



Exploring the impact of off the beaten path: Violence, women, and art

Lynn Corcoran*, Annette Lane

Faculty of Health Disciplines, Athabasca University, Canada



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Gender-based violence
Arts-based strategies

ABSTRACT

What impact can the arts have on gender-based violence? Violence against women and girls is a global public health problem. Despite the volume of research amassed on this topic and recognition of the roots of this violence in the context of individuals, families, and communities as well as political and cultural systems, progress remains to be made toward recognizing and eliminating this violence. It is time to consider arts-based strategies as a catalyst for change. The purpose of this research study was to explore the impact of an art exhibition regarding violence against women and girls. The results of this study highlighted the following themes: personal stories of violence; learning and knowing; the power of art; and calls to action. These results pointed to the untapped potential of art as a strategy for making an impact on the issue of gender-based violence.

Introduction

Gender-based violence is a global public health problem (García-Moreno et al., 2015; World Health Organization, WHO, 2013). Women and girls are the target of violence regardless of where they live, work, and play in the world. Violence against women and girls cuts across all segments of society; it occurs irrespective of culture, socioeconomic status, or level of formal education. However, it is notable that the incidence of violence against women and girls is compounded by other forms of inequality including race, class, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability, HIV status, migrations status, sexual orientation and gender identity (García-Moreno et al., 2015; Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2015). Gender-based violence has been a topic in the research literature across practice disciplines such as psychology, nursing, social work, and legal/justice studies for several decades. Despite the substantial body of knowledge related to gender-based violence, significant progress remains to be made in the area of decreasing the impact of violence against women and girls both individually and collectively (Ellsberg et al., 2015; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015; Michau et al., 2015). It is compelling to consider the potential influence and contribution arts-based strategies might have regarding telling stories of the experience of gender-based violence.

Background and context

Art Works for Change is a not-for-profit organization that began nearly a decade ago with a vision of “creating contemporary art exhibitions around the world to address critical social and environmental

issues” (*Art Works for Change*, 2017, para. 1). *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art* was one such exhibition. It was a global art exhibition that toured museums in Norway, USA, Mexico, Canada, Spain, and South Africa from 2009 to 2014. It is possible to take a tour of this exhibition online as images from *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art* are housed in the *Art Works for Change* website. Thirty-two artists from 26 countries contributed artworks in the form of photographs, videos, paintings, sculptures, digital prints, and audio-visual media. The artists came from Yugoslavia, Sweden, USA, South Africa, Norway, France, Cuba, Pakistan, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Palestine, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, Senegal, Egypt, China, Kazakhstan, Poland, Kenya, Israel, UK, Peru, Mexico, and Iran.

The goals of this exhibition were to promote awareness regarding the roots of violence; present women's stories to foster empathy; provoke discussion about the embeddedness of violence against women and girls; and inspire female empowerment (Rosenberg, n.d.). Underpinning these goals was the hope that the stories of women and violence would help those who attended the exhibition to feel and understand the magnitude of the problem of violence against women and girls around the world. The dominant discourse regarding this violence has often focused on the choices and behaviors of women and girls (e.g., “What was she wearing? Why was she walking alone in the dark?”) rather than on that of those who perpetrate acts of violence. The objective of *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art* was to help create a new conversation on all the issues related to this topic in an effort to promote social change (*Art Works for Change*, 2010).

Randy Jayne Rosenberg, the *Art Works for Change* Chief Curator, was the sole curator for *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art*.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: lync@athabascau.ca (L. Corcoran).

Ms. Rosenberg researched the topic of violence against women and organized the exhibition thematically. The artworks in *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art* were categorized into five main areas: violence and the family; violence and politics; violence and the community; violence and the individual; violence and culture. Violence and the family focused on women and intimate partner violence, the violence that can occur between a woman and her partner in their home, in the supposed safety of the family. The supportive role of women in war and conflict (e.g., nurse, cook, or caregiver) was highlighted in the violence and politics category. The art in this section also alluded to use of sexual violence as a weapon in war as well as the diminished status of women that keeps them from playing a role in cultivation of peace. Women and the community showcased artworks dedicated to the strength of collectives of women and girls. In groups of peers, as true equals, the community helps give rise to the voices of women and girls. The female experience was the main message being presented in the violence and the individual section of *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art*. Women and girls face enormous cultural expectations and burdens based solely on gender. Violence and culture addressed difficult but necessary exploration of issues such as female genital mutilation, dowry murder, bride burning, honor killings, and child marriage. From digital prints to oil paintings to India ink on fabric to video installations to sculptures made on cloth and beads to pencil on paper, the artworks tackled violence against women and girls in family, political, community, individual and cultural contexts.

It is important to acknowledge that the culture of museums and art galleries reveals a long standing gender gap that is difficult to ignore (Gan, Giraud, Phillips, Anagnos, & Wade, n.d.; Heitman, 2017). There is widespread gender disparity in the arts. For example, although women in the USA comprise 51% of visual artists, women remain under-represented in galleries with just 3–5% of artworks in permanent collections in major museums created by female artists (National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2017). The majority of the artists as well as the curator of the *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art* exhibition are female. This represents alignment with the topic for this exhibition and an acknowledgement of this gender disparity.

Potential artists, both renowned and emerging, were selected through invitation only, rather than in an open call. Some artworks were newly created specifically for the exhibition, other artworks were existing. A diversity of mediums (e.g., painting, photography, sculpture, video installation) was sought. There was a deliberate focus on poetic, non-literal artworks so as to facilitate interpretation. A mindful and considered approach was taken to avoid sensational and tabloid graphic images that could recreate the violence that is ultimately trying to be eliminated.

Art Works for Change sought geographically diverse artists to reflect the global manifestation of the issue of violence against women and girls. The artists contributing to *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art* are visionaries and storytellers. The stories being told are meant to reflect experiences, offer fresh insights in the service of translating and transforming one's worldview. A few examples of the artworks are as follows. A series of 25 black and white photographs in "Hidden in the Radiant Green, a Man Waits. In Hate-Blinded Hands, Darkness Waits" detail the impact of an American artist's violent sexual assault. A set of three posters from Amnesty International in Sweden initially appear to be a pink rose, a white rose, and a red rose. A closer look reveals suturing in the rose petals in a campaign to raise awareness regarding female genital mutilation. Yoko Ono's "Cut Piece" is a powerful video of her performances on stage in 1965 and 2003, where she sits on a chair while people come forward and cut off her clothing, piece by piece. A Korean artist used ink washes of female images on white sheer silk, hanging in silhouettes from the ceiling in a piece titled "Being 1–15". This artwork represented images of women going about their activities of daily living, anonymously and insignificantly.

Theoretical framework

The vision of *Art Works for Change* involves the creation of global art exhibitions to address critical social and environmental issues (*Art Works for Change*, 2017, para. 1). In line with this vision, it follows that this research study was situated in a critical theoretical framework. While there is contention regarding what critical theory is and what it is not, in this research study, a critical theoretical stance involved not only describing what was being examined but responding with some provocation as a result of these descriptions and findings (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2012). Critical theory involves examination of social and political contexts as well as scrutiny as to how power is at play (Steinberg, 2012). Critical theory involves intense scrutiny of issues of power and gender related to injustices. Violence against women and girls is a global injustice, intense scrutiny is warranted, and this study represents one small step in the process.

Positionality of the researchers

It is important and necessary in a study with a critical theoretical framework to address the positionality and identities of the researchers. The researchers in this study identify as White, female, registered nurses, with backgrounds in clinical practice, currently working as academics at a university. The researchers' interest in violence against women and girls arises from their nursing practice in the areas of women's health and mental health. The first author worked as a counselor in a women's shelter and has been involved with in-service education across disciplines (e.g., nursing, social work, education) in the area of intimate partner violence for over two decades. While working as part of a mental health crisis team, the second author worked with families who were experiencing violence. Both researchers are committed in their clinical and teaching practices as well as their programs of research to gender equity social justice issues.

In this study, positionality is significantly related to the data analysis process, as this process served as a gateway to the research results and a discussion of these findings. The positionality of researchers can be screened through identity in categories such as culture, gender, race, and class although these categories are not always discrete (Cousin, 2010). Reflexivity enables researchers to recognize and work with their positionality relative to the data being analyzed. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be mindful of the changing social, cultural, political, economic and linguistic contexts (Patton, 2015). During data analysis, the researchers remained mindful of reflexive practice. The strategies they employed included regularly checking in with one another, discussing and questioning the tentative results and how they might be represented in language during the coding and abstraction phases of qualitative content analysis. While the iterative nature of the research design of qualitative content analysis demanded this of the researchers, they remained alert and open to the influence of their identities as well as the shifting social, cultural, political, economic and linguistic contexts in which they were living and working.

Literature review

Violence against women is often referred to in the context of intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence includes all forms of abuse, actual or threatened, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner (Ford-Gilboe, Varcoe, Wuest, & Merritt-Gray, 2011; Johnson & Dawson, 2011; Kelly, Gonzalez-Guardia, & Taylor, 2011; WHO, 2013, 2014). However, intimate partner violence is one sub-topic of a much larger topic area of violence against women and girls. While violence against women and girls includes intimate partner violence, globally, the United Nations (UN, 2012) and the WHO (2013) have advocated for an end to the practices of female genital mutilation, forced marriage, bride burning, dowry murder, and rape of women as a military tactic in countries

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6852540>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6852540>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)