

‘Should I, Shouldn’t I?’ A self-reflexive study in unpacking ideologies of race whilst devising a critical studies fine art programme

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I start from the controversial position that everyone, including the victims of racism, can be racist. I believe there is a real danger that we become so thoroughly cloaked in the garb of the eternal victim and White people in the role of eternal oppressor that we cannot recognise genuine progress and concentrate our efforts to focus hard on those places where disadvantage and racism continue. (Barling, 2015: 158)

This chapter develops British journalist Kurt Barling’s (2015) provocative statement in order to think about race and its associated systems of oppression in what may be deemed as an equally controversial or a less desirable way. The concluding chapter of Barling’s *The ‘R’ Word* challenges us to imagine moving beyond race as a fixed identity construct. He unpicks the way in which matters which may not have anything to do with race often get taken up as such, due to the practice of ‘race-thinking’ as a type of systemic way of thinking that reduces all human variation and interaction to ‘one stable variable associated with an individual, namely their “race”’ (Barling, 2015: 148). Then, in taking the idea of race-thinking further, whether it be a social practice or group, he discusses the practice of ‘racialisation’, as a historically specific ideological process which transposes racial meaning onto a previously non-racial relation.

As I will go on to show, this chapter gives a counter perspective to the dominant ways in which we understand racial oppression, within the context of inclusion and diversity debates. It does not focus solely on how white people are eternal oppressors but, rather, focuses on showing how non-white bodies can also occupy such spaces, by unpacking these ideologies of race, and legacies of whiteness. Whiteness as a privileged system of power has historically benefited some white bodies, whilst excluding others. As Henry (2007) points out crucially in *Whiteness Made Simple*, whiteness operates ‘as a conceptual framework and not a mere way to describe white people which is where I think many fail to have the right conversation and thus draw the wrong conclusions as they focus on complexion and not on a system of power’ (Henry, 2007: 160).

By engaging with intersectionality as an analytic tool to unpick overlapping social categories (Collins, P. and Bilge, S. (2016), we can begin to unpack ideologies of race that limit whiteness and blackness to a matter of skin colour, or that make matters of race synonymous with discussions for and about Black people. We can do this by focusing on the right conversation, the systems of power and oppression, and the ‘autonomy of the individual’ within these dynamics. I take an interdisciplinary approach to these debates, drawing on the thinking of key theorists from a range of disciplines that range across critical race theory and cultural studies, critical pedagogy, gender studies and fine art practice and theory. However, I focus particularly on two major thinkers for whom destabilizing power relations within an educational context and liberationist thinking: the feminist and social activist bell hooks and Brazilian educationalist liberation thinker Paulo Freire.

Teaching and learning methodology

This chapter is placed within the context of a fine art course programme at HE level, where currently I devise the critical studies programme for first-year students at a specialist art institute. By specialist I mean that it places emphasis on traditional craft and skills such as painting, sculpture and drawing, through the use of modern techniques and resources. As the university promotes on its course pages, ‘studio practice is linked to the external world at all times’ (Leeds Arts University,

2017), requiring the students to become critical thinkers as they engage with art histories and critical debates whilst developing their own personal and professional arts practice.

My approach uses a practice-led methodology, building upon two key components of art school pedagogy: theory and practice. I have always drawn my visual arts practice into my teaching, both as the content of material that is taught and in using some of the strategies that I will outline in considering the issues raised above. Understanding the synergy between the two was a main learning outcome of the critical studies module that I had to devise. This asked students to consider the position of the artist as individual, in the wider dynamics of the social, linking theory to their practice and vice versa.

The methodology is defined as:

Research initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners in the visual arts. (Gray, 1996: 3)

This approach is useful as it puts into practice the very theoretical underpinnings of its interrogation, which leads to further action and new thinking upon an engagement with self-reflection. As Freire reminds us, it is only through an engagement with 'reflection, which is central to action' (Freire, 1996: 35) that true change can come about. For example, in my own journey in addressing the imbalance in how Black and white women are seen within constructions of gender – Black women as non-feminine, white women as the feminine ideal – I learnt that I was simultaneously de-valuing white women by switching the ways in which both bodies would appear in my work (Lori, 2014). White women were subjugated to a lesser position visually, through the juxtaposition of Black and white female bodies within the frame. By merely replacing one objectified female body with another for the sake of Black women's visibility, I realized that this did not necessarily lead to re-addressing black women's symbolic position or empowering them. It is this shift in thinking, challenging what could be described as a prescriptive response to address an imbalanced way of looking, that is required to tackle the discussions in this book.

So, where to begin: back to the question of race?

There has been extensive work on the question of race, and rather than recite the countless list of names from various sociological and cultural studies fields, I will revisit Omi and Winant's teachings on 'Racial Formations in the United States', a seminal text which they first wrote in 1986, later revisited in 1994 and most recently updated in their Third Edition of 2015. Like their counterparts they discuss how race has been seen over time as both a biological concept, the property of scientific debate, and also as a social construct, where the meaning of race is embedded within specific historic and social contexts. Race has been at the forefront of fierce political struggle. Drawing on British politics, for example, the authors discuss how the term 'Black' is used to refer to non-whites, and includes people of Asian and African-Caribbean heritage. Important to this discussion, it is worth noting that in today's UK current political and social climate, terms such as 'people of colour' are now gaining more currency than the term 'Black'. Lamuye (2017) states that the use of 'people of colour' is regressive, an offensive term that originated in US history and was used to denote any person who was not white. Not only does it lump all non-white people's experiences together, stripping away any individuality, but in doing so it reinforces whiteness as the norm. For this very reason, I too take a similar position to Lamuye and in this paper I use the terms Black and non-white, as opposed to people of colour.

Omi and Winant then go on to discuss the concept of racialization, through unpacking the genealogy of the category 'White'. As earlier mentioned this is an ideological process which places racial meaning onto a previously non-racial social practice or group. In the context of slavery, within the colonies 'white' was used as a term of separation between the colonizer and the colonized. During the nineteenth century 'white' then underwent its own political struggle whereby claims to the authenticity of whiteness and its Anglo-Saxon foundations were challenged by migrant communities such as the Irish, Jewish and Southern Europeans. And it is around this concept of whiteness, which has both excluded and included certain white bodies as a group, having economic, social and political access for themselves at the expense of those bodies seen as non-white, that these discussions around racial ideologies ensue. Whiteness sets itself up as a universal ideal, 'in other words the 'invisible hand' of destiny, that intangible 'god-like' presence that has privileged whites and made their assumed superiority the norm, needs to be made visible'. (Henry, 2007: 4) Its power lies within producing its own invisible status, whilst still being able to shape others. This therefore becomes part of the problem I will begin to outline, for how can you address something which is set up not to be seen, and how do white and non-white bodies maintain this illusion, reinforcing ideologies around race?

However, historically, due to discussions of race and racism being so heavily fixed in one direction across the colour line, whites being the eternal oppressors to non-whites, when there are moments in which these dynamics are changed we are not programmed to see them as such. This is not to say that non-whites are not disproportionately on the receiving end of acts of racism: we need only look at the current political and social climate where, for example, there is still a disproportionate number of Black male youths in the UK prison system. An independent commission led by David Lammy MP in September 2017 stated that there is greater disproportionality in the number of Black people in the prison system in the UK than in the United States (Kentish, 2017). More pertinent to this discussion, however, is the still disproportionate number of Black students failing to attain high degrees in comparison to their white counterparts, a fact that highlights the ever-present acts of institutional racism and social inequality (THE, 2012).

No one can argue that these are not real experiences for groups of non-white bodies. However, recently in the UK public arena there have been many cases that challenge the ways in which we are meant to see and talk about identity political issues. The first Black transgender model, Munroe Bergdorf, was hired by cosmetics giant L'Oréal, only to be sacked for making comments which were against the views of the company. Writing on Facebook after the white supremacist riots at Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, the model stated: 'Honestly I don't have the energy to talk about the racial violence of white people anymore. Yes ALL white people' (Moodie and Tingle, 2017). Putting Bergdorf's position into context, a similar line of controversy was seen in the resignation of the white Labour shadow minister Sarah Champion after a backlash of complaints in response to the her article in *The Sun* on Muslim grooming gangs in the UK, in which she wrote 'Britain has a problem with British Pakistani men raping and exploiting white girls. There. I said it. Does that make me a racist? Or am I just prepared to call out this horrifying problem for what it is?' (Elgot and Ruddick, 2017). The issue with the article was that it made a blanket claim which put all British Muslim men in the same category of inherently being rapists. Champion distanced herself from the article, claiming that it had been edited and altered: 'the Sun decided to make the headline and opening sentences highly inflammatory and they could be taken to vilify an entire community on the basis of race, religion or country of origin' (ibid). In both cases the women were 'unapologetically apologetic', calling out the situations out as they saw it. However, whilst there have been supporters on both sides of the fence for Bergdorf, there has not been the same level of tolerance for Champion.

I specifically turn to these debates that took place in public discourse since this is a space which houses 'mainstream popular thinking' – the very thinking that this chapter seeks to challenge. For example, on reflecting on the mainstream LGBT communities in the US, Halberstam (2005) critiques that these communities fail to tackle the bigger questions of capitalism, class and economics and remain fixed on stressing their victim status on the ladder of being the most oppressed. They engage in what Halberstam calls 'transgressive exceptionalism', where because academics fail to articulate identity politics to the mainstream, discussions on topics such as gender become the property of the masses, and deep complex issues remain unexamined. Identity politics then, is far more of an issue for communities outside of academia (Halberstam, 2005). However, what these examples do highlight are questions around inclusion and by inference exclusion: which issues are accepted diversity debates and which don't follow the normative pattern. It is worth pointing out that the construction of whiteness, as I have and will go on to show, is not only a non-homogeneous, monolithic identity, but it 'is a discourse that operates through individuals' interactions with one another to constantly reassert the elevation of white people over people of colour' (Blackwell, 2010: 474–6).

My point here is not to condone or support either woman, nor to make endless comparisons between groups of people badly affected by racism. Rather, I want to reiterate Kurt Barling's knowingly controversial statement quoted above (Barling, 2015: 158) around who can and who can't be racists. It is the way in which discussions around race perpetuates these hierarchies, whereby the only people who can talk about race and racism are those presumed to be on the receiving end, without acknowledging that these positions can be interchangeable. This concept of interchangeability engages with the paradox of the oppressor and the oppressed, those with power and those without: two key existential positions outlined by Paulo Freire (1996). His writing, first published in Portuguese in 1968 and then translated into English in 1970, particularly in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, helped me to understand how to create oppositional images in my own art practice as part of my PhD research. His theoretical positions have now been interwoven in this text, acknowledging the need to address the dual nature of the two positions. Furthermore, to achieve an inclusive arts education which takes into consideration the intersectionality of all those 'included and excluded', we must recognize the proximities to power that each can hold within the learning space. Freire provides a valuable perspective:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world. (Freire, 1996: 30)

Outlining our complicity as spectators or actors either implicitly or explicitly is not then as controversial or as far-fetched as it seems, when one begins to investigate the subject of 'colourism', which is a form of discrimination that privileges lighter skin tones over darker skin tones even within members of the same racial group. Sociologist Margaret Hunter describes 'White' racism as the fundamental building block of 'colourism' (Hunter, 2005: 2), meaning that even though it is based on skin colour, colourism still has its foundations rooted in the ideologies of race and thereby racism, thus demonstrating the dual nature of the oppressor and the oppressed. Where those non-white bodies were originally seen as being on the receiving end of the guidelines of the oppressor, they are

now seen to be internalizing them and reinforcing hierarchies of race amongst members of their own community.

Inclusion agendas, as Hatton addresses in *Towards an Inclusive Arts Education*, 'are always measurable in terms of what can be delivered to those who are excluded' (Hatton, 2015: 1). However, given the implicit nature of power to these discussions, those who may be excluded at any one time could then become the included in relation to the axis of power, and this is exactly the remit of intersectionality for 'there will always be unequal relations of power, depending on where we sit, either in the margins or in the centre' (Pollock, 2003: xxvii) and it is these unstable relations that one needs to address. What about questions of class, power, or looking at the body in a specific space? Anthias, in reflecting on the concept of intersectionality, reminds us that 'the notion of translocation references the idea of "location" as a social space which is produced within contextual, spatial, temporal and hierarchal relations around the "intersections" of social divisions and identities of class, ethnicity and gender (amongst others)'" (Anthias, 2008: 9). This can lead to border crossings and the redefining of those borders as associated with them. My practice, through the act of doing, reflected on the experience of the individual in recognizing the power of one's shifting position. We are reminded then that intersectionality is a dynamic rather than static process (Bhopal and Preston, 2012) and one which is very much situated around the individual. As Crenshaw (1993) points out, using the lens of race, yet alone gender, to account for Black women's experience, is inadequate in taking into consideration the multidimensional experience of the individual.

An inclusive visual arts education would need to address all sides of the story and give credence to intersectionality in its varying complexities, whether it be blackness in relation to gender, class and disability or whiteness in relation to class, disability and sexuality. If, as hooks (1994) states, we want to create a culture where biases can be addressed, then all border crossings must be recognized and seen as legitimate. This would not mean 'that they are not subjected to critique or critical interrogation, or that there will not be many occasions when the crossings of the powerful into the terrains of the powerless will not perpetuate existing structures' (hooks, 1994: 131), but that other narratives around race such as looking into the complexities of the white working class, being at once benefitters and victims within a white supremacist structure (Gillborn, 2012), will be allowed to circulate. 'In this context, intersectionality can be a useful analytic tool for thinking about and developing strategies to achieve [studio] equity' (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016: 12).

In this chapter the aim is to address and think through how whiteness is maintained and held up, not only by white bodies, but also by non-white bodies, cutting across a range of subjectivities, who continue to privilege the position that Barling refers to, either explicitly or implicitly, through acts of racialization and self-censorship, indirectly conforming to the status quo. If I, as a Black lecturer, reject practices of racialization, I will have more freedom to have what Stuart Hall called those 'unfinished conversations' around identity, which is never stable, always incomplete and in transition (Hall *et al.*, 1996). As hooks notes, 'even those professors who embrace the tenets of critical pedagogy (many of whom are white and male) still conduct their classrooms in a manner that only reinforces bourgeois models of decorum' (hooks, 1994: 74). These bourgeois models of decorum, as discussed in Theuri (2015), see these critical spaces of dialogue as intersecting along both class and whiteness itself. Theuri addresses how, within the arts, class can be as much of a defining factor in the disadvantages of Black people as matters of race. For the Black middle class, for example, utilizing the right language in navigating the 'white world' means denouncing characteristics of speech typically seen as 'Black' in favour of re-embodying characteristics seen as 'white' and 'middle class' (Theuri, 2015: 64). In the negotiation of my own critical studies programme, this is the same as limiting how many non-western or Black artists I use to address themes such as the development of modernism, thus maintaining the ideology of white

and western artists being at the centre of the art knowledge and production, a position which needs to be deconstructed and challenged.

Next I will unpack the challenges of operating in these spaces, considering more specifically the experiences of those educators who, like me, are not white and male. 'Should I, Shouldn't I?' as part of this essay title refers to the eternal conflicts that a non-white educator may experience while teaching within a predominantly white institution. To some degree then, this is a self-reflexive paper. However, even though based on my own experiences, there are resonances with a small number of studies of the challenges facing non-white educators in white institutions. Of note is a qualitative American study carried out in 2011 called 'Racial dialogues: Challenges faculty of color face in the classroom' conducted by Sue and colleagues at Teachers College, Columbia University (Sue *et al.*, 2011). The study is useful because it examined the internal struggles of non-white faculty members regarding addressing racial issues when in front of a diverse class, whilst trying to remain objective and unbiased in balancing their views in relation to student and course expectations. This is not to say that white counterparts do not face their own internal struggles, especially when it comes to discussions of race, but what is useful here is how the study highlights the impact of non-white educators abiding by the bourgeois models of decorum that Theuri discussed. In this case non-white staff were trying not to respond to difficult conversations on race and expose their true feelings. As one faculty member stated, 'I think for me, I have to be very sort of objective, which is hard ... and I also am mindful that I don't want to reinforce stereotypes' (Sue *et al.*, 2011: 335).

Although the study's focus was situated around racial dialogues that emerged, my experiences are based around the facilitation of a fine art critical studies series, at HE level. However, there are issues pertinent to both cases. First is positionality: thinking of where the educator stands in relation to the social dynamics of the students they are speaking to. Second is subjectivity: how identity informs or is assumed to inform what we include and what is not included when we teach. Last is intersectionality: thinking through how both positionality and subjectivity converge and diverge, producing conforming and nonconforming subjects in these critical spaces that allow for thinking that moves beyond the normative debates. In tackling inclusivity and providing a critical space for all participants, we need to utilize Freire's conceptual framework around the oppressor and the oppressed in thinking of these three interrelated conceptual terms. We can then begin to unpick how racial ideologies around whiteness are maintained implicitly or explicitly and how these can then be disrupted.

Positionality

Everyone has a position, both critically and physically. This section looks at positionality, as defined in the *Encyclopedia of Geography* as 'the notion that personal values, views, and location in time and space influence how one understands the world' (Warf, 2010: 10). This was the premise of the two-screen video installation *After All, Sometimes Just Changing The Point Of View Can Transform The Landscape* (2016) (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: Ope Lori. *After All, Sometimes Just Changing The Point Of View Can Transform The Landscape* 2016. Two-screen video installation. © Ope Lori

Reflecting on contemporary society, the work uses four stereotypical characters that in some way evoke fear in today's social imaginary. Perceptions of colour, gender and dress are challenged in a dialogue between the same characters dressed in white and then in opposition to themselves in normal coloured attire, in a different role. Our stereotypical assumptions related to the visual are challenged through the staging of multiple oppositions around 'difference', asking us to question the premise of the fears we ourselves might hold in relation to the other, who at any one time, might also be the self. Subject positions are constantly in flux and unfixed; bodies sit and then walk off screen only to reappear as a new subject identity, transitioning from being into not being, through the performative repetition of gestures. The failure to fix an identity is confounded through the multiple registers of difference on show: colour, race, ethnicity, being aware and turning a blind eye, active and passive, sitters and walkers, those in white and those in dark dress, authority figures and social deviants, not forgetting the inter and intra relations between the characters in the image and the 'I' of the viewer.

The use of feminist theorist Elisabeth Grosz's (2011) definition of difference enables new power dynamics to arise around constructions of gender, race, class and desire. 'Difference is the undoing of all stabilities, the inherent and immanent condition for the failure of identity that is concerned not with coinciding the subject with its past so much as opening the subject up to its becoming more and becoming-other' (Grosz, 2011: 97). From this viewpoint, reiterating Hall *et al.* (1996), subject categories become temporary positions, socially and spatially constructed, rather than fixed given qualities.

In addressing students then, upon my first encounter, there are multiple modes of difference which maintain distinctions between self and other. Of note, there is the encounter between the would-be 'expert intuitive', a term described by McMillan in his discussion of the workshop as a pedagogic tool that fosters an inclusive space for the realization of a student's creative potential (McMillan, 2015: 79). Here he breaks down the myth of the educator being the only beacon of knowledge, so that both teacher and student simultaneously become one and the other and are responsible for knowledge production. The students also begin to develop for

themselves a critical consciousness, without feeling intimidated by the position of authority (Freire, 1996: 54). Secondly, as a non-white educator, there are expectations and assumptions of the way that race informs the critical positions that bodies are expected to take in discussions. When it comes to diversity, inclusion and speaking about race, for example, there is the idea that white people are ill-equipped in comparison to their non-white counterparts (Sue *et al.*, 2011: 332). This fixes the critical positions across the colour line as homogenous, as only those perceived to be at the receiving end of race are eligible to speak about its effects. This helps to create the illusion of whiteness operating outside of racial identities, by dislodging white people from the position of power as being raced, so that they can speak about and for others (Dyer, 1997: 2). This thereby helps to maintain whiteness as a system of social power and privilege.

Utilizing the video work, for example, one could forcibly overturn the assumptions around critical positions. Whiteness was simultaneously shown through the aesthetics of the clothes being worn, and also in the stereotypical assumptions tied to the actions and how one behaves. This played on the historical associations and symbolisms of whiteness as purity, passivity, silence and accepted modes of decorum. Whiteness was not the property of white bodies, but all bodies through the accepted notions of decorum as earlier discussed by Theuri, through thinking about subjectivity.

The title of the work was taken from Gonzales-Day's text to accompany the exhibition on 'Seeing Gray: Whiteness and the Erasure of Difference' (Stallings *et al.*, 2003), in which he discusses using grey as a perceptual device in understanding whiteness. When seen from an 'other' perspective, then, those bodies cloaked in white could be seen as aggressive, acting in counter-distinction to assumptions that 'the more White the classroom is, the more likely it is [the students] to be silent' (Sue *et al.*, 2011: 333). These shifts in positionality, as not being located to the fixed subject, can be brought about by raising the consciousness of the students and what is expected of the non-white tutor, by breaking up the associations of position to a fixed sense of the body in space and time.

In the Teachers College study, one participant used a class discussion on minority hiring to break stereotypes or false assumptions. As a faculty member of colour, the students assumed that he would agree with the need to hire more people of colour within an organization. However, the professor used his own race to provide a different perspective, challenging the students' assumptions and using this interaction to illustrate a point:

Helping them to see the divergent perspectives. That there is no one right answer ... the answer is not just a diversified workforce. That's cookie-cutter, and that may not lead to creativity and here's why ... and so coming from a Black professor, I think they didn't expect that. (Sue *et al.*: 337)

Here is a classic example of how assumptions based on racial identities can play out and a counter strategy that utilizes positionality as a strategic weapon to address such thinking.

Subjectivity



Figure 2.2: *After Newton* (2012)
Laser print, 594 x 841 mm © Ope Lori.

The photographic image *After Newton* (Figure 2.2) is based on a re-appropriation of the fashion photographer Helmut Newton's fashion spreads in the 1970s and 1980s. It takes the politics of looking, the dynamics normally played out across the active male/passive female roles and substitutes Black and white women into the scene. Three white women instead of men with masculine gestures bear the active power of looker, while the gender-ambiguous Black female stud, a term used for a Black male-defined lesbian, pensively becomes the body to be looked at. In this queer space, through the failure of fixed readable identities, looking positions based on race, power and sexual difference take on new meanings.

In an interview with Sylvia Theuri, David Gillborn discusses the whiteness of art institutions such as galleries and museums and addresses the specific way in which bodies perform in such spaces:

they feel like elite spaces, the kind of space where you keep your voice down, people hold themselves differently if you look at people as they are walking round major galleries, they hold their bodies differently, they don't walk in the same way as they would walking down the street towards the gallery. (Gillborn, noted in Theuri, 2015: 63)

Whereas I discussed positionality through dialogues in the critical space, thinking through notions of subjectivity, we can begin to look at how one's body can disrupt the physical space. The idea for *After Newton* arose from the fact that as a Black lesbian woman I was at three degrees of separation from the dominant white male order in British culture. Because of this, my practice aimed to

challenge the visual oppression by forcibly putting bodies such as mine back into the frame. Doing this invariably changes the context of the space, creating an oppositional or counter-narrative. To then counteract the replication of white ideologies, we must re-imagine a new way in terms of what it means to occupy space. For example:

A professor challenged the students to think about difficult dialogues both inside and outside the classroom: 'Why does it [difficult dialogues] have to be stuck in the classroom?... once you understand the theories and models, when you watch TV, when you go to the movies, when you're at your job, you're in a case study, so you need to be thinking that way. (Sue *et al.*, 2011: 337)

Using as a reference the movies, in which the cinema becomes an apparatus which creates on- and off-screen subject positions (Lauretis, 1984: 39-44) the professor is here calling for a new way of looking, through a change of context, bringing one's body into an unaccustomed space to break up and tackle its diegesis. Similarly, being aware of one's body within the classroom space can have a powerful impact. Bell hooks (1994) in her dialogue with Ron Scapp, a white male philosopher and friend, highlighted the importance of being aware of our bodies and how they operate in space, and also of knowing the power they hold to disrupt normative narratives:

bh: One of the things I was saying is that, as a Black woman, I have always been acutely aware of the presence of my body in those settings that, in fact, invite us to invest so deeply in a mind/body split so that, in a sense, you're almost always at odds with the existing structure, whether you are a black woman student or professor. But if you want to remain, you've got, in a sense, to remember yourself – because to remember yourself is to see yourself always as a body in a system that has not become accustomed to your presence or to your physicality.

RS: Similarly, as a white university teacher in his thirties, I'm profoundly aware of my presence in the classroom as well, given the history of the male body, and of the male teacher. I need to be sensitive to and critical of my presence in the history that has led me there. Yet it's complicated by the fact that you and I are both sensitive to-and maybe even suspicious of-those who seem to be retreating away from a real, maybe radical consciousness of the body into a very conservative mind/body split. Some male colleagues are hiding behind this, repressing their bodies not out of deference but out of fear. (hooks, 1994: 135)

In both accounts, hooks and Scapp highlight the importance of self-awareness, being conscious of their bodies operating physically within systems of whiteness. Not only do both accounts expose whiteness, but also highlight how these discussions are also bound up with phallocentrism and privilege. The first account, however, addresses acts of self-empowerment, whilst the latter highlights issues around self-censorship. In theoretical terms, Black women are twice removed from the white male on grounds of sexual and racial difference. Hooks as a Black female body therefore already troubles this space, by virtue of being. In the second account, as a white male teacher, Scapp alludes to issues around self-censorship, and the fear of those similar bodies who may be seen to reinforce whiteness, by virtue of being. Here, self-censorship as the 'exercising of control over what one says and does, especially to avoid criticism' (*OED*, 2017), is at odds with what is said to be taught. There are parts of our 'selves' we choose to censor, in respect of the critical, institutional and individual frameworks that we operate within. In the Teachers College study, for example, there were institutional pressures around student evaluations that professors thought would have an impact on promotion and tenure opportunities. Similarly, I am conscious of not 'overdoing' teaching about difference, as students all too readily associate discussions back to

race, given my presence. By focusing on self-empowerment through embodiment to overturn acts of self-censorship, our bodies can dislodge dominant narratives within the whiteness of the space and thereby within critical thinking. The two are still bound with each other. As bell hooks points out:

We must return ourselves to a state of embodiment in order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally orchestrated in the classroom, denying subjectivity to some groups and according it to others. By recognizing subjectivity and the limits of identity, we disrupt that objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination. That is why the efforts to acknowledge our subjectivity and that of our students has generated both a fierce critique and backlash. (hooks, 1994: 139)

Intersectionality

I Want Me Some Brown Sugar (2013) (Figure 2.3) is a video installation, composed of moving screen images of different sexed and raced bodies, with layered text that looked at the way in which online pornography becomes a contradictory arena for taboo subjects on race, sexuality and gender. As a subtext, through multiple difference(s) and specifically through the assertion of race, it was made with the objective of deconstructing and destabilizing 'narratives of visual pleasures' (Mulvey, 2009: 15). According to feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey these narratives of visual pleasure are predicated on sexual difference and influence the gendered power dynamics within the looking politics in traditional cinema, specifically in the capturing of desire for the female form by the active power of male looking. *I Want Me Some Brown Sugar* sought to overturn such prescriptions by looking towards a future that inscribed new gender and race positions, rather than re-inscribed existent models.



Figure 2.3: *I Want Me Some Brown Sugar*. Video © Ope Lori. 2013

The definition of intersectionality, although not universally clear, 'references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape

complex social inequalities' (Hill Collins, P. and Bilge, S., 2016: 25). As discussed earlier, intersectionality brings awareness to the relations of power in the construction of subject identities and social inequalities and, due to the concept of difference, these proximities to power that bodies will occupy at any one time will not always take on privileged positions.

As a clear example, I teach at two renowned schools of art at opposite ends of the UK's north–south divide. Both are made up of predominantly white home students and international students tend to be greater at the university in the South. However, given the geographic positioning of the university in the north, the assumptions of white bodies having access to privilege, has only been contested there. For example, in an icebreaker activity I carried out for a session at the Northern University on difference, called 'knowing me, knowing you', where the students had to state one thing in common with their neighbour followed by one thing that was different, it was evident from some of the discussions that racial, or ideas of the privilege allocated to all white bodies was not homogenous. Many students stated their working-class background before their race, citing issues around their accent and being conscious of the north–south divide (Bretan, 2017) that distinguished them from the London-based fine art schools. Historically, we have seen examples of this exclusion of white bodies from the constructions of whiteness, as they have been seen socially and politically outside the domains of power and privilege: from the Jews in Nazi Germany, to the Irish in relation to the English in the nineteenth century (Dyer, 1997); from the Romani Gypsies as outside of accepted forms of white 'European-ness' (Lopez 2012); and, more pertinent to this discussion on education, intersectionality and inclusion, the underachievement of working-class white boys as the 'worst performing ethnic group at school' (Telegraph Men, 2017). It is worth pointing out here that such discussions on working-class white boys underperforming are not a new moral panic, since such discussions have proliferated in public media debates (Bhopal and Preston, 2012: 36).

In the work, *I Want Me Some Brown Sugar*, there were multiple overlapping positions on show, all with different proximities to power: male, undressed, white, young, standing; or Black, female, dressed, old, sitting. Intersectionality brings both positionality and subjectivity to the fore, producing conforming and non-conforming subjects in these critical spaces that can allow for thinking that moves beyond the normative debates. Race can be addressed but, in order to have any holistic view, it must be done so within the context of class, economics, ethnicity and nationalism, in relation to who is privileged and who is not-privileged, not forgetting other identity categories. However, it is worth noting that critical race theorists such as Gillborn (2008) will not examine white working-class contexts at all, because this means looking at an argument 'between inequalities' which they may feel devalues their key subject (race). Gillborn has stated 'What is rarely appreciated ... is that privileging class inequality has the effect of privileging White interests' (Gillborn, 2008: 53). However, British Journalist and broadcaster Martin Daubney said in 2017 on BBC 1's 'Sunday Morning Live Show' on the topic of 'Are Britain's Top Bosses too white?', that when he talks about diversity and inclusion and mentions the plight of working-class white boys at the bottom of the stack in education, he is often side-lined, as they are seen as being from the 'wrong' side of the diversity discussion: 'as to be white and male is seen as a privilege'. It is this kind of attention to inclusivity and intersectionality, which crosses multiple borders, that is needed in order to tackle Barling's provocative statement that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion

As an artist, an initial phase of my practice was located around creating oppositional images in relation to normative structures around race and gender. In working towards these 'oppositional gazes' however, through practice and the 'switching of polarities between Black and white women's situation in my work', in the act of elevating Black women over white women within the image, it

dawned on me that this was an act of violence, or at least, according to Freire, did not change the situation. What did effectively make a difference was understanding the intersecting effect of differences and seeing how each had the capacity to link to either systems of domination or oppression.

To conclude, unpacking the impact of whiteness whilst devising a critical studies series is a complex process in which, as a non-white teacher, I have had to re-imagine the impact of my body within the space. The blurred line between subjectivity, positionality and intersectionality created complex positions. However, taking them into consideration as a form of empowerment, they can be used to overturn issues around self-censorship. Key to this paper is the idea that whiteness is an operating system which conforms bodies to act in specific ways following its own ideals. This is true of my own experience within the institution, partly due to issues around self-censorship. However, if one embodies Freire's way of thinking as a practice, playing with power relations and unfixing positions between the oppressed and the oppressor, 'abandoning our minority complex and adopting a majority complex' (Barling, 2015: 175), then we can work towards a fine art critical studies programme for all, without having to measure what or whom is excluded, given that this could be the majority as well as the minority at any one time.

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