SEEING HOW IT WORKS

Transnational dialogue on the use of the visual and digital media in girl-led ‘from the ground up’ policy making to addressing sexual violence

Sexual Violence Research Initiative Conference
September 14-17, 2015
Stellenbosch, South Africa
Overarching Question:

“What would it really mean to study the world [of sexual violence] from the standpoint of [indigenous adolescent girls and young women] both as knowers and as actors?”

(Ann Oakley, 1994)

Networks for change and well-being:
Girl-led ‘from the ground up’ policy making to address sexual violence in Canada and South Africa

Duration: 6 year study (SSHRC-IDRC funded)
Led by: McGill University and University of KwaZulu Natal
Viewing Questions

- What are the strengths of this kind of work, particularly in the context of addressing sexual violence?

- What are some of the shortcomings or challenges of this kind of work?

- What questions do you have after looking at this exhibition?

- How do you think this work could take place locally? Internationally? In which contexts?
Seeing how it works ... in South Africa
Setting up the exhibition
Designing and Creating a Policy Poster

1. List the issues for which you already have guidelines.
2. Discuss these issues and list the benefits and problems.
3. Make a draft of a policy poster, possibly having a text in text format.

What is your primary audience?
What do you want them to remember? Are the audience's concerns about this issue?

Guidelines on creating a policy poster.

The text is designed to be readable and to the point.

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Invitation

Fourteen girls leading change meeting against backdrop of exhibition

Women in education faculty
Viewing (girls) individually followed by an open ended question “What comes to mind after having viewed the exhibition?”
Viewing (academics) individually, followed by responding to 4 questions (verbally):

1. What do you see as the strengths of this kind of work, particularly in the context of addressing sexual violence?
2. What are some of the shortcomings or challenges of this kind of work?
3. What questions do you have after looking at this exhibition?
4. How do you think this work could take place locally, internationally? In which contexts?
Themes from audiences

Girls as audience
- The visual representation enabled them to see the ‘bigger picture’ of the research process
- As the knowledge producers and activists they felt they were contributing to change
- It was a sustained process rather than usual ‘in and out’ research
- They can do it too in their rural school communities.
- They felt like celebrities!
  - The process made them grow.

Colleagues as audience
Power of the visual to enable ‘seeing’ that which is usually silenced
Change - on campus: research outcomes, even though small, demonstrate change
  - personal: marginalised ‘girls’ engaging with high ranking university policy makers is empowering
Can replicate research process in class, in projects (xenophobia), at other universities
Sustainability: What comes after the exhibition?
Seeing How It Works…

...in Canada

Claudia Mitchell
Ann Smith
SEEING HOW IT WORKS

WHEN: Wednesday, August 12
3:30-5:00PM

WHERE: Penderosa F, Room 103

Participatory Visual Research and Transformation in Addressing Sexual Violence
Procedure and Participants

One 90 minute session:
1. Short presentation
2. Viewing the exhibition
3. Plenary discussion
4. Analyzing themes from field notes

Participants:
45 graduate students and professors (including a Head of Department, 2 Associate Deans, and 1 former Dean)
THEMES AND ISSUES

Technical, Content, Researcher Reflexivity
Technical

- How to work with the space you have?

- How to best mount an exhibition for a large number of people that is meant to be linear?
  - i.e. How to ensure that people look at the work in a linear way?

- What does it mean to look at an exhibition in a workshop setting?
Content

- How do we think about the role of men in this work?
  - We can see that the policy-makers in the pictures are primarily men
  - What does that mean for social change?

- How are girls and women implicated in this work? Do women necessarily support other women?

- We have a hard time imaging people being so open about talking about sexuality and violence in public settings
Content

- How long did the whole process take?
- What are the implications for other projects like this?
- When we think of challenges, are they challenges related to engaging girls and young women or are they challenges in terms of publishing visual data? Or both?
Researcher Reflexivity

- What if people won’t look at the pictures?
- Did we give enough context for the fieldwork in our exhibition?
- Social science research could benefit from some training in ‘seeing’, ‘looking’ and showing
Seeing how it works.....

.....in Sweden

Sara Nyhlén
Katja Gillander Gådin
Katarina Giritli Nygren
PROCEDURE AND PARTICIPANTS

Two one hour sessions with 13 and seven participants respectively

One individual session with one of the deans

1. Short presentation 2. Watching the exhibition 3. Discussion

Analyzing themes from field notes

The head principal
Deans
Head of the department
University teachers
Researchers
Student health counsellors
Equality ombuds
PhD students
Themes (strengths and challenges with the method)

Emotions

Power asymmetry

The researchers – roles and responsibilities

Cultural assumptions

The local versus the global

Democracy and bureaucracy
Emotions

**STRENGTHS**

- Creates engagement and closeness
- Can make difficult problems visible
- Placing the problem outside yourself
- More real when it is visual
- People dare to tell
- General increased awareness ➔ Increased reporting

**CHALLENGES**

- Negative reactions, difficult memories
- Needing therapeutic treatment or social counselor

"If policy makers get it in texts, in pictures, in movies then it creates feelings, and darn if that do not lead to change.."
Power (a)symmetries/relations

**STRENGTHS**

- New and more diverse voices
- Enabling a dialogue with policymakers
- Identifies power orders

**CHALLENGES**

- Power asymmetries within the group of participants
- Decision makers part of the problem ➔ resistance or shifting responsibility
- Young girls (low formal power) meeting (older) men with formal power
- A risk for retaliations
The researchers — roles and responsibilities

What is the role of the researchers? Can e.g. university girls adopt the method and conduct it by themselves?

STRENGTHS

Enabling

CHALLENGES

The researchers can not control the situation nor take responsibility for the result and the process of the project

How to avoid victim blaming?
Cultural assumptions

**STRENGTHS**

Social media literacy among young people

**CHALLENGES**

The problems different in South Africa and Sweden, although the method is valid
The local vs the global

**STRENGTHS**

- Quick and easy solutions here and now
- Capturing complexities that can lead to structural changes

**CHALLENGES**

- Focusing the easy problem instead of the real ones
Democracy and bureaucracy

**STRENGTHS**

- Can avoid a hostage situation
- More diverse voices/stories
- Fits in the Swedish democratic model
- Action briefs facilitates the process

**CHALLENGES**

- Finding and identifying the most significant policy makers (right level?)
- Swedish bureaucracy as a way to avoid actions
Researcher reflections/conclusions

The visual participatory method in the South African university context was transferable to a Swedish university context.

The "What about the boys" discourse was present.

Key policy makers supports a future project at Mid Sweden University.