The Art of Culture War: (Un)Popular Culture, Freedom of Expression, and Art Education

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This article examines the culture wars in the United States and considers their impact on the field of art education. Stretching across virtually ever facet of contemporary culture, these ideologically charged battles over opposing moral values and fundamental belief systems are an intrinsic part of the ongoing struggle to define and control U.S. society. In recent years, the culture wars within and around art education have manifest in two interrelated battles—the first, over the adoption of a visual culture paradigm for the field, and the second, over art teachers' moral responsibilities and academic and expressive freedoms. By examining each set of controversies through a discussion of key arguments and events, this article considers potential implications for the teaching and learning of art. It concludes with a discussion of possible future directions for the field.

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War is a vital matter of state. It is the field on which life or death is determined and the road that leads to either survival or ruin, and must be examined with the greatest of care. (Sun-Tzu, 1993, p. 103)

Lex Luthor: Some people can read *War and Peace* and come away thinking it's a simple adventure story. Others can read the ingredients on a chewing gum wrapper and unlock the secrets of the universe. (Donner, Shuster, & Siegel, 1978)

In the Beginning: Struggles to Define America

In November of 2004, columnist Frank Rich (2004) of the *New York Times* wrote, "As American forces were dying in Falluja, some Americans back home spent Veterans' Day mocking the very ideal our armed forces are fighting for." He was responding to the decision by 66 American Broadcasting Company (ABC) affiliates to refuse the network's request to broadcast *Saving Private Ryan* in its entirety on Veterans' Day 2004. Influenced by the lobbying efforts of the American Family Association (AFA), who cited both the corrupting influence of the "F-word"—used 21 times over 170 minutes—and the film's graphic depictions of the violence of war, these stations, which cover one third of the country, chose instead to play it safe by broadcasting more 'family value' friendly shows. This occurred despite the fact that the network had nationally broadcast the movie uncensored in both 2001 and 2002 in the face of objections by the same family values groups. The difference? Rich claimed the climate in 2004 was clouded by the recent decision by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), at the time headed by

former Secretary of State Colin Powell's son Michael, to crackdown on stations and networks for airing 'indecent' material. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) had received a stern public warning months earlier after an investigation into U2 front man Bono's use of an expletive during the Golden Globe Awards. Meanwhile, in February of 2004, Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) was investigated by the FCC for the widely watched Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake 'Nipplegate' incident during the Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show. Officially described by the network's Keith Olbermann (2004, February 3) as a 'wardrobe malfunction,' the FCC publicly rebuked and fined CBS owner, Viacom Inc., $550,000 for the incident (Wise, 2004). Soon afterwards, the United States House of Representatives and Senate passed bills (Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act, 2006) that significantly increased the maximum allowable fines the FCC could impose for broadcasting indecent content. Thus, the ensuing self-censorship by the ABC affiliates on Veterans' Day 2004 could be seen as a cautious response to the threat of real public relations and financial consequences. It could also be seen, according to Rich (2004), as a chilling harbinger of what was to come. As he pointedly asked in his November 21st column:

> If these media outlets are afraid to show a graphic Hollywood treatment of a 60-year-old war starring the beloved Tom Hanks because the feds might fine them, toy with their licenses or deny them permission to expand their empires, might they defensively soften their divisions' efforts to present the graphic truth of war?

Welcome to the culture wars. Stretching across virtually every facet of contemporary American society, these ideologically charged battles over opposing moral values and fundamental belief systems are an intrinsic part of the ongoing struggle to define and control American society. Derived from the 19th-century German word *Kulturkampf,* which literally means 'a struggle for the control of culture,' the culture wars in the United States have been smoldering and, at times raging, for the better part of 80 years (Gans, 1999). The term itself first surfaced during the 1980s and gained widespread usage in the early 1990s after the publication of James Davison Hunter's (1991) *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America.* In his book, Hunter portrayed a widening divide in American culture and politics over defining issues like abortion, separation of church and state, censorship, homosexuality, and funding for the arts. He described how the culture wars are being fought between two passionately polarized groups, the orthodox and the progressives, and claimed that the use of power politics over democratic debate ultimately overshadows more moderate viewpoints. The notion of 'culture war' gained further notoriety the following year when presidential hopeful Patrick Buchanan delivered his campaign speech to the

1992 Republican National Convention. In this primetime TV address, Buchanan called on conservatives to declare a cultural revolution, which he described as a "war for the nation's soul" (as cited in Williams, 2003, p. 10).

Schoolyard Fights and Art Attacks

The field of education has certainly not remained immune from the culture wars (Nash, Crabtree & Dunn, 2000). People from across the political spectrum have long recognized that schools don't *serve* a public so much as they help to *create* one (Moran, 2002). Struggles by ethnic minority groups and women to gain a place in the history texts and curriculum, along with disputes over religious instruction, school prayer, and sex education have helped to ensure that schools remain sites of cultural and sociopolitical struggle (Fraser, 1999; Zimmerman, 2002). Combined with conflicts over racial integration and multiculturalism, the standardization of curriculum, funding levels and distribution, teacher effectiveness and accountability, assessment and evaluation, and commercialization and privatization, public education has persisted as a key battleground in the culture wars (Giroux, 2001; Saltman, 2000).

Equally explosive, controversies within and around the arts, including issues of government support and funding, indecency and religious desecration, and free speech and censorship have proven to be both inflammatory and divisive (Dubin, 1992; Heins, 2001; Sweeny, 2007). Not surprisingly, conflicts surrounding both education and the arts have directly impacted and been reflected throughout the field of art education. Teachers, scholars, community members, and policymakers across the nation have struggled to find common ground around issues of appropriate school curriculum, moral standards and intellectual and expressive freedoms. These disputes have played out in classrooms, academic journals, school board meetings, conference presentations, and the media at large (Anderson & Garoian, 1995; Barrett & Rab, 1990; Henley, 1997; Tapley, 2002; Tavin, 2005a; 2005b).

In recent years, the culture wars within and around art education have manifested in two interrelated battles—the first, over the adoption of a visual culture paradigm for the field, and the second, over art teachers' moral responsibilities and academic and expressive freedoms. While disputes over visual culture forms of art education have been waged primarily in academic circles within art education, the repercussions clearly extend outward toward the larger field and beyond (Duncum, 2006; Freedman, 2003). Battles over art teachers' moral conduct and expressive and academic freedoms, meanwhile, have played out almost exclusively within local communities and the media. While this issue has profound implications for the field at all levels, the academic and larger professional art education communities have remained conspicu-

ously unengaged. In what follows, the culture wars in art education will be examined through a discussion of key historical and contemporary events, theories, and arguments. Specific cases will be considered, as will possible implications and future directions for the teaching and learning of art.

Visual Culture Wars: Moral Panics and (Un)Popular Culture

Within the art education academic community, ongoing arguments over the current state and future curricular direction of the field have exposed fissures in fundamental belief systems and highlighted important differences in social, political, moral, and artistic values. These disputes have pitted researchers and practitioners committed to formal aesthetics, individual self-expression, and the production of artistic objects (Clark, Day & Greer, 1987; Dorn, 2001; London, 1998; Parsons & Blocker, 1993; Smith, 2002, 2005, 2006) against those advocating more socially engaged and democratically responsible forms of art education (Blandy & Congdon, 1987; Chalmers, 1996; Chapman, 2003; Darts, 2006; Desai, 2005; Efland, 1976; Freedman, 1994, 2000; Garber, 1995; Garoian, 1999; Gaudelius & Speirs 2001; Hicks, 1994; jagodzinski, 2004; Lanier, 1991; McFee, 1966; Stout, 1999; Stuhr, 2003). In recent years, these debates have manifested and intensified in disputes over the value of visual culture approaches to art education, including the study of popular culture (Tavin, 2005a). This has prompted some art educators to critique a perceived emphasis on 'social studies' (Chalmers, 2001; Freedman, 2000, 2003) and to lament the lack of 'art' in many of the proposed visual culture approaches (Dorn, 2003; 2005; Eisner, 2002; Kamhi, 2003; 2004; Parsons, 2002; Smith, P., 2003; Stinespring, 2001). Visual culture proponents in turn have criticized the continuing emphasis on outdated modernist 'art for art's sake' curricular models— approaches which they claim are disengaged from the contemporary lives and democratic requirements of students (Darts, 2004; Duncum, 2001, 2002; Efland, 2004, 2005; Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Gude, 2007; Smith-Shank, 2004; Tavin, 2005a, 2005b).

At the heart of many of these disputes is the challenge that curriculum that addresses and includes popular culture is less complex, sophisticated, or tasteful and that such materials only cater to the lowest common denominator (Tavin, 2005a). Accordingly, popular culture is deemed to be less pedagogically worthy and even morally inappropriate for study in the art classroom. This predisposition is certainly not unique to art educators and is reflected within education and society at large. In *Trash Culture*, R.K. Simon (1999) argues that this historical bias against popular culture—a prejudice that is supported and reinforced through formal schooling—has been very difficult to move beyond. He explains that while tabloid newspapers and Greek tragedies deal with the same

basic kinds of material, expressed interest in the *Enquirer* translates into depravity and lack of education while appreciation of Greek tragedy is a sign of refined taste and membership in a small cultured elite. Although there are myriad of social, cultural, and economic reasons for this ongoing bias, most explanations are rooted in issues of status, power, and control (Gans, 1999; Weaver, 2005).

Pierre Bourdieu certainly recognized the subtleties and connections between education, culture, and control. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu (1984) identified the social codes, beliefs, morals, and tastes upheld by the ruling class as 'cultural capital.' He claimed that those who possess cultural capital maintain privilege, advantage, and control over those who do not. Bourdieu's thesis included an explanation of the 'social reproduction' of cultural capital, a process in which educational institutions play a vital role. This idea has extended back to Matthew Arnold's (1882) *Culture and Anarchy*, a text that continues to have a profound impact on educational thinking and policy today. In it, Arnold argued against the vocational inclinations of Western schooling and maintained that state sanctioned education must expose young people to a 'liberal arts' or 'greatest works' curriculum. This, Arnold claimed, was necessary in order to combat 'instrumentalism' and to breed authentic culture in the minds of the public. Parts of his approach were later adopted by others, including Frank Raymond Leavis and Leo Strauss, theorists who supported Arnold's canonical approach to schooling, but who argued only a chosen few were capable of decoding and truly understanding society's greatest works. They claimed schooling should support and cultivate these 'gifted' minds in order to form a 'cultured elite' that would defend democracy from the dangerous impulses of the uncultured masses (Weaver, 2005).

And in fact, attempts to support and differentiate between the culture of those in power and those without it have been traced back roughly 2400 years to Plato's *Republic*. Plato's desire to ban poets and painters from the Republic for their dangerous propensity to speak in other voices and put words in the mouths of the Gods signified the first attempt in Western society to distinguish between 'Culture' (with a capital 'C') and 'popular' culture (Plato, Kamtekar, & Lee, 2003; Weaver, 2005). Plato believed artists were predisposed to create distortions of the truth and argued that by appealing to the emotions and desires of their audiences, these seductive artistic misrepresentations only served to misguide and manipulate individuals' moral beliefs and actions. In other words, he believed citizens would be unable to discern between the truth and bad copies of the truth, and this would cause them to act foolishly and even dangerously.

This basic argument—that young people are unduly influenced by their inability to critically discriminate between fiction and reality—has

endured for millennia. It's evident today in both media effects research studies (Gauntlett, 1995) and popular media stories that chronicle the corrupting influence of popular culture on our youth (Osgerby, 2004; Sternheimer, 2003). These accounts depict a world in which a debased entertainment industry drives naïve young people toward violence, promiscuity, obesity, apathy, and so on. As such, schoolyard violence, falling test scores, teen pregnancy, and increasing beltlines have all in turn been attributed to the media consumption habits and entertainment addictions of our young (Osgerby, 2004). Some cultural and media theorists remind us, however, that these 'moral panics' (Cohen, 1972) in Western society are nothing new. Springhall (1998), for instance, describes how dime novels in the 1890s, gangster movies in the 1930s, comic books and rock-and-roll in the 1950s, and rap and hip-hop in the 1990s have all been blamed for encouraging amoral behavior in impressionable young people. Besides exposing deep-seated anxieties about the evolving relationships between new media technologies, popular culture, and contemporary young people, portraying popular culture as the cause of distressing behavior and perceived social ills helps to distract attention away from more difficult questions about systemic poverty, state-sanctioned violent responses to conflict, and widespread class, gender and racial inequities (Sternheimer, 2003; Kellner, 2005).

Contemporary Art Attacks: Censorship and Freedom of Expression

Directly connected to the moral panics and ongoing disputes over young people and popular culture, attacks on contemporary artists over the last 20 years have resulted in impassioned political battles over censorship, freedom of expression, government funding, obscenity, and blasphemy. In February of 1989, for instance, the press was alerted to an art exhibit where patrons were stepping on an American flag located on the floor in a gallery at the Art Institute of Chicago. Art student Dread Scott's installation *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?* (Scott, 1989), which encouraged viewers to contemplate patriotism and the first amendment, soon drew the ire of veterans' groups, concerned citizens, and the entire United States Congress, which passed legislation to protect the stars and stripes from future desecrations. The statute was later struck down by the Supreme Court, but not before some journalists and commentators publicly exposed the difficulties and absurdities of legally defining the law's main terms. Frank Tippett of *Time* magazine, for instance, wondered publicly if a prisoner with a flag tattooed on his chest could be legally executed (Tippet, 1989). And one of Gary Trudeau's November 1989 *Doonesbury* comic strips[1] contained an image of an American flag and a challenge for readers to formulate a

[1]A color reproduction of this November 5, 1989 comic strip can be viewed on the Doonesbury website. Retrieved on August 29, 2007, from http://www.doonesbury.com/strip/oldglory.html

legal way of disposing of the newspaper, should the proposed constitu-
tional amendment be passed (Trudeau, 1990).

In the midst of the ongoing flag controversy, the American Family
Association (AFA) called a press conference to denounce National
Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding for the work of Andres Serrano.
AFA Director, Reverend Donald Wildman, having recently battled over
Martin Scorsese's film, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Scorsese, 1988)
and Madonna's *Like a Prayer* (Madonna, 1989), was determined to have
Serrano's *Piss Christ* (Serrano, 1999)—a luminous photograph of a large
mass produced crucifix immersed in the artist's urine—eliminated from
the "Awards in the Visual Arts" annual exhibition. Senator Jesse Helms
joined the fight and, along with over 100 members of Congress, directly
criticized the NEA for supporting Serrano and other controversial artists,
including prominent photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. As Helms
notoriously declared, "If someone wants to write ugly nasty things on
the men's room wall, the taxpayers do not provide the crayons" (as cited
in Dubin, 1992, p. 180). Feeling the intense political heat from the
conflict, the respected Corcoran Gallery of Art, located only a few blocks
from the White House, cancelled an upcoming Mapplethorpe exhibit at
the eleventh hour. Stunning many supporters and critics, commentators
swiftly pointed out the irony of the engraving ("Dedicated to Art")
mounted above the museum's front entrance (Dubin, 1992, p. 176).
The artistic and gay communities were quick to respond to the show's
cancellation. Artist Lowell Nesbitt withheld a million-dollar bequest to
the museum, Annette Lemieux withdrew her solo show, and students at
Corcoran's school of art demonstrated several times (Dubin, 1992). At
the heat of the controversy, demonstrators and bystanders were treated
to an outdoor slideshow of Mapplethorpe's work projected directly onto
the Corcoran's façade by supporters.

As the 1990s wore on, the political and media spotlights began to
focus elsewhere only to converge on the art world again in 1999. The
Sensation exhibition (*Sensation*, 1999-2000), imported from Britain,
featured work from Charles Saatchi's collection of yBas (young British
Artists) at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Before the show even opened,
New York mayor Rudy Giuliani held a press conference expressing
his shock and outrage that the show had found its way to his city. His
threats to cut funding ignited a war of words in the media pitting artists,
academics, the museum director, and the American Civil Liberties Union
against conservatives, the Catholic League, and the mayor's office. The
controversy was further fuelled by the museum's successful marketing
campaign that promised ticket buyers the possibility of "shock, vomiting,
confusion, panic, euphoria, anxiety" (as cited in Rothfield, 2001, p. 2).
At the center of the controversy, Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*
(Ofili, 1996), a mixed-media which included elephant dung and porno-

graphic images creating a picture of the Virgin Mary. Seen as offensive and blasphemous by many in the Christian community, their threats once again manifested in calls to discontinue public funding for the arts.

The controversy came to a head when a dapper 72-year-old Dennis Heiner visited the exhibit on December 18th, 1999. Waiting until the guards looked the other way, he procured a bottle of white paint from his jacket, slipped behind the protective shield, and proceeded to squeeze and spread white paint over the face and body of Ofili's painting. Heiner was eventually charged with a Class D Felony, fined $250, and was encouraged by the judge to leave his paint at home the next time he visited the museum (Dubin, 1992).

Nude Statues, Topless Teachers, and Shifting Dress Codes: The Lowdown on High Moral Standards for Art Educators

Not to be outdone by conservative attacks against contemporary artists and art institutions, school boards and administrators across the country have weighed in with a number of controversial allegations and rulings against art educators. The 2006 school year, for instance, began with a disturbing story in the *New York Times* about Ms. Sydney McGee, a fifth grade teacher in Texas with 28 years of teaching experience (Blumenthal, 2006a). According to the *Times* article, McGee was suspended by the Frisco Independent School District, allegedly after the parents of one of her students complained that children under her supervision were exposed to nude statues and other nude art representations during a school sanctioned field trip to the Dallas Art Museum. The report explained that McGee was berated the day after the field trip by her principal for exposing the children to nude artworks and was eventually placed on paid leave. Adding fuel to the fire, some local Dallas television news reports began airing the McGee museum story with black 'censor bars' concealing the supposed 'indecent' areas of the statues in the museum. Perhaps as a result of pressure generated by the media attention, McGee's principal and the school superintendent later publicly responded with an e-mail statement to parents, explaining that McGee was being suspended for "performance concerns" and that the district's disciplinary action against her was "not about a field trip to a museum" (as cited in Blumenthal, 2006a). Puzzlingly, McGee's personnel file included a 2004 letter of recommendation from a previous principal along with a solid record of exemplary job evaluations leading up to the museum field trip. She eventually settled with the school district, agreeing to give up her job in return for the balance of one year's annual salary (Blumenthal, 2006b).

While troubling for many in the art education community, the McGee case is just one in a growing list of culture war 'flare-ups' involving art

teachers, curricula, and schools over the last few decades (Anderson & Garoian, 1995; Barrett & Rab, 1990). In fact, less than a year prior to McGee's removal from the classroom, another veteran teacher, Jerry Halfmann, was suspended by the Tucson Unified School District for 6 weeks while authorities investigated "questionable" photographs hanging in his classroom and in the hallways of his school (Sagara, 2005). Following an unidentified complaint to the administration, Halfmann was relieved of duty and a number of photographs were removed from public view, including one piece that had been on display for over two years. The images in question, all of them created by Halfmann's students, included two portraits that showed young women displaying bare backs to the camera. Defending the images in the *Tucson Citizen*, Halfmann explained:

It's students taking pictures of students and it's girls taking pictures of girls.... It's basically ladies with their shirts off, showing nothing. I've got rules and regulations on what you can and can't do and the kids know what they are.... They don't take full-length nudes. They take bare backs. They take pictures with the breasts covered, bare shoulders. The normal things that kids take pictures of, which is nothing at all vulgar or pornographic. We've been doing those for 28 years. You see more nudity watching the Victoria's Secrets [sic] ads on TV. (as cited in Sagara, 2005)

Halfmann was eventually reinstated, though not before his reputation had been scrutinized and publicly called into question. And also not before Tucson High instituted a new policy for art students mandating that subjects in photographs had to comply with the school's strict dress code.

By far the most 'sensational' of recent stories involving art educators, the Tamara Hoover case, hit the airwaves in May 2006. Hoover, a high school art teacher in Austin, Texas, was escorted out of her classroom by authorities. This happened after Austin Independent School District (AISD) officials discovered[2] she had posed seminude for a series of photographs created and posted by her partner, an artist, on the photo-sharing site Flickr.com. The artworks in question chronicled Ms. Hoover partaking in a number of domestic activities, including lifting weights, showering and getting dressed. Although the images were not deemed to be pornographic in nature,[3] were created during her personal time outside of school, and were never used as part of her curriculum or inter-actions with students, the board still sought to permanently revoke her teaching certificate. This based on the claim she had become an "inef-fective" teacher (Castro, 2006). Officials cited the photos as proof Hoover had violated the district's "higher moral standard" expected of teachers (Castro, 2006). This despite the fact that the human form, including

[2] The photos in question were originally brought to the attention of school officials as the result of a disagreement between Hoover and another art teacher at the school regarding ceramics equipment (Castro, 2006).

[3] The AISD ultimately avoided costly hearings that would have determined if Hoover's photographs violated the district's "moral turpitude clause," which prohibits "base, vile or depraved acts that are intended to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of the actor" (as cited in May, 2006).

nude studies and representations, has been a central component of the Western art tradition for millennia, with reproductions of these works publicly available online and at local museums and in libraries and bookstores around the world. In this case, the AISD Board apparently took exception to one of their own teachers participating in the production and display of such artworks. Their decision clearly has important implications for all educators who maintain an artistic practice or who participate in the creation of someone else's artwork—a point that was not lost on some of the young people with whom Hoover worked. As student Austin Clements cleverly pointed out in an Associated Press article about the case, "If Georgia O'Keeffe wanted to teach at Austin High, I don't think they'd say, 'No, you have nude pictures online'" (as cited in Castro, 2006). And as Hoover's own attorney later explained, the case raised important issues about what teachers were able to do in their free time. He explained, "Teachers are asking a lot of questions. What about that picture of me taken in 1973 at Hippie Hollow? What if someone puts that online?" (as cited in May, 2006). In the face of mounting legal bills, however, Hoover eventually agreed 4 months later to accept $14,850 from the School District in return for her resignation (May, 2006).

Culture War Casualties? Popular Culture, Censorship, and Art Education

The Hoover case clearly introduces new elements into the culture war mix. Perhaps the most immediate is the increasingly fuzzy line between the contemporary private and public lives of teachers working in a networked digital society. This raises difficult questions about the academic, expressive, and privacy rights and responsibilities of schoolteachers, community members and school officials. In particular, it calls into question the degree to which educators' private/public lives should be open to school district scrutiny. And, as the Hoover case also plainly demonstrates, in attempting to hold educators accountable to 'higher moral standards,' important questions need to be asked about the underlying values and beliefs those morals and standards are founded upon. This issue clearly extends to other central educational issues as well, including appropriate curricular policies and acceptable pedagogical practices. What, for instance, should become of educational materials and activities that could be interpreted as 'controversial' or 'improper?' Should they be banned from classroom use? If so, which resources and experiences will be selected in their place as 'appropriate' for learning? Who ultimately decides? Using which criteria?

Meanwhile, in considering the McGee and Halfmann suspensions— cases that both center around young people's exposure to, or at least potential exposure to, nudity through the visual arts—three vital questions remain to be answered. How exactly were the materials or activ-

ities in question determined to be inappropriate for learning? In what sense are they hurtful or dangerous to students? And does this potential 'harm' outweigh their potential 'value' as art educational tools/experiences? As Marjorie Heins (2001), director of the New York University Free Expression Policy Project, points out, these questions remain at the heart of the debate over what and when to censor materials from young people.

> But terms like "pornography" and "gratuitous violence" are elastic, and if the underlying philosophy is one of protection through censorship, then it is only a matter of opinion whether gratuitous violence means *Schindler's List* or *Terminator 2*, whether safer-sex films that illustrate the unrolling of a condom are salutary or immoral, or whether Judy Blume novels that discuss masturbation or premarital sex are pornographic. Even if adults could agree, moreover, on what is truly inadvisable for young people, the rarely asked question remains, In what sense is it harmful? And does it justify censorship? (p. 5)

And although the debates in academic art education circles over appropriate curricular materials and pedagogical practices do not focus directly on issues of nudity or sexuality, the basic arguments, handed down from Plato onward, remain essentially the same—that young people will be morally, culturally, ideologically, or intellectually corrupted through their exposure to unsuitable materials and experiences, including those arising from 'popular' culture. This position, reinforced in the field by official state-sanctioned standards and curriculum, and shaped by the views of generations of educators (Simon, 1999; Eisner, 2002), has resulted in both the explicit and implicit censorship of contemporary popular culture and other 'controversial' materials within schools. As Eisner (2002) explains, what schools *don't* teach can be as important as what they *do* teach—a phenomenon he refers to as the "null curriculum" (p. 97). Eisner describes a number of subjects, including the "study of popular images" and the "arts of the vernacular" that are frequently disregarded or omitted from the official curriculum and argues that these omissions have important consequences for students and society (p. 104). Based on Eisner's thesis, the 'null curriculum' could be understood as a form of 'censorship through exclusion.' Whether instigated by ideological bias or from fear of reprisal, censorship through exclusion clearly has consequences for the kinds of education students receive, the kinds of skills and outlooks they come to possess, and ultimately, the types of lives they go on to live.

Not that censorship through exclusion has gone wholly uncontested in the field. Some art educators have found the courage to meaningfully include 'controversial' works of art into the curriculum (Anderson & Garoian, 1995; Barrett & Rab, 1990; Henley, 1997; Sweeny, 2007;

Tapley, 2002). And as Tavin (2005a) has reminded us, art education scholars through the decades like Chapman (1978; 2003), Lanier (1968; 1969), and McFee (1970) advocated for the inclusion of popular culture in art education.

And while educators, policy makers, and others have continued to believe that popular culture negatively impacts the actions of young people (Buckingham, 2003), this idea is not consistently supported by the research. In fact, despite decades of 'media effects' studies, the *causal* links between media consumption and behavior have remained maddeningly difficult to corroborate (Buckingham, 2003; Heins, 2001; Sternheimer, 2003). As David Gauntlett (1995) has explained, while popular culture clearly influences the perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs of viewers, given the inconsistent findings and contradictory results of decades of media effects research, the "effects paradigm" itself should now finally be "laid to rest" (p. 1). He concludes that the true effects of media consumption on contemporary audiences might best be described as unpredictable—a point reinforced by visual culture theorists who have argued media images, messages, and artifacts are often confusing and contradictory and dependent upon multiple social, cultural, personal, economic, educational, and historical contexts (Du Gay, 1997; Hall, 1997; Mirzoeff, 1999; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

So although popular culture is clearly a complex and powerful force in Western culture—one that has a profound social, economic, political, and cultural impact on everyday contemporary life—political and peda-gogical attempts to shield young people from disturbing or controversial materials will do little to ameliorate problems like youth violence, teen pregnancy, obesity, or low test-scores. Instead, blaming popular culture for society's supposed moral decay will only shift attention away from real problems affecting young people today, like poverty, domestic and community violence, and racial and economic inequities (Jenkins, 1998). And, by continuing to exclude popular culture from the curriculum, art educators and others also fail to adequately acknowledge the potential artistic, educational, and civic benefits of thoughtfully engaging with these materials (Darts, in press). For as Heins (2001) explains, our students need access to controversial ideas and materials as part of the process of becoming functioning and responsible members of society—something they can't accomplish "if they are kept in ideo-logical blinders until they are 18" (p. 12). As such, there are clearly better ways than censorship—like training in visual/media literacy and critical thinking—for art teachers to prepare students for active engagement with visual culture and democratic life.

United We Stand: Art Educators as Freedom Fighters?

While individual art educators will continue to find the pedagogical courage to meaningfully utilize and critically examine images, artworks or other materials from visual culture, including those that contain violence, sex or other controversial content, significant institutional and professional change is unlikely to occur without direct intervention, including political lobbying, professional development, and teacher education. Recent cases like the Hoover, Halfmann, and McGee battles clearly raise fundamental questions about the apparent non-response by art education organizations like the National Art Education Association (NAEA). As a professional association that represents over 22,000 art educators, the NAEA surely has the resources and the obligation to provide leadership, advocacy, and support (legal, financial, educational, moral) that meaningfully addresses and responds to challenges to its members' academic and expressive freedoms. Unfortunately, the NAEA has remained noticeably silent.

Of the 28 advocacy-focused *NAEA Advisories* provided for viewing on the association's website,[4] for instance, not one document addresses censorship or academic and expressive freedoms. In fact, save for one Board of Directors motion buried in the archives and written over 15 years ago, the entire NAEA website is devoid of content pertaining to these issues. This one document, entitled "Censorship and the Arts,"[5] offers a series of statements supporting freedom of expression and condemning efforts to suppress "objectionable" artists and artworks. Of special note is the final passage, which reads, "The art educator should impress upon students the vital importance of freedom of expression as a basic premise in the free democratic society and urge students to guard against any efforts to limit or curtail that freedom" (NAEA, 1992).

Whereas the document was clearly written as a good-intentioned response to the arts controversies of the early 1990s, directing art educators to urge their students to protect against efforts to curtail freedom of expression takes on a depressingly ironic tone today in the wake of the Hoover, Halfmann, and McGee cases. In very practical terms, this NAEA motion contains certain omissions and oversights that render it pedagogically and professionally ineffective. It fails, for instance, to provide any course of action should its declarations not be observed by administrators or school boards. Furthermore, it completely overlooks the potential risks for art teachers who are involved in the production of 'objectionable' artwork and/or who introduce students to such work. With the threat of termination or worse a very real possibility for art teachers who stray from ultra-conservative art education curricula or who engage in the production of potentially controversial artwork, a 15-year-old pseudo-policy document is clearly not a viable response to the needs of contemporary art educators. Genuine advocacy

[4] The *NAEA News/ Advocacy* section of the association's website provides links to 28 advocacy-focused *NAEA Advisories*. Retrieved on July 11, 2007, from http://naea-reston.org/news_advocacy_28advisorys.html

[5] This motion was adopted by the NAEA Board of Directors in September 1991 and was published as a Winter, 1992 *NAEA Advisory*. Retrieved on July 11, 2007, from http://www.naea-reston.org/pdf/censo.pdf

and educational efforts will need to be made in order to meaningfully assert and protect the NAEA's members' academic and expressive rights and freedoms.

Ideally, these efforts should include legal support for art teachers facing disciplinary action, the development of more robust policy documents, and national visual arts standards that provide clear guidelines and directives for art teachers and school administrators and boards. The NAEA will also need to engage in ongoing advocacy and educational efforts aimed at school administrators, school boards, policy makers, politicians, and the public at large. And in order for these actions to be successful, the NAEA will need to actively build coalitions with other stakeholders and organizations like the College Art Association (CAA), the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the American Library Association (ALA), the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), the American Association of Museums (AAM), and the American Association of University Professors (AAUA). The NAEA will also need to establish task forces and working groups to study and directly respond to attacks on art teachers' academic and expressive freedoms. This should be accompanied by efforts to develop associated curricular materials, professional development programs, and sponsored research. Finally, all of these actions should be coordinated with and extended to affiliate state and local level art education associations and groups.

And while the NAEA clearly needs to assume a key leadership role, art teacher educators also must shoulder some of the responsibility for meaningfully addressing these issues with their students. Initiating frank and honest discussions with students about the possibilities, responsibilities, and potential risks of addressing controversial materials in the art classroom is certainly one important step. As is providing specific strategies for critically selecting and thoughtfully utilizing controversial materials with young people. And art teacher educators will also need to help their students hone the intellectual and communicative skills needed to articulate and defend their curricular decisions within the contexts of state and national visual arts standards.

Finally, the related issue of challenges to the expressive and intellectual rights and freedoms of *students* will also be need to be carefully considered by all stakeholders. This will inevitably include a hard look inward by the art education community towards art educator-initiated forms of censorship, including censorship through exclusion as well as other implicit and explicit restrictions on the expressive and intellectual rights and freedoms of students. While it is beyond the scope of this article to fully consider, surely the rights required by art teachers will also need to be afforded to art students.

In the end, significant advocacy and educational efforts are necessary within and beyond art education to combat censorship and to assert and protect academic and expressive freedoms. The NAEA clearly has the resources, the mandate, and the responsibility to meaningfully contribute to and, ultimately, lead this cause. Art teacher educators can also play an important role. While we come from a long tradition of 'freedom,' including free speech, free expression, free elections, free press, etc., none of these liberties have been gained or preserved without significant effort and solidarity of purpose. If art educators from all levels can find the courage and the means to stand and work together, they can unite to fight censorship and to protect academic and expressive freedoms for themselves and for generations to come.

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