YOU, ME, AND THE SPACES BETWEEN: REFLEXIVITY AND RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Arts-Based Approaches in Health Research

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Get Messy! Make a canvas:
   Exploring reflexivity

Dahne Harding
DEFINING ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

“Art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” 
~Shaun Mc Niff, 1998

“One of the most valuable features of art-based research might be its potential for offering very different ways of approaching the most serious problems that we face in the world today” ~Mc Niff, 2007
“Arts-Based Research is an emerging set of methods that are extremely diverse, but united by their ambitions to blur the lines between “science” and “art.” These methods tap into the artistic process as a primary mode of inquiry, creating various forms of art as a way to collect data, conduct analysis, and/or represent social science research — Patricia Leavy, 2009

“Arts help us improve the way we interact with others by learning, how to let go of negative attitudes and excessive needs for control, learning how to foster more open and original ways of perceiving situations and problems, gaining new insights and sensitivities toward others, learning how the slipstream of group expression can carry us to places where we cannot go alone…” — Shaun McNiff, 2003
WHY ART?

“Art...refers to a product that is a result of a heart/mind interaction by women who have not been academically trained in the fine arts...is representative of self expression and social commentary and may or may not be aesthetically pleasing”

~Dahne Harding, 2009
Feminist:
- Act as agent for change
- Research with/by women

Anti-Racist:
- Role of racism, marginalization, and stigma

Intersectionality Theory:
- Recognizes intersections of oppression

Social determinants of health:
- Life circumstances (e.g., poverty/social exclusion/education level)

Art- & Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Approaches
SOME ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS...

- What is your theoretical framework and the assumptions that it inscribes in your work?
- Do you understand the context, vulnerabilities and needs of the population of INDIVIDUALS that you will be interacting with? Do you have the capacity to support this?
- Are you aware of your own limitations? – do you understand the potential of and have competency with the medium you have chosen?
- Are you able to support the learning/insights/triggering that may/may not occur for you and for your participants in the process?
- Do you understand your relationship to your topic? Do you have support/clinical supervision if necessary so that your emotional process does not negatively impact the process and safety of others?
- Who owns the data? What happens to the product?
- How will the material/learning/insights be disseminated?

“Reflexivity, or locating oneself in research, is a practice embedded in an understanding that objectivity and neutrality are not possible in research since it is always designed, conducted, and analyzed through the perspectives and biases of individuals”

~Absolon & Willet, 2005
ARTS-BASED EXAMPLES
HER/STORIES: USING ARTS- AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE INTIMATE HEALTH NEEDS OF AT-RISK WOMEN IN NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA
“My mom passed away when I was 10 and we were just shipped up north, abusive foster homes. I ran away and got pregnant at 14”

“I’ve learned the hard way, on the streets there is nobody to trust”

“because I was molested when I was younger, my discomfort has got a lot to do with somebody touching me”

“…the street is where the money is at but...[pointing to canvas] this is me, realizing how much I was hurting myself. I survived through the pain. Many emotions like waves....”
Gendered-based feelings

“So many women I know, don’t go for Pap smears because of the lack of female doctors. For my sister it has been 6 years since she’s gone for a pap…women are lagging for so many reasons and some of them are just not in their hands really”

“there’s a problem right now with me and I need to wait because there’s not a female doctor”

“…If it had been a female I would have been much more comfortable. We need more female doctors to feel comfortable.”
“There are so many junkies in this town, it’s almost like a lot of these doctors now are labeling people so no one wants to give anyone a hand right? I’m trying to heal myself and get places, but I can’t if my physician is not standing behind me”

“He (the doctor) wasn’t really listening to me…he was just figuring he knew”

“I’ve been clean and I’ve been trying to do what society wants me to do and every time try, I get shot down…I just…I just end up using again, because it’s like they want me to fail”
“Having a child so young is hard. To deal with emotions of your own at 15 years old, the crazy ups and downs, as well as a 1 year old crying and all his emotions is constant stress!”

“Transportation is one of the biggest issues for me” (to access services)

“The buses don’t run often enough, early or late enough, or have enough routes”

“I haven’t had a good break for a long time,_____, my husband took off on me, this is the fourth time he did this to me…that’s why my kids were taken away overnight…this is what stress is to me”
“Pretty much every woman that I spoke to, like there are a lot of women in my family that I spoke to about HPV and all that, knew nothing about it”.

“Most women didn't even know the purpose of a pap smear. Most women only get checked because they are told by doctors. The importance of the pap smear is not even discussed”.

“I want to learn more about HPV and women's health because it isn't something I have talked about with anybody”.

“She had no idea what HPV was and didn't think it was contagious”.

“Most women didn't even know the purpose of a pap smear. Most women only get checked because they are told by doctors. The importance of the pap smear is not even discussed”. 

Lack of Awareness
The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over. But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves through another’s life story, re-visioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing the place for the first time.

—Jessica Hoffman Davis
“THE WAY IT IS AND WHY”
“WHY I DO WHAT I DO”
“MY MOTHER USED TO CALL ME DEVIL”
“THE STORY OF MY LIFE”
“GOOD MOTHER THAT I LET DOWN”
“CALLING ‘PRINCESS’ DOWN”
“SOFTER ART”

- T’s enthusiasm for soft art has inspired a tribute to Judy Chicago’s “woman house”.
STILETTOS TO MOCCASINS

DR. COLLEEN DELL, UNIVERSITY OF SASK. AND CANADIAN CENTRE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE
MAKE ART/STOP AIDS
DR. TOM KEEGAN UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
“The central purposes of arts-informed research are to enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible” ~Cole & Knowles, 2008

**Dissemination in the spirit of social justice and commitment to change** -

(Re – presentation) of a set of meanings through community conversations, academic publishing, exhibitions in a variety of formats/forums such as gallery spaces, cyber spaces/processes – again – who owns the material, and how it gets shared should be an ongoing part of the conversation with the participants as dictated by their needs as much as by the needs of the researcher/granting agencies ~Leavy, 2009
CANTAS WORK — RESEARCH PRIORITIES

- Consider your research priorities, your motivation, and your location in your research…
  - What is your story?
- Begin your canvas
- When the bell sounds, trade with the person on your right.
- When the bell sounds again, trade back your canvas
- Repeat
- 15 minutes to talk about your work
REFERENCES


