



EDITORIAL

LIVING WITH PANDEMIC TRAUMA: SEEKING POTENTIALS OF WITNESSING, ARTISTIC RESPONSES, COMICS, UNICORNS, AND QUEER FASHION

KAREN KEIFER-BOYD

This year, 2020, is a 15-year milestone for the *Visual Culture & Gender* journal. Volume 15 is published in a year like no other year any of us have experienced, no matter your age or location. The tri-fold pandemic of the coronavirus, racial injustice, and economic insecurities impacts everyone, world-wide. With 6,717,388 cases of coronavirus and 198,642 deaths as of September 15, 2020 in the United States and 29,270,879 cases and 924,774 deaths worldwide, many have experienced the virus, and lost loved ones.¹ Together, masked up, we can protect each other and contain the spread of the airborne virus (Figures 1 and 2).

¹ Young people are helping us understand the impact of the Coronavirus such as the data visualization work of high school student Avi Schiffmann. He has been webscraping data since age 7. His Coronavirus tracking website at <https://ncov2019.live/> has been used by 40+ million globally.



Figure 1. Juju, my son's cat, sets an example of wearing a mask and sheltering-in-place. Photo courtesy of Ovid Pacific Boyd

Figure 2. I am thankful to Zena Tredinnick-Kirby in New Jersey, who sent me a Judy Chicago designed and signed mask, and Yu Xi in China, who sent a batch of kn95 masks early in 2020 to share with family and others when unable to obtain masks and other personal protective equipment in the United States. Their caring acts, and the wearing of a mask to protect oneself and others, are socially responsible actions. Selfie by Karen Keifer-Boyd, July 2020.

Broadband Internet access should be part of the infrastructure (like roads) in the U.S. This would have helped many, such as a student in one of my courses, who could not pay for the Internet service and, therefore, could not complete the course during the spring semester in which she had enrolled. Fortunately, she was able to move in with her sister's family in order to continue her education and have shelter. Wi-Fi is more expensive in the United States than elsewhere in the world (Sartori, 2018). Many of those with jobs are stretched in helping others, especially family, whether opening up one's home for accommodations or providing financial aid. Green energy economies could create many new jobs, and federal funding could provide education to obtain living wage employment.

One of my sons lives in Portland, Oregon, a few blocks from where the federal agents attacked civic-minded people who peacefully protested against state-sanctioned violence particularly targeting at Black lives (C-SPAN, 2020). Eradicating systemic race-based and gender-based violence, as these intersect with other identity dimensions, requires commitment, constant attention every day, and coalition-building. What does it mean to be committed to anti-racist education and to empower every voice? First and foremost, recognize racism, a belief in the superiority of the white race, in how racism manifests in the absence or subordinate roles of Black people in organizations, institutions, and communities; and who are overly represented in arrests, incarceration, poverty, and school suspensions. Anti-racism education is more than attending or offering one lecture, or even a course, speaker series, or readings. Examine biases evident in everyday actions, language, and assumptions. Listen to the stories of experiences of minoritized people. Engage in dialogue. Actively raise questions, question responses, and teach content that is explicitly anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-gender-oppressive, anti-ableist, and anti-classist. The National Council on Independent Living's Diversity Committee (2016) *We Can't Breathe: The Deaf and Disabled Margin of Police Brutality Toolkit* ([linked here](#)) offers video and text resources, definitions of terms, as well as facilitation strategies, such as guiding a group or class to use "I" statements instead of assumptions and generalizations expressed in "us/we/they/those" terms. "Step up/step back" refers to an expectation that all participate yet do not monopolize speaking time.

Flaming the pandemic fires (Figure 3) is the ongoing impact of the climate

crisis ever increasing in 2020 as evident in the devastating fires throughout the Northwest regions of the United States, Australia, Greece, and around the world; extreme heat waves, droughts, rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity, and mass extinction of species (Everything Connects, 2014; Hawken, 2017; Yale Climate Connections, 2020). We are living in challenging times.



Figure 3. According to the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (2020), climate change has created “warmer, drier conditions, increased drought, and a longer fire season” (para. 2). Climate crisis solutions include cutting carbon emissions, reduce carbon footprints, and strengthen climate resilience with fire-resistance design and materials in the built-environment and preventive and recovery plans in place. Photo by Karen Keifer-Boyd, August 2020.

The five articles and visual essay in *Visual Culture & Gender*, volume 15, traverse potentials of feminist art and art education practices to alleviate not only the traumas of racism, sexism, and ableism but to initiate actions to change the systems that produce the social and personal traumas. Hyunji Kwon, in her article, “The Potential of Participatory Art Pedagogy for Witnessing Sexual Trauma,” advocates addressing trauma in educational settings, not by reliving the trauma but by recognizing the social systems that produce trauma along with the stigmatizations that deepen trauma.

In Lauren Stetz’s article, “Transnational Artistic Responses: #MeToo and the Creative Coalition,” she uses a feminist mapping methodology for relational renderings of eight artists who address gender-based violence within their particular cultural contexts. One of the artists that Stetz interviewed, Mehreen Hashmi from Pakistan, creates from and expresses her affective state rather than narratives of the childhood abuse and rape that sadly she experienced for more than two decades. The selected artists from India, Pakistan, Brazil, Mexico, and England make public the insidious social impact of sexual harassment and assault through street art, augmented reality comic, digital archive, tattoos, mixed-media collages, performance, and self-portraits.

Critical disability comics-making is the focus of G. H. Greer’s article titled, “Comics-making as Possibility-making: Resisting the Inequitable Distribution of Imagined Futures.” The autoethnographic exploration of their own sense of being an outsider to social norms arising from “queerness and disability, as well as from class and geographic locations” is viscerally expressed in the gaps and masking techniques inherent to comics-making (p. 19). Mariia Spirina’s article also addresses queerness and disability in critiques of a fashion line that purports to neutralize difference. Spirina’s article “Pulling at the Threads of Fluidity: Aspirations for Non-Gendered and Race-Neutral Fashion in 69’s Non-Demographic Design” concludes from her critique that by attempts of fashion to neutralize difference the clothing restricts gender expression and marginalizes diversity.

Co-authors Courtney Lee Weida and Carlee Bradbury learned from the girls in a workshop they taught on creating visual stories that unicorns symbolize “freedom, magic, and girlhood identities” (p. 11). Their article, “Magical

Aesthetics of Unicorns in Girlhood Culture,” responds to their research questions:

- What gendered expectations and stereotypes about girlhood and womanhood may be embedded in a unicorn image?
- In what ways does the girls’ fascination with unicorns also defy these stereotypes?
- Since a great deal of unicorn imagery can be traced back to Eurocentric books and visual culture, how can contemporary and counterculture versions of the unicorn revise whiteness and heteronormativity in visions of girlhood? (p. 1)

Some volumes of *Visual Culture and Gender* (VCG) include visual essays, in which the visuals drive the narrative (e.g., Figure 4). In VCG, volume 15 Alexandra Allen contributes a visual essay “Self and Sculptural Transformations: *Coping, Burnout, Restoration, Dis/integrated, Dis/comfort, Containment, and Surviving During the 2020 Pandemic*” in which she makes tangible, through documentation of stages of creative artmaking, her experiences of sheltering-in-art.



Figure 4. May the sun set peacefully on 2020 with democratic leadership on the horizon in which climate and infectious disease scientists guide policies and practices. Photo by Karen Keifer-Boyd, September 2020.

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About the Author

Karen Keifer-Boyd, Ph.D., Professor of Art Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Pennsylvania State University, co-authored several books: *Including Difference* (NAEA, 2013); *InCITE, InSIGHT, InSITE* (NAEA, 2008); *Engaging Visual Culture* (Davis, 2007); co-edited *Real-World Readings in Art Education: Things Your Professors Never Told You* (Falmer, 2000); and has numerous journal publications. Her research on transdisciplinary creativity, feminist pedagogy, cyberart activism, transcultural dialogue, action research, and eco-social justice art education has been translated and published in Austria, Brazil, China, Columbia, Finland, Oman, and S. Korea. She is a recipient of a National Art Education Foundation grant (2017-2018) for social justice art education and a National Science Foundation grant (2010-2012) regarding gender barriers in technology. She has received Fulbright Awards (2012 Distinguished Chair in Gender Studies at Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Austria; and Finland, 2006) and residencies (Austria, 2009; Uganda, 2010); and several National Art Education Association (NAEA) awards including the 2020 Eisner Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2018 Special Needs Lifetime Achievement Award, NAEA's 2015 Technology Outstanding Research Award, NAEA Women's Caucus 2014 McFee Award, the 2013 Edwin Ziegfeld Award, and is elected as an NAEA Distinguished Fellow (2013). She serves on VSA's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, the Art Education Research Institute Steering Committee, the Council for Policy Studies, NAEA's Data Visualization research commission, and served on NAEA's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Taskforce (2018-19), and as NAEA Women's Caucus President (2012-2014). Her lifetime work is based on her deep belief that visual art is integral to forming subjectivity, community, agency, and enacting social change.

Contact Karen Keifer-Boyd at kk-b@psu.edu