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"Counternarratives… can provide a method and medium for interrogating the ubiquitous undergirding systems of inequality and oppression."

how it feels to be BLACK ME: Black Masculinities and Sexualities in Black Visual Culture

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In this article, I build on previous scholarship about Black identities, masculinities, and sexualities within Black visual culture and how their content and concepts reverberate within a larger white-dominant culture as viewed phenomenologically through Black lived experiences. This manuscript is a first-person, focused effort toward contextualizing traditionally nondominant, marginalized stories as valid, viable, and valuable contributions to our larger collective sociocultural (his)tories for composing, curating, and contributing to how I view my physical identities in conjunction with my visual identities. I provide a historical review of literature on Black masculinities, focused on the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexualities. The implications of this article reemphasize this scholarship and simultaneously destabilize hegemonic discourses around identities of Black men situated in whiteness as a way to assert ownership and control over our own images, narratives, and lived experiences.

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It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here. **(Baldwin, 1998, p. 200)**

The title of this article, "how it feels to be BLACK ME," is an homage to Zora Neale Hurston's (1928/2015) publication, *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*. In this, Hurston wrote, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (p. 11). Hurston remembered being a small child and watching white people passing through her all-Black hometown of Eatonville, Florida, with great interest and pleasure, then realizing they instead viewed her—a small Black girl hiding behind a curtain—with disdain. The day she realized this was the day she understood she was designated *colored* in a society founded on and grounded in white supremacy. For Hurston, in 1928, an example of being designated colored or how she *felt* her race was the way she was treated and viewed with contempt by most of the white people at Barnard College as the first Black female graduate; however, her attitude toward being labeled colored was one of acceptance, boldness, and defiance.

Glen Ligon's (1992) work, *Untitled (Four Etchings)*, 1992, *1 From a Suite of 4* (Figure 1), is an homage to Hurston as well. Hurston is known as a storyteller and folklorist, and for writing in the enunciated language of Black people from the South. Here, Ligon channels Hurston's use of repetitiveness in her writings. He emulates her uniformity and consistency through his use of texture and etching. Ligon embodies expressions of Blackness embedded within Hurston's words.

His work simultaneously becomes plain/veiled, unblemished/distorted, clear/blurred, similarly to the ways in which whiteness views Black identity. In short, Ligon's work is an exemplar of Hurston feeling secure, confident, and stable in her vague and nebulous colored body. The distinction of black letters on a white background depicts how Ligon embeds Blackness within whiteness and it is also an example of how Black people did not have a choice but to remain graceful and poised in the trenches of an oppressive white hegemonic America.

Ligon (1992) also addressed constructions of a fixed Black identity, the Black-in-white binary, along with the many blurred layered identities within Blackness. Ligon's work speaks to (re)storying Blackness by destabilizing whiteness, and I contend, it is necessary to focus on the influences that visual culture has on constructions of Black identities, masculinities, and sexualities because hegemonic discourses negate and negotiate identities, masculinities and sexualities by race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Ligon's (1992) work also focuses on his individual lived experiences as a Black gay man living in a hegemonic America.

In this article, I build on previous scholarship about Black identities, masculinities, and

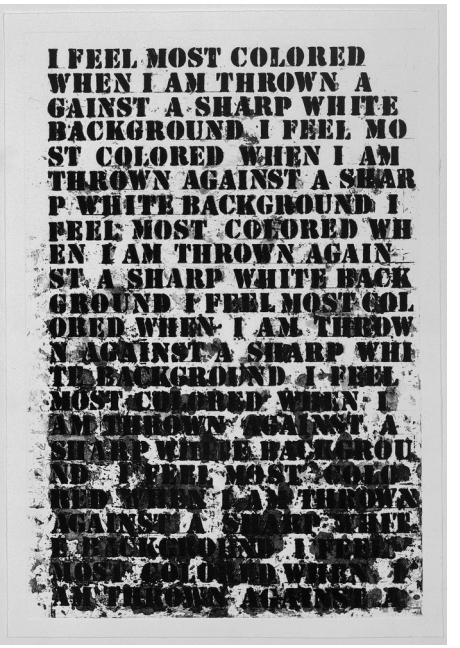


Figure 1. Glenn Ligon, Untitled (Four Etchings), 1992, 1 from a suite of 4, softground etching, aquatint, spit bite, and sugarlift on paper, Each: 25 × 17 3/8 inches (63.5 × 43.2 cm); Edition of 45 and 10 APs; published by Max Protech Gallery; Printed by Burnet Editions, NY; © Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, and Chantal Crousel, Paris.

sexualities within Black visual culture (Grant, 2013, 2014, 2019, 2020a, 2020b), and how the context, content, and concepts presented in these publications reverberate within a larger white-dominant culture, as viewed phenomenologically through Black lived experiences. I begin by discussing Black visual culture. Then I provide a brief historical review of literature on Black masculinities, concentrated at the junctions of race, gender, class, and sexualities grounded in and constructed in whiteness. Later, I gesture toward how this orientation to desiring and eliciting authentic critical first-person stories and counternarratives from marginalized perspectives has the potential to offer new ways of thinking about visual culture research in art education. Finally, I end with a summary of implications for some of the ways in which I was taught to narrate, negotiate, understand, and make sense of my visual identities, masculinities, and sexualities by destabilizing the miseducation of Black me, through encounters within the opaque recesses of whiteness.

Brian Keith Alexander (2012) situated whiteness as a "self-reifying practice, a practice that sustains the ability to name, and conversely not to be named, and the power to speak without being chastised while in the process of chastising others" (p. 23). In response to this self-relying practice of whiteness, I use a lowercase *w* with the words *white* and *whiteness* as a way to destabilize whiteness in my writing. My reemphasizing this scholarship while simultaneously destabilizing hegemonic discourses around Black men's identities as situated in whiteness is an example in asserting ownership and control over our own images and narratives of our individual and personal lived experiences. Here, I use the distinctive understandings of Black masculinities and sexualities that I gained from previously identifying as a brother on the *down low* (DL), a Black gay man, and now as a man who has sex with other men (MSM), to inform my exploration of visual culture's impact on narratives of DL, Black men, and Black gay men, particularly around themes of disidentification and resistance (Muñoz, 1999). For clarity, the term *DL* is a common way to refer to Black men who live their everyday lives as heterosexuals, are often married to (or explicitly involved with) women, yet also engage in discreet relationships with other men (Scott, 2010).

Negating Black Men in Black Visual Culture

In the history of mass-produced visual culture, the vast majority of images containing Black people objectifies them (Pieterse, 1992).

In this article, I adopt Jan Nederveen Pieterse's (1992) construct of *Black visual culture* to signify this production of Black people as objects mediated through visual modes of whiteness. John Berger (1972) noted: "But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world" (p. 7). Further, Pieterse (1992) critiqued Black visual culture from the stance of dominant white discourses working to misrepresent Black people:

> It is not that the images provide no information about [B]lacks, but that the information is one-sided and distorted. They convey allegories of the relations between Europe and Africa, and between whites and [B]lacks, viewed from the standpoint of Europeans and whites. The relations depicted are not those of dialogue but of domination. (p. 10)

Pieterse (1992) noted how Black visual culture is problematic given its production through hegemonic European and American perspectives, which then provide distorted, displaced, second-hand representation of Black people. These multimedia images can include paintings, pictures, sketches, television series, movies, videos, novels, and cartoons; they can be representational and nonrepresentational; and they can depict external and internal qualities, processes, and perspectives (Grant, 2013, 2014). Similarly, "the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe… we only see what we look at… and to look is an act of choice" (Berger, 1972, p. 8). Furthermore, Black visual culture often hyper-focuses on Black men and their deficits, including struggles with societal maltreatment; impoverished socioeconomic conditions and opportunities; educational limitations; and discrimination ranging from minor, implicit bias, like microaggressive language, to extremely explicit racist institutional violence, such as police brutality (Carpenter & Grant, 2015; Cohen, 1997; Collins & Crawford, 2006; Mutua, 2006; Powell, 2003). Some Black men—myself included—feel even further objectified as a result of the inaccurate, distorted ways we are depicted through social and mass media channels (Carpenter & Grant, 2015; Collins, 2004).

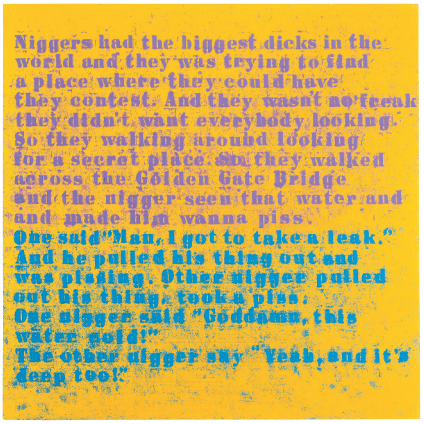


Figure 2. Glenn Ligon, Mudbone (Liar) #3, 2004, oil stick and acrylic on canvas, 32 × 32 inches (81.28 × 81.28 cm); © Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery, London and Chantal Crousel, Paris.

Ligon's (2004) work, *Mudbone (Liar) #3* (Figure 2), pays homage to Richard Pryor's racial truth telling, or what I call telling people how the cow chews the cabbage. Pryor was a master of storytelling and wowed his audiences with his comedic style and charisma. He controlled hegemonic narratives by taking stereotypes of Black men grounded in whiteness and (re)storying them into jokes. One of his most famous characters, created for his stand-up shows, was Mudbone—a philosophical streetwise wino born in Tupelo, Mississippi (McCluskey, 2008). Pryor referred to Mudbone as his alter ego, pontificating on Black lived experiences, folklore, and racial truth telling. In one of Pryor's shows, the character Mudbone was talking about two Black men having a conversation about having to take

a piss. The story went like this: "So they walked across the Golden Gate Bridge and the nigger seen that water and it make him want to piss, see" and the "boy say, 'Man, I got to take a leak. He pulled out his thing and was pissing.'" The "other nigger pulled his out, took a piss. One nigger said, 'God-damn! This water cold.' The other nigger say, 'Yeah, and it's deep, too'" (McCluskey, 2008, pp. 242–243). Here, Mudbone lets the audience know, while taking a piss standing on the side of the Golden Gate Bridge, these two Black men's dicks are so big and so long they hit the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. So, I ask you, what are some of the veiled implications in what Mudbone is saying? What are some of the ways in which Mudbone has taken control of and (re)storied narratives of Black identities, masculinities, and sexualities that are constructed in whiteness? What are some connections between Ligon's work and Mudbone and whiteness?

Once again, Ligon (2004) used text as image; and through visual culture, he explicitly showed how some Black people use comedy, storytelling, and racial truth telling as a way to simultaneously explore and reject stereotypes from white hegemonic culture. In a similar vein, "Black Machismo," a poem by Essex Hemphill (1991) in *Brother to Brother*, skewers this phenomenon, focusing on persistent stereotypes around Black men and the size of their dicks:

> Metaphorically speaking his [B]lack dick is so big when it stands up erect it silences the sound of his voice. It obscures his view of the territory, his history, the cosmology of his identity is rendered invisible. When his big [B]lack dick is not erect it drags behind him, a heavy, obtuse thing, his balls and chains clattering, making so much noise I cannot hear him even if I want to listen. (p. 57)

Similarly, Hemphill's (1991) poem recalls the easily recognized, heavily sexualized stereotypical visual image/narrative of a Black man seen through a colonized gaze. His Black identities, masculinities, and sexualities are used to justify his mutually reinforcing oppression, persecution, and objectification. Hemphill's (1991) description of a "[B]lack dick… so big when it stands up erect it silences the sound of his voice" (p. 57), is a direct reference to Western culture's ideologies around Black male bodies (Grant, 2019; Mutua, 2006; Taylor, 2008). The colonizing objectification of Black bodies into commodities—for-profit capital goods—positioned Black men as studs or bucks, valued (and used coercively) for their sexual reproduction capacity (Woodard, 2014). These associations are so strong that often the presence of physically attractive Black men in 19th-, 20th-, and 21st-century Black visual culture function effectively, with Black male identity being connected to the size of his dick (Grant, 2019; Woodard, 2014).

Narrating Negotiated Black Visual Culture

In contemporary Black visual culture, narratives *of* men "on the DL" and *from* men "on the DL" can provide additional, alternative, and insightful representations of Black masculinities from a traditionally marginalized and secretive subculture. Narratives either reify or reject hegemonic norms. Graeme Sullivan (2005) positioned narratives as one example of first-person representations that can offer opportunities to amplify traditionally excluded and muted voices, helping find and make places for them in a large, diverse, growing collection. Here, I am declaring that such narratives function as powerful social storying, to (re)construct identities, (re)flect and (diss)eminate (sub)cultural values, and (re)configure individual, structural, and institutional relationships and movements. Significantly, counternarratives can provide marginalized people with access to consume, create, curate, and contribute more complex, nuanced representations of their experiences and stories. They also can provide a method and medium for interrogating the ubiquitous undergirding systems

of inequality and oppression. With regard to DL men, first-person counternarratives offer a vehicle to illuminate how they continually understand and negotiate omnipresent systemic oppression, highlighting the multidimensional experiences of a predominantly hidden, silent, overly simplified population.

For me, aligning my identities so closely—through Black visual culture—to my presumed sexual prowess reduces me to an erotic fantasy valued primarily as a phallus symbol. For example, Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs objectify and emasculate the nude Black gay male body. They form a malicious iconography of Blackness that negates personal particulars, creating instead an undifferentiated object of nameless fear, loathing, and perverse desire (Grant, 2019). In this context, the static codes of hegemonic culture overdetermine Black men's identities. Marriott (2000) noted, "Our dream world is… fixed by someone else's fascinations and repulsions, a distorting emanation sent to possess, to consume us" (p. 41). As such, Black visual culture, as it (re)presents and (re)ifies Black masculinities and sexualities, has cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary significance for disciplines such as, but not limited to, art education, African American studies, political science, and gender studies. Black visual culture is a contested field and therefore is not monolithic (Alexander, 2012; Grant, 2013, 2014). It has been written about, conceptualized, and debated in ways other than and in addition to the concept of whiteness (Carpenter & Grant, 2015; Collins, 2004; Ferguson, 2004; Grant, 2020a, 2020b; hooks, 1994; Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, & Carpenter, 2018; Rolling, 2018).

Black Masculinities and Sexualities in Black Visual Culture

Stereotypes of Black men as hypersexual, hypermasculine, and subsequently hyperviolent (Campbell & Giannino, 2011; Collins, 2004; Grant, 2019) frequently provoke fear and misconceptions, resulting in responses running from general disregard and disgust to police harassment and violence. In contrast, exploring how DL and Black gay men articulate and navigate their own masculinities in relation to Black visual culture stereotypes through (re)storying and counternarratives can augment understandings of the complexities facing marginalized populations with intersectional identities. This perspective is lacking in art education, and only nominally present in many other hegemonic dominant education fields. As a Black MSM, my research and stories can enrich our collective understandings of what it means to be DL, Black, and gay in hegemonic society. Centering myself in this research is an unequivocally unapologetic deliberate effort to acknowledge this crisis and destabilize persistent restrictive dominant narratives around Black identities, masculinities, and sexualities. Furthermore, exploring iconographic, symbolic, and visual culture narrative discourses around Black masculinities and sexualities sheds light on some of the ways in which Black visual culture echoes and/or reifies negative stereotypes.

UNAPOLOGETICALLY BLACK

W. E. B. Du Bois's (1903/2005) concept of double consciousness is internal self-awareness coupled with the constant demand to see one's self (displaced) through the perspective of whiteness. The culturally dominant other functions as a powerful visual metaphor for Black lived experiences (Grant, 2013, 2014). Berger (1972) asserted our ways of seeing result from what we are *taught* to know or what we *believe* we know. When what we know is overdetermined by stereotypes and biases, what we see is too. As a result, contemporary discourses around DL and Black gay men position them simultaneously as self-viewing subjects and objects, but primarily as multiply viewed objects across Black visual culture, Black culture, and Black gay culture, with heteronormativity functioning as a stabilizing component within and across these discourses (Grant, 2019; Johnson & Henderson, 2005).

Importantly, DL and Black gay men experience their identity struggles not in fragmented, separate pieces, but through inhabiting multiple fluid positions in identities that shift contextually in recognizability and acceptability (Collins, 2004; Grant, 2020a; Harris, 2003). Black gay activist and scholar James Baldwin (1998), deliberately rejecting the burden of double consciousness as a Black gay man in the United States, stated, "It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I'd been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here" (p. 200). In this context, Baldwin's (1998) words are salient, significant, and striking as he took a stand in being earnest within himself, his resoluteness, his steadfastness, and his confidence in owning/claiming his identities, his masculinities, and his sexualities and his defying whiteness is an example of what I am referring to when I use the term *Unapologetically Black*.

Nevertheless, through a lens of whiteness, DL and Black gay men's identities, masculinities, and sexualities are inherently self-contradictory representations. White heteronormativity does not acknowledge a Black gay man to be considered an authentic man, an authentic Black man, or an authentic Black gay man because he is not heterosexual or a white gay man. This continuous displacement and denial of acknowledgment as an *authentic man* requires alternative approaches to achieving full consideration and inclusion into American society. Therefore, in dominant discourses, Black gay men are an impossibility because being a *real* man demands being white, cisgender, masculine, and heterosexual; in nondominant discourses, gay implies white and (upper) middle class (Campbell & Giannino, 2011; Johnson & Henderson, 2005), positions generally inaccessible to those who are Black.

Charles Garoian (1999) advocated upsetting formal Western educational models and in their place creating liminal learning spaces that elicit and engage critical thinking. Such liminal spaces offer opportunities for including personal experiences, interpreting, and researching grounded in critical pedagogy. They validate using experiences as examples to illustrate concepts of DL and Black gay male identities. Liminal spaces provide opportunities for disrupting/suspending categories. Building on Jose Esteban Muñoz's (1999) concept of queer disidentification as a process of carving out a space within contexts of whiteness to survive and/or thrive, Jeffrey McCune (2008) explored liminal spaces to investigate ways some Black men engage queer and homosexual desire—through heteronormativity—as resistant and anti-normative. For McCune (2008), *the night club* serves as a liminal space that is more accommodating and hospitable to *Black MSM*—or men who have sex with other men but who do not necessarily identify as DL or gay—than it is to Black men who outwardly identify as DL, bisexual, or gay. In the night club's liminal space, Black MSM can refuse the labels *gay* or *queer*, and their associated narratives (particularly around race, masculinities, and sexualities), constructing their own self-determined narratives instead. Black gay scholar E. P. Johnson's (2008b) book *Sweet Tea* created conditions whereby Black gay male participants in the South formed their own counternarratives.

In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks (1992) emphasized the colonizing gaze's "acute need to demarcate subject and object" (p. 30), providing the locus for "desires for 'the primitive'" (p. 30), and fantasies about *otherness*, while "re-inscribing the status-quo" (p. 30). Further, hooks (1992) described how the "white pornographic gaze" (p. 30) eroticizes the discourse of white domination and the subordination of colonial subjectivity, facilitating the symbolic disintegration and consumption of images eliciting both anxiety and appetite for *otherness*. To hooks (2004), "the contemporary cannibalization of sexualized [B]lack male bodies in mainstream popular control suggests that white folks have found a way to conquer their fear" (p. 55). In effect, hegemonic discourses

in the US converge "in the iconography of [B]lack male sexualities" (p. 55), hypocritically (mis) representing Black male sexuality as a compulsive-obsessive "form of power when in actuality it is an indication of extreme powerlessness" (p. 55). Similarly, Black (2007) uses Fanon's analysis of Black men's genitalia producing fear and anxiety for white patriarchy as simultaneously symbol/symptom/source of Black sexual potency and concomitant and contemporaneous white impotency, reifying Black men as overloaded symbols tied to their dicks.

Overall, some academic disciplines—such as art education—have at best marginalized, and, at worst, ignored DL and Black gay men's experiences with their identities, masculinities, and sexualities (Grant, 2013, 2014, 2019, 2020a, 2020b). Within the past few decades, masculinities and sexualities of Black gay men like James Baldwin, Joseph Beam, Essex Hemphill, Glen Ligon, and Marlon Riggs have forced rapid progress in this regard. For example, in 2018, the television series *Pose*'s mainstream popularity provided a candid glimpse and insider perspective into the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual or allied (LGBTQIA+) people. This show also featured realistic portrayals of people of color in the ballroom scene in New York City—a scene similar to some that I experienced firsthand, living there while working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from the late 1990s into the early 2000s. *Pose*'s range of characters offers rich, nuanced insights into complicated intersections of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, providing an exceptionally accurate portrayal of living as *othered* in a world of blinding hegemonic heteronormative whiteness.

Gendered Discussions of Black Masculinities and Black Sexualities in Whiteness

Historically, according to Warren (2009), "whiteness is both an identity and a structure" (p. 80). Whiteness binds white people with a white-benefiting system of power that disadvantages people of color (Ferguson, 2004; Snorton, 2014; Warren, 2009). In a critical response to this focus on whiteness and white perspectives/experiences, some scholars eventually delved into multilayered dimensions of Black identities (Rolling, 2018), masculinities, and sexualities in contexts ranging from hegemonic interpretations of manhood (Cohen, 1997; Holland, 2012; hooks, 1992, 2004; McCune, 2012, 2014; Mutua, 2006; Snorton, 2014), to social media and television representations (Carpenter & Grant, 2015; Grant, 2020b; Johnson, 2008a), to sexism and homophobia in hip-hop (hooks, 1994; Johnson, 2008a), and to education (Griffin & Cummins, 2012). Similar to Johnson (2008a, 2008b), these works also examined narratives of some Black men articulating their experiences at the intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender. Their narratives positioned Black masculinities and sexualities as a discursive site of identities, accentuating fluctuating elements of marginalization and privilege within these Black men's individual lives. For instance, Alexander (2012) considered the Black male body in a controversial argument marking Black bodies as "a site of public and private contestation" (p. 74) with "competing investments in Black masculinity that are historical and localized, affecting notions of intellect and character, as well as virility and fertility" (p. 74). Further, Alexander (2012) and Johnson (2008b, 2008a) used intersectionality as a lens to explore Black gay men navigating sociocultural spaces. More specifically, Alexander (2012) documented how white and Black communities differ in interpretations of *good* versus *bad* embodiments and expressions of Black masculinities and sexualities.

Similar to the *authentic man*, for Alexander (2012), qualities of a *good man*, according to dominant white discourses, include being articulate, educated, intelligent, and polite. However, these qualities may be considered gay or *bad* in some facets of Black communities. Therefore, when read through the filters of racism, heterosexism, and homophobia, a Black man embodying characteristics

dominantly viewed as *good* can be seen as a *bad man* (Alexander, 2012).

Research must help counter the invisibility, objectification, and misrepresentation of DL and Black gay men. In an era of essentialist stereotyping of Black men (Collins, 2004; Grant, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Johnson, 2008b, 2008a), research centered on nonheterosexual Black men must offer an array of insightful, varied, complex, nuanced narratives. Johnson's (2008b) research focused on how Black gay men manage intersectional aspects of their lives within communities and geographic regions that marginalize their race, masculinities, and sexualities, multiply and fluidly. Furthermore, Johnson (2008a) argued, "Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people of color… committed to the demise of oppression in its various forms, cannot afford to theorize their lives based on 'single-variable' politics" (p. 5). Multiple oppressions are generally experienced concurrently by those embodying them; thus, raising one identity above others as a primary focus of analysis reinforces colonizing gazes instead of destabilizing them.

Although research that focuses on Black masculinities and sexualities is improving beyond the mere implicit, inferred inclusion of nonheterosexual Black men in art education, there is still little research focused on DL understandings and experiences of their masculinities and sexualities, which directly affects how some DL men navigate/narrate their lives (Grant, 2019, 2020a, 2020b). Singular understandings of Black masculinities and sexualities are overwhelmingly exclusionary. Acknowledging multiple masculinities and sexualities not only recognizes that DL and Black gay men exist, but also, this recognition legitimatizes them (Cohen, 1997; Collins, 2004; Grant, 2019, 2020a; Neal, 2013). Legitimizing fosters, supports, and promotes different ways of undertaking research into how DL, Black men, and Black gay men construct all of their identities and present their narratives within the intersecting contexts of dominant racist, heteronormative, cisgender discourses, and representations of Black masculinities and sexualities in Black visual culture and larger visual culture discourses. Ultimately, art education provides an ideal venue for pursuing these investigations and conversations further, considering their curricular, pedagogical, and sociocultural implications embedded in visual culture (Grant, 2020a, 2020b).

DESTABILIZING the MISEDUCATION of BLACK ME

Now I return to some key objectives and purposes of this article and reflect on the possibilities for amplifying, complicating, and destabilizing how Black visual culture is typically conceptualized and taught in schools and other education settings. When I refer to Black visual culture, I am referring to visual representations and pointing to what type of representations are visually distributed, disseminated, and purported. I am also concerned with who and what is *seen* and not *seen* in such visual representations. As such, I attend to interpretive practices and how we, as art educators, actively interact with images in the world and how whiteness has shaped the narrative in how we construct visual understandings in "how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein" (Foster, 1988, p. ix). In short, there is depiction, but there is also interpretation. Thus, I am asking the reader to what extent are they interested/concerned with the conditions of depiction, interpretation, and indeed interpretive practices that are most often applied to images of Black identities, masculinities, and sexualities that could be considered further.

Additionally, I ask that educators reflect on the criticality of what they include and exclude in their curricular and pedagogical praxis, and then I ask that they evaluate the implications of doing so, for the education of students and for practitioners. Below, I have provided some sample questions—not an exhaustive list—

with hope that they will point students and practitioners to some of the issues that I have been explicitly drawing to your attention throughout this article to assist you with destabilizing the miseducation of Black Me.

- What are some of the ways in which research grounded in autoethnography helps counter invisibility, objectification, and distortion of DL, Black men, and Black gay men?
- How do representations of DL, Black men, and Black gay men fit onto the landscape of representations of Black masculinities and Black gay men specifically?
- What iconographic, symbolic, and narrative precedents for contemporary representations of DL Black manhood are most influential and how are these antecedents echoed or reified in contemporary visual representations?
- What happens when researchers destabilize overprescribed, restrictive, inauthentic ways we see and understand visual cultural representations of Black masculinities and sexualities and how do they affect research outcomes?
- Why it is necessary to focus attention on the influence that visual culture has on the construction of Black masculinities and sexualities due to the fact that white hegemonic discourses negate Blackness by race, class, gender, and sexual orientation?
- What role does transdisciplinary pedagogical praxis play in meaningful discussions about Black identities, masculinities, and sexualities in visual culture studies and art education?
- How does desiring and eliciting authentic critical first-person stories and counternarratives from marginalized perspectives offer new ways of thinking about visual culture research in art education?
- How can studying whiteness assist preservice art education students and art/educators with understanding some of the ways in which race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, masculinities, and sexualities inform Black visual culture?
- How can the field of art education consider what the practice of constructing narratives (inquiring into social and cultural practices through narrative inquiry) can do, especially when it comes to the production of counternarratives?

In the questions above I present some examples of how to interrogate, interpret, and call into question analyses within Black visual culture, Black identities, masculinities, sexualities, gendered positions, and whiteness. One of my arguments in this article is that once whiteness controls a person's thinking, then whiteness controls a person's mind, body, and soul. For DL, Black men, and Black gay men, these dominant sociological myths and hegemonic master narratives around Black masculinities, sexualities, and Black male bodies in the US construct a singular, fixed, mythical Black male identity that is self-contradictory, simultaneously attractive/repulsive, and impossible. Interpreting, untangling, demythologizing, and counteracting these stereotypical and restrictive images of Black men requires deliberately attending to historical, sociocultural, and contemporary contexts, tools, purposes, and methods of creation, distribution, and consumption. People representing multiple marginalized categories at the crossroads of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation need to be able to tell their own counternarratives, to (re)story themselves, in their own voices, their way.

For DL and Black gay men, (re)storying provides opportunities to counteract hegemonic, heteronormative discourses filled with antiquated perceptions, misunderstandings, misrepresentations, ignorance, fear, and falsehoods about their bodies, minds, and souls. Hegemonic sociocultural hierarchies in the US are intrinsically aggressive, wielding power in many forms and fluctuating degrees—from entropic to explosive—while exoticizing, fetishizing, and misappropriating historically

and socioculturally contingent semiotic markers around identities including race, gender, class, masculinities, and sexualities (Grant, 2019, 2020a; hooks, 2004; Scott, 2010). Dominant discourses surrounding the production, distribution, consumption, and interpretation of Black men as cultural objects/artifacts function fundamentally as acts of epistemic and ontological violence, which inspire further physical and political acts of aggression. In other words, *by naming, (re)naming, and interrogating densely intertextual, hegemonically constructed, circularly reifying processes of Black visual culture, this article provides some of the tools to destabilize the overprescribed, restrictive, inauthentic ways we see and understand visual cultural representations of Black masculinities and sexualities.*

DL and Black gay men contributing their own representations and stories to a growing range of narratives from Black men more generally both challenges and counteracts hegemonic (racist) depictions of Black masculinities and sexualities as narrow, fixed, inalterable, and externally determined. For example, similarly, to Du Bois's (1903/2005) concept of double consciousness, Marriott (2000) posited,

> Human existence… may be a struggle for us all, but for the Black man his being is the effect of a war fought on at least two fronts. He must enter into combat not only with the presentiments and premonitions of a world condemning him to nonexistence, he must also enter the lists against his own image. (p. 88)

Stereotypes of Black men as oversexed, mentally incompetent, beast-fully uncivilized, and therefore threats to dominant notions of whiteness and white women, families, and the greater nation are deeply rooted in a colonizing, racist gaze (Cohen, 1997; Grant, 2019; hooks, 1994). These images position my Black manhood as intimidating, fearful, and frightening. My first-person narrative is deeply personal, a passionate response to the profound disregard of, and disdain for, my lived experiences and my perspective as a Black man living in a white hegemonic America that incessantly defines, delimits, devalues, and dehumanizes my life, both explicitly and implicitly. This is a first-person-focused effort toward contextualizing traditionally nondominant, marginalized stories as valid, viable, and valuable contributions to our larger collective sociocultural (his)tories for composing, curating, and contributing to how I view, and how I was taught to view, my identities living as a Black man in a hegemonic America. While simultaneously destabilizing hegemonic discourses, which focus on my fixed, immovable, static, and unchanging physical identities, inflicted on me by whiteness—a stud for breeding more strong Black men and being hypermasculine—in conjunction with my visual identities as a Black man—unintelligent, lazy, and provincial.

My Blackness threatens to neuter, sterilize, emasculate, castrate, and feminize hegemonic patriarchal whiteness with its foundations firmly built in heterosexuality's and cisgendered hypermasculinities. In return, based on my race and gender, I face continuous (pre)emptive punishments, prejudicial treatment, and layers of oppressions of varying intensities and impact. My Blackness is compounded by my gender, masculinities, and sexualities. Despite these compounding complexities, my perspectives and contributions to art education are valuable and should be appreciated and respected. Different stories need to be told. New ones. Black ones. Like mine. I am claiming this truth, to inhabit it, to use it as a source of power, potency, and strength. Point. Blank. Periodt!

Du Bois (1903/2005) eloquently expressed the disconcerting displacement of constant double consciousness, reflecting, "And yet, being [B]lack is a strange experience—peculiar even for one who has never been

anything else" (p. 1). Zora Neale Hurston (1928/2015) expressed a comparable sentiment when she said, "Beside the waters of the Hudson, I feel my race. Among the thousand white persons, I am a dark rock surged upon, and over swept, but through it all, I remain myself" (p. 11), and "When covered by the waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again. How it feels to be colored me" (p. 11). Here, Hurston (1928) is unapologetic, impenitent, unwavering, sturdy, and stabilized within her Black identity. She understood hegemonic whiteness and how its colonized gaze functioned abstractly to cultivate and propagate racism as she personally experienced it. But she did not understand how, individually, anyone could resist her, the storyteller. Hurston (1928) noted, "Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me" (p. 12). In response to Hurston, we should not deny ourselves her company, her wisdom, her insights, and her stories. She proved this to us, as her stories still resonate across time. These voices, and their stories, need to be heard. My research and my stories need to be heard. Art education, as a field, needs to know better *how it feels to be BLACK ME*.

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