results through averaging the data. The core element of life history interview is to understand a particular person. Consequently, life history interview is underlain by case study research; it is literally a case study of one’s life (or some aspect of one’s life). Even if a research includes several subjects, a case study of each person remains its basic unit. Following Stake’s (1995) definition of a case study as a study of a specific (as a philosophical term), I conclude that understanding of the uniqueness of each person is the goal of a life history interview.

The interview guide reflects information gained from my pilot study (see Appendix C) and was the starting point for the interview process; two subsequent interviews with each participant evolved based on analysis of initial interviews. Additionally, if a participant brought up another topic proven to be relevant to this study, I followed through on that topic (Corbin and
Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue, “Adhering rigidly to initial questions throughout a study hinders discovery because it limits the amount and type of data that can be gathered” (p. 152), they discuss theoretical sampling as a data collection method to resolve this issue.

**Theoretical sampling.** Theoretical sampling Corbin & Strauss, 2008) is based on the premise that data collection and analysis go hand in hand. In other words, data collection never gets too far ahead of analysis because the focus of subsequent data collection. Using theoretical sampling as a data collection method, questions to be asked in subsequent interview questions will be based on discoveries made during analysis of my initial interviews.

While interviews present the understandings of the people being interviewed, and those understandings constitute important, indeed critical information, it is necessary for the inquirer to keep in mind that the interviewees are always reporting perceptions—selective perceptions (Patton, 2002). By making my own perceptions part of the data—a matter of self-awareness—I aim to arrive at a more comprehensive view of the setting being studied than if forced to rely entirely on reports through interviews.

**Observations.** Consequently, in order to understand how Black art teachers think about themselves both as artists and teachers, this research also examined the various contexts within which each art teacher exists—this included observation of their classroom and art studio spaces. Stake (1995) explains, “Observations work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case” (p. 60). Simons (2009) makes clear, “observing may be seen on a continuum from structured to unstructured or, in field settings, complete participant observation to non-participant observation” (p. 55). For my study, observations of each art classroom and studio space, were non-participant and unstructured (Patton, 2002).
Simons (2009) explains that unstructured observing tends to be direct and naturalistic—not constrained by predetermined designs or intent, documenting or interpreting issues/incidents in the particular context in naturally occurring settings and notes, “It is this form of observation that is most adopted in case study research to document an event…” (p. 56). Patton (2002) also details several advantages of direct personal contact with and observations of a setting, noting:

1. Through direct observation, the inquirer is better able to understand and capture the context within which people interact; understanding context is essential to a holistic perspective.

2. Firsthand experience with a setting allows an inquirer to be discovery-oriented, by being on-site, the observer has less need to rely on prior conceptualizations of the setting, whether those prior conceptualizations are from written documents or verbal reports.

3. The inquirer has the opportunity to see things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting.

4. A chance to learn things that participants might be unwilling to talk about in an interview (sensitive topics), especially to a stranger (interviewer).

5. The opportunity to move beyond the selective perceptions of others. (p. 263)

Since the primary concern of this research was to gain a deeper understanding how African American art teachers think of themselves as artists and teachers and to discover factors that influence development and maintenance of various identities in the areas of arts participation through art-making and teaching, the scope and focus of my observations will be narrow. In order to contextualize what I learned from interviews, I sought active involvement in participant’s lives beyond interviews through observation of their classroom environment and
Artist Statements and Artwork. Plummer (2001) notes, “The world is crammed full of human, personal documents. People keep diaries, send letters, compose CV’s, film video diaries, paint pictures, and try to record their personal dreams” (p. 17). McCullouch (2004) explains, “our identities are defined by the documents that are kept about us—documents such as birth certificates, driving licenses, bank statements, newspaper stories, obituaries, and wills” (p. 1). I would also argue that our identities are defined by the documents we create about ourselves. For example, as artists, at some time, we have all either been asked to or have personally engaged in the writing of an artist statement.

An artist statement can be understood as a brief verbal representation created by an artist about his or her work. It is intended to explain, justify, extend, and/or contextualize his or her body of work. The artist's statement generally speaks for an individual rather than a collective. Artists’ words—their statements—may provide us with unique insights into their practices. As Detterer (1997) puts it, "The statement [is] an articulation of the artist's aesthetic position, free of intervention by an art critic bent on interpretation" (p. 9). On the other hand, for the artist her/himself, there's always the risk of saying too much, of over-explaining and thus leaving the viewer little room for individual discovery. Words may get in the way. Writing artist statements is a complex, sometimes daunting job—one regarded by many artists as something far removed from their principal focus on visual practice (Detterer, 1997). In the case of the present study, I analyzed participants’ artist statements, in general, but also specifically an additional statement included along with a conceptual self-portrait submitted by each.

Teaching Philosophies. Knowles (2000) notes, “teaching is an expression of who we are as individuals and can be seen as an autobiographical project” (p. 14). Through the creation of
teaching philosophy statements, we as teachers, clarify why we do what we do in the classroom. The process of drafting a philosophy offers an opportunity for developmental reflection. Personal teaching philosophies can be grounded in the shared foundation of historical educational philosophies. As revealed in the literature (Brookfield, 1995; Ramsey & Fitzgibbons, 2005), the process of reflection required to create and periodically revise a statement is as important as, and sometimes more important than, the actual content of the end-product statement because it increases self-awareness. Teaching philosophies deeply inform teaching practices and are an important tool for self-development in the identity of the teacher (Beatty, Leigh, & Dean, 2009).

**Narrative Analysis and Portraiture**

**Narrative.** Narrative is a basic human way of making sense of the world – we lead ‘storied lives.’ The primary way an individual makes sense of experience is by casting it in narrative form. Storytelling is a relational activity that gathers others to listen and empathize. It is a collaborative practice, and assumes tellers and listeners interact in particular cultural surroundings; context is essential to interpretation. Interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations. In other words, narrative is constitutive of reality as well as of identity/subjectivity (Riessman, 1993).

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) argue, “Narrative researchers hold in common the study of stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events. These researchers usually embrace the assumption that the story is one, if not the fundamental unit, that accounts for human experience” (p. 4). Putting it simply, storytelling is what our research participants do with us, and what we do with research materials. What counts as stories, the kinds of stories chosen to study, or the methods used for study vary. Analysis in narrative studies opens up forms of telling about experience by asking questions such as, “Why was the story told in that manner?” and “What
does this narrative reveal about an experience?”

The growing literature on narrative has touched almost every discipline, and scholars have attempted to locate, historically, the “narrative turn” in the human sciences (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Reissman, 2001). Once considered unique to literary study, this turn toward narrative has entered the disciplines of education (Casey, 1993; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Miller, 2000) history (Carr 1986; Cronon 1992; White 1987), psychology (Bruner 1986, 1990; Mishler 1986; Polkinghorne 1988; Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992), sociolinguistics (Capps and Ochs 1995; Gee 1986, 1991; Labov 1982), and sociology (Bell, 1999; Chase 1995; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000).

Traditionally, the goal of research has been to acquire knowledge, which leads to an understanding and truth, or more specifically, “the fixed immutable truth about whatever it is being investigated” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 39). Narrative approaches, in this sense, do not assume objectivity but instead, privilege positionality and subjectivity of both the researched and researcher. The theoretical variety in narrative research is largely responsible for the current wide variability in how researchers conceptualize what is narrative, how to study it and why it is important—as material, method, or route to understanding psychological or social phenomena, or all of these. (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008).

Narrative research epistemologically respects the relativity and multiplicity of truth and relies on the foundational work of such philosophers as Dewey, Marx, Bakhtin, Heidegger, and Gadamer (Clandinin & Rosieck, 2007). Its goals were to turn toward a new understanding of human experience by aiming to capture the particular and local rather than insisting on the development and validity of a “grand narrative” or generalization of a culture (Josselson, 2011; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Prasad, 2005). As noted earlier, narrative is inherently
multidisciplinary, and is an extension of the interpretive approaches in social sciences (Josselson, 2011; Polkinghorn, 1995). Whereby, traditional scientific theory adopts a rational and empirical approach to achieve an objective description of the forces in the world, narrative lends itself to a qualitative inquiry in order to capture the rich data within stories. To this, use of surveys, questionnaires and quantitative analyses of behavior are not deemed sufficient to capture the complexity of meaning embodied within stories. In this way, traditional science falls within a positivist notion.

As realist assumptions from natural science methods proved to be limiting for understanding social life, U.S. scholars from various disciplines turned to narrative as an organizing principle for human action (Bruner, 1986; Mishler, 1986). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) outline four important themes that they describe as clear indicators of this turn toward narrative: 1) relationship of researcher to researched 2) a turn from numbers to words as data 3) a turn from the general to the particular and 4) a turn from knowing one way of knowing the world to an understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience. These authors offer and outline clearly for narrative inquirers to be inspired to join the conversation in locating themselves within the field and help readers of narrative research understand the different ways other researchers position their work within the overall field.

**Varied definitions and ways of “doing” “narrative”**

In my own search of literature on narrative, key search terms used were: narrative, narrative analysis, narrative inquiry, and narrative methods. Each search resulted in a multitude of scholars and authors presenting narrative as a way to understand lives through story (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2011; Miller, 2000; Patterson, 2008; Patton, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 1993). Miller (2000)
argues, “A precise definition of personal narrative is subject to debate.” (p. 128). Reissman (1993) refers to it as, “talk organized around consequential events….typically, in qualitative interviews, whereby most of the talk is not narrative, but question-and-answer exchanges, arguments, and other forms of discourse” (p. 3). With respect to narrative analysis—which takes as its object of investigation the story itself—additional variety of “how to” suggestions have emerged. Of these, Polkinghorne’s (1995) distinctions between narrative analysis and analysis of narrative was most helpful to my initial understanding of this highly debated methodology.

Polkinghorne clearly delineates narrative inquiry as, “a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action” (p. 5). Further, he argues, “the term narrative has been employed by qualitative researchers with a variety of meanings” (p. 5), delineating narrative analysis from “analysis of narratives.” Describing two conceptions of narrative inquiry inspired by cognitive psychology (Bruner, 1986), Polkinghorne, maps two ways of thinking about narrative inquiry: 1) paradigmatic-type and 2) narrative-type. Paradigmatic-type inquiry gathers stories for its data and uses analytic procedures to produce taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database. In narrative-type narrative inquiry, “researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories” (p. 12). In this case, narrative analysis has to do with how "protagonists interpret things” (Bruner, 1990, p. 51). Thus, narrative inquiry honors people’s stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience or analyzed as connections between the psychological, sociological, cultural, political, and dramatic dimensions of human experience (Bochner, 2001).

research is largely responsible for the current wide variability in how researchers conceptualize what is narrative, how to study it, and why it is important” (p. 4). Locating two distinct divisions—event- and experience- centered narrative research—they attempt to unpack the messiness associated with the varied theoretical divisions. Labov’s (1967) event-centered approach on event narratives focuses on the spoken recounting of particular past events that happened to the person telling the story, while Bamberg (2006) is more concerned with social reproduction of narratives—how personal stories get built up through the conversational sequences in people’s talk. Other work (Reissman, 1993) is interested in how story is tied up with performance and negotiation of social identities in a common space of meaning and still others (Bruner, 1990) highlight the significance of stories as ways of expressing and building personal agency.

In the work of Labov (1967), approaches to narrative inquiry utilize a detailed and rigorous method for the analysis of personal experience narratives, and provides a starting point for analyzing transcripts of talk produced in a variety of different contexts. Narrative analysis, in this sense, focuses on how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives through examining the story, and the linguistic and structural properties (Riessman, 1993).

Isolating personal narrative from its surrounding text, paying little attention to the context of the narrative, proved useful in Labov’s (1972) groundbreaking scholarship, which argued that Black English vernacular be recognized it its own right, yet critiques of this method by Mischler (1996) indicate that the usefulness of this method may be more limited than its widespread application might suggest (Patterson, 2008). To this, within a Labovian strict analysis, Patterson argues, “there is no allowance made for the inevitably partial and constructed nature of any account of personal experience” (p. 30). Additionally, Reissman (1993) argues, “not all
narratives in interviews are stories in the linguistic sense of the term” (p.18). In what follows, I describe narrative-type narrative inquiry, an approach to narrative which reveals how individuals relay stories of experience using a variety of forms.

In narrative-type narrative inquiry, an argument for the consideration of the data inclusive of written documents (i.e. diary entries, art work, etc.) supports Bruner’s (1990) notion of narrative, whereby the experience infused within the objects are not divorced from the lived experience of individuals who create these texts. As a researcher who is interested in narratives as individualized accounts of experiences translated into storied form, I took interest in narrative-type narrative inquiry and am convinced the significance of participant stories as a way of expressing and constructing identity and personal agency.

Some scholars (Bertaux & Kholi; Ginsberg, 1989) have used methods of narrative analysis consistent with stylistic conventions of the life story method, where narratives are represented through a mixture of direct quotes from interviews, longer summaries of the content of speech, statements about theoretical issues, and key substantive themes that cut across multiple interviews (Reissman, 1993). In these cases, the researchers voice and interpretive commentary fuse the disparate elements together, determining how readers are to understand a one’s life experience. Counter to this, Miller’s (2000) suggested approach to narrative inquiry is hermenutical in nature. This approach consists of three stages. The initial stage of analysis consists of looking at transcript text and focusing on the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, including in this discussion how the interaction between interviewer and interviewee may have affected the conduct of the interview. In this narrative approach to life history analysis, Miller states, “subjectivity is the ‘stuff of analysis’” (p. 128). Situation and structure affect an individual’s subjective viewpoint, but they do not determine it in a unilateral,
unvarying way. This has the effect of shifting the focus of an analysis towards the manner in which the participant has negotiated his/her unique view.

Finally, narrative inquirers study an individual’s experience in the world, and through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (Clandinin & Rosiaek, 2007). In other words, narrative researchers read texts for personal, social, and historical conditions that mediate the story. Analysis is aimed at discovering both the themes that unify the story and the disparate voices that carry, comment on, and disrupt main themes (Josselson, 2001, p. 226).

**Life History Research and Analysis**

It is usually at the point of transition from the information-gathering phase to the analysis phase that researchers, especially those new to life history research, set out in search of a set of tools, techniques, or ‘tried and true’ methods to aid in the analysis process. The search is fruitless; the results are disappointing.

Knowles, 2001, p. 99

It appears that what Knowles (2001) is saying here is that there are no strict formulae or recipes for life history analysis and writing. In reviewing the work of various scholars (Josselson, 2011; Miller, 2000; Patterson, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 1993), I have come to understand that there are a myriad of ways in which narratives can be analyzed; none, which are more ‘correct’ than others. It is clear, however, that some are more suitable based on the research questions one is asking. Patton clearly delineates two foundational questions that narrative analysis asks: 1) what does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? and 2) how can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and
illuminates the life and culture that created it? To this, he draws a clear connection between hermeneutics and life history texts/interviews as data for analysis.

Here I make an argument for my proposed use of life history research methods in conducting the analysis of interviews with, observations of and documents written by African American art teachers. Polkinghorne (1995) warns, “Researchers need to treat interview-based data with care [as] recollection of past events is selective and produced from the present perspective of the respondent. The significance and meaning of the event in the present may differ from its effects at the time of the original experience” (p. 20).

If as Polkinghorne (1995) argues, the function of narrative analysis is to answer how and why a particular outcome came about, then the result of narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, linking past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about. Narrative analysis, then, is the procedure through which the researcher organizes the data elements (i.e. interview talk) into a coherent developmental account. The researcher synthesizes or configures—rather than separates—into a narrative (explanation) of, for example, how a successful classroom came to be, how a company came to fail in its campaign, or in the case of my study, how an individual embraces multiple identities and manifests them into a career choice.

My choice of narrative portraits to represent the stories of my participants aims to affirm the experiences of my participants by creating counter-narratives. In doing this, I situate their experiences in context, acknowledging a problematic historical past. I argue that African Americans in many professional circles, continue to negotiate their social and professional identities and do so by providing counter narratives. My aim? To create a narrative, which seems to be absent in the existing literature.
Life History Through Portraiture. Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that “blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5) in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life to present a comprehensive reality. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, a sociologist and originator of *portraiture*, as a methodology, has used it to document life stories of individuals and explains, “Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. xv). The *drawing* of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving *image*.

Much like Lightfoot (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) describes being the “subject” of a portrait, my intent as researcher in this study is for my participants to experience their histories (portraits) as both familiar and strange, so that in reading them they could be introduced to a perspective that they had not considered before. Additionally, it is my aim that my participants feel their voices are heard—fully attended to, recognized, respected. Lightfoot reveals:

> I learned, for example, that these portraits did not capture me as I saw myself; that they were not like looking in the mirror at my reflection. Instead they seem to capture my essence—qualities of my character and history some of which I was unaware of, some of which I resisted mightily, some of which felt deeply familiar. (p. 4)

The portraitist is very interested in the single case because she believes that embedded in it, the reader will discover resonant universal themes. The more specific—the more subtle the description—the more likely it is to “evoke identification” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997,
This is without a doubt the way a novelist works, drawing the scene, defining the relationships among characters, creating the action, and tracing the story. The writer hopes the reader will feel the familiarity of the experience even if the setting and the people are particular. The novelist offers the reader the opportunity of crossing boundaries of experience and geography, of moving across cultures, of traveling to new worlds. But readers will only take the adventure if they feel some sense of connection or identification with the story being told. Portraitists work to create this same kind of resonance and identification (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

In trying to create a fullness, the portraitist describes the details of action and distinct behavior, what people are doing, how they are behaving, what they are saying, wanting to carefully and systematically document those phenomena that are visible, discernable, often countable. However, the recording of these distinct behaviors will not alone produce fullness. The portraitist is interested in, as well, “in how these actions and interactions are experienced, perceived, and negotiated by the people in the setting” (Lawerence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). The primary interest in understanding a life lived in context is that lives are never lived in complete isolation from social contexts—they are not lived in a vacuum.

Actions that place an individual beyond the borders of society or social order are likely to be connected to experiences of family and community or to understandings of society and of the human and natural environments. Such actions are often the result of very particular interpretations of context. To be a human being is to have connections with others and the collective societal influences and institutions, be they historical, political, economic, educational, religious, or even environmental (as in physical landscape and climate, for example). Knowles (2001) suggests, “To be human is to experience the relational, no matter how it is defined, and at
the same time, to be shaped by the institutional—the structural expressions of community and society. To be human is to be molded by context” (p. 22). Both Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) and Knowles (2001) describe the important role that context plays in researching lives. Although Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) do not explicitly name their work as arts-informed life history research, the assumptions and qualities defining their methods of “portraiture” are consistent with the perspectives represented by Knowles (2001).

Context, as described by Davis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), “is an element that plays a role in the creation of a work of art on numerous levels—historical, personal, and internal” (p. 32). An historical context allows us to place individual works of art within categories or typologies based on some previous knowledge of the various movements of art across time. The personal context in which the artist creates includes, for example, the different experiential repertoires they bring into their work. Additionally, the internal context of the work is that in which the parts of the whole are perceived in terms of each other and the backdrop of the work (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Knowles (2001) suggests, “As researchers, we can only ever ‘come close’ to understanding the experiences or life of another and we can only go so far in unraveling the complexities of the broader social condition” (p. 23). As a life history researcher, I sense that I can more fully know and understand these complexities because of a commitment to understanding lives in context. Lightfoot (1997), explains, “portraitists find context crucial to their documentation of human experience and organizational culture” (p. 41). By context, she means the setting—physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, aesthetic—within which the action takes place. Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for
understanding what they say and do. Further, Lightfoot notes, “This perspective on context—as a rich resource for examining and interpreting behavior, thought, and feeling—contrasts sharply with the view of traditional positivist research, where context is a source of distortion” (p. 41).

Researchers (Patton, 2002; Simons, 2009) often talk about the importance of building rapport with participants in order to engage in the intrusive work of interviewing and/or observation. Understanding that qualitative research is largely dependent on building good interpersonal relations between researcher and participant in order to generate rich data, while at the same time ensuring and maintaining respect between researcher and participant is the aim I found particularly important to keep in mind. I understood that knowing my interest in this research may have influenced participant responses although through my data collection process of interviewing, I aimed at objectivity and therefore allowed my participants to do most of the talking during the interview process. Additionally, I continually sought to create an atmosphere that was both safe and inviting. I assumed a level of trust between myself, as researcher, and my participants through prolonged engagement through email exchange, phone conversations, and interviews. I believe that discussing beforehand issues of confidentiality added a measure of trust. Finally, within the context of trust, choosing participants eager to share their personal experiences provided rich data sources.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of this research was recursive (Mertens, 2005), and findings were emergent and ongoing. Part of this process was coding interviews and field notes drawn from observations, written statements (artist statements and teaching philosophies), and statements about their visual artworks. I hand-coded all interviews, observations, and documents beginning with a memoing system (Charmaz, 2007). Inductive analysis of the interview transcript through
open coding allowed me to develop possible categories. I identified patterns and themes in the data through content analysis of the interview (Patton, 2002). Field observations in the artists’ studios as well as close observation in the art classrooms added credibility through thick description.

Coding was my first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data toward making analytic interpretations. The second step, memo-writing, was the intermediate step between data collection and the writing draft life histories. Stopping to write memos allowed me to analyze ideas early in the research process (Charmaz, 2006). Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) suggests that, “memos begin as rudimentary representations of thought and grow in complexity, density, clarity and accuracy as the research progresses.” As I began my initial pass though interview transcripts, I started with the coding process, using memo-writing in order to ask questions of my data.

Though I utilized grounded theory methods and procedures to code and analyze, my aim was not a grounded theoretical study in the strictest sense. I found it more reasonable to employ focused coding described by Charmaz (2006) as, “using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (p. 57). In addition, using an action-verb approach (gerunds) appealed to me as an educator (who learned to use such descriptions when writing learning objectives), and I felt it was an approach I would be able to follow easily. I was not interested in coding every line. In each coding instance, I highlighted statements (whether complete sentences or fragments) and developed a single action code. In cases where I felt no new actions occurred, I simply did not code that portion. I used Microsoft Word to line up the codes in the margins and highlighted the part of the statement being described by the action code and have provided an example of a segment of one interview (See Fig. 1 and 2). I numbered each
“talk exchange” (interview prompt and answer) between myself and the participant and represented it in each table.

When I completed this initial coding scheme on interviews, following Charmaz’s (2011) action-wording recommendations, I wrote a memo on emerging themes, such as the impact and role of specific historical periods as an example of a defining moment in the creation of an identity (See Figure 3). I began to wonder how identity traits might be fostered by other experiences. My memoing and musing on this question played an important role in later analyzing the data, the results and implications of which will be discussed in Chapter 9.

I next went through each of the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) (after writing several memos) and created a table to define the properties of each category, including an example embodying the properties statement (see Table 1). I first labeled each category (classification) and then provided a clear definition for what I would include in that category (properties). To provide further evidence, I then included several key statements that I felt best embodied that category. These acted as the key archetype to which I compared other codes.

Table 3

*Coded Segment of the Participant’s Interview, Showing Initial Action Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Action Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>21 G: this idea of communicating your thoughts and sharing your thoughts. Do you have any examples of…</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 K: Well, examples…if you look at my work. In terms of it’s content, the neck tie images have always appeared in my work for many of years. Because when I graduated from high school I didn’t want to go register to vote. My grandfather owned a lot of property in rural Arkansas, and he told me to</td>
<td>6 describing the content of his art work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
go stand beside this tree, and I did and when I came back, he told me that African Americans, and this was scary for me...he told me that African Americans had been lynched by their neckties on their way to vote. So necktie images have been appearing in my work for over 27 years. So that’s the way of sharing my thoughts about what I believe. Then along with my thoughts, my whole experience as an artist, educator, husband, father, and African American male...all those things are wrapped up in sharing my thoughts. Even with some of the titles of my pieces. One particular one I just completed (in audible 5:50) it’s called “Thoughts and Desires.” I’m doing a process of mapping with my work. Getting fragments of places I’ve been, places I would like to go or I’m passing though. It’s like maps. So the ties become that whole part of it, along with scarf shapes that I use to symbolize women.

23 G: Ok, and could you talk more about that? The scarves?

24 K: The scarf shapes came um, came along in 1995. I was doing a visiting artist at Des Moines art center, and on Saturdays I would teach a group of 12 year-olds. When I was growing up we took the um, the Iowa (?) (6:37). You know, that’s the test that they would give you in middle school and if you passed you would go on to the next grade. And in talking to them, I asked them to name me one major African American female who had made major contributions to American. The only one they could name was Oprah Winfrey. So I had them to do research of Catherine Dunham, Rosa parks, Elizabeth Catlett. So at that time, I would let them listen to music, and I brought in Sweet Honey in the Rock—an acapella group that they loved and they loved to (inaudible 7:11). At

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>locating the context for the content of his artwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>identifying himself; conceptualizing his identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>mapping my work (in vivo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>defining a teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>introducing a logical solution to students lack of knowledge of women African American achievements/achievers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that time Sweet Honey and the Rock had created a song called: For the sistahs who carried the burdens of other sistahs. So I made these scroll type images, and with these scroll type images are these time capsules. Their research papers are in those time capsules. That’s one there (pointing toward a corner wall). The blue piece.

25 G: Ok, yeah

26 K: So, you got this disk in front, and you’ve got this picture of this Black woman that’s in there, and each one of those African patterns and symbols have to do with the research based on that person.

27 G: Ok

28 K: And each one of the time capsules are their research papers. So, I did one on Billie Holiday, Elizabeth Catlett, Catherine Dunnam (sp?) and I did one with a time capsule for the girls in Birmingham—the Birmingham bombing. At that time Spike Lee was doing a movie. That was the name for it, and they were just...these were all White kids—they were experiencing that. They had never heard of it until they started doing research about it.

When I completed this initial coding scheme my interviews, following Charmaz’s (2011) action-wording recommendations, I wrote a memo on emerging themes, such as the impact and role of specific historical periods as an example of a defining moment in the creation of an identity (see Fig. 3). I began to wonder how identity traits might be fostered by other experiences. My memoing and musing on this question played an important role in later analyzing the data, the results and implications of which will be discussed in my findings section. Here I include an additional coded segment of the interview (Table 4).
## Coded Segment of the Participant’s Interview, Showing Initial Action Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Action Codes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>87 G:</strong> …to art. What was the guidance like for you at that time in high school?</td>
<td><strong>Acknowledging a way of thinking about a future career.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 88 K: I was the one…I threw clay…that guy…I figured, I had to do something. My mom always told me…there’s nothing like waking up in the morning and doing what you like. And I liked doing art, so even though my goal was to be a welder and a brick layer and make enough money in the summer that would last me all winter—that was my way of thinking. So, I got these scholarship offers, and my dad said, “well, you might want to go for one year. You might as well just go.” I did…liked it…went to Arkansas Pine Bluff…loved the college…loved the life. Saw these 3 Black guys selling their art, and I was like, “Hell, I can do that.” I’ll never forget when I came to Arkansas…Arkansas, Pine Bluff, Terrence Corbin had just won the Delta prize…the one that they denied… | **Expressing strong emotion for college life.**  
**Locating racialized beings**  
**Expressing inspirational influence/encouragement** |
| **89 G:** right | |
| 90 K: He won the grand prize (22:16). Ernest Davidson had just won the governor’s award, which is big in Arkansas. They give it out to the top artist in the state. Then Henry Linton had just won the Arkansas art competition. So, I’m like, “these guys doin’ it” | **Acknowledging artists receiving approval in the art world** |
| **91 G:** Right | |
| 92 K: And I’ll never forget being in an art history class. We were sitting there talking and they were pointing out to me…you know, they made me learn about White artists. They would say, “Well, you know, he’s a | **Recalling a memorable educational experience** |
‘brotha’”. I’m like “how many brothas y’all got?” [laughing]. You know, they were talking about he was Black!  

Implying a fraternal context  
Racializing an artist

93 G: [laughing]

94 K: “He’s a brotha! He’s doing well…” I’m hearing the names of Sam Gilliam, Richard Hunt, Romare Bearden…all these guys, you know, who were not in a lot of the art history books…they would go to New York…they would take us to Dallas…take us to Houston…to art museums and would say “Well, he’s a brotha” and I was like “How many brothas y’all got?” [laughing] you know?

Implying a fraternal context  
Naming African American artists who were absent in art history books  
Subjecting students to an influencing experience

95 G: right right

96 K: but you know, that was a pivotal point…’cause I saw people that looked like me.

Affirming a positive defining moment in his identity

Charmaz (2006) suggests taking an “analytic break” (p. 72) after the coding process to stop and write memos. Noting the importance of the generative and refining nature of memos, I took the intermediate step to write the memos, and I began to link initial highlighted interview statements to create a code (see Fig. 3- participant’s statement in parentheses). Returning to the memo later revealed that I had categorized these related ideas under the same concepts. Because I used memoing as a generative analytical process as part of open coding, I also later coded portions of my memos to help me identify emerging themes (See Fig. 3). Additionally, this first memo ended up being a succession of many different types of memos, from theoretical to analytical to conceptual. This set the stage for developing further thinking, and I realized how important it was to conduct memoing in tandem with my analysis (Charmaz, 2006).
Table 5

*First Memo, Written After Initially Coding the Entire Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memo #1</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What initially stuck out for me in this first pass through the data was the impact and the role of historic periods on identity formation, and specifically the identity conceptualization of this African American artist in my study. “…and I did one with a time capsule for the girls in Birmingham—the Birmingham bombing”. Here Kevin discusses a work of art he created inspired by the tragic events that took place at a church in Birmingham Alabama. In an initial interview with another participant in this study, an identical reference of this event (Birmingham bombing) was given although the other participant grew up in the Mid-West—a significant distance from the South, where this tragic event took place. In addition, the bombing took place at a time in history (1963) where racial tensions were high. I am wondering if the recollection of this historic event is more apparent to Kevin because of the racial association with the victims of the bombing? I tend to believe this because the participant references history a number of times and events that took place. Knowing that Arkansas (his birthplace) is just North of Alabama, I wonder if I should have asked Kevin to recall what it had been like to live in the South, as an African American, during that period of time. “…he told me that African Americans had been lynched by their neckties on their way to vote. So necktie images have been appearing in my work for over 27 years.” | Artist identity/role influenced by historic events (“and I did one.” [in vivo])
  (…he told me that African Americans had been lynched by their neckties on their way to vote. So necktie images have been appearing in my work for over 27 years.” [in vivo])
  (“I’m hearing the names of Sam Gilliam, Richard Hunt, Romare Bearden…all these guys, you know, who were not in a lot of the art history books” [in vivo]) |
| “…he told me that African Americans had been lynched by their neckties on their way to vote. So necktie images have been appearing in my work for over 27 years.” | Impactful social events (“…he told me that African Americans had been lynched by their neckties on their way to vote. So necktie images have been appearing in my work for over 27 years.” [in vivo]) |
| “I’m hearing the names of Sam Gilliam, Richard Hunt, Romare Bearden…all these guys, you know, who were not in a lot of the art history texts” | Absence in art history texts (“I’m hearing the names of Sam Gilliam, Richard Hunt, Romare Bearden…all these guys, you know, who were not in a lot of the art history books”) |
I next went through each of the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) (after writing several memos) and created a table to define the properties of each category, including an example embodying the properties statement (see Table 2). I first labeled each category (classification) and then provided a clear definition for what I would include in that category (properties). To provide further evidence, I then included several key statements that I felt best embodied that category. These acted as the key archetype to which I compared other codes.
Table 6

Properties of Major Categories

(Properties are used as defined by Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Example in Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptions of Artist</td>
<td>Demographic or self-defined attributes</td>
<td>(lines 35-36) “I went on to do a Master’s degree in Art Education at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. I got my MFA at Northern Illinois University”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(lines 60-61) “Or even going into the studio and just looking at the art—you’re still working, you know?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(lines 950-51) “you know, some of the highest paid artists now are artists with their MFA from Yale—Mickalene Thomas, Kehinde Wiley—you got Kara Walker is from RISD and Georgia State...highest paid.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(line 956) “They you know, they were accepted by the upper eschelon.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming Experiences</td>
<td>Educational experiences that affirmed an identity</td>
<td>(lines 254-257) “I’ll never forget my 4th grade teacher…her name was Mrs. Bradshaw. Mrs. Bradshaw always had me to do her posters and bulletin boards, but then Mrs. Bradshaw told me, she said, “whenever we do a project, your project has to be better than everybody else’s, “cause you got talent. You’re smart and you’ve got talent.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges in maintaining an artist identity</td>
<td>Self-identified social</td>
<td>(lines 493-94) “I had…me and my first wife had decided to separate and that’s when it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I then began the process of grouping like phenomena within each category and came up with a sub-category of “becoming an artist.” For example, the categories “impactful racialized experiences” and “affirming experiences” seemed to house similar statements of encouragement that I might be able to synthesize them into a more descriptive sub-category with properties and dimensions (see Table 3). The dimensions of “becoming an artist” indicated that it was more likely a sub-category of “impactful racialized experiences” than its own category. It was at this point, while I looked for properties within each of the categories, that I eliminated some categories entirely. As I grouped the different categories into a sub-category, I tried to think in terms of dimensions. If a sub-category could not be measured on the same scale as a sister sub-category, then I interpreted it as a distinction of property and not dimensionality. Below is an example of one sub-category supported by labels (in vivo) with an identified property and dimensions.
Table 7

*Becoming an Artist*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(line 316) “but you know, that was a pivotal point…’cause I saw people that looked like me”</td>
<td>Becoming an artist</td>
<td>Educative experiences</td>
<td>Positive &lt; -- &gt; negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(lines 309-11)“He’s a brotha! He’s doing well…” I’m hearing the names of Sam Gilliam, Richard Hunt, Romare Bearden…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(lines 254-257) “I’ll never forget my 4th grade teacher…her name was Mrs. Bradshaw. Mrs. Bradshaw always had me to do her posters and bulletin boards, but then Mrs. Bradshaw told me, she said, “whenever we do a project, your project has to be better than everybody else’s, “cause you got talent. You’re smart and you’ve got talent.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT AND (RE)PRESENTATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

It is my aim in this section to take from the collected data (narratives) and present written portraits of each participant. As I mentioned earlier, I have used methods of narrative analysis consistent with stylistic conventions of the life story method; the following portraits are represented through a mixture of direct quotes from interviews, longer summaries of the content of speech, statements about theoretical issues, and key substantive themes, some cutting across multiple interviews (Reissman, 1993). In this case, my own voice and interpretive commentary fuse the disparate elements together, determining how I would like readers to understand the life experiences of each participant. I was able to locate six substantive themes that I felt salient in the construction of an artist/teacher identity: aesthetic experiences, racializing experiences, a sense of personal agency, informal learning through social bonds, educational experiences, and sense of social responsibility. In my final analysis of the data, an overarching theme of “place” as a possible zone of safety emerges. Using place as a contextual foundation further clarifies how a select group of individuals locate their center of gravity; the city of Atlanta is that place.

Let me explain.

In the 1960’s, a hub fondly recalled as the “Atlanta University Center,” nestled in southwest Atlanta consisted of four historically Black colleges and universities—Spelman College, Morehouse University, Clark-Atlanta University and Morehouse School of Medicine. Many would-be notables graced the halls of these institutions; the sites for educating the likes of actor Samuel L. Jackson, film director Spike Lee, author Alice Walker, playwright Pearl Cleage, and Regina Benjamin, 18th Surgeon General of the United States. Atlanta has long been known
as a center of Black wealth, political power, and culture—a cradle of the Civil Rights Movement. Surrounding cultural institutions such as the APEX museum, Hammonds House, Atlanta History Center, Woodruff Arts Center, and King Center, these sites reflect a quintessential America, more complex than Norman Rockwell could have imagined.

Only New York City rivals Atlanta in the number of museums about Black history, art, culture and heritage. I reflect on this area as a Harlem Renaissance of the South—a place where superior economic opportunities exist, as evidenced by the large middle and upper-middle class Black communities. Just as jazz musicians in the 1940’s were drawn to Harlem, and then again in the 1980’s to Brooklyn, so too were creative talents drawn to Atlanta, ushering in a new dimension of musical and cultural expression. A New York Times article reveals, “Atlanta has long had a high concentration of well-connected, affluent blacks….the Atlanta area is now home to such a critical mass of successful actors and entertainment executives that few would argue its position as the center of black culture” (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/26/us/atlanta-emerges-as-a-center-of-black-entertainment.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

The same hopes for progress that attracted W.E.B. DuBois to accept a faculty position at Atlanta University in 1897 (now Clarke-Atlanta University) has attracted streams of Black Americans to this metropolitan area. Hailing from various cities across America—St. Louis, Missouri, Gary Indiana, and finally Pine Bluff, Arkansas—each of the remarkable individuals involved in making this dissertation study, has found a sense of the familiar in this Atlanta. Immersing myself in this work has been a journey that has forever changed me. I too, have found myself—a military brat born in North Dakota and college-educated in Alabama—in the midst of

4 Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic site, APEX Museum of Black history, Herndon Home, Hammonds House Museum, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Clark Atlanta University Art Gallery, Omenala Griot Afrocentric Teaching Museum, and national Center for Civil and Human Rights
this burgeoning metropolitan region.

    Connected by a love for the arts and education, anchored by a commitment to themselves and their students, and blessed by a chain of life events, the participants in this study have touched audiences both young and old, near and far; creating images that would later end up in institutions ranging from Hampton University to the Smithsonian and then later written about in publications such as the *International Review of African American Art* and by notable art historians such as David Driskell. Garnering awards such from Teacher of the Year to gaining notable recognition by art educators such as Enid Zimmerman, exhibiting along the likes of artist Richard Mayhew to executing agency through the staging of one-man shows. Such self-determination is singular among a group who could be characterized as “at-risk” or “underrepresented” or better, “invisible.”

    Each of these individuals were born in an American civil rights era wrought with much change; it was a great time as any other to imagine “possibility.” These interviews were a walk though time, through history, through victories and setbacks; each progressive conversation revealing the uniqueness of individual lives, but also undeniable similarities of experience. In what follows, I present a series of portraits of a lives as told by individuals worthy of notice. First, I describe a set of guidelines, Dollard’s (1949) seven criteria for judging a life story, which gave me the much-needed direction for such an undertaking.

**Stories of Action within Theories of Context**

    I contextualize each participant’s life using Dollard’s (1949) criteria for judging a life story. I discovered this systematic way of analyzing life history interviews when reading a Polkinghorne (1995) article, which gives clarity for performing narrative analysis. Given the large mounds of data, I found Dollard’s criteria provided a way to pull together the web of
experiences discussed in each interview. In this way, I could give a holistic account of a life lived using social, cultural, and historical contexts. Dollard’s criteria sets forth a direction for the sequencing of events and suggests finding a place to begin and end each life history. In Dollard’s (1949) own words:

| It is hoped that these criteria will be useful to practitioners of the 'art' of life-history taking as well as to theoretical workers who must judge such materials and define needed directions of effort. So far as is known no systematic effort has been made to define the issues, which a life-history technique adequate for social science ends must face. (p. 7) |

I see these criteria (figure 1) as an applicable guideline for analyzing the life history interviews collected in my study in order to develop “storied histories.” The criteria, with a brief explanation of each and how I applied them, are as follows:

1) Cultural context: Description of the cultural context in which the storied case study takes place.

2) Embodied protagonist: When gathering and configuring the data into a story, the researcher also needs to attend to the embodied nature of the protagonist. The generation of the story will include the values, social rules, and meaning systems, as deemed important by the participant. I will attend to contextual features that give meaning to specific events.

3) Cultural context: Be mindful of the general cultural environment and the importance of significant other people in affecting the actions and goals of the protagonist. Staying true to the transcript, I will include bodily dimensions as participants mention them.

4) Vision of the world: Concentrate on the choices and actions of this central person; we must grasp the person’s meanings and understandings. In order to understand my
participant, I aim to give attention to specific motivations, interests, and purposes (including any inner struggles and emotional states)

5) Historical continuity: Consider the historical continuity of the characters. Attention needs to be given to social events that the protagonist and his or her cohorts have experienced. Make sure I am staying true to sequencing, paying specific attention to significant social events that the participant has experienced. (interview protocol were not oriented to elicit responses chronologically).

6) Bounded temporal period: Mark the beginning point of the story and the point of denouement. I frame the beginning of each narrative with early experiences, chronologically giving order to what seemed to a significant events (areas of success and conflict) in their lives. I conclude with events, which contribute to their negotiation and reconciliation of their intersecting identities.

7) Plausibility: Determine whether the analysis makes the generation of the occurrence plausible and understandable. My analysis of factors that contributed to how the participant negotiates, conceptualizes, and maintains an artist identity are included in the longer summaries of interview text. Emerging themes across cases appear in Chapter 9.

Taking an Afrocentric (Molefi Asante, 1980) social justice stance, my intent was to work in tandem with each participant to provide counter-narratives to the current deficit narratives of absence (Galbraith & Grauer, 2004). My intention is to deepen an understanding of how Black art teachers define themselves in an art world that once denied their—and in some cases, still do—full-participation and recognition.
Beginning with the assumption that stories are how humans create meanings from experience that they can relate to their lives in a culture (Bruner, 1996), the aim was understanding these stories within the context of agency. I see narrative as key to a person’s sense of identity. Therefore, how one “sees” oneself within a given culture or how they are “seen,” by others makes a lasting impact on a conception of self.
“Throughout my artistic journey, the tie has been more than just a recurring motif and icon. It has been foundational for the work that I have produced, and who I am as artist, husband, educator, father and friend. Transformed from a symbol of powerlessness to a symbol of strength, it represents my beliefs in change, my sense of a more connected community, and even my faith in a higher power.”

Kevin Cole, January 6, 2014

The smell of a Southern breakfast complete with biscuits and jelly greeted me as I walked through the door of Kevin Cole’s studio, a crisp and clear day in November of 2012. This would
be the first of three interviews with Kevin; each session was timed efficiently as his working schedule was always packed. No different than any of our future interview sessions, he was preparing for an upcoming show of his work. He greeted me swiftly with a hug while ushering me into a smoke-filled kitchen. He had busied himself with cooking breakfast for my visit. He jokes about the smoke—that he has burned the bacon—but does not slow down his pace. He removes the bacon from the pan and asks, “you eat eggs?” We share a hearty laugh, and he proceeds to fix eggs for me responding to my request, “yep, fix ‘em the way it’s easiest for you.” He also begins a pot of coffee.

We settle into an easy conversation about the upcoming NAEA conference and the concern that many “teachers of color” are either unable to participate (due to budget constraints) or are just flat-out not interested because they are unable to make the meaningful connections they are looking for in a professional organization benefitting their students (who also happen to be students of color). He quickly reminds me of our first meeting, which had taken place over the summer. After learning of my research, a mutual acquaintance suggested we meet. I explained the nature of my research to him and scheduled for us meet over lunch at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) where Kevin is an Advanced Placement Studio instructor.

I must make note of this meeting as it gives context to a concern I have had since undertaking this work—that of building trust. Kevin and I met in SCAD’s café. He greets me with an easy smile and firm handshake. Of medium build, and wearing his hair in a “locked” style representative of a legacy dating back to North Africa, he appears confident. Looking at him, I feel he could be a relative on my father’s side of the family, his dark brown skin and prominent frame. He admits to being weary of being “studied,” but once we were introduced, we settled into an easy dialogue about art, education and research. He readily gives names of others
who might be interested in participating in the project before agreeing on a future date for our first interview. On the day of my first interview with him, he would admit that he was relieved to see that I was a “sistah.” I will return to this sentiment later in my analysis.

Breakfast is ready, and he calls for his assistant to join us at the table. A slender male saunters through the door, appearing no more than 20 years of age, and eagerly introduces himself, sits down at the table; we bow our heads to say a blessing before eating. I feel comfortable in this setting as Kevin’s calm presence reminds me of my own father’s when engaged in prayer. In that moment, I am reminded of the many meals my family would share, each preceeded by prayer.

The conversation around the breakfast table is light as we continue the conversation from earlier in the kitchen. Kevin then shares with his assistant the reason for my visit. As I launch into an explanation of my research, his assistant replies, “That sounds like necessary work!” I probe further, and we launch into a familiar discussion of stereotypes in the media and a history of trauma experienced among many Black Americans. These conversations are not uncommon, and although seemingly sober to many, the realities of being Black in America comes with necessary implications—too many to responsibly address in this single study. We wrap up breakfast, Kevin’s assistant gets back to work organizing the studio space, and Kevin and I retreat to a quieter space in the living room to have our interview.

Kevin’s story begins in 1960 in Pine Bluff Arkansas. Born sixth of seven children to Sam and Jessie Mae Cole, he experienced life within a close-knit Christian household and discusses some of the rituals they shared as a family:
We ate together, played together; one of the rituals was every Sunday morning we ate breakfast before we went to church; no matter how late you stayed up that night, that morning you got up, my dad prayed and you ate breakfast.

Describing his family as lower working class, the depiction he paints of his upbringing was one of abundance; a set of parents who took pride in their work—his mother a cafeteria manager and father who was in charge of grave set-ups for a funeral home—and also the work of their children. Though, describing an incident his father experienced while working as a gas station attendant, conjures the sobering reality of the times:

I think my most memorable period was…I was 13 years old and my dad worked at a gas station. It was only like maybe 3 or 4 miles from my house. And I never will forget um one incident whereas my dad was there pumping gas for this White guy, and the guy said…he told my dad to check the oil, and I’m sitting by the door watching the whole incident. Sitting by the door and my dad…either my dad forgot or my dad didn’t hear him, so when the guy got ready to pay for his gas, he threw the money by my door on the ground. He said…he said, “Nigger, I told you to check the oil.” My dad just stood there looking at me and the money for about a minute, and my mother seeing this…she called my name and I turned around. When I turned around, my dad picked up the money. That was the longest ride home I ever had in my life. My dad and I didn’t discuss it until I was like 40 years old. And I told him…that’s when I um…one of the moments I remembered. He told me, “I wasn’t gon’ let you see me pick that money up. Your mother thought very quickly. I had a family to feed. I was so embarrassed. I just wasn’t gon’ let you see me pick that money up.”

Kevin’s voice turns serious as he discusses this poignant incident. He would also describe
other occurrences of mistreatment as an African American living in the deep South during the 1960’s. I include this incident in his narrative to give context to how these experiences would later impact him as an artist and teacher. I follow up with a question:

“And what does that mean to you, hearing him say that?”

Um [sighs], you know…hearing him finally acknowledge it, with tears in his eyes…he was about 70-something. I understand as an African American male what he was going through, now, but then I didn’t. You know…my thing was, “why is he saying this to you, why was he calling you that?” And to hear a White person calling you a nigger…it was interesting…but it wasn’t until I was 40 years old that we talked about it. And he said you know, “I was embarrassed to pick that money up in front of you” and my mom thinking so quickly…was the one who deterred all that. But he was…it was one of those situations…

Kevin’s use of the word “interesting,” in response to his father being caller a nigger, is curious. I can think of many words to describe this experience, and “interesting” would fall somewhere at the very end of my own list. Words like “rude”…”insensitive”…and just plain ole “ignorant” are a few of many. In this moment, I wonder if Kevin’s knowledge that this interview is being used for research, keeps him from being totally candid about how he really felt about the gas station experience. I further address methodological challenges in Chapter 9. This being my first interview experience, I realize I must in some way resolve this dilemma, because I would like for him to be more candid about instances regarding race. In a follow-up email to all of my participants I explain how important their stories are and ask if they would be willing to speak more openly about the sensitive topic of race if they understood that I would remove all markings that might trace these parts of their stories directly back to them. All agreed that their stories were important and that they would share as much as they could to help. Additionally, I
added that if there were ever a time during they interview that they felt uncomfortable, that they were free to decline discussion on any topic.

**Education and Social Actors**

Kevin remembers from an early age, his parents sent him to take classes at a local arts center (each of the Cole children were involved in extracurricular activities). While in school, his attention and success would be divided between football and art. As a teenager, a repeated football injury would forever change his trajectory and draw him back into the world of art. A notable figure in Kevin’s life was his high school art teacher who would eventually guide him in a direction, catapulting his career in unforeseeable ways. He discusses an experience submitting a work of art to the Arkansas State Fair:

One experience that was most memorable…I made this Black power sign out of clay and it had a gold…it was all Black and it hand a red and green ring; we were going to the Arkansas State fair; high school kids…and my art teacher told me, she said “I hate to tell you, you’re not going to win anything because all of the judges are White. Back then they would say it so that’s what she said; and it made sense…she was right because when I looked at who won…it was all about race, but the best thing she told me was to go to the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff; she took me out there.

He would recall this experience in each of our subsequent interviews, which revealed to me that it impacted him deeply. It was apparent the impact his high school teacher would have on his career trajectory. Kevin would move on to attend a local college on the suggestion of this teacher. Here he describes the experience of attending a historically Black college and the important connections he made while there: His work would later reflect themes of a Black experience, though in more subtle ways.
you get a nurturing…um, best decision I ever made was to go to University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff. There were four guys [professors] who changed my life. They told me about life. They told me about being a man…you know? Work ethics. So, when I got to grad school, grad school was easy. Everyone would ask me “How do you know this?” These [four] guys were doing it! They were selling their artwork, they were in galleries…winning major shows. So, when you look at it now, your division 1 schools got more money, but depending on your area…I know for me at Arkansas, Pine Bluff even my [high school] art teacher said that’s the best school to go to…she happened to be White, she said “I’m gonna tell you, that’s where you need to go.” And it was the best decision I made in my life…(second interview)

Culturally Responsive Mentoring

The advice given to Kevin by his high school art teacher is what I refer to as culturally responsive mentoring (CRM). Drawing from the consideration of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)—a conceptual idea and a practical way of rethinking ideology, content, and pedagogy in a more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse educational environment—I theorize that a culturally responsive teacher, draws on a diverse knowledge base to mentor students. In other words, in an effort to improve the educational outcomes of students of color, CRM is a way of responding to students needs and strengths based on sociocultural and historical legacies. In what follows, Kevin elaborates the guidance he received from his professors, who presented their students with a broad view of art history:

these were four guys…Black, in one University; it was important to them that you spoke well; because for them the first thing that you see is the color of your skin; the second thing they hear is what comes out your mouth and when they would take us places, people would be shocked because we KNEW our history; we didn’t just learn about
Black artists; we knew about Picasso, we knew about Albrecht Durer; we learned about history, and it was important for us to know about everything; and their philosophy was “you’re gonna find out about the White artists, but you’re gonna have to seek out the Black artists.” I never shall forget we were going through some slides in the slide library and we were looking through some images and one of the things they kept saying was “He’s a brother” so I said how many brothers y’all got? What they were saying was “He’s Black.”

I intentionally italicized this section in Kevin’s interview to highlight what I feel to be salient in my own narrative as a student and teacher. It also reflects a systematic failure in our culture of education. While I believe that curriculum improvements have been made in an attempt to address diversity, there is more work to be done.

In the last two sentences, Kevin describes a type of connectedness where personal interactions through spoken language whereby African American artists were often referred to as “brother,” or “sister.” Here he is not implying it in a literal sense but in a sense where it represents a social, cultural and racialized identity. This would prove important in molding and solidifying his identity as an artist, and thereby encouraging him to pursue an advanced degree. It is at this point where I begin to reflect on a few thoughts: Because of a shared “racial” experience, his professors were able to supplement the traditional Eurocentric canon of art history with artists who reflected their student body, emphasizing the importance of appreciating aesthetics broadly.

**Graduate School: Challenges and Victories**

A cultural shift takes place, as Kevin acts on a suggestion by a former professor at the University of Arkansas to attend the University of Illinois—a predominantly White university. Revealing a sobering reality, a mentor, Bill Atkins, would tell him that as a minority, Kevin may
experience some challenges. He was warned that while the university admitted students of color, it was a well-known fact that many of these students did not matriculate. Luckily for Kevin, despite a negative run-in with an art instructor, another important figure saw his potential and decided to nurture his talent and provide continued support and encouragement:

Ed Lancaster…he was at University of Illinois…he was the one that pulled me aside—I was doing these tennis shoes that assumed the personality of people—he passed away from cancer…he was that professor that gravitated toward me for some reason, he considered me talented and I would work all night in the studio; I was the only art education, but the only one that had a studio; he was the one of those guys…he was…he gravitated toward me; he liked my work ethics. He told me that I would get into someone’s MFA program. That was it!

I probe Kevin by asking him why he thought this professor might have “taken him under his wing” (his own words). He responds:

and even when I went to Northern Illinois, another guy a watercolorist…he did the same thing; sometimes it’s a Black and white thing and sometimes it’s not. All of these people were Christian men… that’s the common relationship we had…THEN we were artists (3rd interview)

Here, Kevin is describing a bond uniquely different than the bonds he shared with his professors at the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff. Instead of sharing a racialized identity, he shared with these professors an identity marked through religious beliefs. Bonds or identification between individuals outside of familial ties (Shiptoll, 1997) are often found in fraternal or religious contexts, such as the use of “brother” to refer to a priest. On a personal level, kinship symbolizes an attempt to strengthen the proximity between non-kin individuals (Ballweg, 1969).
I further discuss the importance of fictive kinship ties, especially as it relates to African Americans, in Chapter 9.

Kevin experiences an educational history, I suspect, awarded to a small percentage of African American men, in the overall general population—that of an advanced degree. Statistics indicate that fewer and fewer Black American males are obtaining graduate degrees (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Wilds, 2000). This number has steadily been on the decline since the 1960’s. Discussing his experience while working on his Master’s of Fine Art (an MFA is the terminal degree in studio art), he illuminates a reality experienced by many Black artists:

So, going there to get my MFA, being told—because I was painting these clothing—why don’t you paint something about your culture? And then even though the clothing I was painting was of kids being killed by drive-by shootings, White people don’t realize that you’re Black because you’re not painting Black images, and that’s where it’s played a role.

Other Black artists have discussed this dilemma (Yinka Shonibare MBE and bell hooks, to name a couple). Given the long legacy of African Americans creating documentary paintings (sometimes called “genre”), which reflected scenes imbued with Black subjects, any departure from this means of representation, is often challenged by others. In an Art:21 video segment, Yinka Shonibare (http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/yinka-shonibare-mbe) discusses a similar incident while enrolled in an art class while attending college. He challenges the notion of “Black art” and the meaning of Blackness by appropriating and using well-recognized African-patterned fabrics in his artwork, which ironically, have Dutch origins. In a way, this represents a continued negotiation of identity, which is necessarily informed by race.
Race Consciousness

I circle back to our interview to highlight the fact that as Black people—and I would argue most peoples of color—we are racially conscious from a very early age (Tatum, 1997); it is not because we are born with an inherent consciousness. Existing in a body marked by darker skin pigmentation necessarily sets one apart in a nation still dominated by a larger White population. We are reminded that we are “different.” These reminders come in many forms. It especially happens in educational situations and many professional environments. Kevin discusses one such experience, while attending a professional development experience for artists:

Or being the only Black invited somewhere…for example the (inaudible) ranch, I got a fellowship to go…the only Black…only Black in the whole camp. 100-something people! We walk in and out of two worlds…one Black and one White and it’s common. It plays an important role everyday. (second interview)

Further probing, I ask, “Have there been any other specific situations you want to share where race has been a challenge?” To this, he responds:

Yeah, um, when I finished the mural for the Olympics…there were a lot of things. I got death threats. Whenever I would put a Black person over a White person or a White person over a Black person, they would call my studio and say, “I don’t think it’s fair that you put this White woman over this Black woman…when it was only where the head would fit…composition. When I went to teach at Excellence Academy (pseudonym) they wanted to start their magnet program…first day I’m there, I’m coming down the hallway, this White parent runs in and says, “Hey you, custodian, I need you to help me get this box out the car.” So, I just laughed and went into the office. She dropped the box in the
office and said, “I told that custodian to come and help me with this box” and the secretary had to answer, “he’s a teacher.” And even when I was just a visiting artist at University of California Redmond and the guy who is the chairman invited me out there, he’s Hispanic, um, and they bought some of my books, he was sharing them with the students. A lot of them had no idea I was Black. They had no idea I was a high school art teacher. So, they thought, “You’re an artist. You probably work at a University.” And when he said I was a high school art teacher, everybody’s mouth just dropped.

Awarded the prestigious honor of painting a commissioned mural for the 1996 Olympic Games—held in Atlanta Georgia—he again reveals an all-too-common assumption made by others. He has been mistaken for the “help” in both of his professional worlds. The first time while painting the mural; the second while at the school where he teaches. This is the part of the narrative that problematizes our visual culture. I mentioned early in Chapter 2, the problem of representation and its historical underpinnings in our visually mediated world. It is the very reason why some Blacks in general, and Black Americans specifically show little support for contemporary films like The Help or the series of Madea movies made by Filmmaker Tyler Perry. It is not because of the implausibility of the characters in the films, but more so, the historical legacies of how Black people have monolithically been portrayed, often with damaging and stigmatizing outcomes.

**Teaching Philosophy**

Of the three participants, I was unable to visit Kevin’s classroom environment. A declined IRB proposal from the county was a great disappointment; their letter of regret gave no indication why the application was declined, and I wondered if my study would somehow be
compromised without having this data. Because I frame my work as case studies, I felt it would diminish the richness I could provide the narrative, however, before conducting the first interview, I was able to obtain a written teaching philosophy from Kevin, which gave me insight to how he thinks about himself as an artist and teacher. Revealing is the idea that he understands the interconnectedness between his racial and professional identities. Having taught visual art in K-12 environments for 28 total years, he has experienced teaching in a multitude of environments. His most current teaching assignment places him in the context of a predominantly Black community of students. He writes:

My artwork and my teaching have long had a symbiotic relationship – one inspires the other. It is essential that I be engaged as a productive artist exploring the same issues as my students…. Most importantly, I take a personal approach to teaching. Students respond positively to my classes because I am fully engaged in the same issues with which they struggle. Mentoring is an important part of my teaching philosophy. I make myself accessible to my students. I bring them to my studio. I encourage my students to come to me with both artistic and personal crisis. I always take the time to either help them myself or help them find the right resource to assure their professional and personal success.

As a former art teacher, I am familiar with the challenges of curriculum development—especially in an age of standardization. I was fortunate that I taught at a time (1996-2009) when the idea of assessment in the visual arts was merely a discussion. Although, the state handed down standards, most art teachers were given the autonomy to decide how those standards would be covered—in other words, if I wanted to teach about specific artists, I could do so without the anxiety of “teaching to” a mid-year or year-end standardized test. As I mentioned earlier, my first teaching assignment was in a predominantly Black inner-city school. Given pedagogical freedom in this case meant that I could supplement my curriculum with diverse artists often not
found in art history books. This required extra effort on my behalf, but I found that showing my students images of artists that reflected their own racial legacy would prove to be inspiring at the very least.

**Teaching Curriculum**

During our first interview, Kevin and I talked extensively about his teaching career, which spanned middle school to high school, urban to suburban. He revealed that he has taught in a total of four schools in the span of this 28 years teaching in K-12 environments. I wanted to ask him about his curriculum, and he decided to address his approach to teaching within the context of his current teaching assignment. He discussed the demographics and launches into an explanation of the *what* and the *why* of his curriculum:

…the way I decide to deal with the content…for my kids, I have to make it relate to life and since I’m teaching at an African American school…one of my assignments, is called “On Your Way to School” and I introduce the works of Romare Bearden. And it gets interpreted in various ways in doing these collages. One of the collages, one of the kids did a collage in Bearden’s format, on the foreclosures in his neighborhood. I mean…she called it “America Forever.” All these foreclosure signs people laying on the sidewalk…in windows…and in front of the signs there were all these people protesting foreclosures. So, I do it that way. And then, on a 3-D standpoint, I always use Richard Hunt and Mel Edwards. Mel Edwards has a lynch fragment series where he did the locks and chains and hammers and stuff. I use Richard Hunt because he takes a lot of ideas from poems of Langston Hughes and African American poets. So, that’s the way I…it depends on the class…it depends on the situation. That’s the way I deal with the content.

(second interview)

Based on the assignment he discusses, it quickly becomes apparent that Kevin is knowledgeable and responsive to the demographics of his school and community. It appears that he takes the stance of a culturally responsive mentor. It is not surprising that he would be
sensitive to his students needs, as his shared racialized experiences would necessitate his actions of providing the guidance he received as a student by his former mentors. I am curious, so I ask him to tell me about an art lesson that he felt was successful:

One I feel was successful was entitled “How do I see myself?” This is the introduction to art. What I have them to do is write up a one-page paper telling me about them. You know, my name is …I’m from blah blah blah…this is what I want to do when I go to college. Then at the end of the semester they have to illustrate How do I see myself? It could be through song and dance, it could be through a rap…anything…a piece of sculpture, but they must do it. And it’s only been lately that I included the other arts other than visual…meaning like dance, playing the trumpet…you know… What makes this successful is that I get a chance to learn about them first…even though I don’t know them; then 18 weeks later, they get a chance to learn about themselves and then show me what they have learned. You know? And it’s mainly 9th graders…you know, ‘cause that’s the hardest area. ‘Cause…there was an article in the New York Times especially with Black males saying that the biggest problem is with organization skills…time management… it stated that Black males between the ages of 14-18 they never finish anything; so, when they grow up, when they get in a relationship, they wanna leave ; I tell parents that I don’t care how the picture looks as long as they finish the damn thing; they never finish anything; look at the dropout rate…just finish. I tell people all the time, I do a lot of bad things [art] before I do good things. Our kids…we gotta make them finish something…

Social Justice Actor

How often do we as educators ask our students about their lives? I would describe all of the participants in this study as conscious educators. It appears that Kevin is concerned with getting to know his students in a deep and meaningful way. Allowing them full agency to express themselves, while in the process gaining intimate insight at the lives of his students. In this way he learns what is meaningful to them and perhaps is able to locate hidden strengths,
which might prove useful when further developing curriculum. He does not run from broaching the topic of race, by referencing an article revealing a perceived plight of Black males and lack of organizational skills. The assumption here is that a lack of these skills leads to bigger issues—dropping out of school is salient in his discussion. Here, I see Kevin as a social justice actor who shows how strongly he feels about his students staying encouraged to reach a goal. Although Kevin sits on the AP (advanced placement) College Board as a judge for high school student portfolios, and additionally sets high expectations for his students, here he displays a flexibility and realization that he must differentiate his instruction to accommodate those students who need help.

Guiding the discussion along, I ask Kevin what his concerns for art education are. His discussion clearly indicates his awareness that many educators in general, and specifically in the field of art education lack a culturally diverse knowledge base. He begins his response, noting:

…a lack of identity of…um, I always tell teachers when I teach AP that you gotta know about other cultures…you’d be surprised today those [art teachers] that don’t know of any Black artists (second interview) Don’t now of ANY (raises his voice) Black artists! They’re teaching at an urban school. 95% Black, they’re wondering why they can’t get that AP score…they cannot identify. I mean, whenever I give my students an assignment, I try to find an artist that looks like them…a lot of them [art teachers] don’t read magazines. That’s my concern, with education in general…

So, it appears here that he is drawing from his own experiences in school (as noted in our first interview) where images of Black artists were not present in his art history text books. This creates a dilemma, not only for Black students, but also for other students who share different racial backgrounds. The domino effect is that, if you are not given a diverse knowledge base—if
the teacher fails to present information outside of a realm of what is comfortable—you will only pass along what you know. Hence, if an art teacher fails to present images of diverse artists, for example, it will be difficult to achieve a broad conception for who can be an artist. I will also add that, in a broad sense, we have many teachers (i.e. parents, minister, counselor) who can share the onus for passing along information—or dare I say misinformation? The question here is: What does this mean for students who lack a diverse knowledge base, who ultimately aspire to teach?

“What did they hear that we did not see?”

Spirituality became an emerging theme in my pilot study. In Dollard’s (1949) criteria for judging a life history, he asks researchers to attend to the cultural contexts of an individual’s life story. I would be remiss if I did not include it in the present narrative, so I asked Kevin about the role, if any, that spirituality played in his life. I was not afraid to ask, as he opened up our 3rd interview discussing his Christian-family orientation. Here is what he had to say:

It plays a very special role for me because it’s even reflected in my work; normally when I do a series, I’ll do three or seven or I may do five; the numbers in my work have everything to do with the math in the Bible; so when...some of the pieces you may find that (walks over to a piece of his work); you see this triangle? It represents God the father, God the son; God the holy spirit…you see 3 right here that’s strategically planned. You see those three; so spirituality with me is very important; you look at numbers in the Bible; even you look at...for a long time I shied away from the numbers 6 6 6...because it was the mark of the devil but as I did more research and looked into it...6, 6 6 is 18, so 6 by itself is not the equivalent; I use a lot of African patterns that are symbolic to spirituality.
He then continues by discussing himself as a Christian being and his growth as an artist, continuing to creating works which problematize a troubling racial past, yet also finding peace in his 53-year journey by redirecting his focus on the uplift of a people. He also mentions being unable to ignore a more recent news story—the death of Trayvon Martin—for which he is currently providing commentary through a sculptural work of art:

A lot I think that in everyday life as a man that spirituality you come in knowing who you are and who’s responsible for you being as a Christian…how do you know God? The only thing that matters at the end of the day is when you leave this world; it’s like when you’re born and when you die…the dash in between; it’s not gonna matter 30 years from now that I did the mural for the Olympics…it’s not gonna matter to most people; it’s not gonna matter what type of house I lived in; what’s gonna matter is one, whether you’re saved…two, what you’ve done for others, the lives you’ve tried to change; and that’s what I’ve come to understand. A lady was looking at my work and she said she could feel the spirit in my work, and she said, I look at it and what I see is these nice colors and before I bought it I kept looking at it and there were all these nice colors; the title of it is “If I Change My Name Tomorrow, Will My Journey Remain the Same.” If you notice, all of my pieces have positive titles even though I talk about the idea of the lynching with the neckties, my pieces have moved beyond that now; every once in a while, like the Trayvon Martin piece…I had to do it. When my son calls me and tells me dad…I heard the verdict that night and he called me; he wasn’t calling for money [laughing]; and he said to me “What did they not hear that we didn’t see?”

Advice for Teachers of Black students

“The moral of the story is that he knew what to say to me and knew what to say to her; he was pushing me; you got to know what to say to your students but more importantly you gotta know how to listen; a lot of new teachers are good at doing power points…they’re great at doing electronic stuff, but they can’t teach.”

Kevin Cole (interview 10-26-13)
I decided to use this quote to serve as the denouement of Kevin’s story. At this point in our final interview, I reminded him of one of the reasons I began this research project—the 2011 NEA survey revealing a 25-year decline in arts participation among Black Americans. So, I asked him what advice he might give teachers in the field (art). Here was my final question: “So, you teach at a predominantly Black school. Having the experience you had with your high school art teacher, who happened to be White, what advice would you give to other teachers in the field who have Black students who are talented and show a real interest in art?”

…you got to know what to say to your students but more importantly you gotta know how to listen; a lot of new teachers are good at doing power points…they’re great at doing electronic stuff, but they can’t teach.

His solemn response reveals to me that he believes perhaps that technology, when used incorrectly, acts as a barrier for the fostering of meaningful connections between human beings—more specifically, teacher-student relationships. As college students, we are required to give presentations; many of us use power points in order to convey our message. I am not saying that using power points is bad. What I am suggesting, based on Kevin’s response, is that using them in lieu of hands-on culturally responsive teaching and mentoring will continue to drive a wedge between culturally different beings.
“Living in a place separate from this world where life flourishes with grace, mystery and poetic beauty lives within the hidden world of my subconscious mind.”

Eleanor Neal, January 5, 2014

My initial visit with Eleanor Neal happened in November 2012. We met at a local bakery near her home. Let me just say, first meetings are always curious—especially those that involve a power differential. I as researcher understood that I necessarily wanted, and in fact, needed participation from others in order to conduct my study. What I have learned is that people are naturally skeptical around the idea of being “studied.” They are curious about the “what’s” the “why’s” and the how’s” of it all. I came to the realization that the ultimate factor influencing
one’s decision to be studied is what I call the “trust factor.” People want to feel safe when discussing the personal dimensions of their lives. Period.

Getting back to my first meeting with Eleanor. We chatted for about an hour, and by the end of the visit, she was fully on-board with the research project. I suspect that something about what I said or the way I said it swayed her to join “team Gloria.” We decided to meet in her home for the first interview. It was a mild day in December, and we talked over a simple dinner she has generously prepared for us: salad and pasta. Our discussion spanned what is happening in her classroom to current events. Once we have finished the meal, Eleanor cleared a space on the dining table for us to begin the interview.

Let me begin by noting that Eleanor Neal is internationally recognized as an artist. Her portrait above reveals her deep-seated passion for nature and reveals a desire to escape this material world, which has required her to negotiate several identities—woman, artist, teacher, and African American. She has taught art for 15 years in elementary and high school environments. Unlike many K-12 art teachers, Eleanor has managed to balance being a teacher while actively pursuing her passion for making art. She further complicates the narrative because she happens to be African American—an ethnic population often discussed as underrepresented in (visual) arts participation. Unmarried with no children, she grew up in Gary, Indiana, the oldest of three children born to Elijah and Constance Neal. The south shore train only blocks away from where she grew up, Eleanor’s memories take her back to frequent visits to the Museum of Science and Industry and the Art Institute, both located in Chicago.
Burgeoning Artist Identity

My story of Eleanor begins with her recollection of an event that she feels central in the development of her identity as an artist. She discusses a moment when her real interest in art began:

I think I’d give a lot of credit to Mrs. Schavel. I’ve been thinking a lot about that since we met. She was my high school art teacher, and she was this older White lady who was so energetic and so supportive, but at the same time—she was funny—she would tell us that we are going to enjoy art in her classroom, we are not going to do any competitions, and we’re not going to sell our artwork. So she was not about taking art outside of the classroom. She was about kinda letting you do your thing but keeping it in the classroom. And to show you how strong she felt about that, I had created some piece of art and we hung it—she hung our work up there in the high school there in the gallery spaces in the hall—one of my pieces caught the eyes of the assistant principal, who really liked the art work. He wanted my piece in his office. So he came to the classroom—I’ll never forget that—to visit us, and he told Mrs. Schavel, “who did that particular piece?” She introduced me to him and she said “but sir, Eleanor is not getting ready to sell you her work. It’s going home with her, for her parents to see and admire, but here’s what you’re getting ready to do…you’re going to go and buy her some art supplies, and I think she needs some paint so let’s get her a nice set of paints. You’re going to get her some paints and some brushes, and how about you get her a couple of canvases. That’s what you’re going to do.” I’ll never forget the day I received those supplies…all kinds of watercolor paints, canvases, brushes. So her thing was, “No, she’s not getting ready to give to you…you’re giving to her, and that piece is going home.” My parents still have that art work. Yeah yeah, I’ll never forget that. But she told me, she says “no, I’m not putting you in art competitions, and at that time, teachers could basically do what they wanted to do. I couldn’t say that to my principal [laughing], but she made real sure we felt good and secure about what we were doing, and she really liked the work I was doing. She said get your family and get on that train and go to Chicago. Go to the museums. Just do it. Just go. And she was right, so I have to give a lot of credit to her.
She also remembers vacations on Lake Michigan with her family. Taking me back to an annual experience with her family that began when she was a teenager, she discovered her love of nature, revealing her desire to capture that in her own art-making:

We were a very close family...all the relatives, aunts, uncles, cousins, everybody. And so my uncle would call all of the family up and we would go to a place called...there’s this place up there that has cabins...beautiful cabins and beautiful landscape—just woods and everything...I spent most of my time sitting under a tree with a whole bunch of sketch books, drawing. And I remember then realizing that I really like just being able to just create and I liked sitting here looking at nature, looking at trees, family having a good time. And I had tons of sketchbooks and I would sit there, have my lemonade, just kind of watching people, watching everybody. And I think that is part of my interest in landscape....Yeah, that’s more than just going to museums and looking at art because it involves a connection with the family. It just brings a sense of peace and happiness and calmness, and I think a lot of times when I’m creating by myself, I hear that noise of just...those time...happy times together.

Eleanor’s narrative reveals a family support, indicated in her own words; unlike the discovery made in a study (Charland, 2010) discussed earlier in my review of the literature (Chapter 2) where adolescents rejected the notion of artistic aspiration based on attitudes generated from the participant’s family members. She continues:

I told my parents, I said ‘you know, I really want to go to the Art Institute (pseudonym).’ I really wanted to go there and my mom used to take me and my sister there on the south shore train on Saturdays. We’d go over to the museum. The museum of science and industry, the museum of natural history...you know the museums and I loved the Art Institute.
Education: Racializing Experiences

Eleanor continued to pursue her love for art in college, attaining a Bachelor’s in Fine Art and then a Master’s in Art Education. Beginning her teaching career in an elementary school in the Midwest, she was later convinced by her sister, who had recently moved to the South for employment, that she should consider moving there as well to work as an art teacher. Eleanor’s experiences living and being educated in the Midwest were different than the experiences she encountered after moving to the South. She discusses a traumatic experience during her Master’s program at a predominantly White University in the mid-80’s. She describes a moment when she is reminded of her “difference”—that she is the only African American among a group of White art students. She aims to reconcile her feelings while experiencing what she felt she was too immature to articulate at the time, and sense of self-determination is revealed.

I’ll never forget this—it was a very traumatic experience for me at Indiana University. A White professor…a White gentleman…all White class…literally separated me from the other members in the class. He wanted all of them to do figure drawing. So, they had their easels all around the figure and they were all drawing. He told me he wanted me to do a still life.

Many African-Americans have race-related memories dating back as early as age three (Tatum, 1997). In a conversation I shared recently with a colleague, he admits that each time he and his four-year-old daughter have been shopping in a toy store, she readily identifies with other brown-skinned dolls by shouting, “There’s me daddy!” Other stories may reveal a curiosity had by lighter-skinned children who wonder why a dark-skinned person’s palms are so much lighter than the backs of their hands; still others are stories of active bigotry, transmitted casually from one generation to the next through the use of racial slurs and ethnic jokes. Here Eleanor
reveals a racial-sensitivity about an action taken by her college instructor that seems unfair, but at such a young age, she was not adequately equipped to confront the experience.

And at that time, I was young. I didn’t realize what was going on. I was the only Black person and he didn’t want me in the class with the rest of them. I could’ve easily said ‘you know what, I’m not going to do this. This is crazy. I’m just going to go home.’ But there was a drive that was in here (pointing to her chest) that said, ‘you’re going to find your way though this, and you’re going to do this because this is what you really want to do, even though you’re not really getting the support here…you’re not.

Current multicultural identity models suggest that identity development is a linear process (Constantine, 2002; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000); however, the integration of multiple social identities may be more reflective of a process of negotiation between inner and outer world conflict(s) associated with one or more social identities. For example, individuals can feel positively about one social identity due to their own personal regard for that identity, but also feel neutral or negative about another social identity due to the negative and oppressive attitudes they receive from their family, community members of other social forces. This experience may cause an individual to unevenly identify and integrate their multiple identities (Ferguson, 2000). Apparent in her narrative is a conflict Eleanor is attempting to reconcile: the consciousness of being African American in an environment where she does not feel safe. What is also revealed here is Eleanor’s sense of personal agency. In what follows, she revealed her longing for a community of support.

I knew there was a part of me that really wanted that ‘art’ place. It was just finding my right niche in there (college), and that didn’t happen until I came to Atlanta.
Moving “South” and Social Actors

Currently teaching in Gwinnett County, she is one of over 50 high school art teachers in her district and quickly makes a point before the interview, to reveal that she is one of few Black art teachers in her county, and in fact, the only Black high school art teacher. Her story continues with her ideas about being an artist, moving to the South, and inevitably, connecting with other Black artists. Salient here is the influence of context on her professional, social, and racial identities.

Art is life. It’s who I am. Yeah…I can’t imagine doing anything else; and it’s not about selling art or being approved by others when you make the art. It’s more an internal vision I have; an internal message I put out for myself. I think if it’s really a part of your life, it’s REALLY a part of your life, it doesn’t come as a second occupation. When some people say, ‘When I retire, then I’ll do my art,’ that really bothers me because then you’re saying that it’s not really part of your life. So, to me, to be a good art educator, you have to be an artist.

It is not uncommon to hear a K-12 art teacher say, “I just don’t have time to make art anymore.” Constraints of family, dedicated studio space, and low energy levels are all factors contributing to this well-known plight. As an unmarried woman with no children, Eleanor’s responsibilities, beyond her “teaching” day, are perhaps less than those of the average female art teacher. She continued:

Um, I’ve been in the South for a while. I’ve lived in the South for probably about, wow, 15 years now. Maybe more than that…time goes by. I’m from the Midwest. I attended Indiana University. I’m one of three children. I have one sister; one brother—they’re both younger. My sister is here in Atlanta and my brother is in the Midwest. Both my parents are in the Midwest, and let’s see. I’m single—no children. I spend most of my time when I’m not teaching, creating my own art.
As revealed in her the following narrative, Eleanor’s migration to a different environment where she makes connections with other African American artists/educators provides her with a positive experience whereby her racial identity is affirmed. Suggesting a reflection of a racial identity through achievement, pivotal to Eleanor’s success was a personal association with well-established African American artists—a luxury sometimes denied Black students in educational spaces. In her response, she mentioned making a connection between me and another personal friend, who happens to teach at a local historically Black University:

When I came here, I was still trying to find who I was as an artist. I have a good friend who is an art professor at Morris-Brown College and you should meet him! We connected right away…found out we were both from the Midwest and he attended IU too. After meeting him, I remember him saying, ‘Eleanor, I can introduce you to some other artists here in Atlanta’…basically [he meant] some other African American artists…getting to know him, I met other African American artists as well as getting this really cool experience to go abroad.

**Group Identity**

In my initial analysis using methods of grounded theory, a reoccurring theme of social identity through group membership became apparent. With the purpose of understanding how individuals make sense of themselves and other people in the social environment, social identity theory suggests that group identity development is a cognitive process that uses social categories to define self (Korte, 2007; Turner, 1982). Individuals derive a portion of their identities from their memberships and interactions within and among groups (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel, 1982). Though social identity theory has been applied in limited contexts (i.e. organizational management settings), which rarely considers categories based on nationality, skin color,
common history and oppression, and ancestry, in keeping with a social justice stance I extend the boundaries of this theory to consider these additional categories. Individuals vary in the degree to which they identify with a group (Thompson & Akbar, 2003).

Racial identity is only one of several possible social identities. Not all African Americans place the same importance on racial identity (Cross, Strauss, & Fhaghan-Smith, 1999), however Eleanor appears to have “found her footing” with the help of connecting to other artists who happen to also be African American. While most individuals identify with more than one social identity, often only one may be prominent for any one person at any given time. Salience of a social identity may be influenced by context, privileges and power associated with one or more social identities, and awareness of the existence of a social identity.

Eleanor then discusses meeting Kevin Cole, another participant in my study. I was pleasantly surprised about this connection. It was beginning to make sense to me. How could these two, active participants in an art community, who work within 20 miles of one another not know each other?

He [professor at Morris-Brown] told me about Hammonds House Museum, and I went and saw Kevin Cole at one of the openings and I remember asking [the professor] if he knew him, and he said ‘I do,’ and I said I’d like to meet him…I met Kevin, and that opened up a whole new opening into the art scene with Kevin, meeting other artists and going to his studio, and seeing how he works and how he teaches and how he just pulls it all together. And I would say from there the networking continued.

I cannot ignore the salience and power of group memberships. What I see emerging here is the benefits of group membership and racial identity as factors in her encouragement and achievement as an artist/teacher. Next, Eleanor discussed an experience and acknowledged an
awareness of being the only African American present. She highlighted a discussion she had with Kevin where he suggested she connect with other African American artists.

I attended an art program on the Northeast coast. I was the lone African American at the residence and workshop. I can remember my cousin in Boston saying, ‘You’re probably going to be the only Black there, you sure you wanna go?’ And I said ‘Yeah, I want the experience.’ And so then, through Kevin, I heard about Tougaloo and he said, ‘You need to go to one where you can meet more African American artists and you can meet artists who are a part of the whole genre of the Black experience like you didn’t have the at Indiana University.

As in Kevin’s narrative, I apply the sociocultural construct of fictive kinship to refer to the type of connectedness that is implicit in Kevin’s suggestion to Eleanor. Salient among many African Americans, this bond represents not only social and cultural identities, but also a racialized identity. While Eleanor continued to negotiate her identity as an artist, her identity as African American was also in question. Kevin implied that she should connect with others who might share similar experiences—he suggested she attend an artist residency held at historic Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi.

So I signed up and I talked another artist into going too, and we both decided to go and met and loved and enjoyed working with this dynamic gentleman named Moe Brooker from the Northeast. He, at that time, he was teaching at Moore College of Art and he taught a course in abstract painting. And that whole Tougaloo College experience was absolutely wonderful. Coming from Midwest, I’d never really experienced a Black college—when I’d go on art trips, it would always be going to a larger White college. So, going to Tougaloo College, I would say, ‘They all eat together, and they have soul food for lunch!’ I had so many questions and they’d laugh at me, and I’d have to say, ‘I’ve not experienced this.’ It was wonderful! We went to the President’s house and in it were
pictures of Richard Mayhew’s painting and Jacob Lawrence’s work and Romare Bearden over here and Elizabeth Catlett here, and I just couldn’t believe it! All in this little house! Basically, they have a very phenomenal African American collection. Joe told me to think about really getting serious about my work because, ‘you’ve got a lot of really good things going on and you should follow through and stick with it.’ I got a lot of messages from him.

The fictive kinship construct is effective when an African American achieves. Eleanor discusses working with a notable African American artist and professor describing the experience as wonderful. This construct is equally effective when an African American fails (i.e. images of African American males in prison, for instance). In other words, role models work because of fictive kinship. In asking Eleanor to discuss what it has meant to be an artist who is Black, she responded thoughtfully, revealing how she negotiates her identities as artist/African American:

Well, I can say a couple of things on that. Initially, I would participate in a lot of African American shows, like for example, there’s one in the Midwest called The Black Creativity and it’s at the Museum of Science and Industry. I participated in that a couple of times. And then of course Harlem: The New Power Generation. Kevin has one in Louisville, KY, which is called the Theater of African American Artists and I’ve done that one and I realize that I don’t want to be classified as a Black artist. I want to be classified as an “artist”.

She continues:

My subject matter, when you look at it, you don’t know who I am, however I am Black and I’ve participated in the Hampton show. I was very happy about that and to be with Elizabeth Catlett and Faith Ringgold, oh my gosh…exciting and honored and all of that, but I have to say that I am limiting how many of the Black shows I do now. My mom
asked, “you gonna be in that show? You know you get to come home and all of that.” I said, “Ma, the next time I’m in the museum of Science and Industry, I want to be in an exhibition that is not a Black show, I just want to be in “A” show in the Museum of Science and Industry.

Art Teaching

“I believe that all students should have the opportunity to learn…”

Eleanor Neal, interview, May 9, 2013

One month before school is out for the summer. Students have only shortly returned from spring break and are looking forward to summer vacation. This location is one of the older structures in the county. There are two art teachers that accommodate the school. Course offerings are 2-d design, 3-d design, drawing/painting, printmaking. The demographics of the school is predominantly African American and Hispanic. Eight black top tables surround the room; Eleanor tells me that her average class size is 25-30. Students have ample space to move around although with the present assignment, many stay on task while remaining in their seats. They are making figurative sculptures using aluminum foil.

The art room is overflowing with images representing various aspects of the art world (posters of artist exemplars both historical and contemporary, student art work in the form of paintings). It is the beginning of the day and Eleanor explains to me that her morning classes are working on sculpture projects. Not uncommon in other art classrooms, a variety of activities take place simultaneously—students are at various stages of the process of building figurative sculptures using aluminum foil and plaster strips as well as making sketches of a “set” for their figures. Eleanor aids students in beginning to use plaster strips while giving suggestions for planning how to “finish” their figures using paint. She explains to them the next step in the
process (painting) and begins distributing the paint for those who are ready to begin that process. She explains that she’ll teach them how to make flesh tones (tomorrow) and then on Wednesday they’ll begin making clothing. Students in her afternoon class are working on painting landscapes:

Wash your brushes, have your picture in front of you as a resource. We are building up our sky. You just put a layer on your sky. Build up your layer. Mix on top of what you have. Today it should look more opaque.

Eleanor is very proud of her drawing/painting students, and it transfers to the attitudes they have about their work. Students worked intently on their landscape paintings utilizing the brightest colors they could find. Students were also eager to share with me their previous portrait assignment inspired by the work of Mickelene Thomas. In our second interview, I ask Eleanor her reasons for including Mickelene Thomas in her curriculum as an artist exemplar. She responds:

I think that I showed them Mickalene Thomas’ artwork first of all to get them in engaged. I told them that we were gonna do self-portraits a little different. I looked around and said to them “You guys like fashion…a little bling bling.” I said, “you like color.” And I said, “I’m gonna show you some art work of an African American artist.” And basically my class is predominantly African American and Hispanic and one Caucasian. So…they couldn’t wait to get started and that’s interesting that they took it upon themselves to share that with you. In this project that we did, I had 2 of my Hispanic students to shine…no three…of them to shine like “Oh my gosh” and one of the girls, I put her piece in one of our major art shows…hers can be seen on our school’s website.

I must admit, Mickalene Thomas is one of my favorite contemporary artists, so when I noticed the use of glitter in her students’ self-portraits, I immediately knew they were paying homage to Ms. Mickalene. Her students enthusiastically pulled their artwork off the shelf and
were eager to share their portraits with me. They were beautiful. If the end-product was any indication of their enthusiasm for the project, I would have to say, “job well-done.” With this assignment, Eleanor seemed to be in tune with her student’s cultural needs. Many of her students appear to relate to this “brown” artist exemplar. I am unsure if it is because of her use of glitter or if it is because she is an artist of color. Perhaps it is a combination of the two? I get the sense that it might be the latter, and Eleanor’s next response may just reveal the answer. She discusses with me an incident when engaged in a conversation with a White art teacher. This particular teacher wanted some suggestions on contemporary sculptors she could introduce to her kids:

   I told her, add in Richard Hunt. The teacher said, “I’ve never heard of him before.” And then I said, “you’re doing organic shapes…check him out.” Martin Puryear…look at him……you see, you’ve got African American kids over there…they need to know some African American sculptors. White art teachers don’t think of African American sculptors. Are you kidding me? There are so many out there, but she didn’t know that.

   Reviewing Eleanor’s “spoken” teaching philosophy, she is concerned with students receiving the necessary skills mandated by the state’s performance standards. It is important to her that the students are well-versed in the elements and principles of art. Within this framework, she is thoughtful in the planning of her curriculum and shows a sensitivity toward the varied students (levels of ability and diverse ethnic cultures) in her classroom. She also believes in the importance that her students recognize her as an artist—a measure of credibility acknowledged by many art students and one that I am familiar with.

   As such, during the Spring of 2013, Eleanor invited me to come an annual event that she involves her students in. The event is called “The Big Print” and is sponsored by the Atlanta Printmakers Studio and is also a way for her to immerse her students in her world as an artist, as she has a studio space located in the area. Each year, Eleanor prepares a group of her
printmaking students, by having them work on an original design; this year’s theme? Georgia Forklore, and specifically the short story by Flannery O’Connor, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. Students used etching inks, relief block carving tools, and the computer as a resource. Prior to making and carving the image on linoleum, students listened to the story on tape narrated by various artists. The overall size of the linoleum block was 8ft x 4ft, which was divided into 4 parts. The finished design was printed on canvas as one block print. Hence, the name “big print.”

In meeting her students that day, I could feel their enthusiasm and tell that they share a great fondness and respect for her. Reminding me of my former past, I could not help myself and lent a hand when I noticed one was needed. As I understood it, the goal of this event reflected the mission of the Atlanta Printmakers Studio – to support and celebrate the vitality of printmaking and to educate the community about this image-making medium. The theme for their 2013 event was creativity and collaboration. An event free and open to the public, many turned out that spring afternoon to enjoy the music, great weather and of course, to watch a steamroller be used to make the finished prints!

**Racializing Experiences as an Adult**

Asking Eleanor pointedly about her racial status as an artist who happens to be Black, she recalls for me early experiences of participating in art shows dedicated to African American artists. She very clearly states:

> It’s almost like “ok, this is the time of year, you Black people can come to the museum…hurry up and come. Ok, now that’s over, we can have other shows.” You know, been there, done that, don’t think so. I would do Hampton, but I don’t I don’t get excited anymore about Black shows. I have an uncle who basically grew up in Boston and he told me a long time ago. He said, “you are an artist who’s not…” Wait, he said “you’re an artist who happens to be Black…you’re not to promote yourself as a Black artist.” And at the time I was like, “hmmm!” Now, I understand what that means, but
sometimes I get a little angry about Richard Mayhew because I think his work is so absolutely beautiful for all cultures and all people to understand, and absorb, and admire, but I notice that I only see him with Black galleries and I don’t understand. I really don’t. And I don’t want to limit myself. I just don’t.

Eleanor’s uncle makes it clear—while implicit—that in order to succeed in the art world, she must, in a sense, shed her “Black” identity. It is an interesting discovery, as the other two participants, who happen to be male, do not exhibit a desire to distance themselves from shows devoted toward participation by Black artists. This “action,” reveals a conscious shedding of a racial marker in order to be seriously considered in the established art world, which problematizes the need for an Afrocentric perspective. In my prior reviews of the literature detailing the art-making actions of American Black artists, I was able to delineate three categories as impetus for the creation of art: 1) assimilation 2) self-determination and 3) resistance (more on this in Chapter IX). I pull from this discovery to interpret that Eleanor has been able to solidify her position in the art world through a means of assimilation. Her decision to make art that does not strictly reflect a “Black” aesthetic (i.e. she creates landscapes versus making images of Black subjects) reveals a distancing from an Afrocentric perspective.

Additionally, she also makes reference to Richard Mayhew, Black male artist with whom she recently exhibited her work alongside. My musings at this point turn toward the fact that Eleanor is an artist who also happens to be a Black woman.

**Response to Declines in Arts Participation**

I wanted to give each participant the opportunity to comment on the recent statistics indicating the steady declines in arts participation. Eleanor had ideas of her own why the declines are occurring:
If the art teacher is not participating, then the art student is not going to participate. It trinkles down to the students, and these are art teachers who are saying, “I’m not willing to be a part of this,” so as one teacher said, “I’ve never been there, but I need to go so I can tell my students about it so they’ll go.” You know, so it just trickles down to the students. The organization that night was primarily Caucasian, but a lot of them teach our students. They’re the ones teaching our students. So, in order for the students to feel it’s a safe place to go, “That’s a place I can go to learn about artists.” And for that to happen, I think the art teacher needs to cross that threshold in order for that to happen. If the art teacher doesn’t get excited about it…doesn’t talk about it, then it trickles down to the student, and it effects our students because these are the teachers that are teaching our kids. Our Hispanics and African Americans…you’ve really gotta…to me do a little extra more work. You gotta make them feel comfortable that we can do this. They gotta talk to mom and dad because they don’t have the transportation like we do.

Eleanor makes several references to a perceived salience of racialized identity (both students and other art teachers) as it relates to student participation in arts-related activities. The racial interactions between teachers and students could influence student participation in several ways. For example, pupils may trust and respect someone with whom they share a salient characteristic, making participation come more easily. Likewise, a teacher of the same race may serve as a more effective role model, boosting students’ confidence and enthusiasm for learning. However, while such role-model effects are widely believed to be important, there is actually little direct empirical evidence that they exist (Dee, 2004). There may also be (largely unintended) racial biases in teachers’ behavior. In particular, minority teachers may be more generous with minority students, devoting more time to them and making more favorable assumptions about their capabilities. Eleanor’s own positive educational experience with her elementary art teacher speaks to the contrary. In this case, much can be learned from those who
possess an empathetic openness a willingness to see the potential of every child/student and, in Eleanor’s words, “to do a little extra work.”
“I was born with a much greater purpose. I try to use my art to raise the conscious level of people and do it in a positive light. When I retire I want to still have some input with young people, young artists, but it means more to me that they understand what’s at stake here. Like Miles I'm not afraid to trust my instincts, step out on the ledge and take that leap into the unknown.

Ron Young, 2012
For my final participant, Ronald Young, I chose to use his upcoming retirement to ground the beginning and ending of his story highlighting themes along the way that I found to shape his identity as an artist. His choice of portrait and statement reflect a life lived with intention and self-determination. I was able to spend two full days visiting with him in his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri. The breadth of the following story is a reflection of that extended time.

Ron Young’s energy level matches that of a youthful boy. At age 57, he keeps a whirlwind schedule that makes one wonder how he maintains such a constant high level of energy. A public school art teacher of 33 years—Ron retired at the completion of this past school year (2013)—Ron is now actively making art and pursuing his career as an artist. Our interview gave him the opportunity to reflect on a life lived fully, and he had much to say. I met Ron in 2007 while on a trip in Japan. He was among other American teachers who were awarded the funding to travel to Tokyo in order to learn about the culture of their K-12 educational system. Although Ron and I had limited interaction on that trip, we managed to loosely stay in touch through another American teacher, Daniel Zarazua whom we connected with while on the trip.

When beginning this research project, I aimed to find African American K-12 art teachers who had been teaching art for at least 10 years and who were also actively practicing artists. Because of recent statistics (Rabkin, N. & Hedberg, E.C., 2011) indicating a decline in arts participation among African American adults, I was interested in what I might find through in-depth life history study of those African Americans who I consider “full participators” in the (visual) art world. I spent my time talking with others about my work in hopes of finding teachers who exhibited these qualities; little did I know, there would be a suitable and willing candidate from my past. I knew that Ron was a full-time middle school art teacher, yet I was pleasantly surprised to find that he was simultaneously orchestrating one-man shows of his
artwork. Through social media and reconnecting with Daniel Zarazua, I discovered that Ron would be a prime candidate for my study.

When I emailed him an introductory explanation of my research, an uncommon hurried, yet kind reply via telephone went something like, “Ok, I’m on board, what do you need me to do?” With an unexpected funding opportunity, I was able to fly out to visit Ron in his Midwest hometown of St. Louis for an interview and observation in his studio and classroom. My visit took place in December of 2012, and the plan was to spend two days immersed in his working environments.

I arrived late in the day on a Monday, spoke with Ron and made plans to see him after school the very next day. The location of my hotel was on his way home from school, and he stopped by to pick me up so that I could interview him in his art studio. Seeing him, I was reminded of the excitement we experienced while in Japan, and it was as if very little time had transpired. Dressed in baggy jeans, a long sleeved t-shirt, a winter vest jacket, skullcap and work boots, Ron looks much younger than his years and also comfortably prepared to continue on to the second half of his day.

I was happy to accompany him on a quest I was all too familiar with—going to the art supply store. Although his day of teaching was officially over, Ron was on a mission to purchase some art supplies for a portrait project his students had been working on. With a limited school budget, he was using his personal funds to make the purchase. We rode to two local art supply stores to find just the right blending stumps needed for the task. Happy to help out by providing my own student ID for a discount on his purchase—as the store did not offer teachers a discount—we left with the supplies that Ron’s students would need for the following day. Ron then insisted taking me to a historically well-known Black-owned, restaurant in the area to grab a
quick bite of Southern cooking delights. On the way over, Ron gave me a brief history of the area where he grew up. Intentionally, Ron drove me in the direction of the city where there is a marked division between the “haves” and “have-nots” and memories of a childhood marked by gentrification.

Once we arrive at his home, he immediately steered me in the direction of his basement studio. As I enter the space, I am greeted by a large sculpture, which I soon realize is a racecar track Ron has built. Taking up one-third of the room and what seems like long hours of labor-intensive work, I notice a boyish playfulness in his eyes as he describes his passion for all things racing. During his interview, he reveals how drawing racecars in art class created a space of community along with other art students whose interests were the same. He also discusses the instrumental role model who launched his realization that his talent was “something special.” Launching into detail of the time spent building such a structure, he takes me on a tour of his studio, outfitted with model race cars mixed in with inspirational quotes and what appeared to be an inspiration board filled with photos and drawings among other documents.

As I look around, I am surrounded by paintings influenced by his early career in commercial art—painting billboards. A father of two children—both who are beyond high school—Ron humbly reveals that keeping such a busy schedule deeply affected the relationship he had with his former wife and mother of his children. Inspired by his life experiences, his artwork acts as a driving force to propel him in a positive direction, especially now that retirement from teaching is on the horizon. Ron’s capacity for a “determined” spirit accompanied by a resilience marks what has come to reflect a life of agency.
K-12 Experiences

When parents pressed for an end to legalized segregation in the years leading up to the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, it was not the companionship of White students they were seeking for their own children—it was equal access to high quality educational resources. What they and the legal system could not predict was that given the ruling that race separation be considered unequal and, therefore, unconstitutional, the landscape of educational environments would not look vastly different a half century later. Somewhere along the way, the original dream of the African American parent of the 1950’s—that their children have access to schools with better facilities, equipment, and a curriculum with more options—may have been blurred.

Ron’s K-12 educational experiences took place in his mid-west hometown, and his discussion reveals a segregated school system in the early 70’s. During the interview, Ron highlights a common contemporary phenomenon of a segregated school system (Caldas and Bankston, 2005). Despite the legal strategies put forth in Brown v. Board of Education, many of our nation’s schools remain segregated environments, where schools inhabited by children of color are the poorest (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The common narrative created at the time of the Brown ruling was that somehow, the “educative” (Dewey, 1938) experiences happening in these environments was necessarily inferior therefore the solution was to remove children from their familiar communities and transport them into communities unfamiliar. Ron notes:

I grew up in an area…lived in the city…I didn’t really ever think of this until later on in my life, but I basically went to all-Black schools my entire…elementary, high school…for example, when someone says they’re from [the area], somewhere in that conversation that person who they’re talking to is gonna ask them “where did you go to high school?” or “where did you go to school at?” That’s a way of finding out the demographics…the social…it’s a WHOLE list of things that aren’t being said that go into that conversation. Cause as soon as that person says “well, I went to this high school or that high school,
you automatically know something about that person. If they went to [my high school] or any of the other Black high schools you immediately knew, and if they tell you what year that they went, you know that they know certain people. On the other hand, if they say they went to a prep school...if they say they went to any of the…if they went to some of these more prestigious schools then you know that their family had some means. You know, usually that meant that their family had money.

Discussing his pride of being a product of an inner-city school system, he mentions the teachers’ vested interest in the community as an impactful experience in his education. Considered an urban environment, the teachers working in Ron’s school reflect the data from the most current National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) report—that minority teachers are overwhelmingly employed in public schools serving high-minority and urban communities (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Ron remembers:

At that time that I went to school in the inner-city school district, we had teachers that really cared about us. The biggest difference is that they had a vested interest in the community because they were FROM the community. My teachers were part of the community. My teachers went to my church. My teachers lived in my neighborhood. My teachers grew up and knew my parents. We no longer have that. We no longer have that. Especially…not only in our community, but…you know, you have very few communities now where you have people who are …especially when you start talking about an urban environment, people are transient and moving around a lot.

In his book, \textit{Troubling the Waters: Fulfilling the Promise of Quality Public Schooling for Black Children}, Jerome Morris (2009) highlights the concept of “communally-bonded” schools in the success of educating African American children. His study of how two schools—one Midwestern and another, Southeastern—defy stereotypical portrayals in the media about urban and
contemporary predominantly African American schools. Ron brings up an interesting point—the possibility that there are fewer teachers who return to the communities where they were educated, in order to teach.

I can attest to the advice I give as a supervisor to pre-service teachers that they should not limit themselves to their immediate geographic area, when considering where to teach. I give this advice, however, only that they might better their chances of finding a full-time job teaching art—the very discipline they have been trained to teach. With on-going budget cuts, I have known many art teachers whose roles within a school double with that of librarian or reading coach, for example, in order to "save" their art position. Giving context to this narrative, I must acknowledge that at present, most of my pre-service teachers have been White.

The impact of transiency, when looking at these statistics, might be greatest in communities of color (i.e. if teachers of color are leaving their own communities to teach elsewhere). As stated earlier, recent NCES data reveal that minority teachers are overwhelmingly employed in public schools serving high-minority and urban communities (Ingersoll & May, 2011) which may reveal that teachers of color still feel a sense of obligation to their communities.

Aesthetic Experiences: “I say it loud, I’m Black and I’m proud”

Ron recalls being a child who grew up around a family who displayed strong values for the musical arts. His discussion of a racial pride imbued his memory and how he came to realize the impact this aesthetic had on his current art-making practices. This music aesthetic, coinciding with a groundswell of racial consciousness in the United States beginning around 1967 (Harris, 2003), reveals a political activism of African Americans during the late 1960’s and into the 70’s, which encouraged Black Americans to immerse themselves in reinvented personas—a resistance
to previous stereotypes—taking the notion of “reconstructing” an identity in new directions. The work of many visual artists of this time acted as a visual response to modernity’s distortions and erasures of black people (Powell, 2008). At this historical juncture, the catchphrase was “Black is beautiful,” and the figures in Ron’s current paintings represent notions of a self-determination and racial pride, imbuing Black people in the philosophical premise of their social, political, and economic realities:

I am a product of the 60’s. I can remember Hendrix. I can remember Sly Stone. I can remember James Brown. I can remember Coltrane. I can remember Miles. I can remember all these music…this music. I had an uncle who was a jazz musician, but he was actually a cousin but you know, because he was older I called him my uncle named Bernard…that was his name, Bernard Hutchison. Bernard and his wife Elizabeth, and I can remember growing up, going out to their house, and they lived in a Black community—which is no longer there—not very far from where you were, at the airport, and I…and we would go over to their house and I can remember they always had music…jazz music playing, and I didn’t know the names of the musicians at that time. Like I said, it was Miles, it was Coltrane, it was Horace Silver, but I knew that the music…it spoke to me. It really did, and I can remember seeing Bernard, was an artist so to speak, and I can remember he had art work around and stuff you know and how I could just sit there for hours and look at this stuff just…it made a serious serious serious impact on me. I think largely the reason…I know my musical taste as far as Jazz is concerned definitely came from that. But I think to a larger degree too…or to a lesser degree, my aesthetics as far as the arts are concerned came from them, you know?

Sharing the complex realities and experiences of being a person of African descent in America, Ron reveals being both excited and confused by the experiences he has throughout his life. Beginning in early childhood:

I can remember as a young person 12, 13, 14 years old trying to decide, “do I want to be a Black Panther or do I want to be Hendrix?” and that whole dichotomy…that whole
thing of racial…of having racial pride, but also feeling like I….it was kind of…it was exciting and confusing at the same time. The Panthers scared me, but it was the type of thing where I respected what they were saying, and I was proud of the fact that they were proud of being Black. Because before that point, I had never heard anything like that. I can remember Ali…how outspoken he was and how that made me feel. Ali was my hero, and to this day is still my hero. I don’t have many heroes, but he was a person I really really admired and looked up to. I remember one time hearing Malcolm X, but I didn’t know who he was. I remember hearing him say some things, and I didn’t really understand who he was, and the next thing I know he was gone. But I do definitely remember Ali…I remember James Brown’s “I say it loud, I’m Black and I’m proud.” All those things made an impact on me, but I also remember Hendrix, Sly, you know, and how they…how the music just appealed to me. So that made a real impact on me…it made a real, real, real impact on me. And I can remember feeling like I was glad that there were other people that shared that with me. I got all that. Got all of that you know? And it was an exciting time.

Revealing how exciting it was to be Black at that time, he also discusses the complexity of the confusion he felt due to the racial tensions more apparent in other parts of the country. He continues, recalling racialized events that occurred in the southern United States:

I can also remember around that same time…I remember when the bombing happened in Birmingham, at the church, and I remember going to my church and feeling terrified. And I couldn’t understand…[his voice raises several octaves] how do you go to a church and bomb a church and kill some kids? And I remember Bill Cosby was on…he hosted the Tonight Show ‘cause he used to be the guest host on the Tonight Show, and I remember him speaking out about that, and I gained a lot of respect…I always liked Bill Cosby, but I remember him…you know, he said what he said and once again, at that time, for a Black person…a Black man to come out and say something about that…I remember as a kid how I felt! You know, you go to a church and bomb a church to kill
some kids!? What kind of people are these? But…but…the White folks that I knew weren’t like that, so I had a good…I’m glad I came up the way I came up because I learned at a very early age that everybody is not like that…EVERYBODY [voice gets louder] is not like that…everybody don’t hate because the color of your skin…everybody doesn’t feel like you know, that I have to be at odds with you. Everybody’s not like that. So I really go out of my way to judge people as an individual. I refuse to make blanket statements about any group of people. I don’t care what color they are…what their racial orientation…what their sexual orientation is or anything like that. ‘Cause I learned at a very early age, everybody’s an individual. Pick your friend…what’s that saying? Pick your friends by the content of their heart and your socks by their color? I’m probably saying that wrong, but you get the jest of what I’m saying?

A Burgeoning Artist

Ron recalls for me for me the time when he believes his interest in art began, remembering the attention given to him by his high school teacher who recognized his talent and interest in drawing cars. Her guidance was instrumental in giving him direction to become an artist by recommending him to the honors art program at his high school. He then remembers being a part of a group of students who enjoyed drawing cars, which explains his fascination with racecars:

My junior year in high school was the first art class I took in high school, and my teacher…I used to remember her name. Gosh, I can’t think of her name… she took a special interest in me and she liked me, and I liked her. She was young and really nice-looking. She recommended me for honors program, and at that point it said something to me. That somebody sees something in me and recommended me for this program, and I thought…you know how as a young person you tend to take some things for granted. A voice said something to me that this is something that you might be able to do…you have some talent…you have some skills. ‘Cause people, you know…if you hear it from your friends and family it’s one thing, but if you hear it from somebody outside that it tends to
carry more weight, and so when she said that…it kind of struck home. So…at the same time there were other thing…a lot of things were steering in that direction anyway. This was just the icing on the cake. There were a group of us…us meaning a group of guys…we kind of had our own little art group and we all drew…matter-of-fact we all drew cars…that’s so interesting…we all drew cars! And you know, I wasn’t the best, but I wasn’t the worst. I was kind of in the middle. I can remember drawing all of these hot rods, and the fact that we collectively bonded, it helped all of our skill level and so when I got recommended for the honors program I was like “aw man!”

Ron was able to begin to solidify an artistic identity through communal bonding with others in an honors art program who shared similar interests. While his discussion excludes details of any racial markers among this group of high school students, Ron begins to discuss the concept of race as it relates to his experiences thereafter—specifically his entre into community college experience.

**Education: Racializing Experiences**

According to psychologist Beverly Tatum (1997), people of color become racially-conscious at a very early age. Many African-Americans have race-related memories dating back as early as age three. Whether they be stories of wonderment, as when a lighter-skinned child wonders why a darker-skinned person’s soles are so much lighter than the tops of their feet; others are narratives of active bigotry, imparted casually from one generation to the next through the use of racial slurs and ethnic jokes. Here Ron reveals a racial-sensitivity about an all too common situation that students and professionals of color find themselves in—being the lone person of color among a group of White people. Continuing, Ron discusses his experiences as a college student, he notes:
So anyway after I graduated, I did a year here at the community college and I remember the first month…the first 2 weeks of class…I was the only Black person in a lot of my classes and I can remember…I can remember not really even looking around. I can remember just you know…just doing this (demonstrates “working-with-head-down” posture) ‘cause I was kinda nervous, maybe thought I was questioning my ability as opposed to those who were around me. After about the 4\textsuperscript{th} week when I started kinda looking around and looking at people’s work and I was like “aw hell, they ain’t got shit on me!”

Any self-doubt Ron might have had initially, disappeared after time. Had I probed further, I would have asked for deeper discussion about this experience. Based on the details given, I would say that any initial discomfort Ron felt being the only Black student in the class melted away after recognizing his strength as an artist, and deciding to do something about it—a characteristic of agency and self-determination. Further, Ron experienced a dilemma when attempting to decide a four-year college to attend. Having sights set on a larger Northern school widely known for its arts programming, on the suggestion of a high school friend, he decides to attend an HBCU (historically Black college) in the Southeast U.S., which had an art education program. Describing a “culture shock” of sorts when moving from the Midwest to the southeast for college, Ron was not prepared for the level of community he felt being connected to other African Americans.

These feelings are consistent with qualitative data suggesting a number of benefits of attending an HBCU, including not being a “minority” within a dominant ethnic group and an increased feeling of belonging and pride (Freeman, 2005; Nora, 2004; Suggs, 1997b; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005; Willie, 2003). HBCU’s also offer students greater exposure to Black academic role models with whom they can identify, and therefore offer
increased student/faculty interactions among African Americans than predominantly White institutions (PWI’s), both factors which are important to Black students academic self-concepts; a topic that has received extensive attention (Berger & Milem, 2000; Cokley, 2000, 2001, 2002; Osborne, 1999). Additional studies reveal the impact of attending an HBCU as instilling a sense of racial pride among African American students (Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, & Clarke, 2009). Ron notes:

But anyway, being [at] a Black college, that was an eye-opening experience too. Being a historically Black college…historically Black University. I really didn’t know a lot about Black colleges…I didn’t know anything about any of those schools and so that was an eye-opening experience. I also didn’t know anything about Greek [fraternal] organizations. I didn’t know anything about any of that so that was something that really was good for me. I think that you get…I think that you get something as a Black person…you get something…as sense of purpose…out of going to a historically Black college that you just don’t get if you don’t go. You get a sense of purpose and direction that you just don’t get…nothing against any of those other institutions. But there’s a sense of purpose and direction that you get, and what’s interesting is, is that when I talked my friends who went to White Universities and they talk about, like, homecoming, and how when they go to homecoming, they bond together with their Black friends or with their friends and stuff, whereas when I go to my homecoming, it’s like chocolate city!

**A Social Justice Actor**

Choosing a career path in art education allowed Ron the ability to support himself financially while continuing to practice his art. Ron’s teaching philosophy follows a legacy of teachers who sacrifice their time and energy to make an impact in their student’s lives beyond following a set of standards handed down from an administration. The literature on social justice indicates that despite some of the current confusion and tensions, there is a long history in the
United States of educators who foreground social justice issues in their work and who argue passionately for their centrality to schooling in a democratic society (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). We see this in a variety of places, for example in Dewey’s (1938) work on grounding education in a rich and participatory vision of democracy, and in the work of critical pedagogues and multicultural scholars to create educational environments that empower historically marginalized people (Kozol, 1991), that challenge inequitable social arrangements and institutions, and that offer strategies and visions for creating a more just world. According to Bell (2007), social justice involves “social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live” (p. 2).

Ron recalls:

I remember wanting to make a difference. I remember that I wasn’t just there to collect a paycheck. I really wanted to make a difference. I wanted the kids to know that I cared. I wanted the kids to feel like they were capable of doing. I remember having kids that were really good and that could draw. I remember one day…this was towards the end of the school year at the last school I was at. We were out in the yard. The kids were playing…and out the clear blue sky, one of the little girls looked me square in the face and said “Mr. Young, you’re leaving.” And boy, it took all of my…I looked at her. I can’t remember my response, but I dodged the question ‘cause I could not lie to her to her face. And when she asked me, all of them was lookin’ at me, like, “you’re gonna leave us” and that hurt me…that hurt me because I WAS leaving and it wasn’t about them…it wasn’t them, but it was you know…I knew then that this was more than just a job. You get attached to the kids.

A social justice theme emerged as I was reviewing his interview transcript. There appears to be an intersection between his philosophy of teaching and the means in which he creates
works of art. There is no doubt that his strong sense of obligation to his students and he reveals the conflict he felt about “leaving” his students in order to take another teaching job. This sense of obligation to his community (African American) is obvious, also in the messages that he creates through his artwork. Here, he discusses what it means to be an artist briefly referring also to a traumatic experience, which impacted him emotionally once arriving to the South for college.

I try to use my art to raise the conscious level of people around me and do it in a positive light. I think that for me, it’s a way to draw people’s attention to things that I’m concerned about and I try to do it in a positive light. I may have at some point been angry and have said some things in my artwork out of anger or did some things in my artwork out of anger, but I always try to bear in mind that anything I said or did in my artwork, I still tried to maintain an aesthetics and a creativity because to me that’s what makes the arts “the arts” (makes air quotes with hands). I’ve never been one of those people that felt like it was, you know… it was [for] the shock value. My whole educational philosophy as far as art is concerned is the creative process. The creative process is being able to take an idea from the mind to a finished product and what steps do you take to do that. That’s my whole educational philosophy.

Asking Ron to elaborate on the “anger” he mentions during this part of the interview, he reveals:

When I was in the South, I… coming from the mid-west I knew about racism, but when I moved to the South, I experienced a whole level of racism that I had never experienced before, and I remember coming back here (home) and telling one of my White friends…I said I couldn’t stand them White folks down there, and I remember him looking at me, and I was like… you know… I couldn’t because I had never experienced anything like that. It’s a whole different level of racism. And it made me…it just opened my eyes to stuff I had never experienced before…I can remember, if I never went to the South I would always feel like, you know, that…”how could you be scared of the Ku Klux Klan?
How could you be scared of those groups?’ But when I went and I lived down there and I saw how the impact that they had…they way that they operated and how they ruled through fear…I understood it. And when I left in 1980… I had never experienced anything like that. And so when I left in 1980, I knew I was ready to go ‘cause…it had just…it left a bad taste in my mouth. I never grew up disliking folks…it was because of who you were, not the color of your skin, but I saw some things that when I was down there I was like…whoa…whoa…whoa, this is a whole different set of circumstances here.

It is not uncommon to hear stories of trauma among African Americans who lived in the South during this period in American history when acts of racial injustice were prevalent. My own father was born and raised in the South, and I grew up hearing the stories of violent acts against African Americans through the use fire hoses and dogs, in addition to stories of segregated bathrooms, water fountains and seats on public transportation. My own reality, although quite different, seems not far disconnected from that of my father’s. Physical, mental and emotional acts of violence against African Americans have historically been told through spoken and written narratives and can also be found represented in fine art and popular culture (Harris, 2003).

**Art Teaching**

While Ron experienced the unfortunate experiences associated with racism while in the South, interestingly, his exodus after graduation had less to do with these experiences and more to do with the necessity of finding work. This requisite finds him back home in St. Louis, where he immediately finds his first art teaching position in the very school district that once nurtured him as a child. Here, he discusses the realization of a limited budget but the joys of working with one very special teacher:
When I first graduated and I came back to teach and I taught in [my old school system], it was interesting that I worked side-by-side with some of the people who had been my teachers! This [guy] being one of them! (pointing to a Facebook page)… and that was….that was…that was special. That was special that I...you know, here’s someone that was my teacher…my educator who was an adult that I looked up to, and here I worked alongside of them. You know…so that had a lot of meaning to me and I…I’m glad that I had an opportunity to do that. I learned how to teach based on the fact that I had good teachers….I learned how to make do with very little. You know, I think at one point my budget was $200. A year. I remember wanting to make a difference. I remember that I wasn’t just there to collect a paycheck. I really wanted to make a difference. I wanted the kids to know that I cared. I wanted the kids to feel like they were capable of doing.

Art teachers may find inspiration for their work through personal experiences, and Ron is no exception. In the two days I spent in Ron’s world, I began to find connections between his personal life experiences, his art and his teaching pedagogy. To this extent, a topic of concern in the field of art education is how art teachers make sense of their dual identities: artist/art teacher (Adams, 2007; Hatfield, Montana, & Deffenbaugh, 2006; Robinson-Cseke, 2007; Shreeve, 2009; Thornton, 2011; Zwirn, 2006).

Many art teachers agree that their primary responsibility is to educate students (Shreeve, 2009) rather than promote themselves as artists, yet others report that maintaining the artist identity is important (Hatfield, Montana, & Deffenbaugh, 2006). To this extent, there are a variety of “paths” one might take in order to become an art teacher. The most common path would be to receive a degree in art education, whereby a student would ideally take classes in both studio art and education methods. Additional pathways include receiving a degree with training in studio arts (i.e. painting, photography, ceramics, textiles, etc…) with certification in teaching. Each college degree program is structured differently where students receive varying
degrees in the quality of instruction in both areas of education and studio training. Earlier in our
talk, Ron reveals that he received his most instrumental training only after graduating and
moving back home.

**Social Bonds and Informal Learning**

Majoring in art education while in college, he was able to immerse himself in studio art
and education classes, yet reveals that much of his artistic preparation happened informally as he
began to paint billboards under the guidance of a former high school classmate. He moved back
to St. Louis, where he began to teach art at a local middle school. While driving home from
work, he would pass by workers covered in paint, and finally one day had the courage to stop
and strike up conversation with them. He remembers:

> It was only after I graduated that I really began to more or less hone my skills as an artist
so to speak and really began to see what I wanted to do as an artist, which was paint and
do mixed media and murals. I had always done murals, but I really began to more or less
kind of hone my skills…I met these billboard artists and suddenly realized that my
knowledge of the…of the…of graphics…working large and all these things were self-
taught things and then I met these guys who only one of them had a degree. All of these
guys were basically self-taught and I learned more from them than any class that I had
ever been in since…up until that point and since. There was nothing that came even close
to comparing. It was like a hands-on uh…like a um…a hands-on crash course in what it
takes to uh create large-format large-scale work. And nothing that I’ve done since even
comes close. I’ve gained so much knowledge and information from them so that was
really a key turning point in my career both as an educator and as an artist.

Although explicit writings about informal learning did not emerge until the 1980s,
characteristics of informal learning can be traced back to the early writings of Dewey (1938) and
Knowles (1970) who suggested that adult learners become aware of their learning experiences
through self-direction. Writings by Marsick and Volpe (1999) and Bell and Dale (1999) considered the relationship between the learner and the environment and acknowledged that much of the learning occurring in the workplace took place through interaction with others. Considering his experience learning how to paint billboards as a pivotal moment in his development as an artist gives a direction for recognizing the social significance of learning from other people and has a greater scope for individual agency. Ron indicates that “planning” is the key element to painting on such a large scale and has appropriated his teaching philosophy based on this in way of thinking. In addition, he structures his curriculum based on this basic concept.

A Teaching Philosophy

At its core, a teaching philosophy statement (sometimes simply called a teaching statement) is a brief, personal statement that offers insight into an instructor’s beliefs about teaching and actions in the classroom. In essence, it is the “why, what, and how” of one’s teaching. It is often included as part of a more comprehensive teaching portfolio, but can also stand alone as a singular document. More specifically, Nancy Chism (1998) writes, “What brings a teaching philosophy to life is the extent to which it creates a vivid portrait of how a person is intentional about teaching practices and committed to career” (p. 2). Often, pre-service teachers are asked to create a teaching philosophy as a requirement in a teaching methods class. Because it had been many years since Ron first began teaching, I didn’t ask him to provide me with a documented teaching philosophy, rather he simply volunteered to discuss his philosophy with me. His discussion reveals a philosophy in pragmatism. He decides that it is important to teach students how to apply knowledge of design that begins with planning, and then applying it in a practical way that falls in line with an interdisciplinary approach:
Over time I began to formulate this concept of teaching bridging the gap between what my kids learned in their core classes…about measurements…about spatial relationships. That’s a hard one…measurements and spatial stuff…about planning…about actually taking and having a plan. So, what you saw in my classroom today with the 7th grade assignment, you actually saw where I have…I taught them about measurement. I taught them about balance…symmetrical versus asymmetrical balance. I taught them about how to create a freestanding object. But all these are things these are terms that they’ve heard in their regular core classes, and I try to incorporate that into my art curriculum and bring it to them in such a way that they can actually see a finished product as opposed to it being abstract. So, my curriculum goes with teaching them things that they can apply. Actually being able to see a product in their hands that they can apply and use these steps that allows them to think through the whole creative process.

Part of the success of his instruction is Ron’s use of a culturally-relevant pedagogy which involves linking students’ “home” culture with the culture of education (Ladson-Billings, 1995). I would suggest that it also be inclusive of students’ daily culture—I refer to this as “popular” culture. In this way, Ron makes a personal connection with his students, which creates an atmosphere in his classroom of active participation—students want to come to class, and they are excited to work.

Spending a day with Ron in his classroom, I was able to witness this philosophy in action. A beautiful example of this occurs in his current sixth grade students project. Students investigate figurative proportion through fashion design and illustration, ultimately creating a line of clothing using a paper and a collage technique. Finished projects include a figure, drawn in correct proportion, complete with clothing representing each season of the year. To this, Ron answers the age-old question (many of my own first-year high school art students ask this, as well): “Why do I have to take art, anyway?”
Self-determination and Agency: One Man, One Show, One Night

Bandura (2001) states, “the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life is the essence of humanness” (p.1). To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions. The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times (Bandura, 200; Bruner, 1996).

Responding to a question I asked about a challenging experience as an artist, Ron discusses a turning point in his career as an artist—to create an opportunity for himself rather than wait for an invitation to exhibit his work in an “exclusive” gallery. Ron recalls:

I was tired of waiting for a big break for a solo exhibition with an exclusive gallery, I decided I would rent a space and have my own. One man…one show…one night. I decided to do my own solo show. I put it together and it came about as a result of me running around trying to get my work into some galleries, not realizing “who are you to come into our gallery trying to get a solo exhibition? We don’t know you…we don’t know you from a man on the moon…” But I felt like my work was good enough and I took the gamble. I literally stepped out looked over the edge and stepped out there. That’s what you have to do…that’s what you have to do. You cannot be afraid of failure. I’ll take calculated risks. I’ll do my research…I’ll figure out what it is that I need to to…I’ll contact people that I need to contact. I think that it’s important that you come across as intelligent. That you come across that you’re able to articulate what it is that you’re trying to do. That people are confident in you based on the confidence that you display. If you can convince people that you know what you’re talking about, they’ll take a chance with you.

Ron gives an explicit description of the type of work he creates and the reasons for creating artwork that depicts specific subject matter, noting that he must reconcile the dilemma of either using assimilation approaches—used by some Black artists and adopted as a means for solidifying a position within the artistic elite—or creating artwork expressing a self-deterministic
approach in his work. The latter practice allowed artists to imbue their Black subjects with what Powell (2002) describes as a more “truthful humanity” (p. 26). These artists, like Ron, tend to depict scenes of Black life as an affectionate acknowledgement of a Black consciousness and pride.

Well…you know, I guess I could put it best that when I paint and when I create my work, a person looks at my work and they can tell that there are Black images in my work. For me that’s special. However, I also realize too that as a Black artist, I bring a perspective that is my life experiences to my work. All Black artists don’t do that. Some artists they want to paint and they create and they don’t care about saying something that is a voice for the Black community or images that are uniquely Black or anything like that. I respect that. For me, it’s about being able to show things that Black people can look at and say: “Those are Black faces. Those are Black images.” It’s kind of a two-edged sword because it can close some doors…it can close some doors, you know? If I were doing landscapes and flowers and abstract, my stuff would be HOT because that’s what I end up seeing. So I stopped submitting my work to some of these competitions. I’ve stopped.

Locating myself to my students: “I am an artist”

Ron discusses with me an important art experience he brings to his students by explaining an annual silent auction he takes part in. This event is sponsored by a St. Louis art gallery and offers a show of live “performance” by local visual artists. Patrons are allowed to make bids on the artwork while artists are engaged in the creative process. Important in solidifying his artist identity to his students is making them aware of his dedicated practice:

I tell them about the silent auction experience, which is the live art experience that I do and matter of fact I had a student come last year. When I went down South…when I had
the show down South back in October, I shared that with them. I told them exactly what I had been working on. I let them know when I leave here I’ll be going home and getting in my studio to paint and how disciplined I have to be in order to get this stuff done. I often bring in work. I’ve brought in [artwork] that I’ve shown.

As a former art teacher, I know the importance of gaining the trust of your students by showing them your credibility as an artist. From my personal experience, many students initially have little understanding of the diverse role of artists in society, therefore they have doubts about a teacher’s ability to “teach” them art. When you bring your students directly into your world as an artist, you are validating your identity—both to them and to yourself.

**Concerns for the Future: Declines in Arts Participation**

At the close of our interview, Ron voluntarily adds to the discussion by bringing up a concern related to my own interests: the decline in arts participation among African Americans. Based on current studies (Rabkin, N. & Hedberg, E.C., 2011), arts participation—both in attendance and in creation—has declined most significantly over the last quarter century. As someone who has taught art for over 30 years, I felt Ron would be a perfect candidate to respond to these concerns. His response is revealing:

I’m trying to figure out at what point did my Black students lose interest in the arts, and I think it happened around the time that the media said that it’s more important for you to be cool and to look like you know somebody in the music video…I’m not pointing the finger at that, but it had a big part of it. At the same time, it became more important for me to push a button than it was for me to try to figure out how to make things work and how to put things together. Now, this happened to young people as a whole but it really alienated a lot of our Black kids because they got the impression that all I have to do is show up and everything’s gone happen. ‘Cause that’s how it happened to this person they see on tv…they just showed up and stuff just started happening. They started making a whole lot of money. They got cars…they got jewelry. They didn’t have to do
nothing…so…and I’m trying to figure out when that happened and then how to change that because I used to have kids that wanted to learn how to do certain thing…that took on the challenge of drawing. I don’t see that anymore…I see it in smaller and smaller numbers of our kids. Whereas I used to see a lot of creativity and a lot of desire to do stuff. I don’t see it anymore and that concerns me. A lot of our [Black] kids don’t have a clue…not a clue. White kids can get away with it because there are all types of safety nets to catch them. Our kids don’t have that…they don’t have those safety nets.

Ron mentions the concept of a “safety net” that some have (Whites) while others (Blacks) do not. My own curiosity leads me to wonder if a factor at work here is an ever-increasing wealth gap. A report issued by the U.S. Census Bureau shows that in 2002 the median net worth of non-Hispanic White households in the United States was $87,056. For African American households, the median net worth was $5,446. Whites had nearly 16 times the net worth of Blacks. A widening achievement gap is also cause for concern. Researchers have identified several factors that serve as indicators for students' lack of academic success, compared to students who are White. These indicators include: poverty, test bias, academic loss over the summer, racial stereotyping, access to child care, parent involvement, qualified teachers, and high student mobility (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Viadero & Johnston, 2000). The intersections of a growing wealth and achievement gap gives researchers a lens through which to look at the phenomenon of declining arts participation. Historically, in education, the arts have often been considered “frills” or “non-academic” and therefore are the first to be cut from the curriculum when budgets dictate. If education as an institution refuses to support the arts, how could we not expect the same from individuals whose wealth is growing smaller and smaller? Given the scope of this topic, I am limited in any discussion I might attempt in this paper, however I would suggest further investigation.
Retirement: From Paris to Atlanta

“I judge myself on the kids and what they tell me, and by the feedback I get from the parents. I judge myself by that.”

Preparing for his retirement, Ron discussed plans of moving forward with his career as a practicing artist beginning with a trip to Paris and London. The richness of this experience cannot be ignored. Many notable artists throughout history have traveled to these cities for inspiration and training. I was able to catch up with Ron for one final interview as he made his way back to Atlanta to the homecoming festivities at his alma mater. Reflecting on the impact of this trip to Paris, he notes:

I’d never been to Paris; I woke up one Saturday morning and the spirit, God said “go to this workshop.” This woman was doing this workshop on Black artists trying to get their work displayed in galleries and museums and the history behind that; while I was there I found out this trip to Paris; that was the real reason I went; it was meant for me to go to this workshop…I’m at a point now when things happen…and everything happens for a reason…you’re supposed to respond; God was telling me that I needed to go on this trip and there were things that I needed to see and do; as far as what I saw and did when I was there… for years as an art student as an artist teacher I’d read about all of these places and to actually be able to experience the Louvre to actually experience the d’Orsay; Arc de Triomphe, the Cathedral of Notre Dame…I’m still processing all of it; I’m seeing that….and it lends credibility to you…when I got back and did the artist stroll at Carleton’s…one of the ladies who was in attendance…she brought up the question of my travel experience…

The good thing about this trip was it was called a “cultural discovery” tour, and it was
geared toward the Black experience so when we went to Paris, we went to the places where the Black artists and musicians hung out in Paris…so I got a chance to see where Miles and Dizzy played…I got a chance to see where Baldwin wrote his plays. I got a chance to see all these areas…where Josephine Baker lived…the chateau…it was a Black experience, and it was very eye-opening and then when we went to London, we went to this one museum…it was called the Museum of the Docklands…and after this trip I see it more on a global scale; I’m starting to see the global stuff that I need to address that Black people experience that’s universal; I had no knowledge of that. It made me think of the Fresh Prince of Bel Air; Remember Geoffrey with the British accent? That’s where it comes from; their ancestors were there…they were part of that slave trade! I never put that together. To see that it was very eye-opening. And the approach that the Europeans take towards Blacks that White folks don’t take here in America. In Europe they don’t have a problem acknowledging what we have done as a people. Whereas in the US there’s this denial…jazz music comes to mind immediately; that’s why a lot of Jazz musicians ended up going to Europe…because their music was looked at as an art form, whereas here they were treated like…it’s like…in Berlin and Paris they were performing in concert halls whereas here they were in smoky bars and they were treated as such, and it’s still there now because I heard Jazz music and R &B music everywhere I went, and it wasn’t like they were doing it just because I was in town either.

Ron becomes a student again. Making this trip to Europe, he is able to experience many of the sites he has only witnessed in textbooks. Most notably he refers to this as a cultural discovery—a “Black experience.” What exactly is a “Black experience?” My best guess would
be that it is one where a person of African descent makes a connection such that he/she feels is familiar. Whether it involves recognizing a music genre (hip-hop), a gastronomic delight (sweet potato pie), a cultural location (barber/beauty shop), a political site (having kinky/curly afro-like hair). Any and all of these things, in my opinion, constitute a “Black experience.” For Ron, it meant being reminded of the great Black musicians, writers, and entertainers who were allowed acceptance, when America turned them away. In retirement, he has become a student again, being inspired by others of African descent who came before.

Throughout my interaction with Ron, I got the sense that he humbly shies away from accolades. He mentions that early in his career, he dreamt of winning awards for things like, “Teacher of the Year.” As he continued to teach, he realized more important was how the students and parents perceived his performance as a teacher and artist. I close his narrative with the above quote as it seemed the most fitting. Ron has defied any challenge set before him—divorce, racism as a college student in the South, and denied exposure in notable art galleries—self-determined artist and teacher, who also happens to be African American.
CHAPTER 8
LAST DANCE: PARTICIPANTS TAKE THE LEAD

In the previous chapters, I presented the life histories of African-American art teachers, giving emphasis to how they think about and maintain an artist identity in addition to the social and cultural forces at work in structuring their career pursuits as artist/teachers. I have sought to provide rich narratives in order to illuminate these experiences that we may gain a better understanding of Black art teachers who have persisted beyond challenges to embrace both identities of artist and art teacher in addition to finding a center of gravity in the context of being a Black American. The themes of agency and self-determination resonate throughout their stories, as does the important role of social and professional “actors” involved in guiding their direction and influencing how they think about themselves as professionals. Additionally, the impact of racializing experiences as college students and later, as professionals, created only a moment of pause in each of their lives (i.e. being the only Black student among other art students or only one of few in professional development settings) in addition to self-pride and a sense of purpose reflected in their teaching philosophies and art-making processes. There is no doubt these factors enabled them to fully reconcile and embrace their identities as a Black/artist/teacher.

I conducted my final interviews in November 2013—almost exactly a year from my start date. I found it both fulfilling and yet surprising that it would take an entire calendar year to conduct three interviews with three people. Our lives are generally very busy. I do believe that
the time and space between interviews allowed each of us time for personal reflection and just enough time to have recovered from previous interviews—life history interviewing is exhausting mental, physical, and emotional work!

Data collection through the interview process began as a juggling act—managing time, trying not to manage time, listening closely to ask appropriate follow-up questions, allowing participants to share their experiences regardless of the time it took—but with each interview, the process became easier. The transcription process allowed me to slow down and listen again to these stories, and I often heard narratives I forgot about during the interview. Being able to recognize emerging patterns of data relevant to my research questions created a feeling of success.

Simons (2009) discusses the concept of “dancing with the data” (p. 140). I like to think of an interview as a dance, if done well, is very fluid and leaves both parties involved feeling a sense of satisfaction. While we are not yet attempting to make sense of the data, we generate at this phase of the research process, “dancing” calls for a forging of a relationship—a well-choreographed process of trust and dialogue where sometimes leading is necessary (interviewer) while other times understanding that someone else needs to lead (interviewee) is of equal importance.

I return to the panoptic view earlier mentioned. Beginning to close the door on the first phase of three newly forged relationships, I wanted to allow my participants the lead in the final dance—the last question in our final interview. We each had taken turns throughout this dance, but I wanted them to have the final say, so at the end of our final interview, I asked each of them:

“How has participation in this study impacted you?”

Big question, I know. Here are their responses:
**Kevin:** It has really made me think about my role as an artist and as an educator to bring somebody else along, who happens to be of color; it goes back to those four guys looking like me…so now, there’s a teacher at my school—I’m mentoring them to stay in there; two people actually—one’s in elementary school and one is in high school; I also encourage them to work (make art); that’s the key in bringing them along; it made me think…this is going to do very well for you…you need to figure out how to market yourself.

**Eleanor:** Ooo, good question. Well one thing it’s made me do is think about my journey; you have really made me sit down and think about my journey. We get so caught up in the moment that we don’t take the time to reflect; it’s made me think about journaling more; it’s one way for me to go back and revisit the past. I’ve shared a lot of this with my mom. And thanked her again for taking me to Chicago. So, we’ve had more conversations about me going down this path. I think a lot of it is appreciated. You get so caught up in the moment that you don’t realize what an impact you’ve made on others; the successful things you’ve done. And when you put it out there asking you these thought-provoking questions. I mentioned to you, “I don’t know if I have enough to apply to a graduate school,” and having you to sit down and say, “I think you do have enough, you just need to apply.” You have really been a catalyst to me really sitting down and thinking. The opportunities are there, we just get so caught up…and then another thing I’ve noticed as an educator; we have a different sense of time. We’re doing the same thing daily…the same classroom; the kids are different…the kids are different, but we remain in the same place. Most people in corporate America, they move around…different jobs, different cities. Our routine doesn’t change…time passes, but we don’t change. Oh my gosh…this is how we see where we’re at; the kids move on and have families. I’m in the same school that I’ve been in for years. So if I weren’t doing so much outside of the classroom, it would be like time standing still and I think that can be a negative because we as educators need to keep moving like the people in the business world, and I think that’s why the art educators that say, “I can’t do any art.” We get in a
routine. Summer comes around and we sleep later. I think being a part of your program helps me to see that time moves. I’m SO proud of you.

**Ron:** The fact that you were interested enough in me to tell my story; that’s it. The fact that you thought enough, that you thought enough to put this together to tell my story. I was telling some folks about you when I was on the trip in Paris. That we have a story to tell, that we’re just not here in a “void.” All too often, people have such a warped…they don’t have a clue this is what we do! Not a clue…that this is just fun stuff…someone told me “any old fool can teach art.” What I learned to do over the years, when we had open house, it was my chance to let my parents know beyond a shadow of a doubt does matter; I do more than just teach your child art. When my parents left my classroom…that their child learns how to apply those certain things…how to use a ruler…how to apply scale; my parents were honored and privileged to have me; they made sure I had what I needed and understood the importance and significance of what I was doing….

For each of these participants, reflecting on the telling of their life stories impacted them in various ways. For Kevin, it recalled memories of early mentorship by those he found connection with through racial group membership. An earlier introduced concept of fictive kinship (Shiptoll, 1997) rings loudly in this case. A broader discussion of this and its significance to the success of the participants in this study is explained later in the chapter.

Reflecting on her journey in ways similar, yet different, two things become obvious. First, Eleanor has embraced the core feature of an agency that enables her to play a part in her self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times (Bandura, 2001). She vehemently discusses “time” in her response. I had not given much thought before to her idea that teachers essentially remain static—in other words, it is easy to fall into a “rut.” We construct a routine—we are creatures of habit, by nature. Often we get really comfortable with the routine, and are afraid to take risks beyond what we “know.” The outcome of this agency, she has so
decidedly embraced? She has taken a step toward enrolling in a low-residency MFA program at the Art Institute of Chicago. She says she was inspired and had the courage to do so, on the heels of the work I was doing.

I remember our initial conversation, and she mentioned being unsure whether or not she was prepared to apply for such a program (MFA). I remember thinking, “Are you kidding, woman? Your work has been exhibited *nationally!*” Reminding her of that small detail, she then realized that she is more than ready, began and ultimately submitted her application and portfolio for review. Here, I draw attention to Bandura’s (2000; 2001) three modes of agency: direct personal agency (accessing resources or the expertise of those who wield influence and power to act on behalf of one, to secure a desired outcome), proxy agency (relies on others to act on one’s behalf to secure desired outcomes), and collective agency exercised through socially coordinated and interdependent effort. Often people do not have direct control over the social conditions and institutional practices that affect their everyday lives, yet Eleanor—through *direct personal agency*—was inspired by a seemingly small suggestion on my part.

Secondly, I theorize that the relationship that was forged between Eleanor (participant) and me (researcher) was made in trust and that the bonds that we shared as women of color, artists, and educators, was necessarily a form of fictive kinship—a theme that emerged across each individual case in this study. I theorize this concept taking form not only among one-on-one interactions between individuals, but across educational institutional settings, and further within broader cultural institutions

And finally, for Ron, this question helped him reflect the importance of being recognized—in this case being recognized and validated in his role as an art teacher. His curriculum showed evidence that his belief was that art should share a level of importance in the
academic world with subjects such as math and science. Many of his class assignments revolved around measurements, scale and, proportion; in other words “practical” stuff. One observation of his classroom solidified this for me. Through his early beginnings as a billboard painter, Ron sees the world of creation as a means to an end. He asks the question: “How will we apply this knowledge?” For him, being an active artist means being a better art teacher. I would say that this is a sentiment carried by each participant. I expressed in Chapter 1 my belief that each identity (artist and teacher) informs the other.

Each participant agreed that participation in this study was beneficial and for varied reasons. It goes without saying that participating in this experience has rewarded me with an experience that brings me that much closer to finishing the PhD. I must say, that getting to know these individuals in an intimate ways has enabled me to reflect on the occurrences in my life, which have necessarily led me to rediscover the artist within me. I was formally trained as a painter and have since begun to make quilts, merging the two skills to create sculptural garments. Much like the traditional Filipino dress pictured in my Acknowledgements, these garments reflect a history of my own that is an essential part of who I am today as a multiracial person, artist, educator, researcher.
CHAPTER 9
CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this Chapter, I delineate reoccurring themes across each participant’s life history applying theories of agency (social cognitive theory) and social identity. Common among the factors largely contributing to the success of the individuals in this study was the influence and support of “social actors.” Those persons—and in this case, teachers—whom I believe possessed the willingness to go the extra mile in order to know the needs of their students and engage them accordingly. Both Eleanor and Kevin experienced support as young adults from a community of Black teachers; yet early in their formative years received the important guidance from White teachers, who I perceive to be social justice actors. To this, I give implications for teacher preparation that engenders a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

I conclude with implications for future life history work and research, which includes a discussion of methodological challenges associated with participant/researcher relationship, specifically from an *emic* perspective. What I have learned ultimately is that reflection on one’s life history can have both a strong personal and social impact. Deliberately storying and restorying one’s life (or cultural story) is a fundamental method of personal (and social) growth and is a fundamental quality of education. Participation in this project has added to my personal and professional development as well as that of the participants. Allowing self-reflection of life experiences has lead each of us to make decisions to further embrace an artist/teaching identity.
In what follows, begin with what I believe to be the most significant of themes across each case in order to answer my research questions.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

*Research Question 1:*

*How does an African-American art teacher conceive and maintain an artist identity?*

In order to answer the first question, I discuss of Bandura’s (2001) conception of agency and how I believe each participant has come to be an agent of their destinies; beginning with the “self” (micro) and then continuing with an explanation of the sociostructural supports (macro) guiding the participants toward agentic achievement, the supports present in their lives become clear. The second and third questions will be discussed within the context of the Afrocentric paradigm—that while each person’s experience is different, they have come to exist as “Black-centered” despite the obstacles along the way. Additionally, I address the third question in the context of social identity theory and include a dimension not often found in the literature—race and gender.

**Personal Agency.** People are both producers and products of social systems. As mentioned earlier, these social structures may include, but are not limited to these social systems: economic, legal, political, and cultural. In addition, family, religion, and class are all social structures. The "social system" (p. 14) is the parent system of those various systems that are embedded in it. Social systems are not created in a vacuum—they are interactive and function as such. These social structures represent authorized systems of rules, social practices, and sanctions designed to regulate human affairs (Bandura, 2001, p. 14)

People who make their way successfully through a complex world of challenges, have to make good judgments about their capabilities, anticipate probable events and different events
and courses of action, size up sociostructural opportunities and constraints and regulate their behavior accordingly. In other words, forethoughtful, generative, and reflective capabilities are, therefore vital for human survival and progress. According to Bandura (2001), “these belief systems are a working model of the world that enables people to achieve desired outcomes and avoid adverse ones” (p. 3).

The once before accepted theory of human behavior as a function of an input-output model (i.e. shaped and controlled automatically and mechanically by environmental stimuli) has been debunked by a social cognitive theory which suggests that cognitive factors do quite well in predicting human behavior and guiding effective interventions—in other words, personal influence can be and is exercised consciously in order to guide behavior outcomes. This explanation of what we have come to know as “agency,” is a prominent feature exercised by the three individuals in this study.

To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions. Agency embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place (Bandura, 2001). The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times.

A second line of theorizing centers on the macroanalytic workings of socially situated factors in human development, adaptation, and change. Within this theoretical framework, human functioning is analyzed as socially interdependent, richly contextualized, and conditionally orchestrated within the dynamics of various societal subsystems and their complex interplay (p. 5)
As explained by Bandura (2001), the field of psychology currently proceeds down two major divergent routes: one line of theorizing seeks to clarify the basic mechanisms governing human functioning, the other centers on the “macroanalytic workings of socially situated factors in human development, adaptation, and change” (p. 5). Withing the second framework, human functioning is analyzed as socially interdependent, richly contextualized, and conditionally orchestrated within the various societal subsystems and their complex interplay.

The Self and Sociostructural Forces: Conception and Maintenance for Human Agency

Bandura (2001) theorizes how basic mechanisms governing human functioning along with sociostructural factors link to action thereby creating and enabling the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life. He sets forth four core mechanisms (fig. 4) of human agency: 1) intentionality 2) forethought 3) self-reactiveness and 4) self-reflectiveness, delineating the mechanisms of the “self.” I apply these core features to each of the lives of the participants in this study as a way to understand their achievement of “centeredness” in the art world.

Figure 3. Bandura’s (2001) Four Core Mechanisms of Human Agency
**Intentionality.** Personal agency begins with the “self” and having an intention (Bandura, 2001). Each participant made proactive commitments to bringing about a course of action, which led them to fulfill their future professional roles of artist/teacher. Though varied, all participants admitted to being intentional about pursuing art at various stages in their lives. Eleanor readily had access to a Chicago cultural scene, with a mother who had the desire to expose her to it. Admitting that she had no idea “how” to be an artist, she sought out experiences that might give her the answers. Kevin decided to continue to participate in art when his early football career came to a halt due to repeated injury. And finally, Ron, after having a positive experience in an honors art program in high school, decided that he would pursue being an artist.

**Forethought.** These initial motivations guided them to take action in anticipation of a future outcome—that of becoming an artist. The expectation of a perceived outcome is important here. Despite any negative feedback each of them might have received at their desire to become an artist (often stigmatized as “struggling” or “starving”). Ron, specifically notes in his first interview:

I also didn’t listen to the folks that talked about starving artists, ‘cause to me, I knew I would never starve, ok? I ain’t gon’ be about starvin’ you know? To me, that whole concept of being a starving artist never applied to me…STILL doesn’t apply to me…it’s a hustler. I mean, in every sense of the word, I’m a hustler, and I think that most successful artists look at themselves like that. I’m a hustler. I’m gon’ make it work.

**Self-reactiveness.** Linking thought (intentions) to action (forethought), each participant operated through self-regulatory processes; they had the ability to give shape to their courses of action and regulated their execution. For instance, each of them pursued art beyond high school. I noted a study in my review of the literature, in which high school students were asked about
professional aspirations, specifically in art. None showed any interest in pursuing art beyond high school, largely because of the negative stigma placed on art as a profession by society in general, and more specifically by close family members. Kevin’s intentions were supported early on by his parents. Noting early experiences of taking classes at the local art center, shows that outside forces were shaping his beliefs about what he could aspire to be later in life.

**Self-reflectiveness.** Having the ability to reflect on one’s motivations, values, and the meaning of life’s pursuits is the fourth characteristic of agency. Each participant faced challenges along the way, in pursuit of their professional aspirations. Reviewing their interview transcripts, I did not feel a sense of hopelessness anywhere along the way. If anything, facing the obstacles seemed to propel them to push forward with more determination—aiming to prove their initial commitment (intention) to themselves.

Recalling my own personal journey, I had very few art classes during my K-12 schooling. As a matter of fact, I only recall having art in the first grade. My family lived in Tacoma, Washington at the time. I did not take art in high school, but I would “make” things on my own. I pursued art in college because of the desire to continue to make things. I took my first formal drawing class at the age of 18 and never looked back.

**Proxy Agency**

I support the notion that any act of agency necessarily requires an individual to foster *intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflection.* However, these acts are often not enough in order for an individual to achieve agency. The necessity of sociostructural supports cannot be ignored and must be present, especially in the case of those individuals who exist within a larger systems of historic oppression.
The second dimension of agency focuses on a “social mediated” mode. We do not live our lives in isolation (hopefully). Many of the things we seek are available only through social interdependent effort. Hence, we have to work *in coordination* with others to secure what we cannot accomplish on our own (personal agency vs. proxy agency). This mode of agency is what Bandura (2001) refers to as proxy agency, whereby people try by one means or another to “get those who have access to resources or expertise or who wield influence and power” (p. 13) to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire. However, in the case of most of my participants, it was not readily evident that they exercised this “intention” the way Bandura describes it. Instead it became apparent that each of them was supported by various *proxies*, acting on their behalf.

For instance, in the case of Kevin Cole, his high school art teacher acted as a proxy guiding him to pursue art in college, but within a very specific context. This teacher exhibited the cultural capital to know that Kevin, with his desire and talent, would need and benefit from having the guidance of the professors at the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff. He recalls:

But the best decision…the best thing she ever told me was “I think you need to go the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff.” Now mind you, I had like 11 scholarship offers. There were a few academic. There were a few in sports, even though I didn’t play anymore. But she said, “you need to go out there because there are four Black guys that would really help your career.” And I went there…I’ll never forget, I did the interview and, they gave me the scholarship.

Had Kevin’s teacher not been familiar with these individuals and their own cultural capital, his trajectory might have been very different. Providing the path that led to his future connections in the art world, was what this teacher was prepared to do. It is difficult to speculate, but I suspect this is so. In Ron’s case, his proxy revealed itself in a personal and institutional
form. Attending Clarke-Atlanta University, on the suggestion of a friend, charted his path for his current status as an artist and former art teacher. There he admits:

> You know God has a way of putting us where we need to be, [laughing] doing the things that we need to be doing. Clark being a Black college, that was an eye-opening experience too. Being a historically Black college…historically Black University. I really didn’t know a lot about Black colleges. You know, the only Black college I knew anything about was Grambling and I think Fisk and Tennessee State. That was basically it. I didn’t know nothing about Bethune-Cookman. I didn’t know anything about Spelman or Morehouse other than what my friends had told me. I didn’t know about Morris-Brown. I didn’t know about Florida A&M, uh, Howard, Hampton…I didn’t know anything about any of those schools and so that was an eye-opening experience. I also didn’t know anything about Greek organizations. I didn’t know anything about any of that so that was something that really was good for me. I think that you get…I think that you get something as a Black person…you get something…as sense of purpose…out of going to a historically Black college that you just don’t get of you don’t go…if you don’t go. You get a sense of purpose and direction that you just don’t get…nothing against any of those other institutions.

In this case, Ron found a sense of belonging attending Atlanta University that he had not experienced before. As for Eleanor, ironically, her proxy was Kevin Cole. Early on in their relationship, he suggested she attend an artist residency in Mississippi:

> And so then through Kevin, I heard about Tougaloo…Tougaloo College and cause he said you need to go to one where you can meet more African American artists and you can meet artists who a part of the whole genre of the “Black experience really sounds like you didn’t have that at IU, and you know, it’s nice you went to Bennington, but maybe you want to try this.”

**Conception and Maintenance of an Artist Identity**

I return to an earlier question—one that is salient in the lives of these individuals. *What criteria do we use to define an artist?* Through examination of the lives of these individuals, we
can agree that the multiplicity of ways in which the occupational title of artist can be interpreted. Often tending to focus on individual studio practice rather than on the many other activities that may fall under this occupational category, our definition may depend on educational qualifications or the amount of time spent working as an artist or the informed opinions of art critics, art gallery curators, and grant committees or contemporary recognition by institutions within the art world. These are all valid considerations in any formal definition of what the title ‘artist’ designates.

Each participant in my study has a dedicated workspace they referred to as their studio—a place where they could go, separately from other activities, to create their work. Many artists I have spoken with over the years voice concern about not having a dedicated space within which to make their art. Often times, other areas of an artist’s “living space” become a place of work (kitchen table, coffee table, the floor, etc…), which sometimes inhibits how productive one can be. Describing an interaction he had with a friend early in his career, Ron discusses the impact it has in his shift in perception about what it means to be an artist:

I remember a friend asked me a question about did I have a studio, and at that time I didn’t have a studio. And his response to me was “Well, you’re not an artist if you don’t have a studio.” And I’ve realized you can’t be an artist without a studio. At least that was the frame of mind that I took at that time.

Kevin discusses his studio space as a safe haven:

I’ve always had a speech impediment so that was my way of communicating. You know, have a bad day and you go in your studio and do some wonderful things and even though being an educator and having a bad speech impediment, you’re always teased for having it. But it’s really, I think for me…it’s always been to release some of my frustrations.
Eleanor discusses an artist identity:

It’s life. It’s who I am. Yeah. I can’t imagine doing anything else. And it’s not about selling art or being approved by others when you make the art. It’s more an internal vision that I have; and internal message that I put out for myself. I spend a lot of time alone in my home and it gives me pleasure and I guess a sense of self-esteem for me just to be able to create, and nobody else has to see it. However, I do enjoy interacting with my art with others.

A study conducted by Bain (2005) investigates occupational identity construction among contemporary Canadian professional visual artists, highlighting the notion that “work” is an important part of an individual’s sense of self and that work plays a vital role in the narratives that individuals weave about their lives. Bain provides examples of two studies (Kondo, 1990; Glaeser, 2000) in which individuals working in a factory and a police force share a workplace culture that contributes to a sense of self; many artists do not share this privilege. The researcher further acknowledges, “Without the physical environment of the workplace in common, myths and stereotypes provide ready-made stories of the self that become a vital source of information about what it means to be a professional visual artist” (p. 27).

To this extent, participants in a recent study (Hatfield, Montana, & Deffenbaugh, 2006) revealed differing opinions about the professional identity and role of an art teacher. A common debate in the field of art education, for some art teachers, being recognized as an artist and teacher is empowering for those who are able to fuse the two roles together. Others are perfectly happy embracing the singular identity of art teacher without the need to be recognized as a practicing artist as well. In what follows, Ron’s desire to be seen as both a teacher and artist is revealed in his determination to be visible in the art world.
Research question 2: What role does social identity play in structuring their career pursuits as artist/teacher?

Addressing my second research question, I build on Bandura’s (2001) concept of agency. In order to theorize how the individuals in this study came to embrace the idea that they could become artists, I looked to the sociostructural supports that I believe influenced these beliefs. Five broad categories (fig. 5) emerged consistently across the three cases: access to economic resources, access to cultural institutions, familial support, educational institutions, and teacher/educator support.

Figure 4. Sociostructural Supports

Because this study is largely about identity reconciliation, we can agree that the one constant variable across all cases is the racial identifier of “Black” or “African American.” The other identities discussed have necessarily been “chosen.” My question has now become: How
does one embrace the mantle of three identities simultaneously, all of which historically, bear little social reward?

Along the way, each participant was able to benefit from all or most of these sociostructural support systems. I argue that in order for someone to bear the gravity of undertaking such identities, all of these supports must align. As I look at the chart, I recognize my path to conception and maintenance of these identities. This is not to suggest that if one is lucky to have these supports in place, that the decision to espouse these professional identities is more appealing. If I am honest, I will admit that I have sometimes reflected whether I made the right career decisions (usually these moments have come during economic downturns—as the arts and education are the last to get funding).

It is important to recognize how the events that took place in the lives of the participants in this study were aligned in a way to allow for the best possible outcomes. Take for instance Kevin Cole and his experiences beyond high school. Based on some of his interview responses, Kevin has an understanding of the relationship between his identity as an artist who is African American, his perceptions and experiences, and historical contexts and events. By mentioning the absence of African American artists in art history texts, he acknowledges the significance of his professor showing him images of these artists by stating:

“but you know, that was a pivotal point…’cause I saw people that looked like me” (line 316).

Asking questions of the data, I wondered: What structural conditions gave rise to this situation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)? Recall my earlier reference to a bell hooks (1995) quote—“not enough images and not enough visible Black artists.” (p. 3). Had Kevin not been shown
images of “himself” in the artworld, how could he possibly conceive that he could become a part of it? Pivotal to Kevin’s persistence to conceive and embrace an artist identity was his association with well-established African American artists he met during his college experience, as evidenced in his own words:

“John Howard—he was chair of the art department at University of Arkansas Pine Bluff and he was well-known at Arkansas….And then in meeting John Howard, I met Henry Linton, Terrence Corbin and Terrence Corbin became my biggest mentor. And how I got into teaching was because of Terrence Corbin.”

An important reminder here is that Kevin attended a historically Black college (HBCU), which made a profound impact in how he viewed himself as an African American artist. The Nation’s 105 HBCU’s are located in 20 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands and serve more than 300,000 undergraduate and graduate students (White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 2010). The 2010, Executive order 13532 states, “These institutions continue to be important engines of economic growth and community service, and they are proven ladders of intergenerational advancement for men and women of all ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds, especially African Americans” (see explanation of counter narratives, Chapter 1, p. 18). Ron Young would be convinced of an identity adoption after his own experience at an HBCU. As a result of reconnecting with two former classmates, Ron began his artistic career as a billboard painter.

For Eleanor Neal, finding a mentor in Kevin—who was fully immersed and well-accepted in the established art world—was instrumental in launching her future success as an artist. He was able to steer her in the direction of connecting with other well-established African American artists—an experience Eleanor would cherish and continue to benefit from as she
continued to connect with others throughout the years. The importance of social actors in one’s life cannot be ignored. I theorize that belonging to a community among others who share a historical legacy of discriminatory treatment, may lead to a desire to help one another find and achieve success. The recognition of this legacy is the first step in actively moving toward a social justice stance—this is not uncommon in communities of color.

I am not suggesting that instances of social justice do not exist outside of these communities (for instance, among non-Hispanic Whites), however the “problem” may lie in what sociologist Nancy DiTomaso highlights in her 2013 publication, *The American Non-Dilemma* as an issue of unconscious favoritism. In other words, after interviewing a sample of working, middle and upper class Whites about their general outlook on racial inequality in America, the vast majority professed strong support for civil rights and equal opportunity regardless of race, though many continued to pursue their own group-based advantage. Harvard social psychologist, Mahzarin Banaji, refers to this phenomenon as *hidden-bias blindspot*—or a bias capable of guiding our behavior without our being aware of its goal. (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013, Preface, para. 5). The economic, political, social and education implications from these biases are far-reaching. DiTomaso (2013) provides a comprehensive examination of the persistence of racial inequality in a post-Civil Rights era and how it plays out in a political and economic context. I am concerned how these hidden biases have impacted the potential advancement of people of color within educational contexts, thereby impacting future successes in professional environments.

Each participant in this study was able to benefit professionally and educationally by being guided and supported by social actors who share a common racial group membership. If the assumption is that there is an underrepresentation of people of color in many professional
environments (i.e. arts-related careers), could it not stand to reason that the social supports, who wield power and exist outside of historically oppressed racial groups, are at best, uncertain allies in the fight for racial equality (DiTomaso, 2013)?

In the next section, I discuss the implications of a racialized history as it relates to the art-making practices. I lay out a continuation of the notion of “identity negotiation,” within a professional identity. Art-making is thereby used to represent an act of survival.

Research Question 3: How does race (a racialized identity) inform and shape their art practices/pedagogy?

Racialized Identity and Art-making. What are the art making practices of a “Black” artist? In reviewing the scholarship of Harris (2003) and Powell (1999; 2002; 2008), I was able to name three possible considerations by Black artists as impetus for creation:

- assimilation- depiction and use of iconography of the dominant culture for mass appeal and potential serious consideration by the art establishment.
- self-determination- reimagining and redefining black identity
- resistance- confronting stereotypes and using direct criticism and satire to undermine racist attitudes

I wondered then, how a racialized identity might inform the artistic practices of the participants in my study. My own work as an artist of color reflects a sum total of my experiences, inclusive of my formal education and ways of knowing as a person who has experienced life in and out of various ethnic cultures. Although I cannot attest to having the same experiences as other Black artists who I have encountered over the years—those who are questioned why they do not make “Black art”—I have to assume it is because, to take one look at me, it is not readily accepted that I am Black. Without anticipation, I discovered that the works
created by the individuals in this study represent each of the aforementioned categories. In her own words, Eleanor describes her art and art-making process:

I look at my work as a personal voice to interpret the many facets I see in nature. I use printmaking as a vehicle to create collage work and monotypes which allows me to explore various areas of interest and personal connection to nature. Elemental materials combined with creative aspirations, gives me the platform to create art.

I would most closely align her art-making to an assimilationist means of making. Assimilation approaches used by some black artists were adopted as a means for solidifying a position within the artistic elite. Devoid of any racial marker, Eleanor makes it crystal clear that she would like to be considered as an artist generally, and more specifically a landscape artist. Her story reveals an early childhood spent on the water and in nature:

I think it goes back to family time. My uncle, one of my uncles had a boat, and we were a very close family…all the relatives, aunts, uncles, cousins, everybody. And so my uncle would call all of the family up and we would go to a place called…there’s this place up there that has cabins…and it’s not Lake Michigan, but a smaller body of water and this beautiful cabin and beautiful landscape—just woods and everything. Well, we would spend a lot of times on weekends, the whole family would go and I remember my uncle had a speed boat and my aunts were bar-b-queing and laughing and having fun and the kids out having a good time. And I remember then realizing that I really like just being able to just create and I liked sitting here looking at nature, looking at trees, family having a good time. And I had tons of sketchbooks and I would sit there, have my lemonade, just kind of watching people, watching everybody. And it was just a really good feeling inside and I think it just always took me back to that time. We would do that all the time. And I think that is part of my interest in landscape.

Reflecting on a passage I included in her written portrait, Eleanor reveals a discussion with an uncle who emphatically encouraged her to shed her “Black” racial marker as one which defines who she is as an artist. This sobering response is not uncommon among people of color.
In an effort to be seen as complex beings—as all humans are complex—it requires us to necessarily alter who we are. Again, we are not ever able to fully shed a racialized identity. Eleanor wants to move toward a group membership among other artists. She wants to be seen as more than the color of her skin.

On the other hand, as a painter, Ron’s style of art-making portrays scenes of Black life as an affectionate acknowledgement of a Black consciousness and pride. In other words, they display a sense of self-determination. His stylized portrait of jazz musician Miles Davis gives a nod to a musical legend, one which continues to be a source of inspiration for Ron, as evidenced in his interviews. Like Henry Tanner’s genre paintings of Black life, Ron’s images reflect life as he experiences it directly. I have come to call this style of work *documentary painting*, whereby an artist represents life as they see it. Ron shared with me the frustration he experienced attempting to find gallery representation for his work:

I was tired of waiting for a big break for a solo exhibition with an exclusive gallery, I decided I would rent a space and have my own, for one night only. One man, one show, one night. I decided to do my own solo show. I put it together and it came about as a result of me running around trying to get my work into some galleries, not realizing “who are you to come into our gallery trying to get a solo exhibition?"

Here, Ron recalls wanting an exhibit with an *exclusive* gallery. By exclusive, I assume he is referring to the selection process many galleries use when deciding how they will market themselves. After all, art *is* a business. This reminds me of a statement often used as humor in many a Black community when referring to the phenomenon of “White flight”: “When Black people move in, they bring the real estate down.” This is yet another sobering reality. White flight is a demographic term originally used to describe the phenomenon of residential relocation...
of white households from inner-city neighborhoods to suburban communities in response to the in-migration and succession of minority populations, especially blacks, and the social problems that sometimes are associated with such migration (e.g., crime and poverty in inner cities after the 1950s) (Frey, 1979). This reality continues to exist; it is especially obvious when looking at the slow resegregation phenomenon happening across our nation’s schools. To this extent, those who are members of communities of color—specifically Black people—have to continue to negotiate which group membership will award them notable status. In the art world, it may mean that one can show their allegiance to their community, but do so in a way that is not as obvious. I refer to this phenomenon as culturally responsive resistance.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, a series of strategies by artists have attempted to neutralize and undermine the harmful representations of Blacks through resistance, inversion, appropriation, and reinvention (Harris, 2003). The work of Kevin Cole reflects such a resistance. Driskell (2012) writes, “[Kevin’s] art reveals his knowledge of the oppression African Americans endured as forced immigrants to an inhospitable nation….this requires a selective way of inclusion in order to avoid mundane historical references” (p.3). Here, Driskell refers to Kevin’s use of unorthodox symbols as historical references to a troubled past. In doing so, Kevin’s audiences connect, not to images of a Black subject, but to colorful sculptural works where spatial relationships enlist attention. Driskell further refers to these sculptures as “visual inventions that fit within a modernist tradition” (p. 3).

**Racialized Identity and Pedagogy.** Because the participants of this study would also extend their skills to speak to the heart of public school students, I was interested in knowing how this racialized identity, if at all, informed their pedagogical practices. I was able to spend time in the classrooms of Eleanor Neal and Ronald Young. What I found in both settings was a
deep commitment to teaching and learning as evidenced by the structured curriculum set forth by each teacher. For both, it was important their students develop great work habits and that the elements and principles of design were enforced. Imprinted in my memory, my visits in these classrooms were welcomed with evidence of a cultural inclusiveness prominently displayed throughout. Posters of Salvador and Dali Pablo Picasso shared a space with Dada and Afro-Futurism. Evidence of classic and contemporary thought were made apparent through the display of works from the Renaissance juxtaposed with street art. One stroll through these art classrooms, the visual culture “dialogues” taking place were hope that these conversations could be happening across other classrooms, no matter the racial identity of the art teacher.

I am a little cynical though, and here’s why.

In my current role as the supervisor for preservice art teachers, I am able to enjoy visiting art classrooms at all K-12 levels. I have occupied this role for three years and not only am I able to observe my students growth in their teaching ability and their ability to manage a classroom of students, I am also able to informally observe the curriculum of the teacher they are working along side. I am always observant of the visual images they share with their students. I look at the walls because I know how powerful images are. I look at the students to see who they are and then I look to see if their faces are reflected somehow, in the visual culture of the room. Often times, these images are missing. What continues to be recycled, are the images of who has long been considered notable in the historical canon of art—those images of the great White male (and now White female) artists. So then, I ask: Are the students of color able to imagine themselves as existing as a part the world of art? This question directs my discussion to social identity and group membership.
Social Identity: Group Membership

The extent to which individuals are aware of more than one social identity is influenced by personal experiences, the salience of more than one identity and by social contextual factors. Tajfel (1982) described social identity as “…those aspects of the self-concept which derive from knowledge of membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 255). Awareness of group memberships may fluctuate for individuals and their acceptance of one group membership versus another may be at varying progressive states during their lifetime. For example, some individuals may be aware of their racial and gender membership before they are aware of other group memberships.

Memberships in racial and gender social groups have distinctiveness, significant sociocultural and sociopolitical histories, and perhaps higher salience relative to other social categorizations. Consequently, individuals may only identify with one social group in order to avoid continued social isolation.

What I have discovered in conducting this study is that each participant has had to negotiate between multiple identities—a racialized identity always present. I was able to spend an entire year immersed in the lives of these individuals. We exchanged numerous emails and phone calls. I have attended field trips, gallery nights, silent auctions, homecoming events. Each was excited to share their victorious moments of pride, as were they candid to reveal the challenges associated with perceived racism. They have continuously had to find safety zones within zones of conflict. Zones of conflict encompass places where battles are being fought, and in this case, moments in the lives of these individuals that caused them to retreat—even if only for an instance. Here I highlight the psychological underpinnings of a Black racialized identity; an identity that has experienced trauma in many forms. While I do not embrace a romanticized
notion of a homogeneous Black culture/experience, what I have come to know, existing as a life–long member of an African American community and learn through in-depth engagement with the lives of these three individuals, is that we necessarily need to find our safety zones—places removed from battle sites; though these are not necessarily always safe. In what follows, I consider the anthropological construct of fictive kinship (Fordham, 1997) as an emerging discovery and metaphorical safe zone.

**Fictive Kinship.** When asked to discuss significant events leading to their interest in becoming artists, participant responses indicated a clear understanding of the relationship between their identity as artists who are African American, their perceptions of and experiences in the art world, and sociohistorical contexts and events contributing to their identity formation. Each mentioned the underrepresentation of African American artists in art history texts, thereby acknowledging the significance of being denied exposure to images of successful artists who share similar racial identification. Suggesting a reflection of their racial identity through achievement, pivotal to participant’s success was a personal association with well-established African American artists, a luxury sometimes denied Black students in educational spaces.

I drew on scholarly work about fictive kinship (Chatters, Taylor & Jayakody, 1994; Fordham, 1987) to provide me with the notion of applying this construct to describe the bonds of the kin-like associations that were emerging as a possible factor in identity development. In anthropology, kinship generally implies “a familial relationship, such as by blood or by marriage, while fictive kinship is commonly used to describe bonds or identification between individuals outside the aforementioned ties” (Shiptoll, 1997).

Although, some scholars (for example, Fordham, 1987) situate fictive kinship as a response to White opposition, I instead chose to adopt the anthropological use of fictive kinship.
Here, I view fictive kinship as a sociocultural construct, salient among many African Americans, as a special type of connectedness where, the personal bonds are close enough that they resemble familial bonds. In the case of the present study, I include personal interactions through spoken language where whereby participants often referred to African American artists as “brother,” or “sister.” Here they are not implying it in a literal sense but in a sense where it represents a social, cultural and racialized identity. This construct is effective when an African American achieves; it is equally effective when an African American fails. In other words, role models work because of fictive kinship.

Associational forms of kinship are found in fraternal or religious contexts, such as the use of “brother” to refer to a priest. On a personal level, kinship symbolizes an attempt to strengthen the proximity between non-kin individuals (Ballweg, 1969). Vanita (2000) writes of William Shakespeare’s use of this concept in his plays, such as “The Winter’s Tale” and “Henry VIII”—itself a prominent discussion on how female fictive kinships could be empowering for the women involved. In the U.S. fictive kinship ties have played important roles in the lives and culture of Black Americans (Gutman, 1976). Ethnographic literature of Black families generally describes two types of fictive kinship—those that involve unrelated individuals, such as close friends, and those bringing in unrelated individuals into an extended family network, such as unrelated individuals being addressed as “aunties” or “uncles” (Chatters, Taylor & Jayakody, 1994).

In his 1967 ethnographic study of Black street corner men, “Tally’s Corner”, Elliot Liebow is struck by their use of kinship terms to describe, validate, and even formalize closely held friendships such as “going for brother”, “brother”, “sister”, or “going for cousins” (Liebow, 1967). Emotional and financial supports, even taking care of each other’s children, were often
part of such relationships. As these friendships evolved around daily interactions and needs, Liebow saw such relationships as being of particular importance to these men’s self-esteem and emotional wellness.

Fordham (1987) proposes that fictive kinship among Black Americans emerged not only as a symbol of social and cultural identity but also as a response to racism and in opposition to what may be deemed as White culture. Aside from her work, fictive kinship has received very little attention in education research. In their review of fictive kinship ties, Chatters, Taylor, and Jayakody (1994) surmise that such ties appear less prevalent amongst Anglo-Americans relative to other groups.

It was the work by Fordham (1987) and that of Chatter et al.’s (1994) review of fictive kinship in Black extended families that provided me with the notion of applying the construct of fictive kinship to describe the bonds of the kin-like personal relationships that were emerging as a possible factor in identity development in the initial analysis of Kevin’s interview transcript. In his own words, Kevin discusses his experience in an art history class when he was shown the artwork of African American artists:

And I’ll never forget being in an art history class. We were sitting there talking and they were pointing out to me…you know, they made me learn about White artists. [My professor] would say, “Well, you know, he’s a ‘brotha’”. You know, they were talking about he was Black [laughing]! (lines 303-306).

I view fictive kinship as a sociocultural construct salient in some cultures. Although, where Fordham situates fictive kinship more as a response to White oppression, I instead choose to adapt the anthropological use of fictive kinship. I view fictive kinship as a special type of connectedness where, like “Tally’s Corner”, the personal bonds are close enough that they begin
to resemble familial bonds, in the personal interactions as well as in the spoken language. In the case of Kevin’s experience, while his professor referred to an African American artist as a “brother,” he was not implying it in a literal sense. In other words, his professor implied the word “brother” as a social and cultural identity. I would add here a racialized identity. I suspect that Kevin’s reference to me as a “sister” during our first interview implied that he felt that we shared the common identity as Black or African American. Interesting to note that while I (the researcher) claim African American as an identity, most who know me personally, also know that I claim Asian and Hispanic identities—my mother is of Filipino, Spanish and Chinese descent.

**Implications for Teacher Preparation: Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy**

Understanding that students and teachers are caught in an educational system that sees learning as compartmentalized, stifles creativity, and operates in an absence of understanding the interconnection among people and environments, I acknowledge that a transformation requires a moving towards understanding that a more holistic approach of teaching and learning must take place. To this extent, if we are to consider teaching and learning as a contextual, situational, and personal process, we must understand that it is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students are included in its implementation.

I acknowledge teaching as a social and cultural intervention and believe it imperative that teachers confront and be aware of their personal, national, and global aspects of cultural identity and their social biases. Directing our focus on student-centered community-education processes where teachers must access and utilize the students' sociocultural values and beliefs and those of the cultures of the community when planning curricula is paramount in a contemporary
education paradigm. Thinking critically about how our experiences are shaped by our own social position, which is always informed by history, cannot be ignored.

In light of the continued changing ethnic, racial, and cultural demographics in the nation’s schools, an increasing number of scholars and practitioners have made the call for teaching practices that are informed by cultural knowledge possessed by students (Abrahams & Trioke, 1972; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In a society with as much sociocultural and racial diversity as the United States, a lack of wonderment about alternative approaches to teaching and learning results in unequal education practices and social injustice (Gay, 2010).

Historically, teacher education has focused on research that links failure with socioeconomic status, cultural difference, poor-parenting skills and involvement, and lack of language development (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010). As such, there is a tendency to assume deficits in students whose home lives reflect these dimensions. Rather than locating and teaching to their strengths, this deficit thinking makes it more difficult for some students to develop a healthy academic identity. Scholars explain that teachers’ conception of students of color in deficit terms, which has inevitable negative consequences for their longer-term academic success, is a product of longstanding racialized and institutional policies and practices that consistently disadvantage these students (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005).

While it is understood that most teachers want to do the best for their students, some believe that to treat students differently because of their cultural orientations is racial discrimination. Decontextualizing teaching and learning from the ethnicities, cultures, and experiences of students minimizes the chances that their achievement potential will ever be fully realized. Our society’s predominant worldview and cultural norms are so deeply ingrained in
how we educate children that we very seldom think about the possibility that there may be other different but equally legitimate approaches to teaching and learning (Gay, 2010). Over the last 20 years, scholars have proposed that a very different pedagogical paradigm is needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from very different ethnic groups—the paradigm that teaches to and through their personal cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching embodies this paradigm.

Culturally responsive education considers the nature, purpose, and result of the Westernized educational system as problematic. Acknowledging teaching as a social and cultural intervention, it is imperative that educators are aware of their cultural identity and social biases (Gay, 2002; 2010). Culturally responsive educators utilize students' sociocultural values and beliefs as well as the cultures of the community when planning curricula; as social justice work, it provides alternative ways of evaluating that does not deny minority cultures and different ways of knowing (Sleeter, 2011).

**Antecedents of culturally responsive education.** During the 1970s, schools across the U.S. were undergoing desegregation, and school districts were experimenting with approaches to working productively with more diverse student populations. It was during this time, out of concerns for the racial and ethnic inequities apparent in learning opportunities and outcomes—which continue to prevail—that multicultural education originated (Sleeter, 2011). The concept of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) has gained increased attention over the past decade as a way to rethink instructional practices in an effort to improve the educational performances of African American, Latino, Native American, and various Asian American students.
This merging of culture and pedagogy represents a complex and intricate set of processes that many practitioners and researchers have suggested may improve student learning; thus, they continue to evaluate its effectiveness for helping culturally diverse students improve academically (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2011). The link between culture and pedagogy rests upon a comprehensive and informed set of knowledge and skills that, in their attempts to engage diverse students in the teaching and learning process, many practitioners fail to possess. Some suggest that this is one of the contributing factors to the widespread academic disparities between many students of color and their White counterparts.

**What is culturally responsive pedagogy?** CRP is a conceptual idea and a practical way of rethinking ideology, content, and pedagogy in a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse educational environment. Ladson-Billings (1992), among the first scholars to define the concept of CRP suggests, “it is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 312). As such, it is more than just a way of teaching or a simple set of practices embedded within curriculum lessons and units. It has to be embodied within a larger framework to reform education such as educational policies, which reflect standardization. By imposing national common core standards on students' minds we are, in effect, depriving them of their fundamental intellectual freedom by applying one standard set of knowledge.

Many educators have good intentions about not being academically unjust and discriminatory toward ethnically and racially different students. Important as they are, good intentions and awareness are not enough to bring about the changes needed in current educational policy to prevent academic inequities among diverse students (Wells, 2014). An *actively* responsive pedagogy embodies a professional, political, cultural, ethical, and
ideological disposition that supersedes more mundane teaching acts. It is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, their families, their communities, and an unyielding commitment to see student success become less rhetoric. Further, CRP operates from a position that much of the curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessment mechanisms that are used in US schools are steeped in mainstream ideology, language, norms, and examples which often place culturally diverse students at a distinct educational disadvantage. Hence, students whose cultural knowledge is most congruent with mainstream ways of knowing and being are more likely to experience cognitive comfort and better educational outcomes in schools. Finally, culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world.

**Institutional, personal, and instructional dimensions of CRP.** In order to offer sources for greater understanding of CRP, I briefly address the institutional, personal and instructional dimensions (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) of this pedagogy.

**Institutional dimension.** The institutional dimension of CRP emphasizes the need for reform of the cultural factors affecting the organization of schools, educational policies and procedures (including allocation of funds and resources), and community involvement (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007). Systemic reforms must be undertaken that deal with multiple aspects of achievement (academic, social, psychological, emotional, etc.) within different subject areas, across school levels, and through different aspects of the educational enterprise. Just as in health care, for instance, where treating symptoms does not cure disease; simply pointing out achievement problems does not lead to their resolution.
**Personal dimension.** Teacher self-reflection is an important part of the personal dimension. Culturally responsive teaching rejects the deficit-based beliefs that some teachers may hold about culturally diverse students. It operates from a standpoint of recognizing student strengths, affirming them, and seeks to build on them (Gay, 2000, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

In order to promote this standpoint, teachers should avoid deficit syndrome and strive toward bias reduction. Deficit-based explanations usually focus on poor students and students of color lacking or being devoid of culture, coming from a culture of poverty which is not suited for academic success, possessing an oppositional culture, having a disdain for academic achievement, or having parents who lack concern for their children’s academic aspirations (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching rejects these beliefs and builds on student knowledge in an informed and caring manner. To do this, educators need to analyze their own cultural attitudes, assumptions, mechanisms, rules, and regulations that have made it difficult to teach students successfully. This is imperative as Abrahams and Trioke (1972) suggest, “there is no other way of educating…[racial minority] students than to provide them with a sense of dignity in the selves that they bring with them to school and to build on this by demonstrating the social and linguistic and cultural alternatives around them” (p. 6).

**Instructional dimension: acknowledging diversity and taking action.** The instructional dimension of CRP refers to practices associated with implementing cultural responsiveness in the classroom. This idea suggests that teaching is a rich and complex endeavor that is built on a wide range of knowledge and skills about students, pedagogy, culture, and the intersection of each of these domains into a unique approach to engaging students in content. CRP is situated in a
framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills that diverse students bring to schools, and seeks to develop dynamic teaching practices.

Teachers might do this by validating students’ cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials, providing multiple means of assessment, encouraging students to think critically, and motivating students to become active in their learning. Sustaining a philosophical view of teaching that is dedicated to nurturing students’ academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well-being is essential to this dimension.

CRP requires thorough knowledge about cultural values, learning styles, and historical legacies as well as contributions and achievements of different ethnic groups (Gay, 2010). Although called by many different names, including culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, and reflexive, the ideas about why it is important to make education more consistent with cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students and how this can be done is virtually identical. If the potential of CRP is to be realized, then widespread instructional reform is needed as well as major changes in the professional development, accountability, and assessment of teaching and the institution of education itself.

**Implications for Future Life History Work/Study**

These life history case studies highlight a critical need to continue examining the experiences of Black art teachers throughout this country, beginning with those that exist here in our midst—Atlanta Public Schools would be a great place to start. Further investigation of the experiences of this group at earlier stages in their teaching career (i.e. between 5-10 years) may provide for a different perspective. Despite their presence in the field, there exist few publications that discuss specifically the experiences of this group of teachers. Additionally,
critical case studies examining the role of race in the experiences of other art teachers of color would add to our understanding of these groups.

This research aimed to provide a deeper meaning and reflection within the world of visual arts and education arising out of such. Participants have shared meaningful stories, contributing to the much-needed research on African American art teachers in k-12 environments, further benefitting arts organizations and education bodies in the desire to increase arts-participation among people of color.

I believe that life history work, as studies of professional life and work, can enhance our research understandings, broaden and deepen our professional collaboration and development of professional practices. The value and significance of these transformations can be substantial in terms of further understanding of, as well as developing and improving, teaching and learning.

Given the investment of time and energy required for substantial life history work—between both researcher and participant—developing questions to frame a series of interview conversations is paramount, suggesting that questions need to be sufficiently broad to allow space to roam, but not so broad or vague that the focus of the research is easily lost or participants are uncertain about how to respond. As with any qualitative research endeavor, life history researchers are compelled to develop an acute awareness of methodology, and a number of methodological are challenges presented to them.

I want to suggest then that the life history approach is an in-depth means of understanding how identity and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world. Life history data disrupts the assumptions of what is ‘known’ by intellectuals in general, and sociologists in particular. Conducted successfully, the life history forces a confrontation with other people’s subjective perceptions.
Quantitative methods tend to sidestep the messy confrontation with human subjectivity, which is believed to comprise the heart of sociological inquiry. Life history approaches demand a holistic approach.

**Insider research: An emic approach**

I now want to shift the discussion to emic and etic (insider vs. outsider) approaches in qualitative research. My understanding of the emic/etic dichotomy became very real as I approached planning the interviews of my participants. Although these terms are often discussed in relation to fieldwork in ethnographic research (Patton, 2002), I drew similar parallels toward conducting the life history interview. In part, I attribute my access into the lives of these participants to a shared set of identities.

As noted earlier, I was a secondary art teacher for many years. A more visible characteristic of my identity however, is that I am a person of color. In the article, *The Space Between: On Being an Insider- Outsider in Qualitative Research*, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) discuss the phrase *insider research* as “research with populations of which the researcher is also a member….so that the researcher shares an identity, language, and an experiential base with the study participants” (p. 58).

Given the intensive nature of life history work, paired with a sensitive topic, I understood that my own racial, social and professional identities positioned me as an insider (emic) within the group under study, thereby allowing more rapid and more complete access to the study’s participants. I would find that having this status provided a level of safety and comfort for the participants, thereby allowing them an opening to having the challenging conversations about
sensitive topics related to issues of racial identity. I wondered if it was possible that my status within this group membership had the potential to impede the research process as it progressed.

As with this PhD project, it is important that researchers be mindful of the enormous role of their own and others’ racialized positionality. Furthermore, this project rests on premises grounded in research, theory and practice of other scholars: that people of color historically have been silenced and/or misrepresented in education research. To this extent, my positionality facilitated access into the lives of participants who shared a similar experience.

However, this was only a starting point. While participants were put at ease by our shared culture, each took pause during the unrecorded portion of their interview to give full disclosure of the challenges associated with their professional and social identities. In other words, while participants were willing to share their stories, each felt more comfortable speaking “off the record.” Taking note of this dissonance, I searched for ways to include these important aspects of their stories in my dissertation. This begs further consideration of how an emic/etic perspective might advantage or inhibit the research “dance.”

**Representing a life history**

It is this aspect, which constitutes the substance of various dilemmas that have to be confronted if research ethic and participant integrity are to be preserved. I will leave you with a few questions that might prove helpful in shifting from thinking about researcher positionality to thinking about larger systems at work when aiming to write up and present a life story:

1) What is known socially, institutionally, and historically about the community and people under study?

2) What does the research literature reveal about the community and the people under study?
3) And in particular, what do people from the indigenous racial and cultural group write about the community and people under study? Why? How do I know?

A recurrent theme in this section is that matters of race and culture specifically, are important considerations in the process of conducting research; more generally, matters of relationship-building, power-relationships, and representation must also be considered. Researchers are challenged to work through these dilemmas and reconsider their own and others positionality when conducting research. While this is not meant to suggest that there are not scholars already engaged in these discussions and processes in their research, I offer this account as merely a suggestion moving forward for those interested in doing this type of work.

As researcher, I agree with other scholars (Casey, 1993; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Knowles, 2001) that human experience has meaning in a particular social, cultural, and historical context—a context where relationships are real, where the actors are familiar with the setting, where activity has purpose, where nothing is contrived (except for the somewhat intrusive presence of the researcher). The context not only offers clues for the researcher’s interpretation of the actors’ behavior (the outsider view), it also helps understand the actors’ perspective—how they perceive social reality (the insider’s view). In addition, it allows the actors to express themselves more fully, more naturally. Surrounded by the familiar, they can reveal their knowledge, their insights, and their wisdom through action, reflection, and interpretation. It is also true, of course, that the actors’ natural environments will inevitably present constraints, restrictions and barriers—but they will be familiar ones and the researcher will be able to observe the ways actors negotiate these points of resistance.

Just as people move from being subjects of inquiry in the laboratory to being actors in their own natural environments, so too does the researcher shift positions from being the one
defining and controlling the experimental conditions to being the one learning to navigate new
territory (i.e. what happens when the conversation turns to experiences about race?). The
researcher is the stranger, the one who must experience the newness, the awkwardness, the
tentativeness that comes with approaching something unfamiliar, and must use the actors in the
setting as guides, as authorities, as knowledge bearers. In qualitative inquiry this is a crucial shift
of perspective and role between researcher and actor that has important implications for how the
inquiry is approached and what is learned (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

As newcomer and stranger to the setting, the researcher inevitably experiences surprises:
events, experiences, behaviors, and values that she had not anticipated, and to which she must
adapt and respond. Working in context, the researcher, then, has to be awake to surprises and
inconsistencies and improvise conceptual and methodological responses that match the reality
she is observing. The researcher’s stance becomes a “dance of vigilance and improvisation.” (p.
43). In observing and recording human experience in context, my work in attempting to develop
portraits of these individuals, joins with the practices and craft of phenomenologists,
ethnographers, and a variety of other qualitative researchers (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

**Reflection of Analysis**

My initial attempt at understanding portraiture and narrative methods of inquiry was not a
straightforward path to choosing a way to analyze and represent my data. I felt a constant pull to
revisit my research questions. I found myself asking, “Will this method help answer my
questions?” and “Do I need to revise my research questions to accommodate the method I am
choosing?” I was able to locate an encouraging quote by Reissman (1993) who states, “I
discourage students to tightly specify a question that they will answer with data from narrative
accounts because analytic induction, by definition, causes questions to change and new ones to emerge.” (p. 15)

I also felt quite a bit of confusion how to begin my analysis and ultimately how my analysis would be represented. I found most helpful in guiding my methods of analysis and representation were Casey’s (1993) life history work, Ginsberg’s (1989) study of women activists, Polkinghorne’s (1995) article, and Reissman’s (1993) book, both on narrative analysis. Additionally, I was able to locate the entire Dollard (1949) text on Questia.com, which was helpful in giving context for using his criteria for judging life history work. The most difficult challenge was “finding” the story within the interview. My protocol were topic-centered and allowed for unstructured meta-narratives, which I sometimes felt I clumsily pieced together.

I am still unsure whether my plot development of each participant’s story best represents a narrative that answers my research questions. In Reissman’s (1993) words, “All forms of representation of experience are limited portraits….our narratives about others are our worldly creations” (p. 15). Keeping in mind my research questions and engaging data analysis using methods of grounded theory aided my identification of themes in order to develop their narratives. I found these themes to resonate in each of my interviews with participants.

Polkinghorne (1995) discusses, “The analytic development of a story from the gathered data involves recursive movement from the data to emerging thematic plot. Evolving a plot that serves to configure the data elements into a coherent story requires testing the beginning attempts at emplotment with the database” (p. 16). Here, I recognize the purpose of narrative analysis is not simply to produce a reproduction of observations; rather, it works to provide a framework in which a range of disconnected data elements are made to cohere in an interesting and explanatory way.
Analyzing Experience

My task with each participant in this study was to try to get as close as possible to understanding and rendering elements of their lives, paying particular attention to the influences of context. When reviewing the interviews, there was a choice in what I noticed as a way to interpret and represent their lives through experiences of identity negotiation: Black/artist/teachers. What I have attempted is the creation of metastories about what happened by telling what the interview narrative signifies, editing and reshaping what was told, and turning it into a story.

At the outset of the study, participants were given the option of using a pseudonym, but none felt it necessary. As the initial interviews progressed, I noticed a common pattern of occurrences—that when I asked about issues concerning race, each participant seemed eager to share their positive experiences yet hesitant to discuss the negative ones. One participant even contradicted their pre-interview talk (which was off-the-record) revealing how frustrating it was being Black in a mostly White art world. It was at that point that I decided that any study conducted hereafter might benefit from the use of pseudonyms, which might help participants feel safer discussing authentic feelings about their experiences.

In non-interviewing instances, I noticed that each participant felt extremely comfortable discussing with me the frustrations that comes with being Black in general, and more specifically, being an artist who is Black. In these instances, I felt the need to share with them my own personal struggles as a way to build rapport and trust. Scholars (Oakley’s, 1981; Roulston, 2011) agree that the sharing of one’s own experiences may be seen as good practice. To this extent, I felt it necessary to share my own experiences as an artist and teacher with my participants during the interviewing process as well. Reflecting on the differences in their
“interview talk” and non-interview talk” created a cause for concern for me, and I am still struggling with how to address this discomfort for future work.

Ultimately, my decision to use participant’s real names was the best decision. Because of the apparent invisibility of these voices, I wanted to honor them in a way that reflected their own commitment to the work I cared so deeply about. I will admit that for a while I struggled with ways I could (and “should”) suggest they use pseudonyms without disappointing them—they were all excited that someone (me) wanted to study their lives and that I use their REAL names. After all, is it not fun to see our “name” associated with something that is perceived important?

Having completed a grounded theory analysis, my suggestion for continued analysis of these life history interviews is to use Miller’s (2000) hermenutical narrative approach, focusing on the interaction between me (the interviewer) and my participants. I would include in this discussion how the interaction may affect the conduct of the interview. Miller represents this type of analysis as having a triangular structure. One apex of the triangle is the respondent with their pre-existing subjective and negotiated view of social reality. A second apex of the triangle is the interviewer with an agenda of research interests and goals while the responses to the interviewer’s questioning produce the third apex of the triangle. The manner in which the respondent frames his/her responses to questions will be determined in great part by how they see the researcher and the effect they calculate their responses will have, (Miller, 2000) creating a “double hermeneutic.” (p. 67). Attempting this type of analysis may help articulate the interview experience with more complexity.
Limitations and Advantages: Locating the self

“To understand an experience from the viewpoint of those who participated in that experience, a researcher can only view it through their eyes and ‘looking back’ at who they were then and distinguishing that from who they are in the present. There is the experience as you ‘live it’ and experience as you ‘reflect’ back on it. Only when we look back can we put our actions and experiences into perspective”

Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 170

Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance (Patton, 2002; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). Simons (2009) argues, “case study is a study of the singular, the particular, the unique….It is through analysis and interpretation of how people think, feel, and act that many of the insights and understanding of the case are gained” (p. 3). As such, a case study design limits the generalizability of the study, but provides an in-depth study of each particular case. A case study is not designed with a large sample size so that the results could apply to a broad range of contexts. Rather, the study is tightly situated within sampling criterion of participants. Thick description of each case in the written report allows readers to gain insight into the context of the lives of the participants and then make comparisons between the study and the context with which they would like to transfer the results. To this, Stake (1995) suggests that a researcher’s first priority is to do justice to the specific case and to do a good job of particularization before looking for patterns across cases, emphasizing transferability as a direct function of the similarity found between two contexts.

Case study is flexible, that is, neither time-dependent nor constrained by method (i.e qualitative vs. quantitative). It can be conducted in a few days, months, or over several years and...
be written up in different forms and lengths appropriate to timescale. It is responsive to shifts and focus and when written in accessible language, includes vignettes of people in the case, direct observations of events, incidents and settings, allows audiences of the case study report to vicariously experience what was observed and utilize their tacit knowledge in understanding its significance (Simons, 2009). Case study also has the potential to engage participants in the research process. It signals a potential shift in the power base of who controls knowledge and recognizes the importance of co-construction perceived reality through relationships and joint understandings. Finally, it provides an opportunity for the researcher to take a self-reflexive approach to the case and themselves (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). To this, Simons (2009) notes, the self is more transparent (reflexivity), and it is important to monitor its impact on the research process and outcome” (p. 5).

To provide balance and signal some issues that some have seen as a potential weakness of the case study approach, I highlight my own personal involvement and subjectivity. The way in which inferences are drawn from each case and the validity and usefulness of the findings may be cause for concern (Simons, 2009). My own subjectivity is an inevitable part of the research process, and appropriately monitored, is essential in understanding and interpreting the case.

Due to time constraints, accessibility and cost considerations, it was my aim to locate subjects who worked/lived within a relatively close driving distance of the researcher. I deviated from my original plan when one of my original participants, due to personal matters, could not participate in the study. It was then I discovered Ron Young, who I felt would be a great candidate. While he is not currently living in the Atlanta area, he has established roots there as an alumni of Clarke-Atlanta University. Additionally, it was happenstance that each participant of this study engaged in traditional means of art-making (painting, sculpture printmaking).
Unintentionally, I did not consider those artists whose work exists outside of these boundaries.

Getting involved in life history research, participants have commented that they enjoyed the chance to talk about themselves and the opportunity to reflect on experiences. On some occasions, the consequences were unexpected. For a small minority, being involved in a life history project can have life-changing effects (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Knowles, 2001). Relating and reflecting on one’s life and doing life history, contextualizing work can lead to new insights and perspectives that may find their ultimate expression in some form of change. However, engaging in life history work can sometimes be painful in that participants may find themselves revisiting stressful events. Although these effects cannot easily be predicted, I acknowledge the fact that life history work can alter lives.

**Denouement**

I circle back to my original research question: *How does an African American art teacher conceptualize and maintain an artist identity?* The answers are multiple, varied, and complex. I began this research study wondering about the results of the SPPA survey and its assessment of recent declines in arts participation; the underlying assumption is that educational experiences in the arts are the greatest predictor necessarily leading to future participation as adults. While I do not disagree with this assessment, it only scratches the surface of a much deeper, and necessary, conversation; one that asks researchers to look broadly at the multitude of contextual factors (historical, cultural, economical, social, etc.) that contribute to this outcome.

The survey, with its focus on race and ethnicity (African Americans and Hispanics), does not take into account the reasons why there has been an exodus from arts participation. It has been my aim, from the outset, to add another dimension to this narrative of absence by bringing
to the fore a counter-narrative of presence. In doing this, it was my hope that this study would not only uncover the factors advancing success and victory, but also begin to shed light on the possible challenges associated with identity negotiation—specifically the intersection of and reconciliation with a social and professional identity. With this information, a call for action can be made, beginning with those of us who are responsible for preparing others to go out into the world and find themselves there.

In my final analysis, I focused on relationship themes—sociostructural forces, which necessarily provide context and impact outcomes. Because it is my belief that human lives are best understood in context, I began this research by examining the ubiquity of our visual culture, using it as a framework to begin the discussion. I used this as a lens to view Black Americans, because I believed that the visual provides richness to the already written and spoken narratives of marginalization—in other words, it is one thing to read about a thing, another to hear about it, and yet another to see it. Our visual culture is an undeniable narrative. In the canon of fine art, the Black body has been a site of contention for centuries (Harris, 2003; Powell, 2002). As a visual artist, beginning with the visual was the obvious place for me!

It is my hope to continue this conversation, yet I have more questions than answers. Particularly drawn toward the concept of fictive kinship, I wonder if fictive kinship ties are easier forged by those who share a common experience of trauma—whether directly or indirectly? For instance, when undergoing a structured experience where race is made salient, the cognitive trauma experienced by Black Americans, reveals a phenomenon called stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). I theorize that a fictive kinship bond is what has helped this group of people find zones of safety within a familiarity of experience (for instance, being able to openly share with others who have similar experiences). Tatum (1997) has documented a
similar pattern of bonding in her text, *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*. This study has guided my future interest in the concept of psychogeography (O’Rourke, 2013) in order to examine the effects that a geographical environment has on the emotions and behaviors of individuals.

Further, I am curious whether it is possible to readily form fictive kinship ties with those who we are not able to share in similar life experiences; the recent tragedies of slain teenagers Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis immediately come to mind. Both unarmed and innocently gunned down by men who happened to have a White racial identity, these young Black males, were tragic examples of what it sometimes means to exist in a Black body; following the verdict of the Trayvon Martin case, a CNN interview with one juror revealed a “disconnectedness” as she referred to Rachel Jeantel—a Black female witness in the case—as “those people.” The power of the visual and the importance of unpacking our troubled history through this lens is salient here. I am afraid that these tragic acts have the ability to render a feeling of hopelessness among those who experience life marked by race.

I am not suggesting that fictive kinship bonds are unable to be formed by those who exist in opposing realities; I am curious though, the impetus for such bonds to take place. My deep interest as an educator exists in creating spaces where we are able to recognize and affirm the human spirit and its desire to be recognized as worthy of being. However, I am sobered that embedded in the pathology of a constructed racial hierarchy is continued injustice and inequity. With the knowledge that agency not only begins with intentionality and forethought, but also benefits from the actions of forces (social actors, for instance) outside oneself, I call for educators to be active in finding a familiarity with their students, so that they are able to act on their behalf to secure desirable outcomes. This call for action is broad—one that acknowledges
education as a place for active learning where transmission takes place through dialogue with students as well as about them. This place of learning is enacted when teacher becomes student, making the strange familiar and the familiar strange. Moving forward, I am curious what this study might mean for communities of color; specifically, I am curious how we as Black Americans can continue to encourage ourselves to arise out of a contentious past and move toward a victorious narrative that does not rely on one that has been given to us. I would argue that the lives of the participants in this study give us a direction for doing so. It is a beginning for finding our center of gravity.
References


APPENDIX A
Invitation for Participation in Research

Dear __________,

__________ has given me your name as a person who would be very good to include in my doctoral dissertation research project at the University of Georgia on life histories of African American/Black K-12 art teachers. I am writing to make a formal invitation, and to give you some of the details of the project. Participation in this research is completely voluntary.

Following, is a brief description of my project:

For several decades, shortages of minority teachers have been featured prominently as a big issue for the nation’s schools. With respect to the discipline of art education, there is an understanding that a smaller percentage of minority art teachers exist than in the overall general teacher workforce. Additionally, surveys conducted by the national Endowment for the Arts reveal that arts participation—in both attendance and creation—has declined most significantly over the last quarter century among African Americans. When reviewing the literature, it becomes apparent that Black/African Americans, as teachers, artists, and audiences of the arts in the United States have become significant as negative numbers.

Placing their absence at the center of discussion compels an understanding and analysis of ways Black people have historically been included and excluded from these spaces and prompts further discussion how African Americans who prevail in these spaces, make the decision to persist despite challenge and participate fully. Looking at the career decisions African Americans have made about teaching as a profession, when a multitude of options are available, and more specifically, those who have embraced teaching art, and then turning our attention towards an affirmation, by African American art teachers, of an artist identity by actively making and exhibiting art, we might begin to understand how Black people have, in fact, negotiated full participation in spaces where they are often discussed as under-represented. Thus, the purpose of this life history case study is to understand how African American/Black art teachers think about themselves as both teachers and artists.

To participate in this study you must:
1) be at least 18 years of age
2) self-identify as Black or African American
3) be currently a full-time art teacher in a K-12 environment
4) have taught art for at least 10 years
5) be currently making and/or exhibiting your own artwork

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded, one-on-one interview, and one or two subsequent interviews based on analysis of the initial interview. Interviews will be conducted between October and December 2012. The interview format consists of an initial interview—approximately 90 minutes—in, which you tell the story of your life, specifically answering questions about early experiences with art, experiences as an artist, and also experiences as an art teacher. Follow-up interviews are designed to answer questions not covered in the initial interviews. In addition to interviews, this research will
include one observation of each participant teaching in his/her art classroom, one observation of each participant in his/her studio art environment, and an examination of curriculum documents and one artwork of the artists/teachers choosing.

All participants will be anonymous, and will have access to drafts of my written work. If you agree to participate, I am hoping that our combined efforts will provide an important document about African American/Black K-12 art teachers. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at 1-251-455-1008. I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with us. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Gloria Wilson
Ph.D. Student
University of Georgia
**This research is supervised by Dr. Carole Henry (Professor of Art)**
706-542-1631
APPENDIX B

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS
LAMAR DODD SCHOOL OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
ATHENS, GA 30602

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY, CONTACT: Gloria J. Wilson, 1794 S. Lumpkin St. #18, Athens, GA 30606, 251-455-1008. Faculty sponsor is Carole Henry, Professor of Art, Art Education Chair, Lamar Dodd School of Art, 270 River Road, Athens, GA 30602, 706-542-1631

Gloria Wilson
1794 S. Lumpkin St. 18
Athens, GA 30606

Month, day, 2012

Dear ( ),

You are invited to participate in a dissertation research study of African American/Black K-12 art teachers that I am conducting. This study focuses in particular on hearing the voices of three K-12 African American art teachers and examining their experiences and decisions to embrace an artist identity, to consider art as an academic pursuit beyond high school, and subsequently to choose a career as an art(s) educator. This study attempts to add to the limited information on this population by examining and understanding how black art teachers think about themselves as both artists and teachers.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in three audio-recorded, one-on-one interviews, conducted by the researcher between November 2012 and January 2013. In addition to interviews, this research will include one observation of each participant teaching in his/her art classroom, one observation of each participant in his/her studio art environment, and an examination of four documents, including: one lesson plan and one artwork of the artists/teachers choosing, an artist statement, and a teaching philosophy.

If you choose to participate, you will be given the option of choosing a pseudonym. All written reports will utilize the name you choose. Your identity and the identity of your school will be obscured, per your request, in all written reports to protect your privacy and that of your school. All recordings and notes from the interviews will be stored in a secure, locked file cabinet, and computer files will be password protected, with access available only to the researcher. The audio recordings, should you consent, will not be listened to by anyone but the researcher without your explicit written consent.

I hope that participation in this project will add to your own personal and professional development. As a participant, you will contribute to the much-needed research on African American art teachers in K-12 environments. Your comments and experiences will contribute to
making the Art Education program at the University of Georgia more aware the experiences of African American art teachers and will also contribute to the larger literature in the field of teacher education.

There is a time commitment involved in this project. Individual interviews will probably last about 90 minutes. Interviews will take place at a location of your choice, where you feel most comfortable. Your total time commitment should not exceed 15 hours. This includes any time you may spend reading the various transcripts. If you decided to participate in this study, please understand that your participation is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

The results of this study will be used for writing a dissertation, in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Georgia. They may also be used as part of presentations at conferences or published in journals on art education and/or general education.

It is important in any research study to behave ethically with those with whom we interact. I wish to establish and maintain a relationship of trust that respects your dignity and integrity. You will be treated fairly, and if difficult issues arise, a resolution can be attempted through discussion to address your concerns and aid in my production of public knowledge. If you have any further questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at any time during this process by email at gjwils@uga.edu or call me at 251-455-1008.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Gloria J. Wilson

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I have read the above statement and agree to participate in the study described.

PRINTED NAME__________________________________________________________

SIGNATURE______________________________________________________________

DATE________________________

Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the researcher.

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

You have been invited to participate in a research project through the University of Georgia. The reason for this research is to examine the experiences of African American art teachers who have embraced an artist identity by choosing art as an academic pursuit beyond high school, and have chosen a career as an art(s) educator. This study attempts to add to the limited information on this population by examining and understanding how African American art teachers think about themselves as both artists and teachers.

The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without the prior consent of you, unless otherwise required by law. The interviews will be audiotaped. The tapes will be transcribed, and your words may be quoted. If so, a different name will be used to ensure that you cannot be identified in any way.

For this project, you will participate in a series of 3 interviews of your life history, in general, and specifically with experiences related to your pursuit as an artist/educator. This interview will last approximately 90-minutes.

You are free to stop during any of the interviews and withdraw your participation at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with me.

Do you have any questions?

Do you agree to participate in this study? ____

Okay. May I begin recording? ____

Interview 1

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Tell me about being an artist (what does it mean to be an artist)? Has this has changed over time?
3. Recall for me when your interest in art began.
4. If you were to tell me about an event in your life that has influenced the development of your identity as an artist, what story comes to mind?
5. Tell me about an experience as an artist that was a highlight for you/a challenge.
6. Tell me about a moment in your life when you felt disconnected from this identity.
7. Recall for me your earliest memory of wanting to be an art teacher.
8. Tell me about your first teaching assignment (the school, surrounding community, curriculum). Second teaching assignment? Third?
9. How has your teaching changed over time?
10. Tell me about an experience as an art teacher that was a highlight for you/a challenge.
11. Tell me about a good day in your classroom. How about a bad day?
12. Tell me about an art lesson that you feel was successful. (What made this lesson successful?) What about a lesson that was not successful?
13. Tell me about an art experience that was meaningful for you to bring your students.
14. What has it meant to be an artist who is Black/African American? A teacher who is Black/African American?
15. How do you think about yourself within the larger narrative of the world of art? Education?
16. How might you address the gaps in access and participation among African Americans?
17. Describe some rituals important in your classroom?

Is there anything we didn’t talk about that you’d like to add?

**Recommended Format for Probing Questions**

1. You mentioned ______________. Tell me more about that.
2. You mentioned ______________. What was that like for you?
3. You mentioned that you ______________. Walk me through what that was like for you.
4. Tell me what you think about ______________.
5. What happened when ______________.
6. What was your experience with ______________?