Visual Culture: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

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The research question for this case study was based on how students in a beginning education class would respond to studying visual culture. In this study, participants were shown a film titled "Ethnic Notions." This film discussed racial visual culture and how it affected and still affects African Americans. The participants in this study answered questionnaires and participated in a critical discussion about visual culture and racist images. Many of the participants had a strong emotional response to the film. The participants stated that they understood the racist imagery better, as well as visual culture. Included in this study are recommendations for teaching topics using visual culture and how it could be incorporated into many educational topics.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

James B. Schwieger

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CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

In the field of art education, there is an increased awareness and popularity of visual culture. As Mirzoeff (1999) stated, “In the present intensely visual age, everyday life is visual culture.” The study of visual culture is a deviation from the study of what can be termed as “fine art,” to include such things as “fashion … hairdryers, shavers, cars, architecture … advertising, personal, public, corporate, and popular images, film, television, computer environments, and games, Internet home pages, newspaper and magazine design … products and packaging of all kinds (Barnard, in Duncum, 2001b).” The field of art education has broadened to include not only the study of fine art, but also visual culture (Duncum, 2001b). Visual culture can be used in other fields of education as well.

For my study, I used two educational tools to teach pre-service education majors about racist images in popular culture: the first was a film done by Marlon Riggs about racist forms of visual culture entitled “Ethnic Notions,” the second was a discussion that utilized racist postcards that I had recently purchased in a store.

Inspiration for this study came from the strong reaction that I had when I watched the film “Ethnic Notions” in a class that I took as part of my graduate studies. The film opened my eyes to how visual culture, in the form of racist memorabilia, cartoons, and films, can influence and reinforce negative cultural stereotypes. The film also made me very angry and at times embarrassed because of how poorly African Americans have been treated by the dominant white population. I felt that the portrayals
of African Americans in the forms of visual culture helped Whites to rationalize their treatment towards African Americans. I felt that their treatment was unfair and inhumane. Because I had studied forms of visual culture such as cartoons, and advertisements shown this film, I felt that I understood it better than I had before.

I felt that by seeing the objects in the film and listening to the commentaries included, I better understood the subject of racism and how mass media and forms of visual culture perpetuated it.

It is my belief that in teaching students about visual culture, their understanding of what they see will increase. I believe that visual culture has long been overlooked as a teaching resource. Students are surrounded by forms of visual culture and interact with it on an everyday basis. In studying visual culture, educators can connect their lessons with objects and forms with which students are familiar. These forms of visual culture have a meaning of their own that cannot be understood to their fullest extent unless they are investigated.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how students in an art for elementary teachers course respond to studying visual culture.

**Hypothesis**

Because of their participation in this study, participants will see how the study of visual culture can be incorporated into lessons. They will also understand visual culture and better understand the important social issue of racism regarding African Americans. By seeing how visual culture can be incorporated, the participants will study visual
culture in their classrooms; or, for those who were not education majors, encourage its study.

**Definition of Terms**

**Visual culture**: For the purposes of this study, I will use the definition given by Kevin Tavin (2003) that states that visual culture is "cultural practices and formations whose primary effects are affective... the everyday lifeblood of the experiences and thinking in all of us: daily, vernacular, common, cultural environment around us all...the television we watch, the movies we see, the fast food, or slow food, we eat, the clothes we wear (p. 198)."

**Material culture**: Describes all human-made and modified forms, objects and expressions manifested in the past and in our contemporary world (Bolin & Blandy, 2003, p. 249).

**General classroom**: General classroom will stand for any classroom that is not an art or other special area classroom.

**Pre-service general educators**: Students that are enrolled in college as education majors.

**Race**: does not have genetic or scientific validity as a means of differentiating between groups of human beings. However, it indicates a historically, socially, and culturally constructed notion ... that differentiates human beings based on supposedly “natural” qualities (Doy, 2000).

**Racism**: Discrimination against a certain group of people based on their race
Methodology

Within this study, I use a combination of research methods, including content analysis, action research, and survey in the form of a questionnaire.

I chose content analysis as a way to look at visual culture in this study. Content analysis involves:

The study of objects (i.e. cultural artifacts) or events systematically by counting them or interpreting the themes contained in them… Sociologists … are interested in cultural artifacts as something produced by people. These products stem from very aspect of human life including relatively private worlds, “high” culture, popular culture, and organizational life (Reinharz, 1992, p.146).

Visual culture lends itself to this form of study. The objects that we looked at as a class were racist postcards that I had bought at a bookstore and the film about racist memorabilia. These fit the descriptions of cultural artifacts by Reinharz as: “the products of individual activity, social organization, technology, and cultural patterns (p. 147).”

May (1997, p. 224) describes action research as “in short …the study and enhancement of one’s own (teaching) practice.” This best describes what I was trying to do with this research: enhance and study my own practice of teaching. Action research also works well with what I wanted to accomplish in this studying in that it takes into account “participants’ concerns, ruminations, and relationships… such work is conceived as ultimately empowering to all the participants involved (May, p.230).”

The participants viewed a film about racist images and visual culture entitled “Ethnic Notions.” After this viewing, they filled out a questionnaire that asks about the
film and also about visual culture and its uses in a classroom setting. After filling out this questionnaire, we discussed their answers, along with other responses and questions that arose. The students also looked at another form of visual culture in the form of postcards that I had purchased in a local bookstore.

I analyzed my students’ questionnaire answers and categorized them in order to study their understanding of visual culture and its use in their future classroom endeavors. I also analyzed the discussion that ensued after watching the film and answering the questionnaires. This will reinforce the answers given in the questionnaires.

Participants

The participants were five education majors and three non-education majors who were enrolled in the class “Art Media for Elementary Teachers” at a mid size public university in the Midwestern United States. All of the participants were undergraduates at either the junior or senior level. The course is a requirement for special education majors and it also fulfills a mandatory arts requirement for non-art majors. The specific majors of the participants were as follows:

- Special Education: 4
- Middle Childhood Education: 1
- Recreation Management: 1
- Specialized Studies: 1
- Photography: 1

All of the participants were female and of Caucasian descent. All were in their early to mid twenties.
I received written permission from all of the students to conduct the study. All participants understood that their identity and their responses would be kept anonymous.

**Data Collection**

The data was collected in a three-hour class session that consisted of viewing a film entitled “Ethnic Notions,” a critical discussion of the film that was audio recorded, and a questionnaire that was filled out during and after the critical discussion. During the critical discussion, questions were asked that did not appear on the handout to help to explore issues raised in the film. As a class, we also discussed a series of postcards that I had recently purchased at a store. These postcards contained images, many of which that were discussed in the film.

The questions that were on the handout given to the class were divided into two sections. The first side contained questions that were about the film “Ethnic Notions.” The other side of the handout contained questions that were about visual culture.

**Side one questions (“Ethnic Notions”):**

1. How did this film make you feel?
2. How were African Americans portrayed? What messages were conveyed through these images?

After these questions, there was space for any additional comments.

**Side two questions (visual culture):**

1. After seeing this film and learning about visual culture, do you think that incorporating visual culture could be important in the classroom? Explain.

After these questions, there was room for any additional comments.
Questions that were asked in the critical discussion that did not appear on the handout were as follows:

1. Do these images/ types of images appear today? If so, where?
2. What do you think visual culture is?
3. What do you think visual culture was in the past? What do you think visual culture is now? How are they different?
4. What impact does visual culture have on students today?
5. How could you incorporate visual culture into a non-art classroom?
6. Into what subject areas could visual culture incorporate itself?

Data Analysis

For this study, quantitative and qualitative methods will be used to analyze the data received from the participants. The data was received from a questionnaire that the participants filled out after watching the film. Responses gathered during the critical discussion will also be analyzed. These responses should aid in elaborating comments made on the questionnaires.

Assumptions

Racist images of African Americans appear in many forms of visual culture, such as historical advertising, knickknacks, entertainment, and toys. These objects helped form and reinforce many stereotypes that still exist today. These images of the African American were degrading and false. They served the purpose of keeping African Americans in a position of subordination to white Americans. The caricatures changed as time passed and evolved into what white society needed them to be ("Ethnic Notions,"
1986) at that time. Some of these caricatures still appear today in various forms of visual culture.

Visual culture surrounds us and is present in many different forms. As students become more comfortable in working with technology, the easier it is for them to access visual culture in many different forms. This is just one reason we should try to incorporate the study of visual culture into K-12 education lessons. It is a valuable resource. Students are bombarded daily with numerous images. These images affect students' lives as well as the artwork that they produce in class. Brent Wilson (2004) states: "Every visual artifact produced by a young person is a product pervaded by culture (p. 321)." With the knowledge gained by studying visual culture, students can better understand these images, and interpret what these images are trying to convey.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small number of participants that were involved.

All of my participants were female and Caucasian. Because of this, the participants only represent a small sampling of one gender and race-based category.

My study was conducted in one class session. The topic of racism and how it was and is depicted can warrant discussions that can last for more than one class period. Continued research will follow.

Summary

This case study will examine how students in an art for elementary teachers course respond to studying visual culture. By showing how one could influence racism
by using a form of visual culture that is about racist visual culture, I hope to raise the participants’ understanding of it and the many subjects and ideas that it contains.

The film “Ethnic Notions” and an interest in visual culture and art integration in classrooms motivated this study. It is my hope that the participants’ understandings of visual culture and racist images will be raised with the study of visual culture.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Visual Culture

In art education, visual culture has emerged as an important area of study. Visual culture is defined in a variety of ways. Definitions usually include the study of popular and mass culture as a way to see how images affect society. For the purposes of this study, Kevin Tavin (2003) explains that visual culture consists of:

- cultural practices and formations whose primary effects are affective...
- the everyday lifeblood of the experiences and thinking in all of us: daily, vernacular, common, cultural environment around us all...
- the television we watch, the movies we see, the fast food, or slow food, we eat, the clothes we wear (p. 198).

In studying visual culture, students can see how certain forms of popular culture shape and maintain societal beliefs and values. Visual culture can be seen as transdisciplinary, as Tavin (2003) states: “Visual culture can be understood as a matrix that cuts across multiple disciplines and branches of knowledge (p. 209).”

Many educators, including Duncum (2002b), states that visual culture is very broad and can include an array of images and artifacts. Burkhart (2006) states:

If it makes sense for art education to foster critical understanding of the vast influx of visual images, it also makes sense to encourage similar understandings of all sorts of material objects and forms because they too inform, suggest, prescribe, and symbolize (p.39).

Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) focuses on how we look at these images, the conditions under which we look, and the study of these images within their context as
a part of social practice. Duncum suggests a concentration on images as social practice. This means understanding images in a historical and cultural context. “It involves understanding images in terms of how they are slipped into people’s daily rituals, rather than as self-contained texts (Duncum, 2002b, p.19).”

Understanding images as social practices involves seeing images as power struggles between groups of people who differ in social values. Barnard (in Duncum, 2002b, p.19) sees visual culture as, “a tactic or strategy in the multiple ways in which power is exercised, which today is principally through the institutions of government and corporate capitalism.”

Duncum (2002b) also states that visual culture education should also arise from the questions it asks and the issues that it seeks to address. One such question involves how we represent race, class, and gender. What do we leave unrepresented and why? Yet another is exploring ways visual culture produces as well as reproduces a society (Duncum, 2001b).

One of the last points that Duncum makes is that visual culture should be taught through a dialogical pedagogy: one that involves critical discussion of images and the messages they convey. Students often have a plethora of knowledge about visual culture and can facilitate and enrich discussions as well as the teacher. Classroom discussions are vital in learning about visual culture.

In Boughton’s (2004) commentary, he states that:

We need to engage students in the sustained pursuit of ideas that are relevant to their lives and to their culture. We need to teach them to be critical participants in
democratic life. To do this we need them to understand the seductive power of the visual to engage and persuade them as they participate in the world of ideas (p. 268).

Problems with Studying Visual Culture

Not all educators agree about the inclusion of visual culture. Eisner (2001) argues that, “... the study of visual culture, influenced by critical theory, pays less attention to culture’s aesthetics than to its politics. Students study the art of popular culture to understand the sociology or politics of the image.” Eisner (2002) lists other concerns that come with studying visual culture. He states that even though all art, in a sense, is political, visual culture only examines the political and social context in which art is made. He also makes the statement that art teachers are not social studies teachers, and competence in the political analysis of popular art may not be their strong suit. Eisner also states that if in fact art educators are to analyze popular art in their classes, teacher education programs need to prepare these educators to do so.

Some argue that we as a society put too much faith into images that we see everyday and the effects of relying on the visual rather than the written. Christine Rosen (2007) states:

Today, anyone with a digital camera and a personal computer can produce and alter an image. As a result, the power of the image has been diluted in one sense, but strengthened in another....It is only in the past several years that we have begun to assimilate the effects of the move from a culture based on the printed word to one based largely on images...The potential costs of moving from the
printed word to the image are immense. We may find ourselves in a world where our ability to communicate is stunted, our understanding and acceptance of what we see questionable, and our desire to transmit culture from one generation to the next seriously compromised (p. 30).

**Anti-Racist Education**

For my study, I chose to look at racist forms of visual culture. I chose this topic because I was familiar with a film that I had watched in one of my classes. This film is entitled "Ethnic Notions." This film shows how African Americans were stereotyped in television, film, print, and in everyday objects. Many of these stereotypes are present today. Using this form of visual culture in this study was a way to show how teachers could start a discussion about racism. The readings that I have done for this study advocate looking at educational material and everyday texts and media to examine representations of cultural groups.

In order to begin anti-racist education, teachers must look at the material that their students are viewing everyday at school and at home. Kalin (2002) states that one of the first steps in beginning any anti-racist curriculum is to examine images and representations of people of color in texts, curricular material and the media. Not only does the educator need to look at how people of color are included in these forms, but also how they are omitted. Material should be inspected for how it perpetuates racial stereotypes in both overt and covert ways; time should be spent in deconstructing these images.
In addition, the texts and media that inform or influence us that are not necessarily part of the formal school curriculum, such as newspapers, television, and items of popular culture, should also be examined for their treatments or representations. Often more influential than any textbook are the various media, which impact the culture of the school and the thinking of teachers and students in profound ways. These stereotypes may be bold or subtle and are introduced in often "enjoyable" ways, as through children's cartoons or situational comedy. How television has been employed to imprint race, class, and gender stereotypes - and to sell products - should be carefully examined (Kalin, 2002, p. 85).

As Paul Duncum (2002) aptly put it: "The history of representation is far more determining of contemporary representations than anything in contemporary life. Where, after all, do visual stereotypes derive if not from previous representations (p. 8)?"

Examining race-related dialogue is very important in anti-racist education. Racism is a learned phenomenon, and can be unlearned as well. It has been shown that children are aware of race at an early age, and that racial attitudes can become more negative if some form of intervention is not administered (Banks, 1994; Lynch, 1987 in Howard & del Rosario, 2000). In these discussions, it is important to promote positive experiences.

Speaking about racism is not an easy task, however. As Tatum (1994, p. 463) states:

One consequence of addressing the issue of racism (and other forms of oppression) in the classroom is the generation of powerful emotional responses in
both white students and students of color. White students, in particular, often struggle with strong feelings of guilt when they become aware of the pervasiveness of racism in our society.

How do educators teach students about racism when it is such an uncomfortable topic? One of the primary steps educators need to do, suggests Tatum (1994), is to understand white racial identity development. Janet Helms’ six-stage model of white racial identity development can facilitate educators. Helms writes that white students "must become aware of her or his Whiteness, learn to accept Whiteness as an important part of herself or himself, and to internalize a realistically positive view of what it means to be White (in Tatum, 1994, p. 463)."

White Race Identity Development

There are six stages of white race identity development that Helms described. These stages can be divided into two major phases, the first involving the abandonment of racism, and the second involves the defining of a positive white identity. The first phase begins at the Contact stage and ends at the Reintegration stage; the second begins at Pseudo-Independent and ends at the Autonomy stage (Tatum, 1994). The following six stages are described in Tatum's 1994 article, as well as in Howard and del Rosario's, 2000.

Contact Stage.

Often individuals at the Contact stage perceive themselves as free of prejudice and are not aware of their feelings and beliefs of other racial groups. There is little attention paid to the significance of one's own racial group membership. Individuals at
this stage rarely describe themselves as being white. Those who are at this stage have naive curiosity about or fear of people of color.

**Disintegration Stage.**

White students at this stage are becoming aware of how prejudice and racism affect their lives and the lives of people of color in our society. The individuals begin to see how what they are learning about social inequalities is in contrast to the concept of the American system of meritocracy. This stage can be characterized by feelings of discomfort or guilt, shame, and sometimes anger. The question of "What can I do?" sometimes stems from this stage of learning. "Helping students think this question through is part of our responsibility as educators who have accepted the challenge of teaching about racism (Tatum, 1994, p. 465)."

**Reintegration Stage.**

At this stage in the model, white students may turn to explanations of racism that put the burden of change onto those who are the targets themselves. It is at this stage that white students may accept the status quo of racism. It is easy for them to get trapped in this stage, especially if the students avoid contact with people of color.

**Pseudo-Independent Stage.**

This stage of the model involves creating a positive definition of whiteness. It is also the beginning of the second phase of the developmental process. The individual may try to deal with some of the social pressures experienced at some of the earlier stages by becoming friends with those who share an anti-racist perspective. Individuals often try to
disavow affiliation with the whites by seeking out individuals from other racial backgrounds.

With these friendships, however, the students must become comfortable with her or his whiteness. "We all must be able to embrace who we are in terms of our racial cultural heritage, not in terms of assumed superiority or inferiority, but as an integral part of our daily experience in which we can take pride (Tatum, 1994, p. 468)."

*Immersion/Emersion Stage.*

Individuals now try to intensify their efforts to create a positive self-definition as a white person. Individuals at this stage seek out role models who are white and have anti-racist attitudes. At this stage, feelings of guilt and shame are now replaced with feelings of joy and pride. Persons also learn about anti-racist allies for people of color.

*Autonomy Stage.*

This last stage of the model is a sort of culmination of all the other stages. The newly defined definition of one's whiteness is internalized and a part of one's own personal self-definition. Anti-racist attitudes and behaviors are expressed. This stage is an ongoing process.

*Teacher Preparation in Anti-Racist Education*

With the current educational emphasis leaning towards multicultural and anti-racist education, pre-service teachers need the knowledge necessary to facilitate the inclusion of issues such as race in the classroom. In order for teachers to talk about race in their classrooms, they need to be properly prepared. In order to obtain the knowledge
necessary, Britzman (in Howard & del Rosario, 2000, p. 128) argues that there is a need to "unleash unpopular things" by including race and racism in teacher education curriculum.

Teaching pre-service teachers about race is important in teacher education programs. Perceptions of race influence teacher expectations, perceived student intelligence as well as tracking and ability grouping (Oakes, 1995 in Howard and del Rosario, 2000). Various studies have shown that pre-service teachers are uncomfortable working with students that are from racially and culturally backgrounds that differ from their own. This uneasiness leads many to avoid working in districts whose students are from racially diverse groups (Howard & del Rosario, 2000). Many of these predominantly white pre-service teachers state that they do not want to teach in an inner city or urban school, where most minorities are found (Kalin, 2002).

One way to ease this apprehension is to educate pre-service teachers about race and racism. The first step in doing this is to have teachers come to an understanding about their own conscious and unconscious beliefs and understandings about race and race-related issues. It also requires an understanding of the collision of values and beliefs (Howard & del Rosario, 2000).

What can teacher education programs do? Howard and del Rosario (2000, p. 133) have developed principles for programs to follow to facilitate the discussions and learning about race and its related issues.

1. Increase the number of students and professors of color into teacher education programs.
2. Raise the sensitivity levels of professors through workshops and seminars.
3. Increase university and community partnerships and service learning.
4. Have more diverse field placements in schools.
5. Locate teaching within the culture of the school and community. Pre-service teachers must be authentically informed about the communities in which they teach.
6. Examine racial development.
7. Keep race as a central focus.

“Ethnic Notions”

For this study, I showed a film that depicted images and that perpetuated and reinforced racist stereotypes of African Americans. I chose this film for its in-depth look at how these images reinforced harmful stereotypes through cartoons, advertisements, and memorabilia. This film was unique in that it was a form of visual culture that focused on visual culture. I felt this film would be ideal for this study.

“Ethnic Notions” is a documentary film that was directed and produced by Marlon Riggs in 1986. This film serves to inform and educate the public about racist memorabilia and culture in the United States and how it affected perceptions of African Americans through the years. This film can be used an educational tool that explains many of the racially focused stereotypes of African Americans. It raises the questions of: 1. How did these caricatures mold societal views of the African American, and 2. What were the consequences of these caricatures on the African American society and on the larger society as a whole?
California Newsreel (2003), the company that helped to produce the Emmy
winning film, summarizes it as follows:

Loyal Toms, carefree Sambos, faithful Mammies, grinning Coons, savage Brutes,
and wide eyed Pickaninnies roll across the screen in cartoons, feature films,
popular songs, minstrel shows, advertisements, folklore, household artifacts, even
children’s rhymes. These dehumanizing caricatures permeated popular culture
from the 1820’s to the Civil Rights period and implanted themselves deep in the
American psyche…“Ethnic Notions” situates each stereotype historically in white
society’s shifting needs to justify racist oppression from slavery to the present
day.

Racist Caricatures.

Racist caricatures of African Americans are discussed extensively in the film
“Ethnic Notions,” and also in Pieterse, 1992, and Turner, 1994. Unless otherwise noted,
the descriptions of these caricatures come from the film. They are the Sambo, the Zip
Coon, the Mammy, the Savage/Brute, and the Pickaninny.

The Sambo

The Sambo character was portrayed as a docile man who was always happy and
laughing. His child-like mannerisms and carefree attitude embodied the idea that slavery
was good and kept the African Americans happy. Sambo’s focus was on avoiding work
and having a good time.
The Sambo came into existence before the Civil War. This caricature served as an example to the white society that slavery was good. Sambos were happy in their situation. He was content with his life and found time to enjoy it. A plantation could not really be productive with Sambos, however. The Sambo would not do the work needed; however, Sambo fit the role of the “Happy Darkie” that was needed to encourage slavery. Slavery kept the African Americans happy and busy. Without slavery, the blacks would roam and cause trouble.

The Coon

The Coon was a Northern buffoon who imitated whites. He was proof of the blacks’ fallacies in trying to adapt to the freedom that was afforded to him by living in the North.

In cartoons of that time, the Coon was shown as having a penchant for gambling and razors. This was to show that like the Sambo, the Coon was childlike and liked to play games, yet he could also turn violent in a moment’s notice. This character was developed after the Civil War in response to the freedom given to blacks with the North’s victory. The whites felt threatened because of the surge of blacks in the labor force.

The Coon was also epitomized in minstrel shows. In these shows, white entertainers would put on makeup to appear to be black. This was called performing in blackface. Their faces would be darkened to black and their lips would be made white and widened with makeup. In their act, they would sing and dance. The dance was done with shuffling, jerky movements, and the song was sung in a babbling, foolish manner.
The black entertainers had to fit in within societal roles. In order for blacks to be in the entertainment business, they had to learn how to do minstrel performances and appear in blackface. Their acts and costumes were the same as their white counterparts. These minstrel performances perpetuated the belief that the African American man was not educated and clumsy. He could not be seen as the white man’s equal.

The Mammy

The primary caricature of the African American woman was the mammy figure. She was shown as being the plantation mistress’ primary slave, taking care of the slave owner’s house and overlooking the other house slaves. She was a large, dark-skinned, imposing woman. The mammy was the antithesis of the white woman: strong, asexual, and a controller. She was asexual in that she was stripped of her sexual allure. This illustration of the black woman was to avoid the provocation of sexual tension and the threat to the housemistress and society.

In reality, mammies were not as evident as they are depicted in movies and other forms of visual culture. She emerged in the defense of slavery.

This familiar denizen [Mammy] of the Big House is not merely a stereotype, but in fact a figment of the combined romantic imaginations of the contemporary southern ideologue and the modern southern historian. Records do acknowledge the presence of female slaves who served as the “right hand” of plantation mistresses. Yet the documents from the planter class during the first fifty years following the American Revolution reveal only a handful of such examples. Not until after the Emancipation did black women run white households or occupy
any significant number the special positions ascribed to them in folklore and fiction. The Mammy was created by the white Southerners to redeem the relationship between black women and white men within slave society in response to the anti-slavery attack from the North during the ante-bellum era, and to embellish it with nostalgia in the post-bellum period. In the primary records from before the Civil War, hard evidence for its existence simply does not appear. (Catherine Clinton, in Turner, 1994, p. 43)

During the period of slavery, most slave owners owned ten or fewer slaves, the majority of whom worked in the fields. Only those plantation owners who were wealthy could afford house servants. House servants were not overweight; like all slaves, their food was severely rationed. House servants were likely to be light-skinned, not like the depictions of the Mammy, whose skin was very dark hued. This was because most household servants were of mixed races. Very few (ten percent) nineteenth century black women lived to be past the age of fifty (Turner, 1994).

The mammy figure is a maternal one, who cares not only for the plantation owner’s family, but also her own. In some depictions she is also shown as domineering and a heavy-handed enforcer to her own race and family.

_The Savage/Brute_

The Savage or the Brute image came in response to blacks getting their freedom after the Civil War. This caricature was a beast that liked to prey on whites, especially white, virgin women. This image was predominant in the silent film “Birth of a Nation,” in which white men in black makeup portrayed the beasts who preyed on white women.
This caricature emerged in order to incite and justify racial violence. Before the Civil War, this image could not have worked; because the whites wanted to justify slavery by showing that the blacks were happy and docile in their societal roles. After being freed after the Civil War, blacks were a perceived threat to the whites. The whites needed to justify the killing of many blacks because they were an offense, and needed to be controlled. The new generations of black men were seen as out of control and brutal. This was in opposition to the older generation, a.k.a. slaves, who were docile and subservient to the whites.

**The Pickaninny**

One of the most predominant Pickaninny figures appears in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” as the slave girl named Topsy. Stowe intended for this figure to create sympathy in her readers for the plight if the child born into slavery. Topsy was a slovenly dressed, disreputable, uncared-for slave girl.

... and her round, shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth half open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas’r’s parlor, displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her wooly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction... She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment made of bagging... Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance, -something as Miss Ophelia afterwards said, “so heathenish (Stowe, in Turner, 1994)…”
Pickaninnies were of both genders. The males were normally shown in patched overalls that were too short, and with one drooping shoulder strap. The females were depicted with dresses that are either torn or too short, or both. However, it was a lucky Pickaninny that had clothing at all (Turner, 1994).

Pickaninnies appeared in many forms of popular culture, some of the most recent being seen in the television series “The Little Rascals.” Characters such as Buckwheat and Farina reinforced the stereotypical renderings of the Pickaninny that appeared in other forms of mass media (Turner, 1994).

Three Negative Perceptions of the African American.

There are three perceptions of the African American that are discussed in the film. It is argued that the negative caricatures of the African American help perpetuate these perceptions.

Black is Ugly

In the caricatures of the African American, physical features are exaggerated to make them ugly. In most of the caricatures, the eyes and the lips are huge and bulging, and the hair is standing on end. These make the caricatures laughable, yet grotesque.

Blacks are Happy Servants

Before and also during the Civil War of the United States, blacks were depicted as a “Happy Darkie.” They were at home on the slave plantation, working for the white plantation owners. The Mammy, Sambo, and Uncle Tom helped to perpetuate this stereotype by always being shown as happy and carefree. This perception of the “Happy
Darkie” was useful to those who were trying to keep slavery legal. It was argued that they were happy to be slaves; it was in their nature to be subservient to whites.

**Blacks are Savages**

After slavery was abolished, the black stereotype was changed to that of a savage, or a beast. After all, it was argued, they descended from the “dark continent” of Africa. Slavery did blacks a favor by domesticating them; without supervision of the white slave owners, they would revert back to savagery. This stereotype helped in the argument for the hunting and killing of blacks. They were savages and needed to be exterminated.

**Summary**

The definition that I will use in this study for visual culture, as defined by Tavin (2003, p. 198) is:

- cultural practices and formations whose primary effects are affective... the everyday lifeblood of the experiences and thinking in all of us: daily, vernacular, common, cultural environment around us all...the television we watch, the movies we see, the fast food, or slow food, we eat, the clothes we wear.

Visual culture education is useful in studying images in their social contexts and also in facilitating discussions about race and racism. One of the first steps in anti-racist education is to examine material and everyday images to see how ideas about race are depicted. Educators should examine what is omitted and included in these materials and discuss these issues with their students.

In order for an educator to properly facilitate a discussion about race and racism, she or he needs to have the proper tools and background knowledge. It is recommended
that teacher education programs need to look at race and racism in its own context, set apart from other issues. Educators need to also understand their own beliefs and feelings about race and racism before they begin to teach these subjects.

Helms’ White Race Identity Development describes the stages in which a white person sees her or his race and becomes knowledgeable about it. These six stages are as follows: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy.

The film “Ethnic Notions” was made in 1986 and was made and produced by Marlon Riggs. This film is about race and racism against African-Americans depicted in forms of visual culture. Discussed are the stereotypical caricatures that were most prevalent in these forms: the Sambo, the Coon, the Mammy, the Savage/Brute, and the Pickaninny. Three negative perceptions of the African American were also discussed in the film: black is ugly, blacks are happy servants, and that blacks are savages.
CHAPTER III: THE STUDY

Introduction

In this case study, I am investigating how students in an art for elementary teachers course respond to studying visual culture. Visual culture can be defined as: cultural practices and formations whose primary effects are affective...the everyday lifeblood of the experiences and thinking in all of us: daily, vernacular, common, cultural environment around us all... the television we watch, the movies we see, the fast food, or slow food, we eat, the clothes we wear (Tavin, 2003, p. 198).

In a class period of three hours, I showed students in an art media for elementary teachers class a film entitled "Ethnic Notions." This film investigates the use of visual culture such as racist images of African Americans on film, television, and in ordinary objects, such as saltshakers. These stereotypical images and objects were used to perpetuate wrongful ideas about African Americans regarding their behavior and intelligence. I was interested in showing pre-service general educators how they can include the use and study of visual culture. I was also interested in how these students would respond to studying visual culture, as well as how they would respond to studying racism in aspects of visual culture.

Participants

The participants were eight junior and senior level education and non-education majors who were enrolled in the class “Art Media for Elementary Teachers” at a mid size public university in the Midwestern United States. The course is a requirement for
special education majors and also fulfills a mandatory arts requirement for non-art majors. The participants were of various majors, ranging from special education to recreational management. All of the participants in the study were female and of Caucasian descent, and in their twenties.

Data Collection

Data was collected during a three-hour class session that involved the viewing of the film “Ethnic Notions,” the filling out of a questionnaire, and a critical discussion about the film and the questions that appeared on the questionnaire. In this discussion, we also discussed the racist images of African Americans on postcards that I had recently purchased. This discussion was audio recorded in order to provide additional data for the study. The questionnaires were collected in order to analyze the participants' answers. The questions that appeared on the handout were divided into two sections. One side contained questions that dealt with the film "Ethnic Notions." The other side contained questions that dealt with visual culture. The questions that appeared on the questionnaire are as follows:

"Ethnic Notions:"

1. How did this film make you feel?

2. How were African Americans portrayed? What messages were conveyed through these images?

Also included on this side was room for any additional comments.

Visual culture:
1. After seeing this film and learning about visual culture, do you think that incorporating visual culture in the classroom could be useful? Explain.

After this question was room for any additional comments.

Questions were included in the critical discussion that did not appear on the questionnaire. These were planned in advance to aid in the progression of the discussion. They are as follows:

1. Do these images/types of images appear today? If so, where?
2. What do you think visual culture is?
3. What do you think visual culture was in the past? What do you think visual culture is now? How are they different?
4. What impact does visual culture have on students today?
5. How could you incorporate visual culture into a non-art classroom?
6. Into what subject areas could visual culture incorporate itself?

Data Analysis

This study is intended to see how students in an art for elementary teachers course respond to studying about visual culture. For this study, quantitative and qualitative methods will be used to analyze the data received from the participants. Quantitative analysis will be used to analyze participants' responses to each question. Qualitative analysis will be used to reinforce the qualitative analysis. The questionnaire answers were broken down into categories for each question. The responses given during the critical discussion were used to further elaborate on each question, along with bringing up other issues that were discussed during the three-hour classroom session.
Side One Questions: Ethnic Notions

1. How did this film make you feel?

    Most participants had a strong emotional response to this question. Out of all the emotional responses, seventy seven percent were upset or unhappy at some level with what they had seen. One participant stated, "It's disheartening to know that people could actually believe what was being fed to them [about African Americans]." Another participant responded that she had felt naive and uneducated about how African Americans were portrayed in the media, but the film had helped her to better understand the African Americans' plight. Yet another participant put down that she was glad that she did not live during that time period.

    Fifty percent of the participants stated that they had already known about stereotypical images of African Americans. One person responded, "[I was] Not surprised. I knew that African Americans were put in the spotlight, but it was purely for laughs [to make fun of them]...These images are a part of an evolutionary step; it is part of our culture."

    Fifty percent of the participants discussed how African Americans were portrayed. These portrayals were described as "inaccurate and terrible" and "stereotypical." Two participants stated that these portrayals have not changed and still exist today. "A lot of the stereotypes still exist today. I think we've come a long way since slavery, but still have a long way to go. Not only with the stereotypes of blacks, but of all races."
Over thirty percent of the participants mentioned their understanding of the issues presented in the film. The participant that had mentioned that she had felt naive and uneducated late responded at the end of her answer that the film helped her to understand a movie that was shown to her in another education class that she had taken. The movie had also dealt with the portrayal of African Americans. Twenty percent of the participants stated that they could not understand how the Caucasian people living at that time could believe the connotations that the stereotypical images had implied about African Americans.

2. How were African Americans portrayed? What messages were conveyed through these images?

The answers given to this first question can be classified under two headings: physical characteristics and behavioral characteristics.

One hundred percent of the participants described particular physical characteristics. Included in these answers were that they were shown as being ugly, their facial features were exaggerated, some wore very little clothing, they were objectified, animal-like, and beasts or savages. One participant also mentioned the stereotypical Mammy and Uncle figure.

One hundred percent of the participants also mentioned the behaviors that were attributed to African Americans. These behaviors ranged from the African Americans were seen as violent, savage, animals, retarded or stupid, unequal to whites and subservient, to funny, loyal to their masters, docile, happy with slavery, jolly, and eager to please.
Fifty percent of the participants noted that these portrayals changed according to the time period. During the time of slavery, Whites saw African Americans in a more positive light. After the United States Civil War, African Americans were seen as being violent. One participant stated, "Odd enough, as African Americans wanted to be more liberated was when they were being portrayed as violent savages." Yet another person responded, "These images made the viewers think of blacks as happy go lucky until after the Civil War, when images of blacks portrayed them as violent.”

Twenty five percent of the participants noted again that they were incredulous that people viewing these stereotypical images thought that they were accurate portrayals of African Americans. One participant stated, “It is ridiculous how things were during that time. Not that it is all butterflies and sunshine now, but the train of thought back then was reckless and hateful.” Another participant responded, “These messages were what society thought of when they saw a Black person. These messages made white people know [feel] they were superior.”

Side Two Questions: Visual Culture

1a. After seeing this film and learning about visual culture, do you think that incorporating visual culture could be important in a classroom?

Every person in the study stated that yes; they did feel that incorporating visual culture into a classroom could be important.

1b. Explain

Twenty percent of the participants stated that educators must be cautious when using visual culture in the classroom setting. One stated that some of the images could be
confusing to children. Another stated that educators should guide the students and guide how visual culture can be used, because some visual culture can be negative, such as the images shown in the film.

Roughly seventy five percent of the participants commented on how much children are immersed in visual culture. Fifty percent of the participants stated that children see forms of visual culture everyday. One replied that visual culture could make students think about their words and actions. A participant stated,

It is very important because students are constantly bombarded with images of visual culture everyday and sometimes the images can be confusing or lead to misconceptions. We can take the opportunity to incorporate visual culture and clear up any confusion while connecting it to the curriculum.

Many participants listed reasons why they felt that visual culture could be helpful to students in a classroom setting. Reasons given included that visual culture can give documentation and it can clear up any confusion; it may help student retain more; it builds a diverse knowledge base; it is good in seeing different ideas; and it made one participant realize the horribleness of the portrayals of the African Americans. Thirty seven percent of the participants made comments on how visual culture could be used to teach many subject areas. One stated, "Visual culture could expose us to history and present events."
Critical Discussion

During the critical discussion, the participants elaborated on their questionnaire responses. This discussion lead the group into bringing up other topics relevant to the discussion, such as racism in their lives.

I started off the discussion by going over the responses the participants gave on the questionnaires. Responses were varied to the question of how the film made the participants feel. The first participant who replied was confused as to how she felt about students learning about racism. She felt that if students did not know about it, maybe they wouldn't realize it existed. She said, "I think I benefited from not knowing (about racism) and growing up in a black neighborhood because everyone was equal and there was no difference between the two of us." Another participant stated that she didn't know about racism until she had moved into a predominately white neighborhood. She stated:

I spent my life in a large city where I had black friends and everyone was equal and when I was nine, I moved to a town that was all white; there were no blacks that lived there... small town, you know; everyone knew everyone and everyone was racist. And you know, moving from a place where racism was non-existent to a place where everyone was racist; it was quite a culture shock to realize that it is out there.

In response, a participant said. "I don't understand or see how anyone could look at another person and think that they were not worthy, you know?"

We talked about people we knew that were racist and how they acted. I had stated that I had some friends, even family, who would make rude comments about
people of other races when they saw them on television or in the store. Many of the participants gave examples of people they knew acting racist. A participant said that her roommate's boyfriend called a black host on television by a racial slur. A different participant stated that she had a grandmother who was racist, mainly because of the era in which she grew up; however, another participant said that her grandmother was very open minded and not racist. She said that it was not when or where a person grew up that determined whether she or he would be racist; it was how a person was taught.

This same participant said that learning racism is also based on a person's experiences. These experiences could affect how a person perceives other areas, such as women's issues. She gave the example of women in advertising in World War II. "There's the same thing, like with women, like the way those old, like pin-up pictures and everything. A woman was either in a skimpy little dress trying to get some man, or she was in some apron. They did totally the same thing with women."

I then asked the second question as to how the African Americans were portrayed. The participants' verbal responses were along the same lines as their written responses. Participants said that African Americans were seen as ugly. The images that represented them showed them in an unrealistic light. One participant stated that many were shown as being happy to serve their white superiors.

I mentioned that in the film, an African American woman had stated that her lips didn't look like a couple of pieces of liver, and that her eyes did not bulge out, so why do they (the stereotypical images) make it appear that way? The participants said that the facial features of the African Americans were exaggerated in the images because of
power issues and authority. "To point out key differences is to say; hey they are this much different from us. You have to be able to observe it." Another participant agreed with her. She stated that the reason that African American facial features were exaggerated because they were the only thing that set them apart from the whites. "Facial characteristics, skin color... that's really the only real difference there really is and so they have to exaggerate that because that's all there is to show the difference." This participant went on to say that this exaggeration still continues today. She mentioned that some people refer to lips as "black people lips", or a "black nose." She was upset and said, "I'm like, what are fucking black people lips? You know, like, they're lips!"

A participant made a point that she thought that with these exaggerated images, it was easier to take the issue of slavery and other issues facing African Americans lightly. This way, the white population did not have to think of the African Americans as actual people.

The participants then talked about how the African Americans' portrayals changed as time changed. During the time when the slaves wanted to be liberated, they were seen as savages and violent. One participant said, "They [the whites] made them look worse to keep them [not liberated]." Another participant said that they were shown as animalistic.

One of the participants raised the question, "Couldn't people figure that out? Wait, I thought they (the slaves) were happy, now they're savages." To that, the participants replied that the whites went along with the idea because of the mob mentality. I then reminded the group that the change was gradual.
As a group, we then discussed how African Americans were portrayed as characters. One participant said that she felt disturbed that they had portrayed the mammy as being gentle towards the family with whom she worked, yet aggressive towards her own family and people. I mentioned that I had always thought of Mammy in the movie "Gone with the Wind" when someone mentioned the mammy figure. A participant had mentioned that she believed the actress that played Mammy in the movie was the first African American woman to win a movie award.

We then tried to think of other stereotypical images found today. Those mentioned were Aunt Jemima, the Zatarain's rice man, and Uncle Ben's. I then brought out postcards that I had recently bought at a bookstore in a nearby town. These postcards had racist images on them and were sold as "nostalgia." I then asked the participants what they thought of them. One participant said that in a class she had taken, the students looked up a website that sold types of postcards that showed lynching of African Americans and images of the like. She could not believe that consumers would buy such items. She felt that they were very disturbing.

Another participant had said that up until the previous summer, she had a poster in her house that had a laughing African American woman on it. "It was this poster from the old Euclid Beach. It was called "Laughing Sal." It was an attraction and it was a big, black woman in an apron and her hair tied back and she's kind of leaning back and laughing real big and her mouth's wide open."

I then talked a bit about visual culture, and how it was seen as adding to the studying of "fine arts" and looking at other images. I asked what they thought visual
culture was. One participant said that it might be pieces that portray the different cultures as they progress through history. Another added "Like movies and stuff, cartoons, that stuff." One participant stated that advertisements could also be a form of visual culture. A statement was made that it could move more towards the media, the Internet, and television. One participant replied, "Well, in twenty years, or whatever, you could take an advertisement and say it's visual culture. You know, just like the ones from Marilyn Monroe (from the past)."

We then talked about the impact that visual culture could have on students today. One stated that visual culture impacts students a lot, because they see it everyday.

The question was brought up of how a teacher could use visual culture in her or his classroom. A participant stated that a student could cut pictures out of magazines. Another said that a teacher could bring in artifacts or whatever was available for the students to look at or touch. A trip to a museum or a trip to an area of a city was another suggestion. One participant suggested that at home, students could watch television and write down what they see from different types of advertisements. Issues that visual culture could explore ranged from religion to politics and genetics or evolution. One participant said that visual culture could be found and used in almost any subject.

Summary

This chapter has been a depiction of a case study done in an Art for Elementary Teachers course. The purpose of this study is to investigate how participants in this course respond to studying visual culture. Questionnaires filled out by the eight participants in the three-hour class session were analyzed according to the answers given.
Examples were given for each question asked on the questionnaire. Data from the transcript of the critical discussion was also analyzed. This discussion was tape-recorded and the responses were used to illustrate points made in the questionnaire. The discussion also brought up more points that pertained to the issues of African American stereotypes as a form of visual culture. How visual culture could be used in a classroom setting was also discussed. In using both the questionnaire and the critical discussion, the participants had both a written and verbal way to elaborate on their answers.

The next chapter also serves as the final chapter. It will draw conclusions from the data and determine if the research questions was answered and if the hypothesis was supported. It will also discuss the limitations of this case study and recommendations for future research. Implications for the field of art education will also be discussed.
CHAPTER IV: THE CONCLUSION

Introduction

This case study began with a research question: how do students in an art for elementary teachers course respond to studying visual culture? To find the answer to this question, students watched a film titled "Ethnic Notions" that focused on forms of visual culture that negatively stereotyped African Americans. After watching the film, the students answered a questionnaire about the movie. As a group, we also discussed the film and the participants' responses to the questionnaire. The student participants also were shown racist postcards recently acquired to show that these images could still be found today.

Overview

During the three-hour class period in which the study was conducted, all eight students completed and turned in questionnaires based on the film that was viewed and the topic of visual culture. After filling out the questionnaires, the students were involved in a critical discussion. During this discussion, the students talked about the answers they had given on their questionnaire. Also discussed were issues of racism in their lives and the impact of visual culture on students today. It was interesting to note how free the students were in discussing such a controversial topic such as racism. All of the participants contributed to the discussion. In retrospect, had the group consisted of people from more than one race or gender, would the participants feel as free to respond as they did?

The film that was shown to the class dealt with forms of racially stereotypical visual culture. When I had previously watched the film, I had a strong emotional
response. Many of the participants did as well. Seventy seven percent of the participants felt unhappy or upset about the images that they had seen in the film. Half of the participants stated that they already knew many of the things that were shown in the film, but some stated that because of watching it, they better understood how the racial images hurt the cause of the African American.

All of the participants noted the stereotypical physical characteristics that were given to African Americans, as well as the behavioral characteristics. These characteristics included being ugly, being objectified, having their facial features exaggerated, being animal-like, and acting like beasts or savages. The participants also noted that the behaviors that were shown ranged from being happy to serve their white masters and happy-go-lucky and jolly, to being violent and brutal when they wanted to be liberated. The participants noted that this was to con the general public into thinking that the African Americans needed to be reined in and kept as slaves.

Because some of the participants in this case study were education majors, I asked them if they thought visual culture incorporated into a classroom could be useful. All of the participants said yes. To elaborate further, the participants stated that because children see forms of visual culture everyday, they should have an understanding of what it is. One of the participants stated that since these images could be negative and/or harmful, teachers could be available to clear up confusion and connect it to what is learned in class. Many of the participants noted that visual culture could be used in many subject areas in school. Many had suggestions of projects and assignments that could be done in class using visual culture.
During the critical discussion, the participants were encouraged to add their thoughts and feelings about the movie and visual culture. The discussion was predominately about what they had seen in the film and their thoughts about racism. Most of the participants were incredulous that these negative images that they had seen in the film were part of that time's visual culture. Advertising, propaganda posters and leaflets, cartoons, films, and slogans showed these images of the African American in a negative light. Many were even more incredulous when I showed them postcards that I had recently bought at a local bookstore. These postcards contained many of the stereotypical images we had just seen in the film: the Mammy, the Sambo, and the Pickaninny. These cards were advertisements for products that were sold in the South.

What Was Learned

Through this case study, I learned that forms of visual culture can be integrated into teaching to enhance students' learning. Because of the film "Ethnic Notions," participants better understood racism through seeing visual forms of it on the television screen and in their hands with the postcards. The participants learned the many different forms of African American racist images. Students correctly listed all the ways that African Americans were portrayed and how those portrayals changed through time. In seeing this film, the students learned to question images presented to them and learn about them, not just look at them and go on. This study showed that participants can effectively and thoughtfully critically examine examples of visual culture.

The critical discussion held afterwards helped clear up any questions the participants may have had during the film and to further elaborate on and issues they
needed to discuss. It was during this discussion where ideas were presented on how visual culture could be incorporated into classrooms and subject areas it could encompass. This study gave the participants one method of incorporating visual culture into a classroom. Participants stated other ways in which the study of visual culture could be used in classrooms.

Participants also understood what visual culture was after seeing forms of it in the film. They had stated that it might be pieces that portray different cultures as they pass through history. Another stated that advertisements were a form of visual culture. One participant said that it could include the Internet, media, and television. A participant also pointed out a racist image that was in her home until recently. She mentioned the poster that was hanging in her home showing the large African American woman laughing. The poster was to advertise for an amusement park attraction.

Participants had a strong reaction to studying racist visual culture. Some said that they already knew how African Americans were portrayed; yet seventy seven percent of the participants were upset or unhappy about what they had seen. The use of visual culture in a classroom could have an emotional impact on students.

When addressing the original research question: how would participants react to studying visual culture, I see that the participants reacted strongly to what they had seen. Participants were angry, sad, and somewhat confused by what they had seen. Many could not believe how much racist images contributed to the treatment of African Americans. Once they saw examples of the images and the actions that were perpetuated by these images, the participants were stunned. One participant stated in her
questionnaire, “It’s disheartening to know that people could actually believe what was
being fed to them (about African Americans).”

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that all the participants were female. It would
have been interesting to see how males would have responded to this film and the
discussion afterwards. All of the participants were Caucasian. I feel that had people of
other races had been involved in the discussion afterwards, they could have added their
insights and experiences with racism.

Having a person of color or of another race involved in the discussion could have
changed its course greatly. I find that it is more difficult to have a discussion of race with
a group that is more diverse than in a group of all one race. The dynamics of the group
change because they are afraid of saying “the wrong thing.” The group is more aware
that there are differences between races and how they are treated. A colleague of mine
had a discussion with one of her classes in which two students were of African American
descent. She was afraid that she would sound as if she did not know what she was
talking about, and that she did not want to seem as if she was an authority on the subject.
She stated that it was much easier for her and her class to have a discussion about race
when the class was all one race.

It would have been interesting to see how people of other races other that African
American could have contributed to the discussion. The group could have seen how
other races have to deal with stereotypes and how they were treated throughout history as
well as in the present.
Recommendations

Visual culture in art education is a relatively new area, and many have discussed the pros and cons of its use. Through this case study, it is my hope that someone will see that in this situation, the use of visual culture helped increase students' understanding of racist images. For further researchers, a suggestion would be to use a larger and more varied participant sample and using visual culture to teach about another topic. A larger group could have its drawbacks, however; too large a group might make a participant feel intimidated and less likely to contribute to the discussion.

For future studies, I would be curious to see if using younger participants in the same study would yield similar results. A tool that would be appropriate to use in a study similar to this one would be a pre-evaluation. The person doing the study could then see if understanding was indeed enhanced through the use of visual culture by comparing the pre-evaluation to the responses given in the questionnaires and critical discussion.

Visual culture does not have to be negative. Positive images can also be discussed. Perhaps an educator can show how clothing manufacturers have expanded their lines to cater their designs to larger women. How are these women depicted in advertisements and commercials? They are usually shown as sexy and on control, which is not how they were shown in the past if they were shown at all.

Many magazines and television commercials show everyday women advertising their products. Dove ran a print ad that showed women of many races and sizes in their
underwear. The message was that not every woman is a size 0 model, but even if she is not, she can still be beautiful.

Implications for Art Education

There are some topics in our society that are uncomfortable for people to talk about, let alone teach. In teaching art, many art educators focus on the production aspect of the curriculum, rather than looking at what else we can teach with images. Through the use of visual culture, we can broaden our topics that are taught in art classes, moving beyond drawing, painting, and other studio areas. In teaching students about visual culture and images that they may see everyday, art educators can aid our students into investigating, questioning, and judging images, instead of just seeing and dismissing them.

I personally have used forms of visual culture in the high school art classes that I have taught. We have examined how gender is represented in fitness magazines as well as in advertisements. We have looked at advertisements and the messages that are being sent through their use. We have also examined product packaging and how designers make their packaging appeal to target consumers. The students are more than willing to look at everyday items and images to examine them. These images are reassuring to the students; they are familiar. The students are not intimidated by the everyday image as they might be of what could be considered “fine art.”

Summary of the Study

The research question for this case study was based on how students in a beginning education class would respond to studying visual culture. In this study,
participants were shown a film titled "Ethnic Notions." This film discussed racial visual culture and how it affected and still affects African Americans. The participants in this study answered questionnaires and participated in a critical discussion about visual culture and racist images. Many of the participants had a strong emotional response to the film. The participants stated that they understood the racist imagery better, as well as visual culture. Included in this study are recommendations for teaching topics using visual culture and how it could be incorporated into many educational topics.
REFERENCES


Eisner, E. (2002). What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education? Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 18, 4-16.


APPENDIX

After a brief discussion about prejudice and the correlation between the film “Ethnic Notions” and the movie “Bamboozled” that one of the members of the class had seen, the following discussion ensued.

Instructor: What I want to do is go over the worksheet that you have completed and talk about the answers that you all gave. First question: How did this film make you feel?

Student One: I don’t know. It’s sad that that’s the way it was, but, like I don’t know. I’m like half and half with the whole idea of like I think kids need to know about it; but, on the other hand, I think I benefited from not knowing and growing up in a black neighborhood because everybody was equal and there was no difference between the two of us.

Student Two: See the thing is though it’s so… it’s still around. I spent half of my life in a large city where I had black friends and everyone was equal and when I was nine, I moved to a town that was all white; there were no blacks that lived there… small town you know, everybody knew everybody and everyone was racist. And you know, moving from a place where I didn’t even know what racism was to a place where everyone was racist; it was quite a culture shock to realize that that is out there.
**Instructor:** Yeah, and even some friends of mine are very… I mean, oh gosh they drive me nuts. But yeah, they’re very racist. You know; they’ll throw in a few snide comments here and a few snide comments there or something will happen on TV, and they’ll be like, “Oh yeah that nigger blah, blah, blah…,” and it’s just like, oh man, you know? And some of these are college-educated people and it’s just like…

**Student Three:** Yeah, I don’t understand it or see how anyone could look at another person and think that they were not worthy, you know?

**Student Two:** I told my roommate’s friend to leave my house if he ever called anyone a “nigger” again and it… because he was saying about somebody on TV one day. Oh, because Wayne Brady, um, hosted the Miss America pageant. And he was, at the beginning, he was doing something about how he was the first African American man to ever host it, and he called him a “nigger.” And I was like, “If you’re going to talk like that, you can leave my house. I don’t care if your girlfriend lives here or not.”

**Instructor:** Exactly, and my grandmother is one of the most racist people I know.

**Student Four:** Yeah, of course, I mean mine is too.

**Instructor:** Yeah?

**Student Four:** It’s the era, because, they grew up with that.
Student Three: Well, I don’t know. It kind of depends on the person though. Because, like, my grandmother came from a little hick town, and she’s completely not like that. She’s very open; she’s open-minded to everything. I think it’s just; it doesn’t matter, like when you grew up, or where you grew up. It’s like how you were taught.

Student Four: Your experiences.

Instructor: Exactly.

Student Three: And how you experience things. It’s just like the same thing, like women. Like there’s the same thing, like with women; like the way those old, like pin-up pictures and everything: that woman was either in skimpy little dress trying to get some man, or she was in some apron like they did, like they did totally the same thing with women.

Instructor: And stuff like this can be, you know, taken to different…you know, you can look at women in this way; you can look at other minorities used in this way. So is there anything else? Any other initial reactions or feelings? Okay, the second question: how were they portrayed?

Student Four: Ugly.
Student Five: And they always said they’re like smiling because they always portrayed them as being happy to serve like the white people, ’cause that’s what, like what we wanted to see or whatever.

Student Six: Kind of unrealistic.

Instructor: Very unrealistic, exactly. And one of the quotes that I always remember just because it’s so true, the one woman who said, “My lips don’t look like a pair of, you know….

Student Four: Liver.

Student Two: Couple pieces of liver.

Instructor: …liver, exactly, and my eyes don’t bulge out, so why do they make it appear that way?” And why do they? I mean, what are your thoughts on that?

Student Three: They just totally exaggerated the features, their facial features.

Instructor: To serve what purpose?
**Student Three:** I don’t know; people still do it today. They make, like you know, oh “they have the black nose,” or “black people lips.” I’m like, what are fucking “black people’s lips?” You know, like, they’re lips!

**Student Five:** Or black people butt.

**Student Two:** Yeah.

**Student Three:** People still do it.

**Student Seven:** I think it goes along with power too and what comes with authority. Like, to point out the key differences is to say that, “Hey, they are this much different from us.” You have to be able to observe it.

**Student Two:** I think it also made it easier for people who were viewing these images but weren’t accustomed to having African American people around to take it as a joke and lighthearted and not think about the fact that they’re actual people. “Oh, they don’t really need to be thought of as actual people, they’re, you know, slaves or whatever. They don’t really need to be thought of any other way.

**Student Three:** I think the other reason like they over exaggerated characteristics, like, because those are really the only difference between: you know, facial characteristics,
skin color. Like that’s really the only difference there really is and so they have to exaggerate that because that’s all there is to show the difference.

**Student Five:** I mean, yeah, you might see that more on African American people, those features; but I’ve seen just as many white people that have, you know, the big nose, big lips, it’s just… everybody’s different.

**Instructor:** And how did their portrayals change? They talked about that a little bit. I found that interesting; I never thought about that before.

**Student One:** Well, I think as they wanted to become more liberated, is when they started doing the violence and, uh, being the savages. They wanted to make them, you know. They wanted to not… the whites didn’t want them liberated. They made them look worse to keep them.

**Instructor:** Yeah, and that’s one of the important points I think the movie shows. Because I never thought about it that way before, you know, because years before, in the Civil War, it wouldn’t have done the people in power, mainly the white male, any good to show the African Americans as savages because they wanted to show them as being happy slaves. That way, they could show whites that slavery was good. Then, as time went on, and they wanted to get liberated, like you said, they showed them as savages, showing why they shouldn’t be liberated, why they shouldn’t have rights.
**Student Four:** Animalistic.

**Student Seven:** Couldn’t people figure that out? “Wait, I thought they were happy, now they’re savages.”

**Instructor:** Yeah, exactly.

**Student Seven:** They just bought it.

**Student Four:** It’s the mob mentality.

**Student Seven:** They went along with it.

**Instructor:** And plus, it’s not … it’s a gradual change too; I mean it’s not… kind of like, “They’re happy yesterday, but today, guess what?” So it’s kind of a gradual change, and in that change, it shows it in visual culture, but um, yeah. So what other messages? We talked about they’re animalistic, they’re savages, they’re ugly, beasts. Any other ones?

**Student Two:** I was kind of disturbed by the way they portrayed the mammy as real gentle and everything towards the family that she worked for and then very aggressive towards her own family and her own people.
Instructor: Yeah, exactly.

Student Two: That disturbed me for some reason.

Instructor: Yeah and in the movies, I always think back to “Gone with the Wind,” I mean she’s always right there.

Student Two: Yeah, they showed Hattie, that’s the woman from “Gone with the Wind,” right?

Instructor: Uh huh.

Student Two: They showed her from in another movie. She was actually like the first African American woman who won an award, I believe.

Instructor: I think so. Anything else? So we talked earlier about images that are found today. We talked about Aunt Jemima. Are there any other ones that you can think of that show up today?

Student Four: Zatarain’s, the rice.

Instructor: Yeah, the guy that holds the clarinet wrong, by the way.
**Student Three:** What?

**Instructor:** The Zatarain’s rice. If you look in the commercials, his hands are like this while he’s playing the clarinet. It’s wrong, it should go like that. Anyways, that’s my little… It bugs me every time because I played the clarinet for like ten years, and he holds it wrong. Anyways, I don’t know if it’s on the box, or whatever, but it’s just one of those stupid things I notice, anyhow…

**Student Four:** It’s a stereotype too, with him playing the instrument.

**Student Eight:** Uncle Ben’s.

**Student Four:** Uncle Ben’s, yeah.

**Instructor:** Those were the main ones that I could think of too. So these images today…

**Student Three:** The pizza guy.

**Instructor:** What?
Student Three: The pizza guy.

Instructor: The pizza guy?


Student Four: He’s Italian.

Student Three: No that’s not who I’m trying to think of though. I can’t remember; oh, I don’t know. It’s not a person, but…

Instructor: So these images that appeared today, do you think of, you know, you think we’re in a pretty P.C. time, I mean a politically correct time, I mean for the most part but uh, these images can be found, stereotypical images, and you know, Uncle Ben’s is pretty… Uncle Ben’s, Aunt Jemima, the Zatarain’s guy… I mean, they’re pretty tame right? One of the things that struck me though, I mean you can actually go into a store and find some of these images that aren’t very P.C., and I have proof.

I went to a Columbus bookstore. If you go to The Loft in German Village they sell postcards like this that are sold as “nostalgic” images and, you know… You can look at them and pass them around. So, I mean, it’s still around today and I mean, some people don’t think anything of it, but you know, this was something I was researching
and I happened to walk by the postcard rack, and I was like, “oh my gosh” I can’t believe that,” you know? And like I said these are pretty tame. But it’s funny how you can still go out there and they’re sold as nostalgia.

And, uh, in some of the research that I do, that I’ve done, was about this guy who collected images like that and little memorabilia and he said the ironic thing was that they’re still producing them. If he goes to flea markets and he doesn’t ask for the old stuff that was out; he asked for the new stuff just to show that it’s still being produced today and sold as nostalgia. I don’t know, I thought that was just kind of… you wouldn’t think.

**Student Six:** There’s still like…There’s a website that we had to look at, but there’s like postcards of lynching, but uh, postcards, I mean they’re still sold now. I can’t believe people actually buy those. It’s disturbing to look at those.

**Instructor:** And there’s a website that uh… The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, and it’s huge. pages upon pages upon pages… it’s a museum that’s in… oh I can’t think of where it is right off the top of my head… um, one of the colleges, one of the big universities, they have a museum like this. You just click through the pages and you just can’t believe how much stuff is out there.

**Student Two:** Also, up until this summer, we had a, we never had it hanging up, but it was always in the house somewhere. It’s a … it was this poster from the old Euclid
Beach. It was, uh, called “Laughing Sal.” It was an attraction and it was a big, black woman with an apron and her hair tied back and she’s kind of leaning back and laughing real big and her mouth’s wide open. We got rid of it this summer though. We always had it but…

**Instructor:** Anything else? Yeah that movie is very thought provoking; it made me think, but yeah. Well, the reason I showed this to you is because I want to talk a little bit… Those images serve as a form of visual culture. Visual Culture’s kind of…it’s not really a new thing, but it’s kind of a new introduction of like a new idea in art education. The goal is looking instead of “fine” arts, you know, you got Renoir, and Monet, and Van Gogh. If you start looking at visual culture, which from what you’ve watched and what little you’ve heard from me and from what I’ve shown you, what do you think visual culture is?

**Student Four:** A general idea.

**Instructor:** And there are no wrong answers.

**Student Two:** I’d just say it’s pieces that portray the different cultures as they’ve progressed throughout history.

**Student Eight:** Like the movies and stuff, cartoons, that stuff.
Student Four: Advertisements.

Instructor: Uh huh. Anything else? Actually the great thing about visual culture is that since it’s such a new idea, there really isn’t a set definition. I mean if you look it up in five different books, you’re going to get five different explanations, five different definitions. The few that I’ve pulled go from very broad to very definitive.

One, Henderson, describes visual culture as “what it is to see and what there is to see,” which, you know, could be anything from the table to the floor to the bottle of pop, to sweatshirts, which it could be, but like I said, it’s so new that people are still trying to eek it out.

Another person, Mirzoeff, says visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasures sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology which is any form or apparatus designed either to be looked at, or to enhance natural vision from oil paint, to television, to the Internet. So, that makes it a little bit less broad.

Then another person says, “Artifacts that are at first significantly visual and second constitutive of attitudes, beliefs, and values, which kind of goes back to what you were saying with like cultural you know, stuff like that.

So, with this in mind, what do you think visual culture was in the past, and what do you think it is in the future, well, not in the future, what is it now? I mean, we kind of seen some from the past, which were like advertising…
**Student Two:** A lot of visual culture is moving towards, like movies and T.V. and Internet, things like that, just by making documentaries about the past: showing how things were.

**Instructor:** And with it moving towards more media, Internet, T.V. and…

**Student Three:** Well, in twenty years, or whatever, you could take a Maybelline advertisement and say it’s visual culture. You know, just like the ones from Marilyn Monroe back, you know…

**Instructor:** And even now you could say Maybelline has visual culture. They kind of constitute our beliefs, values, um; you know… attitudes, beliefs, and values today. I mean, somebody could look at it today and take a look at it and see it as a form of visual culture of today’s society.

So you were talking about more media or Internet. Visual culture is getting to be more accessible, so the reason I decided to do this with you guys is um, just an idea, you know, with it becoming more prevalent, more students are going to see this stuff, and you know, I think it’s pretty important.

So the whole big list that I got from Bernard was visual culture includes “fashion, textiles, pottery and ceramics, hairdryers, shavers, cars, architecture, garden design, advertising, Internet home pages, newspaper and magazine design, typography, products and packaging.” So it’s a pretty broad category…
So we talked about how they are different from the past, we have more media, more Internet, more accessible, what impact do you think it has on students today?

**Student Four:** A lot.

**Instructor:** How so?

**Student Three:** ‘Cause they see it every day.

**Instructor:** And that’s one of the reasons that I think it’s important, because it’s so in your face especially, you know, with the computers and the Internet, it’s just right there. So how would you incorporate visual culture into like a general classroom, I mean you could deviate from this, you don’t have to use this, just any form of visual culture, just think. How could you incorporate it into a general classroom, I mean art is kind of, it’s not a given, I think it’d be more easy to do but how do you think you could do it in a regular classroom?

**Student Four:** Have students cut pictures out of magazines, or something like that.

**Student Two:** Bring in different artifacts or slides of artifacts or whatever you could get your hands on for them to look at or touch or take a trip to a museum or to a different area of the city or…
**Student Three:** You could even have them at home, like watch TV. and write down like what they see from like types of ads on there.

**Instructor:** Uh huh, and what issues do you think visual culture could explore? Like this one, most definitely racism. What other ones, besides racism do you think?

**Student Eight:** Social studies and politics: political cartoons and stuff.

**Student Seven:** Religion.

**Student Eight:** In science, like the genetics, evolution or whatever we’re going through right now.

**Student Three:** I think you could find a piece of it in anything like…

**Instructor:** Yeah, like I said you know, I’m an art major, so you know I can think of a whole bunch of different ways, but you know it takes a little, it’d be a little more difficult, I would think for maybe for math or something like that but I’m sure if you’re well versed in math or English or whatever and you know all that stuff you could probably think of a few things of visual culture that could be incorporated and it may… with the students being so visually bombarded I think it could help them out.
**Student Two:** I actually saw visual culture math last night! I was watching a show the Salem Witch Trials and they were going to commercial and whatever year it was, I forget what year it was, they were going through all the different stuff, the different things that were happening at that time and one of them, someone had invented the first, um device for like… it didn’t add, it multiplied and divided numbers, but it was like a little calculator.

**Instructor:** See there you go.

**Student Two:** And they showed a picture of it too, so…

**Instructor:** So yeah… Any other ideas how you could incorporate it? What areas it could follow?

**Student Eight:** Numerous.

**Instructor:** Yeah it’s pretty, and then like I said before, I don’t want to shove my beliefs down you throats of course, but you know I think it’s pretty important and um, if you overlook it, I mean I think it’s a great way to get into kids’ heads, I mean not really into kids’ heads that way, but you know. It’s a different way to look at it, maybe make it more interesting, so…
For the last question, on the back of your sheet, After seeing this film and learning about visual culture, do you think that incorporating visual culture could be important in the classroom? And I don’t want just yes or no, I mean explain, I mean why do you think it’s important? And even for the non education majors even, you know, if you would send your kid to school would you want the teacher to try and incorporate this and why do you think it could be beneficial or why not? There’s no right or wrong answers like I said. So, then any other additional comments would be appreciated.