CURATING INEQUALITY: THE LINK BETWEEN CULTURAL
REPRODUCTION AND RACE IN THE VISUAL ARTS

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by

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INTRODUCTION

While public art museums seem to project an image of cultural inclusiveness, it is evident that much of the art within museums embodies the attitudes and preferences of the dominant social group (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991). The art museum functions as an instrument of cultural reproduction wherein the primary cultural narrative is crafted by the dominant social group to support a social structure grounded in principles of exclusion (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991; Bourdieu 1993; Lamont and Lareau 1988). Within the United States, research has shown that this dominant social group is largely white, educated and occupies a higher level of socio-economic status (National Endowment for the Arts 2008). Bourdieu's landmark study of cultural reproduction and cultural capital in the arts first presented the exclusive nature of cultural reproduction and ushered in a new area of research (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991; Swartz 1997).

Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction is grounded in the concept that the transmission of cultural capital positively affects educational outcomes and is therefore linked to positions of varying status and power within a social hierarchy (Bourdieu 1984, 1974, 1979, 1977a, 1977b). Throughout his career, Bourdieu defined cultural capital in many ways; however, most scholars now agree that the concept can be defined as "institutionalized, widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, forms of knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion" (Lamont and Lareau 1988:156). Numerous researchers have shown the power

that cultural capital and cultural reproduction have on various outcomes such as: educational success, marital selection, political affiliation and social communication within virtual communities (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Lareau 1987; Martin and Szelenyi 1987; Kalmijn 1994; Rafaeli, Ravid and Soroka 2004; Tramonte and Willms 2010). However, there appears to be little emphasis on the link between cultural reproduction, cultural capital and the social construction of racialized privilege.

This paper expands upon the study of cultural reproduction and cultural capital within the field of art by utilizing the concept of ‘whiteness’ as a privileged social construct (Johnson and Shapiro 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Frankenberg 1993; Du Bois 1996). Racialized privilege is examined within cultural reproduction and cultural capital by exploring the process by which concepts of race are reproduced through the art as well as through the social interactions connected to the art museum. I draw upon critical white studies, a part of critical race theory, which underlines the manner in which whiteness presents itself as a position of dominance within the social hierarchy of society (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, 1997). Art museums provide an avenue to explore cultural reproduction and cultural capital through the examination of the meaning and social interaction surrounding art objects (Foster 1996). While art has the potential to enrich, inspire and enlighten society (Becker 1982) it remains unclear how cultural reproduction and cultural capital found within the field of art support the social structure through the presentation of race.

Museums’ reputation as both elitist institutions as well as inclusive cultural centers provides a unique opportunity to examine cultural reproduction, cultural capital

and race by investigating the link between culture and social structure (Whitaker 2009; Thea 2009; Zolberg 1984). To explore this link, I visited public art museums in a Midwestern state and interviewed numerous curators and directors. I noted how museum curators acknowledge the importance of racial and ethnic diversity within the field of art while at the same time deferring to the institution's definitions, values and symbolism centered on the European-American ideal (Berger 2005). This disparity between the call for diversity within art and art museums and the dominance of a white Western standard provided an opening for discussion into the methodology, influences and constraints involved in museum curating, exhibition and other interactions with the public and how these practices influence cultural capital and support the racial hierarchy embedded within cultural reproduction.

From these interviews, significant themes surface as to how whiteness is actively constructed within the field of art. First, I consider the manner in which cultural capital and cultural reproduction through the visual arts promotes a narrative of whiteness by the norms and values of the curatorial staff, donors and board of directors (Desai 2000). Additionally, I investigate the social construct of whiteness and the means by which the field of art continues to advance the hegemony of racial stratification utilizing Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991). I follow this by indicating how whiteness is perpetuated through the social interaction between art museum and community. Finally, I conclude by acknowledging the limitations of my findings as well as suggest directions for potential research to move beyond the dominant white racial hegemony presented as legitimate culture within the field of art.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Whiteness, Privilege and Culture

Privilege and the Arts have long been connected (Alexander 1996; Thompson 2008). Examples of this connection between art and privilege can be seen in the ceremonial slate pallets of the Egyptian King Narmer depicting the military victory over Lower Egypt in 3000 B.C. (Janson 1977:53) and the commemorative art piece of a royal bronze bust of an Akkadian ruler created between 2300-2200 B.C. (Janson 1977:71).

The connection between high culture, social status and money continues to be evidenced in the world of art through the sheer volume of wealth that moves through the galleries, auction houses and private dealers on a daily basis where art is being bought and sold (Becker 1982; Thompson 2008; Alexander 1996). High culture comes at a high price. Culture is powerful, for it contains the ideas, beliefs and traditions of a group or society while simultaneously offering the means for collective communication, interaction and cohesion (Swartz 1997:1). The art museum transmits culture via a variety of media including painting, sculpture and photography. Art is therefore a conduit linking individuals and solidifying group membership by communicating these ideas, beliefs and traditions in a form of a visual code (Swartz 1997:83; Bourdieu and Darbel 1991: 36, 38). Lamont and Lareau's interpretation of cultural capital as the "institutionalized, high status cultural signals used for social and cultural exclusion" (1988:156) presents an avenue for exploration of whiteness and white privilege, as whiteness becomes part of the visual

code used for social and cultural exclusion. Thus, meaning accorded to visual art objects can reflect the privileged social construct of whiteness and add legitimacy to the racialized social hierarchy within society.

Whiteness is part of a body of literature on race which includes: cultural and historical studies of white racial identity (DuBois 1996), racial formation (Omni and Winant 1994; Winant 2004), critical race theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Pellar and Thomas 1995) and feminist writings on the intersectionality between race, class and gender (Gaines 1986; McDowell 1999; Collins 1999, 2000). McIntosh (1990) describes whiteness as a set of unseen, unearned and unacknowledged privileges of the dominant social group. These inherent advantages enable whites to view race as insignificant in the workings of everyday life (McIntosh 1990; Twine 1996; Haney-Lopez 1996). Whiteness studies turn the concept of race on its head by “making whiteness strange” in order to draw attention to the racialized hierarchy of power and privilege within society (Dyer 1997). Thus, whiteness is no longer the unnamed norm by which all other races are measured (Hyde 1995) but an identifiable variable to be analyzed, measured and categorized.

Symbolic Power and Symbolic Violence

Art museums’ cultural codes project a form of symbolic power which can be used to acquire a variety of resources associated with status and authority (Bourdieu 1986:46-47). Symbolic power is a product of a cognitive system used to organize and comprehend the social world. It is both a mechanism of communication as well as a

mechanism for knowledge (Bourdieu 1977c; Swartz 1997:83). Symbolic power is derived from influence and is created by what Bourdieu terms ‘sincere fiction’ (Bourdieu 1977c:112). This fiction is a belief that the representation, or narrative, is created independently without influence from elements within the social hierarchy. Because of this, individuals view this fiction as a singular legitimate portrayal of reality (Vera and Gordon 2003:114). Hence, as Bourdieu states, the fiction is “misrecognized” (Bourdieu 2000:142-143). The participants are unaware of the fact that the narrative is fashioned from the material interests of the dominant group. It appears to be normal and legitimate.

Utilized by the dominant group, symbolic power works in tandem with cultural capital. Both symbolic power and cultural capital are used to dominate and exclude individuals and groups from gaining access to social, economic and material advantages; contributing to the support of a social hierarchy (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991: 36). Bourdieu conceptualized this use of power as symbolic violence: the ability to impose “the legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions” (Bourdieu 1987:13). For instance, Iadicola (1983) examines public schools and their role as instruments of social control. His findings suggest that symbolic violence takes place when classrooms fail to provide a multicultural curriculum thereby creating a social hierarchy based on power differences between the white dominant group and the Hispanic ethnic minority (Iadicola 1983: 36-40). Knowledge and culture are standardized according to the norms and values of the dominant group. Symbolic violence occurs when those individuals who acknowledge and accept this social order feel compelled to support the system while those individuals who are unaware are powerless to change it (Iadicola 1983: 41).

Dubin (1987) adds to the research of symbolic power and symbolic violence by demonstrating how popular material objects of the 1890s to the 1950s reveal the means of social control and white privilege through the use of everyday items. Objects such as the Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose salt and pepper shaker sets and the Aunt Jemima paper towel holder aid in projecting the stereotype of blacks as domestic servants; an implicit reference to black's position within the social hierarchy (Dubin 1987: 127-128). Other items discussed are more unambiguous. Symbolic violence is exhibited in the closet door sachet shaped in the manner of a black female with a tag that reads, "Hang me up or tie me down" which can be interpreted as a reference to lynching and rape; historically, two of the most brutal means of social control enacted against blacks (Dubin 1987: 133). The lawn statue of a Black jockey popular throughout the South provides yet another example of social dominance by visually portraying black servitude toward whites (Goings 1994). During their popularity, these material objects contained a cultural code used to create and solidify a sense of white privilege and authority. Their use was a symbolic method of projecting a social place within a racial hierarchy and revealed the norms and values of the dominant white group.

Inside the art museum, the art chosen for display also reveals cultural codes; thus defining certain characteristics of cultural capital. These cultural codes have been approved by the art museum's curators and directors; individuals who have been trained and vetted by sanctioned institutions of the social elite (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002:153-4). These defining characteristics of cultural capital are legitimized by the status of these art professionals as well as the symbolic authority of the museum itself

and are thus established as accurate and authentic (Noriega 1999; Desai 2000). Hence, the cultural codes of the dominant group become legitimated preserving the inequality of status and power embedded within the social structure (Bourdieu 1984:7). These cultural codes are part of a “set of basic, deeply interiorized master-patterns” or what Bourdieu conceptualized as habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989:44). These “master patterns” are a product of unconscious historical and cultural practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989:44). Individuals’ habitus has long been considered to have a class-based social hierarchy (Bourdieu 1984:7). Embedded within habitus are ideas concerning race, ethnicity, culture and social standing (Berger 2005). Thus, the defining characteristics of cultural reproduction presented within the art museum are legitimized and subsequently transformed into cultural capital.

Symbolic violence occurs when the cultural codes within the art museum are accepted as accurate and legitimate by the dominated group (Swartz 1997:88-89). Consequently, both dominant and dominated are complicit in the creation of symbolic violence. Art is therefore a vehicle for both symbolic power and cultural capital as “categorizations constitute and order the world and thus constitute and order the people in it” (Schubert 2002:1092). Art museums contain the power to control the categorization as well as legitimize the method of classification within the realm of ideas known as culture.

In *Sight Unseen*, sociologist Martin A. Berger (2005) demonstrates the racial dimensions of the link between the art professional’s habitus and of cultural capital presented through art. Through the examination of selected works of art, Berger provides

evidence of a distinctly Euro-American ideology centered on whiteness. He further indicates that this visual depiction of a racialized social structure has real-life ramifications as a potent affirmation of internalized beliefs (Berger 2005:1-3). Comparing and contrasting two paintings by the white artist William Sidney Mount (1807 – 1868), Berger reveals the embedded racial identities for both white and non-white figures. Mount's painting entitled *Farmers Noonning* (1836) depicts four boys resting from their chores while an African American laborer naps on the hay. The nonwhite laborer enables the viewer to “invoke a series of binaries (lazy and industrious, asleep and awake, black and white), which gives whiteness tangible visible traits” (Berger 2005:11). Additionally, in Mount's painting, *Boys Caught Napping in a Field* (1848), Berger maintains that absence of a nonwhite figure allows for the reinterpretation of the boys' indolent behavior in positive terms of boyish idleness rather than the African American model of laziness of the previous example (2005:13).

Rosenthal (2004) also discusses a concept of whiteness in her research on eighteenth-century British portraiture. Her study of the obsession of female whiteness depicts a constructed norm centering on skin pigmentation and virtue (Rosenthal 2004:567). Referencing Dyer's (1997) observation that whiteness is the “unraced norm”, Rosenthal demonstrates that feminine purity is represented in the skin of the female Victorian portrait (2004:572). Her critique of Pierre Mignard's (1612-1695) portrait, *Louise Renee de Pernancoet de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth* (1682) illustrates symbolic violence through the comparative portrayal of skin tone. The black child servant is used as a foil to accentuate the purity of her mistress; both in skin tone as well

as demeanor (Rosenthal 2004:569). Whiteness is therefore the “aesthetic norm” from which others are raced and valued on and off the canvas (Rosenthal 2004:586). The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century attitudes of race are therefore part of the cultural capital that can be acquired through the artistic knowledge and appreciation of the female portrait.

The cultural codes that form cultural capital can also be expressed within the multicultural exhibitions of art museums. Race and ethnicity are often presented within a hierarchical power structure whereby Western white standards are used as the norm (Frankenberg and Mani 1996: 290). Within the art museum, the power and authority to present marginalized groups as ‘the other’ is expressed in terms of the visual relationship to the white dominant group (Desai 2000; 116). Exhibits are often “packaged as properties and exploited by the theme of ‘the other’ to appeal to the broadest possible audience” (Zolberg 1981:119; Noriega 1999). Artworks from countries such as China and Japan often display iconic definitions of what Western standards dictate is ‘art’ (Desai 2000: 124). These standards are set by the art professionals — the curators, directors, donors and board members — who can impose a certain cultural value and standing within the field of art (Acord 2010:448). Whiteness therefore becomes the unnamed norm to which all other art and artists are compared.

White privilege, cultural reproduction and cultural capital in the Arts are linked by the interaction between art object, museum and patron. White privilege presents a series of rewards, including: “the probability that imagery will support the white experience, the ability to purchase imagery that reflects whiteness and the ability to

remain unaware of other languages and customs of persons of color without feeling guilt or ignorance” (McIntosh 1990: 37). Cultural capital as a powerful tool of “social and cultural exclusion” (Lamont and Lareau 1988:156), frames the cultural experience of the art museum as a racial experience of white privilege. The exclusion of people of color, ‘the othering’ of marginalized groups and their portrayal as subordinates demonstrates a symbolic means of social control which reflect the ways in which the social hierarchy of race is supported and reproduced.

METHODS

This research was undertaken throughout one state in the upper Midwest during the summer of 2011. I chose museum sites in rural, suburban and urban areas in which 2010 U.S. Census data indicated a population heavily weighted toward either an African American or Caucasian (white) American presence in order to sample as wide a range of population density and regional employment opportunities as possible. Conducting face-to-face, in-depth, open-ended interviews with sixteen museum curators, I used qualitative methods to investigate the beliefs, attitudes and practices of actively employed museum professionals and their institutions of employment. I focused on curators' definitions of art, community, culture, quality, race and ethnicity. The demographics of participants described in Table 1 reveals a strong pattern of social homogeneity in keeping with research of the dominant social group attending art museums: white, educated and occupying a higher level of socio-economic status (National Endowment for the Arts 2002).

Table 1: *Demographics of Survey Participants*

Number of Participants	16
Females	11
Males	5
Masters Degree	6
Doctoral Degree	10
Title of Curator	11
Title of Director	5
Race – White	16
Range of Age	35-65

Interviews were between one and three and one-half hours in length. I conducted all interviews at the participants' places of employment and all but two were digitally recorded. Interview subjects were chosen through museum web sites. Curators from ten different museums were contacted. Curators from all but one museum accepted my request for interviews. An introductory letter was sent to each curator and/or director of each institution. A follow-up phone call was placed shortly after the letter was mailed. Participants were also invited to contact me directly via email. All participants were promised confidentiality. Identities were protected through the use of assigned pseudonyms. I transcribed all data as digital text files. All documentation connected the individual with his or her interview was destroyed after transcription was completed. I employed an inductive grounded theory approach for analysis to discover patterns, recognize themes and formulate meaningful conclusions (Corbin and Strauss 1990: 6-9). I used a color schematic to hand-code all data; first, in terms of general categories and secondly along recurring themes. Categories included: cultural reproduction, the means by which societal values and beliefs are replicated within the art museum; curatorial duties, attitudes and behaviors, and how these influence cultural reproduction; issues of function and quality in art and in what manner these values are defined; museum bureaucracy and how this bureaucracy affects cultural reproduction; the interaction between race and art and how race is defined and presented through curatorial behavior and attitudes; and curators' perception of the interaction between museum and community.

It is important to acknowledge that I am a white, middle-class, female educated in the arts and as such I have a certain measure of credibility within the field. I am acutely aware of the relative ease of access and comfortable rapport I was able to establish because of this status. I am also cognizant of the fact that I have my own beliefs and values in regards to art and culture. These issues of my own education, race and social class necessitated a vigorous reflexivity in all stages of the analysis. I have therefore been rigorous in seeking out alternative evidence and negative cases/examples as well as having others review my findings in order to maintain the highest degree of validity possible.

Throughout this paper I explore how white privilege, cultural reproduction and cultural capital in the Arts are linked by the interaction between art object, museum and patron. In interviewing curators I examine the means by which whiteness is constructed and expressed within the field of art through the beliefs, structural practices and constraints of a variety of elements within the public museum. These interviews provide a unique window into the world of art and art's place as both a symbol and product of culture by demonstrating that art and the practice of art is a cultural production; an indicator based upon the dominant group's particular vision of society (Webb et al. 2002:150). First, I examine how culture and the whiteness of culture are reproduced within the art museum through curatorial attitudes, beliefs and practices. I illustrate how curators' preferences shape the cultural narrative and present a normative view of whiteness. Secondly, I investigate the social construct of whiteness and the means by which the art museum and its staff continues to advance the racial hegemony of

whiteness utilizing Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991). Next, I showcase how whiteness is perpetuated through the social interaction between art museum and the community. Finally, I conclude by acknowledging the limitations of my findings and suggest directions for potential research to add to the growing body of literature whiteness studies and cultural reproduction in the Arts.

FINDINGS

Curators, Culture and Whiteness

Art museums' self-proclaimed objective is to acquire, preserve and display art as well as educate the public on the value of art and the processor art appreciation (Zolberg 1981:103). The curator's role is pivotal in this process. A museum's exhibitions and permanent displays communicate a particular narrative. This narrative is based on the selective interpretation and presentation of art by its curatorial staff. Curators' choices and opinions simultaneously create and reflect the dominant cultural narrative (Robins 2005:150). The racial history of this dominant cultural narrative is decidedly white (Zolberg 1984: 380-381); portrayed as neutral and normative (McIntosh 1990).

Whiteness and white privilege are thus expressed through the habitus of the curatorial staff; their choices demonstrating their power to reproduce the dominant cultural narrative. Curators' use of symbolic violence enables whiteness and white privilege to be construed as normal and legitimate.

During interviews, curators discussed their power in reproducing and normalizing the cultural narrative. Some curators acknowledged their role in defining culture while others seemed ambivalent or even unaware of the process. A few curators denied the existence of a particular cultural narrative; claiming the curatorial profession employed a neutral stance. Jason, a curator of a large urban museum discussed the power of choice as follows:

One of the things that museums do . . . I don't think about it very much . . . they are in the business of defining art and what art is. If we find something and put it in our gallery somehow this definition is building on that object.

Cameron and Edith, curators with more than thirty years of experience each at the same urban institution, echoed Jason's statement while adding an historical context. Cameron described his influence to shape the cultural narrative by focusing on his education and personal experience:

We (the curators) are ostensibly the experts; the connoisseurs. We do the research. We carry the intellectual portfolio of the institution. Where else can you go to experience the legacies of the great cultures, the great civilizations? You can travel the world literally by just coming here.

Edith added further nuance by discussing the links between cultural representation and art objects. Her statements reflected the broad scope of the representative power of art and acknowledged that the cultural narratives embedded within art and art exhibits contain social, political and economic statements (Lavine and Karp 1991). "The thing about art . . . often there's history involved: economic, social history; all kinds of stuff. That's what makes it so interesting."

Art therefore moves beyond mere visual aesthetics. Often it is not the art object itself that has value but the idea that the art object represents (Karp 1991:20). The connection between art object, symbolic representation and significance is mediated by curators who utilize their own implicit knowledge and aesthetic codes (Acord 2010:447). However, the curatorial act of designating significance frequently went unrecognized by

the curators themselves. The value and significance of art was seen as either rising independently from within an art object's place in history or from an art object's relationship to other works or ideas. Art was often seen as an independent product of artistic achievement; a demonstration of excellence which curators then exhibited as a representation of culture. Initially, curators routinely implied that 'our' culture was homogeneous in nature. There was no reference to the diversity of 'us'. "We" was seen as a single unit. Helen, a curator of contemporary art stated:

I mean in some ways I've thought that it (art) sort of shows us the best of ourselves. It's our highest cultural achievements, it's ours . . . but I don't mean just the Beethoven symphony, but also contemporary artists doing what they do. It's . . . it allows us to . . . it's one way that our culture expresses itself.

Finally, there were those curators who rejected the role of cultural mediator.

When asked about their ability to shape the cultural narrative, these individuals felt their main function was as a scholar; hired to research and preserve art works for the public trust. They dismissed any idea of shaping cultural narrative. The exhibition of artworks was seen to be an unbiased process. Value and function were relatively neutral, based on the materials used, the reputation of the artist or the historical context of the art works; all of which were seen as outside the curator's control. Lucy, a curator within a small department of a large urban institution, expressed the view:

I don't think it's necessarily our job to necessarily um . . . impose the way we see things and judge things on others. We're simply making them available. So, I don't mind if a person leaves the museum thinking that armor is art and an African mask isn't. This isn't a church. It's just a place to come and see things and think about them. I mean I think

sometimes people want to try to make the art museum appeal to absolutely everyone for every reason and . . . I was at a meeting once where someone said, “It’s an art museum, not a football game,” and at the end of the day it is what it is.

When asked to discuss how the concepts of function and value in art were developed, numerous curators brought forth the historical underpinnings of American society. European influence, religion and wealth were referenced. Historically, art was used as a symbol. The value of art was in its ability to project the wealth and status of its owner (Zolberg 1984:380). Pressed for further details of the social arrangements of art, art making and art ownership, all curators admitted that art and art culture had a historically white bias. Geoffrey, a director of a mid-sized metropolitan museum described the historical context:

There’s a long tradition in this country of Puritanical thinking Art was always kind of something really more foreign than not. When art became sort of a regular thing in the colonies . . . in the U.S., portraiture was the main art form and it had a function that was to recognize presidents . . . heroes and to commemorate family members.

Art was therefore used as a historical record to commemorate prominent individuals and important events. Art was also (and continues to be) a means to project a certain status through its acquisition (Veblen 2007; Thompson 2008). Today, much of museums’ permanent collections are indirectly linked to issues of race and social class (Thompson 2005: 216-217). Gwen, a seasoned curator of contemporary art, explains the connection:

GWEN: So a museum is a place of understanding; seeing the real thing and not the reproduction . . . actually being in contact . . . in the flesh *with*

the work and learning about history; so there is only one history this museum tends to say. It could be a little more articulate.

AB: What history is that?

GWEN: It's the history of the rich people who bought these pieces and now we (curators) understand that it's not any more just about that but . . . I think that everyone in any point in time thought that they were doing their best and that they were doing the best for everyone.

Walter, a curator of European painting and sculpture, expressed similar views, connecting the permanent collection under his care with a culture of whiteness:

I might like to think these things (issues of culture and history) are sort of broadly understood; not at all. Um . . . so there's a kind of remoteness. Yea, I mean it's also . . . you know it IS European so in a sense it's not (understood) and it's OLD so it's not (understood) . . . it's neither contemporary . . . which in itself has a whole set of problematic . . . and it's you know, about a very particular set of cultures which are you know . . . white.

Whiteness also extended to the artists as well as the art collectors. The whiteness of art and artists is the unquestioned norm by which all Western culture is judged (Bowles, Oguibe, Stevenson, Berger, Fernandez-Sacco and Piper 2001: 39). White art and artists are deemed "generic," without race or ethnicity (Pujol 2000: 98). The normative nature of whiteness in Western art and cultural reproduction was discussed at length. Nine curators acknowledged the whiteness of art. However, many curators proclaimed that the field of art and specifically the curatorial profession had moved beyond this limiting vision of race and ethnicity. What was notable in the discussion of prominent art and artists was the fact that not one curator referenced any artist of color in

describing great art or beloved artists. Geoffrey recognized the whiteness of art as well as issues of gender embedded within the field of art:

There's been an unspoken norm . . . it's not even unspoken. I mean Guerilla Girls made their point not all that long ago . . . like only 8% of the artists at MOMA on the walls were women. And that's changed, but it's not 50%, so yea, that was very vocally attacked and . . . laid bare for what it was . . . it (the art) was mostly white males.

Jason mentioned several prominent Italian artists such as Leonardo DaVinci and Michelangelo. Lucy referenced Winslow Homer and Edward Hopper (both white males) in her discussion of beloved American artists. Whiteness was also part of the underlying standard of cultural excellence in Edward's discussion of prominent artists in American art and American history:

We chose to emphasize an historical perspective; Velasquez to Warhol. Warhol is considered to be the master of post-modernism. Rauschenberg, Johns (all white male artists) . . . all these artists give us a unique perspective of history. This is all part of American art and American history.

Museum patrons were also complicit in the selection of predominantly white artists and white art. Curators discussed visitors' lack of art knowledge and how this unawareness affects the choice of exhibits and therefore the cultural narrative. Curatorial selections of exhibits are often made based on the amount of recognition an artist or art movement seems to have with the public. Lena, an art director and master teacher of over twenty years lamented the limited repertoire of proven exhibits and the ambiguity of success in curating lesser known or even unfamiliar works of art:

It's hard to figure what people like in exhibitions. You know people like Impressionism and Egypt. Past that you never know. Part of the problem is the average person . . . the only people they've heard of is Picasso and Renoir . . . and they love Egypt. So maybe Michelangelo will fill a room. So if you go away from those ten names, let's say. You just don't know.

Patrons' lack of knowledge and limited familiarity of artists (Newsom and Silver 1978) fosters a cycle of whiteness in the presentation and exhibition of art (Berger 2005). This dominant cultural narrative is recycled; further supporting the value and meanings connected to whiteness. These value and meanings permeate throughout our culture creating a narrative. Curator said in setting the standards by which art and artists are judged adding to this cultural narrative (Bourdieu 1993b:204; Brody 2003:259). This narrative often contains an element of in-group and out-group status for art and artist (Brody 2003:259). Curators shape these distinct groups through the presentation and interpretation of art within exhibitions (Robins 2005:150). These distinct groups include a racial component in which the dominant cultural narrative of whiteness is foregrounded as it is seen as neutral and normative (McIntosh 1990; Banks 2010).

Art viewers seek out familiar elements when examining art in order to provide individual meaning which in turn invokes "memories, associations and emotions" (Furner and Tennis 2006:7). The experience of white privilege allows for the ability of whites to interact with images that represent their race and life experience on a frequent basis (McIntosh 1990). The unacknowledged norm of whiteness (Dyer 1977) becomes a standard by which all other forms of art are judged (Rosenthal 2004). Several curators

reflected on interactions with visitors that made this lack of connection clear. Jessica, a curator of a small municipal museum described one encounter:

I brought them . . . they were a group of primarily African American students . . . into the gallery and I said . . . essentially said . . . “How do you feel? These are all white people”. And they were um . . . they were pretty . . . some were more honest than others. And they said, “Well, you know black people were slaves. They didn’t have money. They couldn’t pay for a painting.” They also recognized that or . . . what else did they say . . . That was one comment. Um . . . some of them . . . one did say, “Well, you, you know meaning the museum, didn’t think black people were important so you don’t have any paintings of black people.” So yes, it was like, “It’s like this all over.” It was kind of like an acknowledged dismissal and probably chalked up as kind of a shortcoming on our part.

Jessica’s description illustrates the standard of whiteness and the exclusionary experience that can take place within a public art museum. Her additional comments also demonstrate how deeply the norm of whiteness can be culturally embedded within the curatorial community:

And so this points to an area where as we build our audiences we may need . . . we will need to look at our collection . . . the decisions we make in terms of acquiring collections but also exhibiting them. Maybe in hindsight I would have started with the other painting that resonated with them (an urban landscape) and I wouldn’t even have bothered with the others. We do have works by African American artists in the collection. One of them actually one of our premiere paintings, happens to be on loan . . . it’s a landscape painting; huge. Um and so . . . in looking you wouldn’t know it was painted by an African American man.

Jessica demonstrates her power to shape the art experience: to choose which art works have value, which works are presented and in what manner these works are exhibited. The underlying power of white privilege embedded in her unintentional

statement, “you wouldn’t know it was painted by an African American man,” expresses the norm of the dominant group (Miller 1976). Domination also occurs in art museums through the order of presentation. Geoffrey discusses the arrangement of art by culture and the subtle symbolism behind this presentation:

In a museum like this, right now today, because we have Oceanic Art and African Art and Asian Art . . . it would be very difficult to say with OUR collection right now that the majority were white males because we’re so multicultural on the walls. In the European and American galleries though . . . what’s interesting is that they’re the two galleries that are upstairs and they take the entire first floor (laughing). You literally go down to the basement sort of, physically to see the other cultures which is a little weird. It’s not foregrounded like the American and the European art. Like you walk in . . . and there it is.

Gwen also addresses the power of exclusion in choosing works of art. When directly asked about issues of race and exclusion, she becomes contemplative. After a few seconds, she points to several issues of inequality inherent within the collection under her care. Gwen goes on to discuss matters of choice and recognition in acknowledging artists and presenting art to the public:

I want to show you these two pieces over here. We only have two pieces hanging here that are by African Americans. You could never tell they were done by African Americans. This artist (African American artist) and this artist (white artist) are contemporaries. They were good friends and often worked together; but THIS artist (the white artist) is the one that is renowned. Why is that? I don’t know. This is an important piece (the African American artwork). It paved the way for all these artists (gestures to other section with all white artists) over here in this part of the gallery space. He was a huge influence; a pivotal force. Is it his best work? I don’t know but I had to work for hours to convince the director to let us have it and it was a donation! Very few people have heard off him; the public. No one knows. I told the accessions committee that we needed to

be more diverse; that only about 3.5% of the art was done by non-white males. They asked me why that mattered.

Again, the phrase, “you could never tell they were done by African Americans,” demonstrates the “centrality of whiteness” (Tierney 2006:608) in norming the art experience. Art, as a representation of culture, is therefore a “positional truth” connected to issues of history, power and authority (Abu-Lughod 1991). Symbolic violence occurs when issues of race and diversity can be ignored in favor of the dominant group’s legitimized experience. Jessica’s African American students demonstrate an acknowledgement and acceptance of this legitimized experience and also feelings of powerlessness to change it.

Both Jessica and Gwen admitted to issues of inequality and also the need for art museum’s to address these issues. Jessica spoke of broadening the collection to better reflect the diversity of our society. Gwen talked of the necessity to press for recognition and inclusion of artists of color. All curators spoke of the need for some kind of change, including: broadening their reach, expanding their collections and the call for more diversity within their profession. Curators also spoke of the constraints that prohibited them from affecting these changes. Many of these constraints are grounded within the power dynamics of white privilege.

Nine of the curators interviewed acknowledged the whiteness of culture within the field of art. The other curators did not. However, throughout the course of these interviews it became evident that curators did not shape the cultural narrative alone. Structural elements within the field of art and within the art museum itself also influenced

the cultural narrative. Several themes involving museum bureaucracy became prominent throughout the interviews. Whiteness became a factor in these themes linked by money, power and status. It became apparent that several factors embedded within these bureaucratic themes also helped shape the selective interpretation and presentation of art, one of which was the power and prominence of the board and its affiliates. The power of whiteness is reflected in the museum's board members, donors and patrons. The museum's continual need for funding enables the board and its affiliates to influence the museum's choices of art and art exhibits thus reproducing the dominant cultural narrative of whiteness.

Bureaucracy, Money and Whiteness

All curators were asked to explain the bureaucratic structure that manages their particular art museum. All museums associated with the curators that participated in this study are similarly administered. Public art museums are organized and managed by a board of trustees whose primary role is fiduciary. Board membership is voluntary and members are nominated and then elected by existing members of the board. The director is employed by the board and oversees: the collections, research, exhibits and 'public face' of the museum. The director hires curators to manage each particular department, such as Contemporary art or Renaissance painting and sculpture. Curators consult the director in regards to new acquisitions and the selection of possible exhibits. All fiduciary issues of acquisition and selection are brought before the board after being vetted by the director. New art purchases and the leasing of outside themed exhibits must

be approved by first the director and then the board. The board has final say in all matters of purchasing and leasing.

Historically, money has influenced the arts through patronage and/or purchase (Veblen 2007; Zolberg 1984:380, Thompson 2008; Banks 2010). Board members are among the key “stakeholders” in a museum. Board members’ main focus is the management of money, which involves: acquiring donors, attracting audiences and maintaining legitimacy (Alexander 1996:16). Members of the board tend to have a particular profile; most are white and have a certain level of education, wealth, power and prestige. The racial and financial makeup of most boards discussed during these interviews was inclined to reflect whiteness, wealth and power. When diversity was broached as a subject, a variety of answers were given which revealed the normative view of whiteness by associating diversity with gender, age and occupation. Race was absent in all but one of curators’ responses. Jessica, a director of a small suburban museum responded to the subject of diversity by first discussing issues of gender:

AB: So how diverse is the board?

JESSICA: “Um . . . the board is . . . I would say . . . fairly representative of the community. Um, probably hovering in the 60% - 70% sort of range . . . um, there’s some work to do.

AB: What do you mean by 60% to 70%?

JESSICA: “Um . . . gender and age. OK (slightly defensively) . . . the missing 35% - 40% is that we don’t have as much racial diversity as we should. Um . . . we also probably need some socioeconomic diversity but that’s very difficult for nonprofits whose . . . for whom . . . nonprofits that rely on their board as essentially fundraising instigators.

Jason responded to the question of diversity through occupational prestige while Harriet, a director of a small rural museum, replied by discussing issues of age:

JASON: It's the way that boards work and they select people from various aspects of the community um, I mean it includes SOME diversity . . . I mean there's a MINISTER . . . I mean they try to be inclusive but most of them have a financial responsibility.

HARRIET: It's not as much (of a closed circle) as it used to be. We've been trying to break out of that as much as we can . . . um, and go to younger people.

Links to external funding and a social network that can be utilized to tap new financial connections dominated much of the curator's comments. The nonprofit status of public art museums enabled museums to receive grants. However, it was agreed by all curators interviewed that grants were no longer enough to support a museum (Alexander 1996:15). It was apparent throughout the course of all interviews that the search for financial support and the overall lack of financial resources influenced board choices and board membership. Issues of racial and ethnic diversity were overshadowed by the need to acquire a steady stream of funding. Both Lena and Cameron described the importance of a board connected to financial resources:

AB: So how is the board chosen?

LENA: I think it's sometimes friends of people who are already on the board who recommend someone who has a passion for the museum. Um, but they're generally from big corporations in town, banks, philanthropists, people who have art collections.

CAMERON: The board tends to be comprised of people that are economically well-placed. They're successful . . . um, business men and

women from the community or sometimes they come from old money but they tend to be a fairly well-heeled group of people Many of them are art collectors in their own right and they primarily have a fiduciary responsibility for governing the museum and making sure it's financially sound.

Many curators were uncomfortable talking about diversity. Geoffrey further explained the tension between a museum's desire for a diverse board that reflects the community population and the need for financial resources:

We have a diverse board and we have African Americans on the board. We don't consciously say, "Oh, do we have someone from the Asian community, someone from the Indian community?" . . . I mean it would be great if you know we had various . . . every type of ethnicity and religion or whatever . . . we don't . . . but we definitely try and get people from . . . certainly geographically from around the region; different areas, different backgrounds, different jobs. We hope the way things are that the board members bring their connections with them. I mean that is DEFINITELY part of it. Can they help fundraise and um . . . we're always looking for people that can inspire giving and can help with the fundraising; so that's a big plus if they bring that.

The continual quest for financial resources aids in the reproduction of a white habitus among board members. This habitus, a shared cultural narrative of history and identity (Frankenberg 1993), creates a form of social and cultural isolation (Bonilla-Silva, Goar and Embrick 2006: 229-230). The board's habitus becomes "racialized" through the norming of matters such as personal preference, emotion and aesthetics (Bonilla-Silva 2003:104). Throughout these interviews it became clear that the racialization found within the boardroom created definite aesthetic as well as social constraints (Alexander 1996:16).

Many of the constraints placed upon art museums and art curators are fiduciary in origin. The recession of 2008 has created a significant financial setback for many art museums. Decreased financial support from corporate sponsors, private donors and government funded grants has forced many museums to cut back their programs. Shortage of funds has eliminated staff, stifled community outreach and curtailed curators' choices of exhibits. This lack of financial support has helped to create whiteness of place by compelling the museum and its staff to adhere to more conservative policies that align with a proven base of support. As Walter stated earlier, the museum community is predominantly older, whiter and better educated. Policies aimed at maintaining this established audience are therefore chosen by default to support the visual symbols of racial exclusion — predominantly white approved art and white artists — that distinguish the dominant group. Although many curators stated they continue to offer a variety of exhibits and programs, these curators also confessed that financial setbacks have severely curtailed these offerings thereby reducing their impact. Geoffrey discusses the impact of reduced funding on the nature of exhibits and the pressure curators' face to produce exhibits of quality as well as exhibits that are profitable:

GEOFFREY: Can you keep doing shows on Rockwell ad nausea? When you have a bad turn out for a particular show it so impacts the board . . . the board looks at your numbers . . . and asks, "Well, what happened here?" Well, you know nobody knew who the artist was. Well, who do people know? Well, they know Rockwell and they know Monet and they know Warhol (all white males) . . . it's like the same five shows over and over.

AB: So it does become almost circular in the sense that it's the same artists . . .

GEOFFREY: Absolutely; over and over again.

Harriet also discusses the reduction in funding and recalls the painful decision to trim the collection and focus primarily on art of the area in order to keep the museum staffed and viable. The museum's decommissioning of art has led to a much narrower focus and reduced diversity in art objects and art exhibits:

We would have been something quite different had the stock market not . . . did what it did . . . was done to it. And now we are probably just moving into the arts of the area because that's something we can do with our collection very well and do fewer changing exhibits; um . . . and just recognizing that we're probably going to end up um . . . being the same size in terms of staff now.

Policies aimed at attracting this established audience are also reflected in the expanded duties of curators. Curators are now required to actively pursue donors. Curators acknowledged these donors are largely linked to board members by personal affiliation. The curators' pursuit of donors reproduces the whiteness of structure by mirroring the whiteness, wealth and power of its board. Cameron illustrates this link between whiteness, money and art in describing his expanded duties as curator:

Curators today are expected to be many more things. We're involved in development. Ah . . . we're expected to convey a group of donors through the galleries if it benefits the institution.

Donors of the museum are treated with deference in order to insure their financial support and also to establish a long term relationship that continues from one generation to the next (Alexander 1996:36). Donors wield a certain amount of leverage in the choice of art and art exhibits. Art and status are linked by money and the prestige that art

symbolizes (Thompson 2008). Culture is therefore reproduced through the taste and values of the donors connected to the museum as well as its board (Alexander 1996:36-38). Since financial support supersedes all other needs, the choices and voices of the art museum curator are constrained; compelled to reflect the taste and values of those connected to power and money. Consequently, the cycle of whiteness is reproduced; a never ending circle of donor, board, director, curator and art object based upon white privilege and power. Power and culture merge as the defining characteristics of culture are dictated by the dominant group.

Whiteness and social class were not only issues of the board and its structure but also of museum patronage. Research has shown that social class is a proven barrier to museum participation (Jackson and Scott 1999; Jun, Kyle and O'Leary 2008). Race and social class were often linked by curators when discussing outsiders' perceptions of the museum as well as in overall museum attendance. The conflation of race and low-economic status is prevalent throughout the United States (Low 2009:80). African Americans are disproportionally portrayed as living in poverty compared to their white counterparts (Gilens 1996:515). This conflation of race and social class was widespread when curators discussed the demographics of patronage. Walter acknowledged the difference between the museum's patron community and the geographical surrounding community:

AB: So do you think the community that visits the museum is the same or different from the surrounding (physical) community?

WALTER: Oh, totally different. They're older, whiter, better educated. I mean this has been proven over and over again through studies. I mean it's improved but if you mean the truly surrounding community . . . it's mostly African American.

Lucy was more direct in her assessment of some of the constraints of museum patronage; including lack of leisure time as well as low income. Again, her connection between race and social class was inadvertent but also pointed as she included 'single parent'; a status linked to promiscuity, commonly associated with African American women (Collins 2005:100), as part of an overall demographic:

I mean how many families let's say are a single parent and that single parent is working? So when are they actually going to come, the weekend? You know, maybe they're just too busy doing . . . they don't have leisure perhaps. You know I'm not saying that African Americans are the only poor people in the city. I'm sure that's not true; but I'm SURE many ARE.

The subject of an entrance fee was mentioned by all curators. Some museums had no entry fee or charged solely for special exhibits. However, a growing number of museums had added a fee to cover maintenance costs and other expenses. Other museums had increased their special event prices. Curators were clearly unhappy with these changes because they believed that it prohibited lower income people from visiting and enjoying the collections. Many curators worried that it added to the perception that museums were elitist institutions. Geoffrey became quite animated in his response to added fees and the issues of social class and art; expressing a desire for experimentation in the hopes of appealing to a wider audience:

The idea that art . . . that somehow we've dealt with the issue of class and art . . . We have NOT. And people in the museum world we KNOW this . . . we KNOW it and when I was talking earlier about experimenting with things . . . with poetry slams . . . we did one here about a month ago . . . we had a completely different audience. It was young and we had kids from high school that had memorized poems by heart. We had some . . . I wouldn't say break dancing . . . I wouldn't know what I would call it . . . because I'm just so out of it but we had dancers that were grade school through high school . . . again we just had this completely different audience here.

Geoffrey went on to explain that the different audience was much more racially diverse than usual; including a substantial African American presence. Offering a more diverse program by acknowledging other forms of art and art making had allowed for alternative avenues of expression which in turn created opportunities to connect with a larger audience. His viewpoint underscores what he and other curators had acknowledged; that art museums are perceived by many to be elitist as well as too narrowly focused. Curators inadvertently conflating race and social class frame the cultural experience of the art museum as a racial experience of white privilege and agency for "social and cultural exclusion" (Lamont and Lareau 1988:156). To remain relevant, many curators stated that art museums must continually work to cast off the label of elitism and find new ways to connect to the surrounding community. As Geoffrey demonstrated, creating new connections broadened the museum community to include groups outside the museum's demographic norm of white, higher level of income and education.

Patrons and the Whiteness of Place

In Geoffrey's experience, reaching beyond the demographic of whiteness and social class required an acknowledgement that art and art making is a varied practice. Geoffrey's statements about experimentation and new audiences highlighted that culture and cultural reproduction can be different for various social groups (Desai 2000; Guha-Thakurta 2007; Chan and Goldthorpe 2005). Art museums project a predominantly white image (Berger 2005; McIntosh 1990) creating a place of whiteness which in turn, fosters a social barrier of racial exclusion (Gilmore 2002; Fredericks 2009; Shaw and Sullivan 2011). Many curators acknowledged this perception of whiteness of place when discussing museum patronage. Lucy talked about the whiteness of place and linked the art as well as the social experience in her explanation:

I think unfortunately there's a perception that there isn't anything there for me, kind of thing among some people (in reference to African Americans). That the artists who show here have nothing to do with me and my life, which I think if they came, they would see that wasn't true. I think it's also museums tend to be very social experiences. I mean some people come alone, but most people come in pairs or small groups and it can just be a factor of, "It's not something my close-knit group of people does together."

However, one of the most profound statements was made by Alice, a curator of contemporary art from a mid-sized urban museum. Alice talked about context and the connection between art and viewer. She questioned the cultural authenticity that was being experienced by several African American youth in relation to the art featured in one of their prominent galleries:

I remember . . . seeing some African American teenagers in our 19th century galleries and thinking, “I wonder if . . . you know there’s anything?” And you know again, this may be really presumptuous and wrong on my part to think, but I was thinking that these kids could be going through the whole museum and feeling like there’s NOTHING here for me to connect to. I don’t . . . I don’t really, you know, there’s a bunch of portraits of white people and . . . I don’t know . . . is there really anything here that connects with their experience?

Alice and her colleague Lydia went on to describe their efforts in attempting to foster a place of racial and cultural inclusion for an African American audience:

LYDIA: We met with an African American women’s group about exhibitions.

ALICE: We were trying to talk to them about an exhibition that we were planning. We were going to have African American artists in it but they weren’t even particularly interested in that. They wanted . . . they only wanted to know about exhibitions that were ABOUT African Americans or African American art because this exhibition wasn’t specifically about African American art; it just happened to have a number of African American artists in it.

LYDIA: They had very specific ideas about the types of art they were familiar with and the types of art they wanted to see. But they made it very clear that those weren’t going to be like gateway exhibitions or exhibitions that would get them in the door initially so they would come back and consider other exhibitions. So we were really dismayed at first, I think, because of that. Because in OUR mind . . . OK so if we had a show, like a quilt shown of African American quilts that would get them in the door then hopefully, that would be a way that you would get people in here initially . . . that you would get them comfortable.

ALICE: We were trying to talk to them about cultural identity and the complexity of cultural identity and . . . um . . . they weren’t interested. And we thought surely . . . maybe this was . . . well obviously, that was pretty naïve on our part.

Alice and Lydia highlight the complexity of cultural reproduction and the intricacies of creating an authentic experience within the space of an art museum. Urban researchers maintain that culture is a powerful means of exclusion through the production and domination of geographical space (Zukin 1995; Shaw and Sullivan 2011). Curators attempt to alter this perception of white space through targeted exhibits in the hopes of reaching other cultural communities with varying degrees of success. Wendy described curating two exhibits that effectively reached the African American community in her town. Additionally, her description also showcases the astute observation of one of the African American artists:

Well, we try to reach out to the African American community. We have had two shows (two African American artists). Both of these shows were very popular with the African American community. After the one artist had his opening, he told me it was the first time he had a sea of black faces at an opening. He said most of his openings are white.

However, the attempt by Geoffrey's museum to reach the African American community had limited success:

I went to the radio stations in black communities . . . black radio stations. And one of the things that just sort of blew me away personally . . . for example, I was talking with a radio show host . . . and his station is about I would say less than a minute drive from here . . . and he asked me where the museum was. I mean because he really didn't know. He said, "Wow, do I have to be a member to get in the door?" and I said, "Oh, no." And so he asked a number of questions that he felt his listeners wanted to know: where it was, if you had to be a member, basic things. He wanted his audience to be sure and get this information because he assumed they wouldn't know. And I thought, "Wow, we are really disconnected." This museum has been here 90 years and you've NEVER had to be a member to come in the door and ah . . . it's always been free up until this past year.

There are no restrictions on entrance of any kind. We discovered that with the African American community, I mean historically we have not been really as connected as we could be or even as we thought we were. I think what the entire museum organization: the board, the steering committee, everybody, experienced was that there's a lot of work to be done.

The issue of targeted exhibits was debated by several curators. All curators admitted it was part of a museum's lexicon to present exhibits directed at specific audiences. However, the framing of this activity was divided into two disparate positions. The majority of curators viewed targeted exhibits as a method of establishing a voice of diversity within the museum, while a small faction questioned these types of exhibits' authenticity. Lena described the thought process behind targeted cultural exhibits and her museum's limited success in attracting the African American community:

AB: Do you ever do exhibits targeting a specific audience?

LENA: Yea, sure. No, we do. We try to have a variety over the years so you look at the big picture and you try to see what areas . . . you know . . . we'll have an Asian show then we'll have an African show, then we'll have a contemporary show. We've struggled with our neighbors who are by and large African American. Um, but we try to have different shows that appeal to them. We have an African American festival and that brings a lot of people from their neighborhood, but it's just one day.

However, the targeting of cultural groups through a single exhibit was viewed negatively by a small portion of the curators interviewed. These individuals felt that the effort was not genuine and was possibly perceived solely as a moneymaking venture. Edward commented on the practice of targeting groups through a single exhibit by responding:

I don't like superficiality. The targeting of an audience must be authentic. The activities must be ongoing and not just a token gesture toward any group. That's an insult. For many people art museums are viewed as elitist institutions that are continually raising money. I often hear, "I didn't know the museum was for me, I didn't know the museum was for my people."

Additionally, several museums had organizations such as clubs, guilds or programs that had a racial and/or ethnic focus. However, curators described these groups as self-contained entities that did not appear to influence the overall general museum attendance. As Helen explains:

Um, we have our (African American) society . . . and also our (African American) committee who really tries to get us out there. But, of course, they do tend to be more supportive and more interested in um . . . when we have African American exhibitions.

Comments such as, "I didn't know the museum was a place for me, I didn't know the museum was for my people," illustrate the racial divide that occurs in many museums. Whiteness occurs through the process of exclusion whereby art and art patronage is seen by many outsiders as a predominantly white social experience (Shaw and Sullivan 2011). Edward's comments suggest that museum exhibitions, although viewed by curators as embracing cultural diversity may in fact contribute to feelings of racial exclusion by appearing to be inauthentic; further enhancing feelings of "otherness" within minority groups. Moreover, as Alice observed, racial and cultural exclusion may exist within the expression of the art itself through a lack of context and meaning between art object and viewer.

CONCLUSION

Although public art museums portray themselves as culturally inclusive, much of the art exhibited projects the attitudes and beliefs of the dominant social group. Art museums serve as a tool for this dominant social group to maintain a social structure based on exclusion to obtain varying positions of status and power. My research reveals that this group is predominantly: white, educated and occupies a higher level of socioeconomic status; and that their attitudes, beliefs and preferences reinforce the normative social hegemony of whiteness. My findings show how hegemony maintains the social hierarchy of race through the process of exclusion by presenting the white cultural narrative as both ordinary and invisible. Exclusion is found in the practices of the board, directors and curatorial staff and in turn, the presentation of art and art exhibits within the public art museum.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship by illustrating the link between art and the cultural narrative of whiteness by demonstrating that much of art that is labeled and exhibited as neutral and normative covertly carries within it the tastes, attitudes, and preferences of the dominant group (Lamont and Lareau 1988; McIntosh 1990). As a result, symbolic violence takes place through the simultaneous exclusion and shaping of the ‘other’ (Bourdieu 1987:13; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004; Noriega 1999:70-71) within the presentation and exhibition of art. The whiteness of art is

therefore accepted as the unquestioned norm (Dyer 1977; Rosenthal 2004) through the absence of art and artists of color.

In addition, this research reveals that museums' continual quest for financial support fosters white hegemony through the social networks of their board members which in turn, influence the choices and voices of directors and curatorial staff (Alexander 1996). As money and power are predominantly white, much of art and art exhibits have moved toward the normative expression of whiteness in an effort to satisfy these donors and sponsors (Noriega 1999). My findings showcase how lack of funding has eliminated staff and abolished or drastically reduced the implementation of outreach programs into the surrounding community. This curtailing of outreach programs has reduced the museum's voice and overall presence within the community causing the museum to lean even more heavily upon its predominantly white base.

Furthermore, my research demonstrates how this white base has shaped the attitudes of curators. Numerous curators conflated race with social class and perceived African Americans as being at the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum and thus unable or uninterested in the art museum experience. My findings reveal how this conflation of race and social class has created barriers of racial exclusion as exhibits and other offerings have either inadvertently excluded African Americans or 'othered' them by promoting African American art and artists as a separate cultural experience. Many museums offer clubs, guilds or programs to specific minority groups such as African Americans or Latinos however, members' participation rarely goes beyond the designated organization. Consequently, curators have noted that African Americans

seem to perceive the art museum as a designated white space. Furthermore, my research reveals that although the majority of curators professed a desire for the museum to project an image of racial diversity and inclusion, none seem to have been successful in doing so.

This study presents a window into the world of art museums and art museum curators and contributes to the growing body of scholarly literature on critical white studies within critical race theory. This study is limited in three key ways. First, it is quite possible that different regions apart from the upper Midwest would bare different results. Second, interviews inherently present the possibility of practiced responses rather than truthful answers to difficult questions on race and social class. Additionally, this study does not directly examine African Americans' beliefs and practices in regards to art and art museums but relies on the beliefs and observations of curators to garner information as to the interaction between art museums and the surrounding communities.

Future research is needed to pull apart the nuanced relationships between art museums and the diverse communities that they are mandated to represent. Interviews with art museum patrons, African American professionals, African American artists and curators of other types of museums would garner more information as to the relationship between African Americans, cultural reproduction and the art museum experience. Investigation into the various meanings of culture, the methods involved in cultural reproduction and the examination of the exclusionary role of cultural capital, will enable researchers to perceive how power and status is gained within a social hierarchy of race. Finally, connecting the cultural reproduction and cultural capital inherent within art

museums to white studies within critical race theory will allow us to better understand the racialized cultural narrative within which we live.

This research enables us to see the depth and breadth of white hegemony and the subtle power of racial exclusion. By understanding that art has both an aesthetic and a social function, we can use the art museum as a place of dialog and seek alternative means of promoting and achieving equality. Ultimately, art is not just about objects but about people; their relationship to the art, to themselves and to the world around them. Appreciating other people, cultures and ideas is a step toward achieving not just equality but unity. As Edward so eloquently stated:

Everyone . . . African Americans, everyone should feel they can walk in here and that they belong and that they are welcome. I understand that different groups have different cultures, different needs and we want everyone to be comfortable here. That's part of being in the U.S. there's diversity and we have to acknowledge that.

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