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**LOOKING THROUGH KALEIDOSCOPE :  
PRISMS OF SELF AND LGBTQ YOUTH  
IDENTITY**

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**Abstract**

This reflective essay details aspects of a participatory action research study in which I observed and examined the activities of students working in an after-school LGBTQ facility. The study was designed to teach art for social justice and explore the ways artmaking can be a transformative tool in a social environment. However, the activities in which the participants engaged not only increased their knowledge about social justice, but also ignited critical self-reflection and analysis of their world. Furthermore, I describe how my experience as an ally in this LGBTQ space resulted in my own personal and professional transformation.

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1. A kaleidoscope works by using multiple reflections. It is “a tube containing loose pieces of colored glass and other pretty objects, reflected by mirrors or glass lenses set at angles ... [it] create[s] patterns when viewed through the end of the tube” (Brewster, 2011, para. 3). In the title of this essay, the connotation of Kaleidoscope is dual. I use Kaleidoscope as a play on words because this essay details a research experience at a site called Kaleidoscope Youth Center. In addition, the writing addresses the research process as one that involves iterative cycles of reflection and self-analysis.

**Looking through Kaleidoscope:  
Prisms of Self and LGBTQ Youth Identity**

Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character. (Freire, 1970, p. 107)

Paulo Freire’s expressive assertion succinctly communicates the position from which I conceptualize and approach research. For me, it is critical that I engage in meaningful inquiries that aid in real life, personal and social transformations, and social justice work. As an African American heterosexual female, I believe it is important to critically analyze and challenge the status quo, and with that comes self analysis. There must first be reflection upon self to transform the world at large (Freire, 1970). So, with my research, I desire to bring diverse people together in a collaborative exploration of identity— “not as *what* they are but *who* they are. [Thereby], bridging individual and collective identities, histories, and social analyses” (Torre, 2008, p. 111). Participatory action research (PAR) is a methodology that supports these goals. PAR focuses on collaboration in research (between the facilitator and the stakeholders) and the creation of change on a local level (Stringer, 2007). With social justice at its core, PAR is informed by “Freire’s development of counterhegemonic approaches to knowledge construction within oppressed communities” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 3). Implications of such a research methodology are not only professional and educational, but personal as well. PAR studies are not executed in hopes of proving something, but instead have the goal to “find insight and meaning in our practice that results in positive changes for ourselves, our students, and the school and communities in which we [live and] teach” (Phillips & Carr, 2006, p. 102). Stakeholder reflection and self-analysis is a goal of PAR.

In summer 2010, I participated in a PAR research project with youth from Kaleidoscope Youth Center (KYC). KYC, located in Colum-

bus, Ohio, USA, is a community organization with the mission “to work in partnership with young people in Central Ohio to create safe and empowering environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth through advocacy, education and support” (Kaleidoscope Youth Center, 2009, para. 1). Students who attend KYC travel from their respective family communities to build a new community constructed by their inquiries about sexual orientation; therefore, the youth demographic is diverse in race, ethnicity, ability, and class. The youth may attend KYC beginning at age 12, and continue with the center until age 21.

The primary question that guided the research at KYC was the following: How does a multicultural and social reconstructionist approach<sup>2</sup> to art education facilitate the three broad goals of social justice (a) increase personal awareness, (b) expand knowledge and (c) encourage action among youth? To attend to this inquiry, I lead the KYC youth in weekly, one-hour long artmaking workshops for a span of five months. The workshops were titled Kaleidoscope He(ARTS). In the spirit of PAR and its collaborative element, during the first workshop the students and I jointly developed the Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) curriculum by brainstorming social justice issues that would frame each artmaking session. For the remaining weeks, the students and I created visual art that addressed these issues.

The youth did not help establish the guiding research question during the preliminary planning stage; however, their role as researchers was significant throughout other aspects of the study. PAR thrives on collaboration and group dynamics in research. It is a mutual research inquiry that can create change on a local level and is context specific. My primary goal as an investigator was to examine an approach to developing a specific type of art curriculum; a multicultural and social reconstructionist approach to art that focused on teaching for social justice. The youths’ roles as researchers were to help conceive and continuously evolve this particular curriculum. Building the curriculum was ongoing and it

2.This approach originated in the education field; it deal[s] “more directly...with oppression and social structural inequality based on race, social class, gender, and disability....The approach prepares future citizens to reconstruct society so that it better serves the interests of all groups of people and especially those who are of color, poor, female, gay and/or disabled” (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, pp. 209-210).

changed as the students’ lives changed. So, while I maintained the goal of examining the social justice curriculum as it emerged, the youth investigators researched the issues that framed it. In this position, the youth were able to address, question and reflect on social issues that concerned them. To respond to some of the issues, the youth developed, conceptually and aesthetically, dialogic art that initiated change. Executing such tasks made them key researchers in the study.

Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) facilitated the youths’ learning of social justice through an art curriculum that originated from their own voices and concerns, a central objective of PAR. Garber (2004) writes, “Art education for social justice places art as a means through which [social justice] goals are achieved” (p. 16). Working towards social justice through art education is often transformative because art can teach students how to critically analyze imposed ideas and assumptions. Additionally, it helps them to understand how their ascribed characteristics (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation) and their culture impact oppression. This introspection and self-analysis are a requisite that help students clarify their own sexual, racial, and ethnic attitudes and values (Baptiste & Baptiste, 1977). With the Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) workshops, I hoped to provide experiences in which the youth engaged in self-reflection via artmaking that was filled with “complexity, ambiguity, contradiction, paradox and multiple perspectives” (Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris, & Daniel, 2008, p. 83).

### **Kaleidoscope He(ARTS): Creating Experiences that Initiate Self Reflection in LGBTQ Youth**

During the first Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) workshops, the students chose issues to focus on, which included: immigration, gay equality, gay marriage, animal rights, bullying, and unfair imprisonment. For the first project, we attended to the topic of immigration. There are many facets to immigration; however, at the time of the workshop, the Arizona Immigra-

tion Law<sup>3</sup> was a relevant current event. So, to introduce the issue, I handed out excerpts of the law to the students and discussed its contents. The students and I had a dynamic conversation in which they asked critical questions such as, “Isn’t this unconstitutional? The police have no authority in this area. They cannot ask for immigration papers, can they? What does *reasonable suspicion* mean ... it has to mean that they ‘look’ illegal or like someone from another country. Isn’t that racial profiling? Who defines what looking illegal looks like?” The students noted how immigrants from Ireland appear to be “normal” Americans, so those individuals would never be identified as illegal immigrants. I guided the youth into dialogue about how words are loaded; specifically, the phrase *reasonable suspicion* in the law is coded language to support discriminatory practices. The youth identified immigrants, specifically Mexican immigrants, as targets of this overt discrimination. I was excited about the conclusions the students were making about the law. This dynamic dialogue was integral in the creation and development of critical consciousness. Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997) confirm,

Because dialogue requires critical thinking, it can also generate critical thinking. In this sense, dialogue is not a ‘technique, a mere, technique, which we can use to get some results’ (Shor & Freire, 1987, 13); rather, as a communicative process that reflects

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3. Excerpts from Senate Bill 1070: State of Arizona “Immigration Law”. “For any lawful contact made by a law enforcement official or agency of this state or a county, city, town or other political subdivision of this state where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the united states. A reasonable attempt shall be made, when practicable, to determine the immigration status of the person. The person’s immigration status shall be verified with the federal government pursuant to 8 United States Code Section 1373 ( c )” (para. 3). “If an Alien who is unlawfully present in the United States is convicted of a violation of state or local law. On discharge from imprisonment or assessment of any fine that is imposed, the alien shall be transferred immediately to the custody of the United State Immigration and customs enforcement or the United States customs and border protection” (para.4). “A law enforcement officer, without a warrant, may arrest a person if the officer has probable cause to believe that the person has committed any public offense that makes the person removable from the United States” (para.6).

Retrieved from <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf>

social experience in order to understand the social and historical forces at work, it enables participants to develop ‘critical consciousness.’ (p. 39)

While the workshop discussion began with an emphasis on discrimination of immigrants, the students’ dialogue progressed to the topic of discrimination of the gay population. The students shared personal experiences of times they felt they were treated unfairly because they “appeared” to be gay. I questioned what this assertion meant. The students described how others usually identify gay males as being well groomed, wearing tight jeans, or fitted t-shirts. They continued to explain that a lesbian or gay female may be identified by wearing a very short haircut or braids; and dressing in baggy clothes and shirts to hide her breasts. To extend their thinking about the subject, I posed questions such as, “How have those norms been set and by whom? Do all gay people subscribe to them? Who has the power to disrupt this standard?” The students listed mass media, magazines, and visual culture like movies and sitcoms as proponents. Then, I asked the student who controlled those means of communication. Through this questioning, the students realized the similarity between how the dominant population controls who appears to be an illegal immigrant, and how these same people control how gay and lesbian individuals are perceived. At this point, the students began to reflect on their own identities and began to question how their identity was established and/or influenced by these imposed ideas and images created by those in power.

After a lengthy discussion, the students and I began the artmaking aspect of the workshop. The artmaking project gave the youth a chance to make commentary on the Immigration Law. I gave the students five pages of political cartoons that attended to the Arizona Immigration Law. The artists of the political cartoons used satirical, abusive, racist, and discriminatory plots to communicate their personal beliefs on the injustice of the Arizona Immigration Law. The students identified the satire that was used and the way the artists played with language in an effort to confront discriminatory aspects of the law. Using these professional works as a platform, the youth created their own political cartoons (Figures 1-2). Their cartoons did not have to specifically address the Arizona Immigra-

tion Law; however, they were instructed to create cartoons that attended to similar kinds of discriminatory acts.



Figure 1. “Look Burrito, You’re Mexican, this is an all American restaurant.” “I’m not a burrito, I’m a breakfast wrap. Don’t judge on looks alone.” Discrimination is bad, don’t make assumptions, it makes an ass out of u and me.

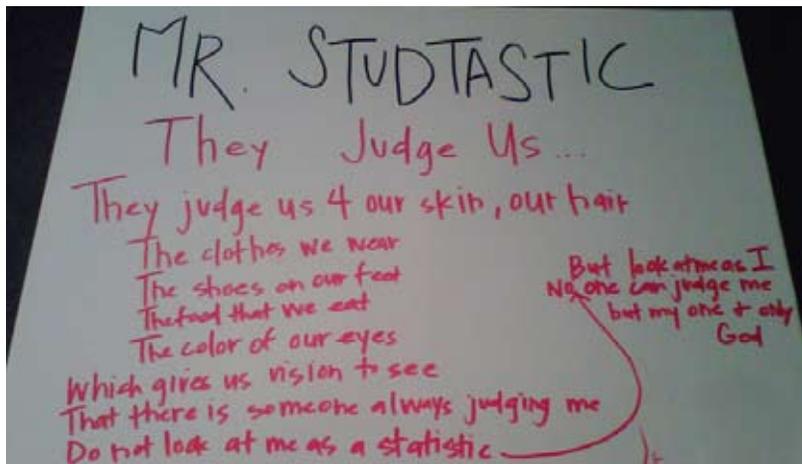


Figure 2. “Mr. Studtastic. They Judge Us...They judge us 4 our skin, our hair; The clothes we wear; The shoes on our feet; The food we eat; The color of our eyes; Which gives us vision to see; That there is someone always judging me; Do not look at me as a statistic; But look at me as I; No one can judge me but my one & only God.”

The students’ questioning of power in this project reveals their understanding of human worth, empathy and the need to take action for oppressed minority groups (Freire, 1979). In addition, the political cartoon ignited inquiries about personal discrimination. One youth used this project as an opportunity to explore personal issues. Her political cartoon (Figure 2) was actually a poem titled, “They Judge Us.” This youth addressed how people discriminated against her based on her skin color, her hair, the color of her eyes, and even the clothes and shoes she wears. Instead of a traditional political cartoon, her work was more like a political poem that ultimately communicated how she was only concerned with the judgment of God. Her writing reclaimed her power as an individual as she stood against those who impose judgment and oppression. She reaffirmed her own human worth.

The political cartoon project introduced the students to the idea of art as counterhegemonic tools that work against institutional and structural oppression, including the impact of media including newspapers, textbooks, films, and even libraries (Sleeter & Grant, 2007a). The discussion and artmaking processes provoked the youth to critically question power and justice in the United States. The students reflected upon their own lives and worlds and who has power within them. The students empowered themselves by actively questioning everyday living conditions (Sleeter & Grant, 2007a). Their questions touched on issues of truth, such as what do we accept as the truth and who has the power to establish truths? The students realized how social power is imbalanced and those on the lower end of the class hierarchy, usually those in historically oppressed groups, are at a disadvantage. With the political cartoon project, students addressed economic exploitation of groups (Snider, 1996) and made satirical commentary on the issue. This project ignited a session of critical questioning and critical self-analysis.

Other Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) workshop sessions provided youth with opportunities for critical thinking and critical self-analysis as well. For example, the students participated in a collage project that involved addressing a social justice issue of their choice. Using various magazines, the youth were to select effective text to juxtapose or dialog with selected images to convey a specific message concerning their chosen issue. To begin creating the collages, I gave each youth a 9x9

inch frame as their canvas. I told them to imagine that the only means of communication left in the world was their 9x9 inch canvas. This was supposed to encourage them to choose effective images that would articulate their ideas clearly and concisely.

There was a collage created about legalizing gay marriage, as well as animal cruelty and animal testing; all were social justice issues listed during the first Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) workshop. Although the collage project did not take much artistic direction, it resulted in some notable findings and conclusions about the content of media. During this activity, the youth identified the ways language, text, and images, can be viewed as hegemonic tools that help maintain the dominant group's power (Freire, 1970; Sleeter & Grant, 2007a). The youth spent significant time sorting through magazines that were available at KYC. The magazine choices were minimal with *OUT*<sup>4</sup> being the most abundant magazine resource. After taking some time with the paperbacks, the students recognized a steady trend in the representations of gay men. They talked about how over-sexualized and over-feminized gay men were represented in the magazines. The youth questioned if this representation could be the sole reason for stereotypes in the gay community. I believe this was a critical point in the youth's understanding of media power and its ability to concretize ideas about groups of people. The students' conversation attended to the sociopolitical inquiry, including "How are we taught to accept what is deemed truth? (Sleeter &



Figure 3. "STOP IT! STOP. We're all getting too old for needless violence."

4. *Out* is a popular gay men's magazine that is supposed to provide a "gay and lesbian perspective on style, entertainment, fashion, the arts, politics, culture, and the world at large" (Out, 2011, para.1). It has the highest circulation of any gay monthly publication in the United States.

Grant, 2007a).

Of the five youth who were present during this workshop, two students actually challenged the stereotypes the magazine perpetuated. To counter the messages, they used some of the over-sexualized images of gay men and juxtaposed them with men that were represented as heterosexual. Student art examples (Figure 3 and Figure 4) show this juxtaposition.

The young man who created the collage in Figure 3 aimed to speak out against violence in the homosexual community. Looking at his work, it was clear that he understood the impact of injustice and the marginalization of certain people. While he focused on this issue of violence with his work, his arrangement and choice of images displayed his attempt to reject the stereotypes that people have of one another, in addition to the ones we have placed upon ourselves (Collins, 2002). The young man's work exhibited in Figure 4 attended to the issue of legalizing gay marriage. However, his images also attack the imposed untruths found in the magazines. I believe that the two youth aimed to communicate the diversity in what a gay male can be and look like.

This art project allowed the youth to choose and combine visual images that defined how their reality was shaped (Atkinson, 2002). Additionally, when the students chose to represent themselves with text and/or images, the representations served as counter-narratives to the representations served as counter-narratives to the imposed narratives that are often inaccurate (Desai, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999). The youth used art in a dialogic capacity, as well as a means for deconstructing "truths" or myths. The collage project provided them with agency in creating

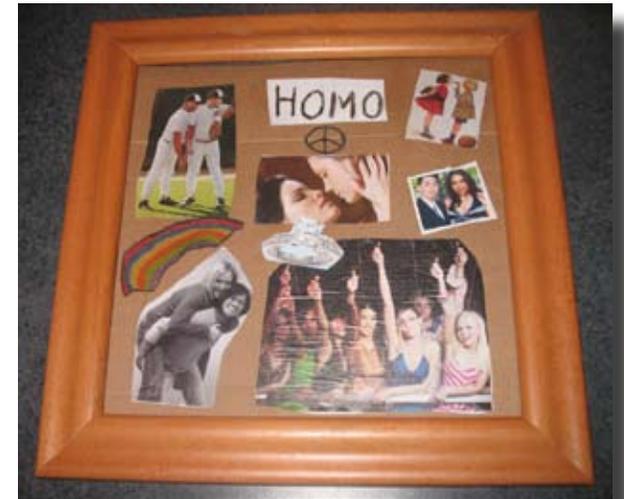


Figure 4. "I want gay marriage to be legalized for All The Gays."

visual narratives in which they made new self-constructions.

KYC director Glenn (Personal communication, January 29, 2011) noted how the KYC youth dealt with internalized homophobia, even though they identified themselves as homosexual. Therefore, I believed it was even more important for the KYC youth to self-investigate in hopes that they would “develop the power and skills to articulate both their own goals and a vision of social justice for all groups and to work constructively toward these ends” (Sleeter & Grant, 2007b, p.186). Zermeno (2011) asserted that youth often see themselves in relation to stereotypes of homosexuals, which are often negative. I saw the collage project as ideal because it guided the youth into a political inquiry about these misrepresentations that influence them (Sleeter & Grant, 2007b). The simple task of flipping through magazines geared toward the gay population made the youth attentive to the creation and maintenance of stereotypes. This recognition incited their desire to assert how misguided the images were. They used the collages to actively counter those representations. I saw this project as an intervention (Herr & Anderson, 2005) that worked to undo and rework (Zermeno, G., Personal communication, January 29, 2011) the inauthentic, negative self-image that had been molded by inaccurate and exaggerated portrayals of the gay community. The artworks were the youth’s counternarratives (Billings, 1999/2004; Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris, & Daniel, 2008) that worked against hegemonic tools, which in this case, were magazines.

For two months of the Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) workshops, the youth worked on creating a mural at the KYC site (Figure 5). The youth initiated, voted on, planned, and completed this dialogic piece of community art that they hoped would communicate the issue of gay equality. I saw this project as a liberating one because the youth controlled the entire process. As a community, they chose the visuals that they wanted to represent their idea of freedom and equality and they chose its location in the center. The mural is now the first image you see when entering KYC. In addition to the youth using this experience to communicate a reflection of who they are and what they believe, I saw the mural as an exceptional example of how art can facilitate a cross-cultural dialogue. The mural is an image of the United States map, painted with rainbow

flag colors. A Black power fist<sup>5</sup> is in the center of the painted map. Each of these images is recognizable by people around the world. The rainbow flag is a universal symbol of LGBTQ or gay pride (Gay Pride, 2009). The shape of the United States is a familiar and recognizable shape. The gender symbols are understood universally. The raised fist has been used in many countries and cultures to represent power and an expression of solidarity, strength or defiance (WorldLingo, 2011). Cross-cultural communication is not just text-based, it is also image based and art often crosses linguistic barriers (Freedman, 2003 as cited in Hubbard, 2010).



Figure 5. Student driven mural addressing gay equality

In addition to the mural project representing a collaboration of physical work and the communication of gay equality; it displays cohesion of worlds. In my research study, I utilized critical race theory as a theoretical framework because it encourages those who work for social justice to identify variations of oppression. In addition, it maintains the assertion

<sup>5</sup>The Black Power fist or “Salute” is recognized cross-culturally. This clenched fist has been used around the world to signify life and pursuit of liberty and justice (Aleman, Taylor, Hjernevik, 2010).

that racism is the most normalized form of oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1999) and the mural plays a significant role in supporting this affirmation. In the center of the map, which is painted to mimic the rainbow flag, there is a Black power fist that holds gender symbols representing males, females, and transgendered individuals. This symbol can be viewed as a theoretical and conceptual union that communicates how two groups of people desire and deserve equality in the world. It is the ultimate power symbol that represents the possibilities that could result from group collaboration.

While the image that the mural displays is undeniably positive for many reasons, I must note that this visual can also be confrontational. Therefore, to clarify, I would like to assert that my discussion about *collaboration* between oppressed groups should not be mistaken for me making *parallels* between oppressed groups. Arguments have been made by scholars, of color and not, that the oppression and marginalization in the homosexual community cannot be paralleled with the oppression and marginalization that people of color have endured for centuries (Lane, 2004). An argument that is central in this debate is that people of color cannot hide their skin color, but homosexual people can walk around in the world without anyone knowing their sexual orientation. This “passing”<sup>6</sup> is a privilege, similar to that of White privilege. In addition, it has been asserted that those who most often make this comparison are White gays and lesbians (Lane, 2004). Therefore, this comparison becomes threatening because it appears that the dominant group has “hijacked” Black civil rights progress for their own self-benefiting civil rights work (Lane, 2004; Lee-St. John, 2005). I am still reflecting and working on where I stand in the debate. However, I believe that regardless of where anyone self-positions in this argument, there should be negotiation; we should not discredit the hardships of other groups of people. We can and should discuss rights and issues without comparing the suffering of one group with another. There should be respect for all oppressed groups, which supports collaborations amongst us. Collaborations facilitate the possibilities for change to occur. The symbol used in the mural represents these possible coalitions that should be made in

6. “Passing” is not foreign in the Black community either, historically many Mulatto people had this capability.

order to work towards change for all groups of people (Collins, 2002). The symbol also communicates the idea that “identities are not ‘mutually exclusive categories of experience:’ rather they intersect” (Crenshaw, 1989, as cited in Lane, 2004, p. 326). This visual symbol for those of us involved in its creation is the epitome of what collaboration and intersectionality looks like.

### **My Self-Reflection at Kaleidoscope Youth Center**

*O’happy the soul that saw its own faults*  
(Rumi & Helminski, 1999, para. 3)

As a heterosexual female, the experience in this LGBTQ environment was transformative for my thinking about and understanding of group marginalization. I am a Black woman; I am a double minority and am familiar with the challenges of being Black and being a woman. The research experience at KYC offered a more intimate perspective of another group’s oppression, as well as an opportunity for intense self-reflection. I consider myself a person who is empathetic to all oppressed groups, especially since I am a person who identifies with two groups which have been historically oppressed: African Americans and women. However, during this study, I realized how I believed in a hierarchy of oppression; and being Black meant I was higher on the hierarchy than any other group. During this point of self-reflection, I wondered if my identification with this historically oppressed group birthed a need to acquire power, even if the power was only to claim the highest tier on the oppression hierarchy. I questioned if I felt powerful because I could say I have the most to be upset about.

Upon entering the KYC space, I did see LGBTQ problems as legitimate, but I see now that I was overly biased towards problems in the Black community. I know this is true because when I chose the site as a research location, I chose it for its racial diversity, not because of the issues in the LGBTQ community. I initially had no intentions to be dedicated to this groups’ oppression. In some ways, I believe that my desire to dismiss this aspect of KYC reveals my bias, belief in an oppression

hierarchy, and the unconscious desire to maintain a power status. Freire (1970) writes, “To simply think *about* the people, as the dominators do, without any self-giving in that thought, to fail to think *with* the people, is “a sure way to cease being revolutionary leaders” (p.132).

As my reflection is ongoing, I cannot assert that I have answered the internal questions that this study initiated. However, I have concluded that my standpoint on oppression now comes more from a position that desires to coalesce. While I may have claimed this position before this study, now I truly believe it. During my work in the KYC space, I realized that initially, my communicating a desire to unite may not have been completely authentic, especially since I had these unconscious desires for power. My self-interrogation was transformative in that I identified self-deception and interrogated how it affected my understandings and relationships with other oppressed groups and I continue to work on interrogating my own positionality.

The experience at KYC not only altered my personal identity and beliefs, but it also transformed my identity as a professional educator. There is an ongoing debate, which I have followed, that questions whether or not someone has the right to teach about a specific group of people if they are not a member of the group themselves (Collins, 2002; Howard, 2006; Smith, 2005). For example, can men be feminist instructors? Can a White person teach a course titled *Black Culture in America*? Who can be a Black feminist? In addition, how do you build rapport, make connections and understand a group’s needs when you are seen as an *outsider*? (Hutzel, 2007). Ultimately, the critique states that knowledge of a society must be from a position in it (Smith, 2005). Desai (2000) asserts, “No representations, whether visual, textual, or verbal, are neutral. Rather, they all involve some act of violence or decontextualization to the subject being represented. The act of representing the other tends to reduce the other to some partial characteristics” (pp. 115-116). *Authentic* representations of the other are not often attentive to positionality; and culture gets reduced to an unrecognizable state. It results in cultural diversity being packaged and sold by corporations, museums, and even academic institutions; this can be called corporate multiculturalism (Desai, 2000). So, the question is: How do you obtain the right to represent a group of people if you are not a member of that group, enmeshed in their

culture and its problems? Does any group have a definite “culture” that is so specific that it can be articulated clearly? There are many dimensions to this debate and I have always been conflicted about taking sides. However, the setting of this particular research has provided me with an unexpected perspective that allowed me to reflect on my personal beliefs about this controversial debate, rattling the foundations of my understanding of cultural representation.

During this study, it was easier to comprehend how a person can teach, be truly empathetic, and advocate for a group of people without being a member of that group because I was actually doing just that. I parallel my experience at KYC to John Howard Griffin’s experience that he detailed in his 1961 novel, *Black like Me*. This autobiographical work described the author’s experience in the South as a Black man. The critical part of the tale was that Griffin was not born Black; he was a White man who put himself through painful medical processes that turned his skin a darker pigment thereby allowing him to pass as Black. Griffin explained that the purpose of his desire to be Black and move to the South was to understand the mental anguish of being considered inhumane based on something as uncontrollable as skin color. He wanted to experience discrimination and investigate how one could survive under such conditions of injustice. At first, I was impressed by this story and touched by Griffin’s life-changing decision. However, after reflecting on the text, I questioned the authenticity of his experience. Griffin was not born Black and had not grown up as a Black person, which means he had not internalized the dehumanization that a Black born man does. This was the privilege Griffin had, although he was “Black” for many months of his life. Being oppressed from birth can often result in negative thinking about life and the world in general; one who is oppressed often feels powerless (Freire, 1970). However, being born with power and privilege, and then later experiencing oppression does not completely diminish one’s optimism about the world. This is evident through Griffin’s attempt to create change through relationships with White people during his journey whereas, a Black man would not have initiated such relationships. The suffering of Black people in the South transcended any ideas about building a respectful relationship with a White person.

I believe that my entrance into Kaleidoscope is similar to Griffin’s

story. Griffin only grazed the surface of the Southern Black experience and my window of experience in KYC was even smaller. I could only make conclusions about the homosexual experience from my four-month engagement with the youth at KYC. Neither Griffin, nor I could truly comprehend the mental struggles that groups of people unlike us face each day. Furthermore, one experience should not frame how an entire culture is perceived and represented (Desai, 2000). However, I believe I learned something from Griffin's (1961) text and my own experience at KYC. Regardless of my ability to comprehend the vastness of the youths' mental struggle, I have enough understanding to assert knowledge about how discrimination of the LGBTQ population affects me and especially the larger world. In addition, what is my role, where is my place in this conflict? The acknowledgement of this positionality is critical and results in having authentic and fair discussions about other cultures (Desai, 2000).

The Kaleidoscope setting facilitated an acknowledgement of intersecting oppressions and attention to the hegemony behind the invisibility of the homosexual population as an oppressed group (Snider, 1996; Desai, 2000). Applying this reflective experience to my efforts in curriculum development, in my teaching, and in establishing educational alternatives is critical. In addition, ally relationships and coalitions support dialogues that help us explore how "relations of domination and subordination are maintained and changed" (Collins, 2002, p. 166). Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997) assert, "Heterogeneous coalitions among different groups can then develop strategies further and build support for change that draws on the energies, and differential insights and access to power of members from various groups" (p. 14). For me, the parallels between the experience as a Black woman and those of other oppressed groups can now become the focus of new investigations (Collins, 2002).

### Conclusion

It is clear that this participatory action research project produced much more than a dissertation document. Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) produced a curriculum that "conceptually connected the students lives" (Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris and Daniel, 2008, p.84). The workshops gener-

ated opportunities for the youth to "envision their lives as valuable, to embrace integrity and to be advocates and activists for justice" (Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris and Daniel, 2008, p.84). This research provided a context for meaningful life encounters and experiences (Freedman, 2010). It held a space for the participants and me "to acknowledge [our] own self-doubt and develop and express ... emerging understandings" of the world and our identities (Freedman, 2010, p. 3). It attended to inquiries such as:

What does it mean for us as researchers—or as teachers, students, activists, community members, prisoners, politicians, immigrants—to be implicated in each other's lives? How does it impact the design of our studies? How does it shift the knowledge we produce? How does it influence the products, actions or social policy recommendations that result from our research? (Torre, 2008, p. 107)

The workshop dialogue and artmaking created opportunities for ongoing self-reflection. The youth were confronted with ideas and cultural representations that were imposed on them (and everyone) by those in power. The workshops were transformative in that they provided a space and the tools to counter those constructions. The artwork that resulted was conceptually strong and revealed how the youth made strides towards establishing personal "truths" for themselves. I can only hope that Kaleidoscope He(ARTS) initiated an invested interest in social justice and the investigation of power and dominance in all its forms. For me, this experience demonstrated how everyone's lives (and oppressions) are inextricably linked. I assert that the PAR framework assisted in the creation of this personally transformative experience. Its theoretical foundation of social justice supports and promotes the analysis of others (the dominant group), but most importantly it encourages scrutiny of self. While this was one of my goals for the students, it became a critical task for me as well. The process of this study informed my identity as a Black woman who is heterosexual, as well as a social justice educator who must be authentic in attending to *all* group oppression, not just those groups in which I belong.

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Joni Boyd Acuff is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at the University of North Texas, located in Denton, Texas, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate students in art education. Dr. Acuff's research investigates multiculturalism, social reconstructivism, and social justice as they pertain to curricular development, pedagogy, instructional strategies, and inclusion in art and art education. Acuff's research also examines and supports the utilization of participatory action research and its place in art teacher training programs.

Dr. Joni Boyd Acuff is the recipient of the 2011 Manuel Barkan Dissertation Fellowship Award at The Ohio State University. Acuff's professional art education experience includes teaching art in both traditional and non-traditional spaces like public schools, community centers, museums, and art schools since 2001. Dr. Acuff's curricular development initiatives include the creation and facilitation of art instruction for special needs classes in multiple central Texas public schools. Additionally, Acuff produced a comprehensive middle school curriculum for New Media Middle School, a newly founded charter middle school located in Columbus, Ohio.

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