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Somi Lee & Ava Maken Ali

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REPORT

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Navigating Intersectional Perspectives in Art Education: Visualizing Identities

Somi Lee and Ava Maken Ali

Art Education, University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how women of Color in Art Education, specifically an Assistant Professor and a PhD student, navigate within academic institutions. Through narrative inquiry, the study investigates racial microaggressions, language challenges, and expectations of representation. Grounded in Critical Race Theory, the paper emphasizes intersectionality art and storytelling as tools for resistance and empowerment. Our narratives illustrate the personal strategies for navigating race, gender, and academic identity in Art Education.

KEYWORDS

Critical race theory; narrative inquiry; intersectionality; cultural identity and expression; art education

The concept of cultural diversity and the complexities of identity can reshape educational paradigms (Chalmers, 1996). In this dynamic interplay, Art Education emerges as a medium through which individuals navigate the challenges of cultural heritage, identity, and inclusion (Hall, 1990). Art Education can foster cultural expression within diverse urban settings, providing a platform for individuals to articulate their layered identities and experiences (O'Neill, 2011). This emphasizes the need to examine how Art Education can address and bridge the diverse needs of marginalized individuals, offering them opportunities for self-expression and inclusion in multicultural settings (Yucel & Whyte, 2023).

In light of this need, this study explores how Art Education can support marginalized individuals by focusing on the narratives of two women in Art Education—one Assistant Professor and a PhD student—who navigate their intersecting identities of race, gender, and culture within predominantly white institutions. Through their collaboration in an independent study course, their shared experiences with marginalization and identity formation became central to their work, illustrating how Art Education can provide a means for personal and collective empowerment. This study seeks to understand how their narratives address the challenges faced by marginalized individuals and how Art Education can serve as a bridge to meet these diverse needs.

In this independent study course, the authors co-designed the curriculum with a focus on advancing the PhD student's engagement in the field of Art Education. Their shared objective was to create an activity that would be genuinely meaningful for her academic journey. In the meeting, the PhD student expressed her frustration with the rigid academic paper format. She felt constrained by the expectation to present research in traditional ways, such as essays and formal papers, and wanted to explore more creative approaches. She then shared a handwritten paper that included sketches and drawings. However, academic settings often require students

CONTACT Somi Lee somi@illinois.edu University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, 408 E Peabody Dr, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

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to adhere to strict formats, leaving her feeling marginalized and limited in how she could express her ideas, particularly given her challenges with language and identity. This realization led them to develop an unconventional academic paper that told the story of the handwritten version, incorporating images of the original work to preserve its authenticity within an academic context. The creative protest paper, which challenged traditional academic formats, has since been submitted to and accepted by a recognized visual art research journal.

Simultaneously, the independent study course was significant for the Assistant Professor, who was deeply committed to ensuring that student voices are heard and valued. Reflecting on the PhD student's mother tongue and its profound value in her life and creative process, the Assistant Professor proposed curating an art exhibition featuring the PhD student's artwork, with the goal of amplifying her voice and making her experiences visible within the broader context of Art Education. To achieve this, the Assistant Professor incorporated the art exhibition into her course on curating art exhibitions, tasking her undergraduate students with planning, organizing, and showcasing the exhibition as part of their course activity. The exhibition was successfully realized while the authors continued conversations for this study, culminating in its presentation in September 2024 (see Figure 1).

By focusing on the personal narratives of these two women of Color, this study uses narrative inquiry and storytelling as a reflective process to explore how we, the assistant professor and the PhD student, face institutional barriers and solidify our identities within a predominantly white institution. Through ongoing dialogue, we reveal how our intersecting identities shape both our teaching practices and our strategies for resisting marginalization. Our artistic



Figure 1. Culminating Exhibition.
Note. The curated exhibition, organized by undergraduate students in September 2024, features Ava's artwork manifesting personal experiences within the broader context of art education.

practices, teaching, and curatorial work serve as acts of empowerment, allowing us to assert our identities and create spaces for our voices to be heard. This study manifests how, through these practices, we position ourselves within the institution, using Art Education to foster dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect while challenging the institutional structures we encounter. This raises a central question: How do women of Color in Art Education navigate their intersecting identities of race, gender, and culture within predominantly white institutions, and how can art and storytelling serve as tools for resistance and empowerment in these contexts?

This article contributes to the discourse by examining the potential of Art Education to foster a sense of belonging and act as a vehicle for social equity within educational contexts characterized by cultural diversity (Thomson, 1999). Through art, educators and students can engage in meaningful dialogues that honor their diverse identities, promoting a more inclusive and understanding school environment.

Intersectionality and Marginalized Identities in Art Education

Intersecting identities, particularly those shaped by race, gender, and class, profoundly influence both culture and education. These complexities bring to the fore issues of identity, belonging, and the navigation of marginalized experiences within educational practices and artistic expressions. Art Education serves as a medium for expressing and exploring complex cultural identities, while addressing the needs of marginalized individuals in urban school settings (Cohen, 1994).

Contributions from scholars across diverse fields have significantly advanced our understanding of how cultural identity and educational practices intersect, especially for marginalized and underrepresented groups. This dialogue draws on various theoretical and practical perspectives, creating a nuanced view of how Art Education expresses and explores these identities. In his 1996 study, Chalmers conducted research with students and teachers in multicultural urban schools, exploring how Art Education facilitates cultural expression. The participants included both students from diverse ethnic backgrounds and educators working within these settings. Chalmers observed classroom activities where students engaged in creating artworks that reflected their cultural heritage, participating in projects that encouraged them to explore their traditions, histories, and values through visual art. His findings revealed that these art-making practices deepened students' engagement with their cultural roots, allowing them to better understand and articulate their identities, while also fostering a sense of belonging within the educational environment.

Further contributions from Lai (2012) and O'Neill (2011) explored the intersection of cultural identity, equity, and transformative pedagogy in Art Education for marginalized communities in urban schools. They emphasized the unique challenges and opportunities presented by intersectional experiences and how Art Education can address these complexities. Building on these foundational insights, contemporary scholarship has shifted toward integrating social justice and intersectionality within Art Education. More recently, Dewhurst (2014) examined how art can be an effective tool for engaging students with social justice themes, particularly in addressing issues of race, identity, and power dynamics. Her research, based on interviews and observations of sixteen high school students in an activist art class at a New York City Museum, identified key learning processes—connecting, questioning, and translating—that students undergo while creating art with a social justice focus. Dewhurst's

work offers strategies for integrating social justice into Art Education, making it a critical addition to the discourse on how Art Education can address intersectionality and empower marginalized identities. Her findings demonstrate the transformative potential of Art Education in helping students navigate complex social identities, positioning it as a critical space for fostering personal and social awareness.

In addition to Dewhurst's (2014) work, recent discussions in *Creative Resilience: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Art Education* (2023), published by the National Art Education Association (NAEA), reflect a growing trend of incorporating intersectionality and social justice into Art Education curricula. Art educators are increasingly focused on fostering spaces where students can explore their multifaceted identities through creative practices, while addressing issues of race, gender, and power dynamics. This reflects a broader trend toward integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion into the heart of Art Education, further underscoring the importance of empowering marginalized identities within academic settings.

Together, these studies and discussions demonstrate the evolving significance of Art Education in creating spaces for marginalized students to express their identities. Despite the increased focus on equity and inclusion, there remains a critical gap: the lack of empirical studies exploring how faculty and students in urban school settings navigate their intersecting identities through artistic practices (Bal & Van Boheemen, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989, 2013; Nieto, 2000). While previous work offers important perspectives, this paper expands the conversation by addressing the contemporary challenges faced by women of color in academic environments. Our research centers on the unique needs and identities of faculty and students from marginalized backgrounds, with particular attention to how they navigate their identities through artistic practices in Predominantly White Institutions. Addressing these gaps would enrich the academic discourse and provide practical strategies for developing more inclusive educational practices, a necessary step in supporting the diverse needs and experiences of marginalized communities in Art Education.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a vital framework for understanding social structures and experiences, particularly as they relate to race and racism. It emerged in the legal field in the late twentieth century as scholars sought to address and critique the slow pace of racial progress following civil rights movements in the United States. CRT has since expanded beyond legal studies to influence education, sociology, and numerous other disciplines. At its core, CRT posits that racism is not a mere byproduct of individual bias or prejudice but a deeply ingrained part of the social fabric and systemic structures that govern societies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

CRT asserts that race and racism are central, endemic, and not aberrational in society, challenging the notions of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy as ahistorical and apolitical (Bell, 1995). It recognizes that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of white supremacy have had long-lasting effects on people of color, shaping opportunities, access to resources, and the very definition of justice and equality.

One of the key contributions of CRT is the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). This concept underscores the importance of examining how overlapping identities—including race, gender, class, and more—interact to create unique experiences of advantage and disadvantage. Intersectionality reveals the multifaceted nature of oppression, illustrating that experiences of racism cannot be fully understood without

considering other dimensions of identity that intersect with race. CRT also emphasizes the significance of counternarratives as methodological tools to challenge dominant discourses. Counternarratives expose the gaps and silences in mainstream educational practices, bringing visibility to the experiences of marginalized communities (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

CRT emphasizes the importance of narrative and counter-storytelling as methods to challenge dominant narratives that often marginalize and silence the experiences of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Through storytelling, individuals from marginalized communities can articulate their lived realities, offering alternative perspectives that highlight the pervasiveness of racial inequalities.

In the context of education, CRT scholars like Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and bell Hooks (1994) have extended the theory's application, advocating for pedagogical practices that are critically aware of racial injustices and that strive to create inclusive educational environments that affirm the identities of all students. Bettina Love's (2019) concept of abolitionist teaching further emphasizes the need for educational spaces that actively support and liberate students of color, challenging systemic inequities. Similarly, Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz's (2020) work on building racial literacy highlights the importance of self-reflection among educators in understanding and addressing complex identities. They argue for an educational system that recognizes and addresses the systemic inequities that affect students of color, incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy that engages with students' cultural backgrounds as assets rather than deficits.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry, as a methodological and analytical tool, is central to the understanding and exploration of marginalized identities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). The use of narrative allows for the articulation of personal and collective stories that capture the complexities of identity, belonging, and lived experiences. Through narratives, individuals from marginalized communities convey the nuances of their realities, providing rich, detailed accounts that contribute significantly to broader discourses on identity and social justice.

Narratives powerfully express the multifaceted realities of marginalized life, capturing the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of identity formation and exclusion (Brah, 2005; Hall, 1990). Personal stories offer insights into the processes of negotiating identity and belonging in new sociocultural contexts. By foregrounding the voices of marginalized individuals, narratives challenge dominant discourses, revealing the gaps and silences in conventional histories and social theories (Said, 2012; Spivak, 2023).

The strength of narrative in understanding marginalized identities lies in its capacity to reveal the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and nationality. These narratives often reflect the intricate interplay of these categories, illustrating how they shape individuals' experiences of marginalization and resistance (Anthias, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989, 2013). Through the personal stories of marginalized individuals, the complexities of identity negotiation and the resistance to fixed, singular identities become evident, offering a more nuanced understanding of these identities. Furthermore, narrative approaches facilitate the exploration of connections that marginalized communities maintain across socio cultural spaces. Narratives frequently encompass themes of longing, memory, and the continuous negotiation of relationships between communities and institutions (Brah, 2005; Clifford, 1994). These stories illuminate how

identities are constructed across multiple locales, contributing to the conceptualization of identity as a condition of hybridity and fluidity (Bhabha, 2012; Gilroy, 1997).

Narrative inquiry is fundamental for comprehending the diverse and dynamic experiences of marginalized communities. It enables the articulation of complex identities and transnational affiliations while also challenging and expanding existing frameworks for understanding social exclusion and identity. By privileging the narratives of marginalized individuals, scholars and educators can foster a more inclusive and nuanced discourse on identity, belonging, and social justice. In art education, narratives from marginalized individuals provide a rich resource for pedagogical practices that aim to foster cultural understanding and inclusivity (Chalmers, 1996; Thomson, 1999). By incorporating these narratives into the curriculum, educators can engage students in critical reflections on diversity, identity, and global interconnectivity, thereby enhancing students' empathy and cultural competence.

The strength of this methodology lies in its ability to illuminate intersectionality—the ways race, gender, class, and nationality intertwine to shape experiences of marginalization and resistance (Anthias, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989, 2013). It reveals the negotiation of hybrid and fluid identities while exploring the connections marginalized communities maintain across socio cultural spaces. Themes of longing, memory, and relational negotiation emerge, showcasing how identities are constructed across multiple locales (Brah, 2005; Clifford, 1994). This approach contributes to a nuanced understanding of identity as a condition of hybridity and fluidity (Bhabha, 2012; Gilroy, 1997).

Narrative inquiry is fundamental for understanding the diverse and dynamic experiences of marginalized communities. It articulates complex identities and transnational affiliations while challenging conventional frameworks of social exclusion and identity. By privileging the narrative of marginalized voices, scholars and educators can foster inclusive discourses on identity, belonging, and social justice. In Art Education, narratives from marginalized individuals enrich pedagogical practices by fostering cultural understanding and inclusivity (Chalmers, 1996; Thomson, 1999). Incorporating these stories into curricula promotes critical reflections on diversity, identity, and global interconnectivity, enhancing students' empathy and cultural competence.

In our study, narrative inquiry was employed to explore and understand the lived experiences of women of color in academic environments. By focusing on personal stories and reflective dialogues between the authors, this methodology allowed us to deeply examine the complexities of identity, race, and gender within predominantly white institutions. We chose narrative inquiry because it provides a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and validates the unique perspectives of individuals navigating intersectional identities. This approach enabled us to creatively articulate our challenges and the strategies of resistance and empowerment we used to navigate institutional barriers. The decision to use narrative inquiry was rooted in its capacity to uncover nuanced experiences, challenge dominant discourses, and foster empathy. Through this methodology, we aimed to contribute to a more inclusive academic dialogue that acknowledges the significance of diverse and intersectional perspectives in Art Education.

Method

In our study, we adapted a narrative inquiry process, recognizing the potency of personal stories to reveal intricate layers of the journey by sharing moments and reflecting on their

meanings as an Art Education professor and a PhD student. The process began in January 2024 and continued throughout the semester until May 2024, as part of an independent study course. We, the two authors, scheduled bi-weekly semi-formal meetings, either through Zoom or in person, to discuss the topic of our experiences over a 10-week period. These meetings provided a space for sharing personal narratives, reflecting on the challenges and opportunities we faced, and examining how these experiences shaped our identities.

After the Independent Study course concluded in May 2024, there was a brief pause in the study due to the professor's international fieldwork. During this time, communication continued via email. In July 2024, we resumed the narrative inquiry process outside of the course, continuing our exploration of identity and experiences. Upon the return of the professor to campus, in-person meetings recommenced and have continued until today.

Throughout this process, each component—meetings, emails, notes review, storytelling, and self-reflection—was interconnected. Meetings were central to dialogue and the initial sharing of experiences, where stories were told, and reflections began to emerge. Emails supplemented these meetings by serving as a space for continued thought, clarification, and the exchange of additional reflections or resources that expanded our discussions. Reviewing notes from meetings allowed us to document recurring themes, track the evolution of our ideas, and prepare for deeper explorations in subsequent sessions. Storytelling functioned as both a method of sharing and a medium for processing complex emotions and experiences. Self-reflection was the glue that connected all these elements, as it encouraged both of us to critically engage with our narratives, draw connections between themes, and find meaning in the evolving dialogue.

These meetings typically lasted for an hour, with meeting notes taken and reviewed before the following session. This approach served as both data collection and a means to gather and refine our thoughts. As we reviewed, we familiarized ourselves with each other's narratives, allowing themes to emerge organically. Through storytelling and self-reflection, we explored the lived realities of navigating academic spaces as a woman professor of color and a PhD student, gaining deeper insights into the emotions and nuances embedded in these experiences.

Narratives as Findings: Intersectionality and Identity in Diasporic Art Education

In this section, we present narratives from two individuals—an Assistant Professor and a PhD student—both of whom navigate the complex intersection of race, gender, and cultural identity within Art Education. The first narrative focuses on the PhD student, who, coming from the Middle East and studying abroad in Europe and the United States, grapples with language barriers and cultural displacement in the academic setting. The second narrative explores the experiences of the Assistant Professor, a woman of color who has lived in South Korea, Canada, and the United States. This narrative inquiry primarily explores the lived realities of both authors as Women of Color within a predominantly white institution. While our narratives may resonate with broader cultural experiences, the focus remains on our personal journeys in Art Education. We do not claim to represent any specific cultural community, but rather offer a unique and intimate perspective on the challenges and strategies we encountered in navigating academic environments.

The narrative begins with PhD student Ava Maken Ali's story, showing how her identities were expressed through her artwork. This is followed by Assistant Professor Somi Lee's story, which explains how mentorship empowered and supported Ava Maken Ali in navigating her

journey and reaching her goals as both a PhD student and an artist. These stories demonstrate how we mutually supported each other, overcoming challenges and navigating the complexities of intersectionality.

Ava Maken Ali, Art, Language, and Cultural Boundaries in Academia

As someone who has studied a variety of places in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, every day brings its own challenges. Some are easy to see, but others are harder to notice, even though they still affect me a lot. I usually do not talk about these big words and themes like "culture" or "system" when I am talking about my work, but let's be real—these things are definitely connected to what is going on around me.

Now that I am doing my PhD and have lived far from home long enough to earn a degree in distance, I have gotten to this point where one of the most noticeable challenges I have ever experienced is language. Since English is not my mother language, sometimes I struggle to really express who I am and what I am doing in my practice. There are times I do not know certain words, or honestly, I just do not like using complex, "fancy" vocabulary. Then there is my sense of humor; when it passes through the filter from Farsi/Persian (my mother language) to English, it loses its fun or seriousness to some extent. I am not a language expert, but what I want to say is that when this situation combines with being an artist/art educator, it might create a chemical reaction that works against you. People either do not understand you deeply, struggle to communicate with you, or take you seriously enough, which can lead to missed opportunities—like not being asked for collaborations or not being asked about your thoughts and feelings regarding your own projects.

I am not talking about the times when I had supportive people around me. Of course, they are out there, and I am always thankful for having them. Instead, I am pointing the light of my flashlight on those moments when I faced lack of fairness. (1) I totally understand—my life experiences might sound like a foreign movie with no subtitles. (2) I always say that if we only want to talk about happy things, then it means something is definitely off.

I must confess, those unfair moments sometimes make me feel small inside (feeling oppressed, if I want to be more specific). But instead of letting these thoughts affect me (which, let's be honest, they do sometimes), I turn to art—a space that embraces my feelings and experiences. As Bae-Dimitriadis (2024) suggests, art can be redefined as "a space that includes the felt knowledge(s) and experiences of all minoritized and 'other-than-human' lives," (p. 6) fostering connections and understanding.

Through this lens, my art becomes a universal language, speaking truths that words alone cannot convey. Building on Lucero and McKee's (2020) idea of materiality—the notion that everyday objects, actions, and routines, often overlooked, can be viewed as creative material—I began to experiment with creating a handwritten paper. Writing by hand, sketching in the margins, and using sources that did not come from polished, published books or articles felt liberating. It did not even feel like something a serious PhD student would create. It was raw and unfiltered, existing outside what is considered acceptable. In fact, this handwritten paper was a creative response to how I felt about the scholarly, traditional academic format, where the language barrier was one of the factors—something handwritten and similar to Lucero's (2017) APA-style drawing.

Regarding the mentioned challenges, Somi was one of those people who saw the value in my idea and encouraged me to keep this way of writing as something special. I remember

taking a course with her, and on the first day, I was planning to show my handwritten sketches, but I hesitated because I was not confident enough. I nervously asked Somi, "I have a silly idea." She looked at me curiously and said, "Sure. What is it?" Then, I pulled out the handwritten paper I had created before, feeling completely unsure about what I was doing and whether I was doing it right (see Figure 2). She was surprised; I could hear it in her voice as it changed. She said, "Did you make all these yourself?!" I was shocked, thinking, "Are you kidding me? Are you serious?" Then I said, "Yes." And this is how our story began—Somi started mentoring me on how to maintain and develop my idea.

In brief, Somi and I decided to find a way to fit my handwritten piece into the traditional academic writing world. However, this was just the beginning of our story. As we worked together, we realized something unexpected: the process of writing this paper became far more meaningful than the final product. It was not just about the paper; it was about the relationship we built. All those long, heartfelt conversations we had, sharing our similar oppressive experiences, made us realize we are not alone and that we have some common struggles.

This bond has become a growing treasure, leading to new achievements, like an exhibition opportunity for me, curated by Somi and her students, an acceptance by the *Visual Art Research Journal* (VAR), and our involvement with the NAEA conference as presenters. And this is not the end of the story either—more is on the way!

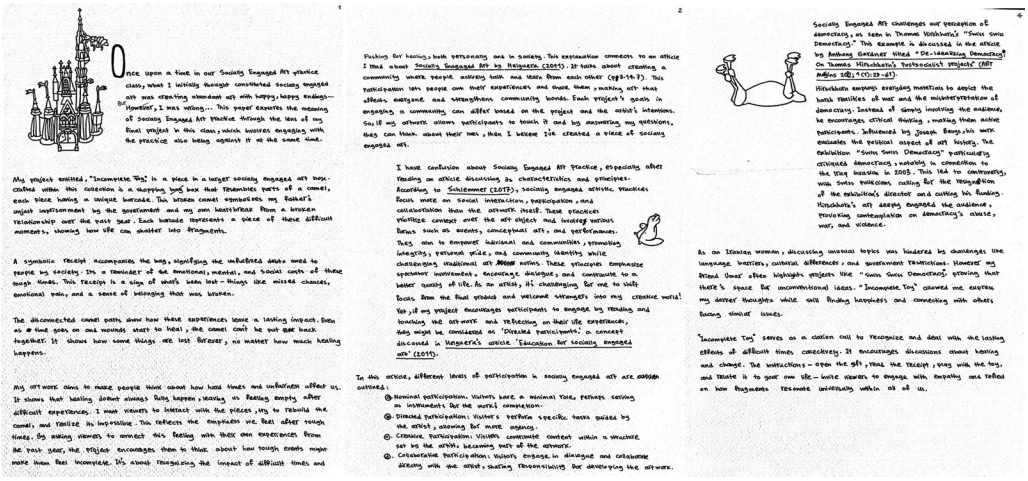


Figure 2. Handwritten papers.
Note. Sample of handwritten papers by Ava Maken Ali shows her nontraditional academic approach.

Somi Lee, Shaping my Own Identities

My educational journey, which began in South Korea and continued through Canada to the United States, has shaped my academic identity and perspective. This experience is not merely a personal narrative. Rather, it reflects the challenges I faced while navigating diverse cultural environments within academia. For example, in South Korea, there is a strong cultural expectation that hard work is a virtue—students are often expected to attend school even when sick, and giving up is seen as a sign of weakness and failure. This mentality has instilled in me a relentless drive to persevere. In contrast, growing up in Canada taught me that knowing when

to give up requires critical thinking skills and can take significant courage. Also, taking a proper rest while unwell is viewed as a sign of self-care and as a means to enhance effectiveness. Such contrasting cultural values have made me acutely aware of the systemic need for inclusivity in higher education, where cultural expression and understanding are essential for fostering a supportive environment and enhancing the educational experience for all students (Hall, 1990). As I became an educator and a member of higher education, I took on the responsibilities associated with being an authority figure in the school setting. Beyond general expectations, particularly regarding equity and diversity topics, I often feel the weight of expectations placed on faculty members from diverse backgrounds to contribute cultural perspectives to equity and diversity initiatives. Shortly after starting my current position last year, I was appointed to the equity and anti-racism committee, where I now serve as a co-chair. While I enjoy being part of the committee, I initially felt discomfort because all members, except the Chair, were visible minorities. Upon raising this concern, I learned that this assignment was intended to meet diversity goals. Although I am unsure if my concerns influenced subsequent committee assignments, we now have a more balanced representation of races and backgrounds.

I interpreted the committee assignment as an example of the systemic expectations placed on faculty members from diverse backgrounds within post-secondary institutions, which echo the cultural dynamics I navigated in my educational journey. While this assignment acknowledges the unique perspectives we bring as individuals from ethnic communities, it also raises the risk of tokenization, where our inclusion may be seen as merely fulfilling diversity quotas rather than genuinely valuing our contributions. This situation has led me to reflect on the delicate balance between being valued for our expertise and being placed in roles that might unintentionally emphasize racial and ethnic divisions.

In addition to serving on committees as a faculty member, I use my expertise as an art educator to elevate the voices of marginalized individuals—women, students facing language barriers, and students of Color—helping them creatively express their experiences. As an assistant professor, I teach three courses per semester, including a course on art exhibition practices, where students plan, organize, and curate exhibitions. This work allows me to make meaningful contributions to the community, providing students with an opportunity to engage with diverse voices in real, impactful ways.

Curating exhibitions validates my identity as an Asian woman faculty member and serves as a powerful model for students. It demonstrates how we can promote social solidarity through art and education, ensuring that different perspectives are heard and valued. My commitment to curating art exhibitions amplifies marginalized voices, and the process supports both student and faculty projects, affirming my multi-layered identity—encompassing race, gender, and my professional role. The projects provide a platform for marginalized communities, such as an exhibition featuring underrepresented street artists (see Figure 3).

Another example is Ava's exhibition, in which I modeled the curatorial process for my undergraduate students. In this exhibition, I presented Ava's use of art as a form of protest against the academic system, challenging traditional formats and expectations (see Figure 4). By showcasing her work, I sought to emphasize the constraints imposed by academic structures and encourage students to think critically about these limitations. The purpose of this exhibition was to amplify her voice and engage with the complexities of diversity while contributing to the broader discourse within art education.



Figure 3. Students collaborative work.
Note. Each student contributed to this collaborative graffiti art curation, focused on social equity, diversity, and inclusion. Often overlooked, graffiti artists are given a platform by showcasing their work indoors, allowing their voices to be seen and heard. The photo was taken by Somi Lee on November 11, 2023, at the Link Gallery in Champaign, Illinois.



Figure 4. The installation process for the Ava's exhibition.
Note. The curating process of the Ava Maken Ali's work under the guidance of Somi Lee. The photos were taken by Somi Lee on September 29, 2024, at Bloc Gallery, Champaign, Illinois.

Reflecting on my personal and professional journey, my experiences navigating diverse cultural environments and my responsibilities in higher education shape my approach to teaching and leadership. By fostering inclusivity through art and curatorial practices, I aim to create safe learning spaces. My commitment to equity and social justice is embedded in how

I teach, mentor, and curate. Drawing from my multicultural background, I challenge academic norms and work to ensure that every voice has a platform. Through this, I hope to inspire students and colleagues to see art as a tool for both personal expression and social change.

Discussion

In exploring the experiences of Women of Color in Art Education, Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a powerful framework for understanding and addressing the challenges of navigating intersecting identities within Predominantly White Institutions. By emphasizing the centrality of race, intersectionality, and the power of narrative, CRT provides a lens to examine how women of Color confront systemic inequities while using art and storytelling as tools for resistance and empowerment. Central to this discussion is the question: How do Women of Color in Art Education navigate their intersecting identities of race, gender, and culture within predominantly white institutions, and how can art and storytelling serve as tools for resistance and empowerment in these contexts? This discussion section explores two key themes that emerge from our narratives and experiences: *Acts of resistance against marginalization* and *Narrative informing pedagogical practices: Breaking down narriers*. The first theme focuses on personal narratives and creative practices that challenge systemic inequities and resist marginalization in predominantly white institutions. The second theme emphasizes actionable strategies, such as coalition building, mentoring, and curriculum co-creation, that work to dismantle systemic barriers and create more inclusive academic spaces.

Acts of Resistance Against Marginalization

The intersecting identities of Women of Color—encompassing race, gender, class, and diasporic status—profoundly shape our experiences in the academic environment of Art Education. Drawing from CRT, these intersections synergistically compound the challenges and strategies us women deploy in navigating academic spaces (Crenshaw, 1989, 2013). Women of Color in academia often encounter systemic barriers (e.g., racial microaggressions, gender discrimination) that marginalize their contributions and question their legitimacy as scholars and educators. However, through the lens of CRT, these challenges are also sites of resistance and empowerment. For instance, Somi's discomfort in being assigned to a diversity committee reflects these systemic biases and the unfair expectations tied to identity in predominantly white institutions. Rather than passively accepting this assignment, she reframed it as an act of resistance by curating art exhibitions that addressed themes of diversity and inclusion, ultimately turning a challenging experience into an opportunity for advocacy.

Similarly, Ava has used art to navigate language barriers and cultural challenges. Through nontraditional drawings and written artifacts, she resisted the constraints of conventional academic frameworks as a personal act of resistance, demonstrating how creative practices can foster a sense of agency and empowerment. Through our roles as a professional and a student in Art Education, we demonstrate how acts of resistance enable women of Color to navigate marginalization and reclaim agency within restrictive institutional environments, thereby reshaping these spaces to be more inclusive and responsive. Our roles as a professional and a student in Art Education serve as a unique vantage point to challenge and reshape academic environments to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse populations.

Narrative Informing Pedagogical Practices: Breaking Down Barriers

The emphasis of CRT on narrative and counter-storytelling as methods for challenging dominant narratives provides a valuable approach for informing pedagogical practices in Art Education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Our approach includes strategies such as coalition-building, mentoring within our communities, and integrating our cultural and artistic practices into pedagogy as acts of resistance against marginalization.

Narratives from women of Color in diasporic communities serve as pedagogical tools, offering unique perspectives into the lived realities of navigating intersecting identities. By integrating these narratives into curriculum and teaching practices, it fosters a learning environment which actively engages with the complexities of identity, power, and privilege. Such narratives illuminate the ways race, culture, and gender intersect to shape individuals' experiences, enriching the educational experience for all students.

They also promote dialogue, empathy, and understanding, breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of community and mutual respect. For example, the co-creation of a curriculum that integrates the narratives of diasporic experiences into Art Education by Somi and Ava serves as a model for how such narratives can be practically applied in educational settings. Incorporating narratives into pedagogical practices reflects the transformative potential of education advocated by CRT, aiming to create educational spaces valuing the diversity of experiences and perspectives that students and educators bring to the classroom.

Through CRT, the experiences of women of Color in Art Education within diasporic communities revealed the impact of intersecting identities on our academic journey. CRT articulates the challenges faced and emphasizes the strategies for empowerment. Furthermore, CRT supports the importance of narratives in informing pedagogical practices, advocating for a more inclusive, empathetic, and transformative approach to Art Education that helps us engage with our identities and experiences within diasporic communities.

Through our narratives, we demonstrate how coalition building, mentoring, and integrating cultural practices into pedagogy resist systemic barriers. For example, Somi's art exhibitions centering marginalized voices, including those of underrepresented street artists, is a form of coalition building that brings together diverse communities and fosters inclusivity. Moreover, Ava's narrative demonstrates how mentoring relationships support navigating the challenges of academia. Her experience of turning personal stories into scholarly work and public exhibitions manifests how integrating cultural practices into pedagogy can create spaces for resistance and empowerment. These strategies address identity complexities and challenge and transform academic environments.

Conclusion

The personal narratives of women of Color in Art Education within diasporic contexts can offer critical perspectives into the intersection identities of race, gender, culture that shape pedagogical practices (Lewis, 2003). The Assistant Professor's academic journey spanning South Korea, Canada, and the United States delineated the influence of cultural roots in shaping academic identity, actively participating in initiatives to promote diversity and anti-racism. Organizing cultural artistic events within the college demonstrates a commitment to promoting social solidarity and creating visible opportunities for inclusion. Similarly, the PhD student's experience, originating in the Middle East and studying abroad in Europe and the United

States, reveals how she navigated language barriers and discrimination by using art as a tool to overcome systematic and cultural obstacles, illustrating its transformative potential.

Our experiences illustrate navigating intersectionality, actively fostering cultural competence and advocating for diversity within academia. Our narratives pinpoint the enduring impact of racial incidents, manifesting the complexities faced by minority women in academic spaces, and showing the potential vulnerability in broader societal interactions (Crenshaw, 2013; Gur-Ze'ev, 2010; Lewis, 2003). Our shared accounts may inform educators and policymakers in creating environments that support individuals from diasporic context.

While Chalmers's (1996) contributions to the field of Art Education and cultural identity in diasporic communities laid important groundwork, the current study moves beyond these historical perspectives to address the contemporary realities faced by women of Color in academia. By applying Critical Race Theory and focusing on intersectionality, this study extends prior cultural understandings to address the evolving dynamics of inclusion, representation, and identity in the academic world. The narratives presented here reflect the ongoing need for Art Education to adapt and respond to the diverse and complex identities within today's diasporic communities, emphasizing the importance of inclusive practices that go beyond traditional frameworks.

In this study, we took a practical approach by co-creating a curriculum through an independent study course, where authors' diasporic experiences were deeply explored and articulated through ongoing dialogues. These dialogues not only provided a space for expressing cultural identities but also served as the foundation for turning these narratives into meaningful outcomes—specifically, a scholarly publication and a public art exhibition. This process demonstrates the significant value of narrative inquiry in Art Education, offering a powerful tool for integrating and amplifying diverse cultural voices within academic and creative contexts. Through this work, we demonstrate how narrative inquiry enriches understanding of identity and contributes to the development of more equitable and culturally responsive educational practices.

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ORCID

Somi Lee http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3126-766X

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