



THE POTENTIAL OF PARTICIPATORY ART PEDAGOGY FOR WITNESSING SEXUAL TRAUMA

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Abstract

Trauma, as an area of inquiry in educational contexts, may re-traumatize students by triggering their reliving of traumatic events and traumatize listeners who may experience painful feelings in hearing about others' trauma. On the other hand, not addressing trauma in educational settings may contribute to the perpetuation of the shame and stigma associated with trauma. In consideration of the sensitive and difficult experience of trauma, as well as the importance to not internalize shame from trauma, I propose employing feminist artist Judy Chicago's participatory art pedagogy, supported by increased subjectivity and empathetic relationships. In this essay, I discuss Chicago's teaching methodology enacted in higher education settings in relation to witnessing sexual trauma. Witnessing (i.e., as eyewitness, witness to other's trauma, and co-witness to the process of witnessing) is the process through which one can *feel for* another and *understand* traumas from different perspectives. In order to explore the educational potentials of witnessing sexual trauma, I analyze two teaching events that incorporated participatory art pedagogy, one by Chicago and another by me. Specifically, I discuss Katie Grone's creation of an art installation, titled *Rape Garage*, in Chicago's teaching project *At Home*, and my own teaching of the art, *Rape Garage*, in a university Women's Studies course.

Keywords: Witnessing, trauma, art, subjectivity, transference

The Role of Education in Healing Trauma

There are an increasing number of studies that examine the role of education in healing trauma.¹ Studies of trauma in a K-12 education context generally emphasize recognizing the trauma to which students are exposed and the creation of a resilient, mindful learning environment (Craig, 2016; Jennings, 2019). Similarly, in the field of art education, a recent study on children's psychological trauma, conducted by art educators and art therapists (Hunter, Heise, & Johns, 2018), promoted ways for art educators to recognize, understand, and work with at-risk children and youth. Other art education studies related to trauma include analyses of artworks that present traumatic events, including the Spanish Civil War, the Holocaust, and 9/11 (Alter-Müri, 2004), as well as the use of curricular examples to cope with feelings regarding 9/11 (Orr, 2002).

Based on the importance to improve the resilience of trauma subjects, Cohen-Evron's (2005) study is unique in that her preservice art teachers implemented their lessons on trauma that was caused by the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. In their examination, they addressed implications for both

¹ The September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001 (9/11), school shootings, hate crimes, police brutality (Black Lives Matter), the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as violence, poverty, abandonment, illness, and death are only a few examples of collective and personal traumas that have occurred in the past 20 years. In addition to physical pain, violent experiences cause psychological and emotional shock for survivors. According to Herman (2015), the consequential symptoms of violence-induced trauma include but are not limited to: Hyperarousal (a physiological reaction to perceived threats), intrusion (i.e., the reliving of events, intrusive memories, etc.), and constriction (i.e., a state of surrender and powerlessness). Psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and sociologists identify this "specific set of behaviors and sequelae" as *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD) (Brodzki, 2004, p. 124). The most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5), published in 2013, introduced PTSD as a "psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault" (American Psychiatric Association, 2017, para. 1). Therefore, the term "trauma" is regularly applied to the "victim of natural disaster, the combat victim, the Holocaust survivor, and the victim of sexual abuse alike" (Leys, 2000, p. 125).

Palestinian and Israeli middle school students who were living in Israel. Whereas the majority of research regarding trauma within curriculum in education and art education has emphasized trusting relationships and accommodations for traumatized students (with therapeutic art in art education), Cohen-Evron (2005) brought trauma to the center of teaching by connecting it to the *us* and *them* perspective through critical pedagogy.² Similarly, educators in many art and humanities fields (i.e., visual art, English, Women’s Studies, history, etc.) have embraced subjects of trauma, vulnerability, and power in their post-secondary classrooms (Carello & Butler, 2014). However, social work scholars Carello and Butler (2014) criticized that such an attempt is pedagogically deleterious because introducing traumatic events in the classroom can cause re-traumatization in reliving earlier traumatic events, as well as secondary traumatization from hearing about another’s trauma.

While some educators consider the introduction of trauma in education potentially harmful to students (Carello & Butler, 2014), such concerns intensify when sexual trauma is a subject in higher education classes (Berman, 2001). Because sexual trauma is highly personal, secretive, and stigmatized, sexual trauma has been rarely studied as a curricular focus in art education.³ Yet, education philosopher Zembylas (2008) argued that students have encountered [sexual] trauma through “media, oral, or written accounts of a catastrophe” (p. 4). Additionally, feminist theorist Rosemary Jolly (2011) claimed that not discussing trauma in the classroom, including sexual trauma, despite it being a widespread occurrence both historically and contemporarily and appearing throughout media

² Critical pedagogy is a theory and practice of teaching that aims to expose, critique, and challenge unequal power relations, hegemonic values, and “taken-for-granted conceptions” (Zembylas, 2015, p. 34).

³ Sexual trauma is a psychiatric disorder (i.e., including hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction) following a forced sexual act, such as forced penetration, sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, and non-contact unwanted sexual experiences (Petra & Hedge, 2002). Despite the prevalence of the issue — nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 14 men have experienced attempted or completed rape, or forced penetration; 44% of all women and 25% of all men experienced some form of sexual violence (Smith et al., 2018), the focus on “violated sexuality” and resultant stigma and shame are largely attributed to the secrecy surrounding sexual trauma. However, as argued by Lorde (2007), “sexual violence is not [about] an aggressive sexuality, but sexualized aggression” (p. 120). By focusing on sexual violence as the form of aggression that is exerted by a person with more power relative to another, educators can introduce the idea of sexual violence as the manifestation of power control in educational contexts.

and storytelling, can contribute to the perpetuation of the shame and stigma associated with sexual trauma. Similar to Cohen-Evron’s (2005) question regarding whether to play it safe or face difficult knowledge, is it possible to include sexual trauma as a curricular subject in art education? Further, how can sexual trauma be included in art education without further traumatizing students? In response to these questions, the concept of “witnessing” may provide a context for how to include sexual trauma as a subject in art education.

Witnessing and Participatory Art Pedagogy

Psychiatrist Dori Laub (1995) articulated three distinct levels of witnessing: “The level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of other, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (p. 61). The first level of witnessing entailed Laub being an eyewitness, as he recalled his childhood experience of the Holocaust; whereas, the second level of witnessing denotes that witnessing can occur from the account given by others and by distancing oneself mainly as a “companion” to a trauma subject (Laub, 1995, p. 62). The third level of witnessing emphasizes that witnessing can be collaborative, as both the narrator and listener are trying to reach the truth of trauma together (Laub, 1995).

Although Laub’s levels of witnessing apply to the Holocaust survivor-narrator-listener interactions, his distinction provides a better understanding of how witnessing can occur through hearing and viewing various forms of testimony. Also, the second and third levels of witnessing grant an active role to listeners and viewers allowing them to contribute to the process of witnessing. In order for eye-witnessing (instead of re-traumatization) and witnessing others’ trauma (instead of secondary traumatization) to occur, feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver (2001) articulated how subjectivity is an underlying structure and process for witnessing. According to Oliver (2001), subjectivity is a “sense of agency and responsibility to continually open and reopen the possibility of response [to oneself and others]” (p. 19). In cases where subjectivity is different from the subject position, meaning how a subject is positioned in human history and human relations (i.e., sexual abuse victims, trauma subjects), Oliver (2001) suggests that “the process of acknowledging subjectivity is not our own but the result of dialogic and transference relations with others” (p. 81). Transference relations are

intimate and trusting, allowing the discourse and practice of others' traumas to be experienced in oneself, or vice versa. Transferential relations can be formed during counseling or researching trauma subjects (LaCapra, 2015). Thus, for witnessing to occur in a classroom, pedagogy should help students form subjectivity (i.e., openness to oneself and others) and transferential relations (i.e. intimate trust).

With shared emphasis on subjectivity and transferential relations, I propose that feminist artist Judy Chicago's theory and practice of participatory art pedagogy is similar to Oliver's (2001) structure and process of witnessing. According to art education scholar Karen Keifer-Boyd (2007), who studied Chicago's participatory art pedagogy informed by feminist principles, Chicago's methodology emphasizes: (a) empowerment, (b) the creation of knowledge and art related to the self, and (c) the pursuit of social inquiry. Through feminist pedagogy, educators and learners analyze and challenge the status quo of social values, power relations, and their consequential gender, class, and racial considerations (Keifer-Boyd, 2003, 2007). However, Chicago's participatory art pedagogy is distinct in that:

1. It promotes an increase in connections between formerly unknown, disconnected emotions, ideas, and images to situate an issue in a larger context.
2. It constructs a class-wide collaboration for feminist art creation, both of which foster subjectivity and transferential relations to respond to oneself and others.

Keifer-Boyd (2007) analyzed Chicago's participatory art pedagogy according to three stages: (a) preparation, which includes self-presentations, preliminary readings, and research; (b) processes such as site preparation and content search; and (c) artmaking that is deeply researched as theoretical, empirical, and aesthetic work. With equal power granted to individuals in an empathetic class environment, self-presentation in a circle-based format (where instructors and students sit in a circle to equally share power and the opportunity to talk) enabled students to divulge "ever-more-intimate information" (Chicago, 2014, p. 159). Based on students' relatable experiences or interests, shared at the beginning of the class, Chicago formed several groups according to various

themes, which became the subject matter for their artworks. Throughout the course, Chicago required group research, class discussions, and visual journaling as means to connect formerly disconnected emotions, ideas, and images to reflect on the larger contexts of personal experiences. Some students perceived Judy Chicago's facilitation as "demanding" for such connections to be formed and a certain level of professionalism in art to be achieved (K. Grone, personal communication, September 10, 2016).

Despite the potential of Chicago's participatory art pedagogy for teachers and students to become witnesses (i.e., eyewitness, witness to other's trauma, and co-witness to the process of witnessing), there is an ever-present tension between witnessing and traumatization. Additionally, because subjects exposed to trauma are "possessed by an image or [traumatic] event" (Caruth, 1995, p. 5), Chicago's pedagogy may not be applicable to all types of traumas and trauma subjects. While not suggesting a general way of witnessing, in what follows, I analyze two examples of participatory art pedagogy that fostered witnessing in education with affirmative results: Katie Grone's collaborative art making of *Rape Garage* and my teaching of her work, *Rape Garage*.

Participatory Art Pedagogy and the Creation of *Rape Garage*

In 2001, Judy Chicago and photographer Donald Woodman taught an upper-level studio art course, *At Home: A Kentucky Project* (hereafter, *At Home*), at Western Kentucky University. Her course was cross-listed with Women's Studies and had 19 students (18 undergraduates, 1 graduate students), and five nonstudent artists (41% male). Most students were majoring in art. In this class, four students—Katie Grone, Joshua Edwards, Stefanie Bruser, and Lindsay Lee—created the art installation *Rape Garage*.

At Home was a re-visitation of *Womanhouse* (Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's teaching project at the California Institute of the Arts' Feminist Art Program in 1972) and utilized the house as a space to engage with feminist issues (i.e., incest, domestic violence, racism, unhealthy masculinity, etc.). Since Grone's trauma initiated the creation of *Rape Garage*, I analyze her experience of participatory art pedagogy with the two overlapping elements of structure and the process of witnessing: (a) subjectivity, which can be formed by connecting

previously disassociated emotions, ideas, and images within a larger context, and (b) transferential relations, which allow the discourse and practice of others to be experienced in oneself.

Subjectivity in Participatory Art Pedagogy

During the first week of the *At Home* project, students gave self-presentations, and Chicago (2014) recalled that these presentations “became more personal and poignant” over time (p. 159). Having an audience of sympathetic and attentive listeners, students became more comfortable sharing their stories, even painful ones (Chicago, 2014). Grone remembered: “I presented about an individual form of feminism ... but Judy knew that there is something deeper and started asking, ‘Why? Why? What makes you think [like that]?’ I basically threw my paper down, burst out into tears, [and shared] what happened ... I had not even shared it with my roommate, my best friend” (personal communication, September 10, 2016).⁴

Chicago’s approach may be interpreted as coercive, but she did so in a respectful manner by telling Woodman to stop filming. Further, the situation led to an unexpected consequence, as a male student, Joshua Edwards, assembled the whole class and revealed something that was not covered in his original presentation. He continued to share his experience of sexual violence, particularly a female-on-male rape. Grone recalled this moment as: “having Josh talk about it really meant a lot and [was] validating for me ... being in a room with a few other people [with similar experiences] especially [who are] my friends, it was validating and therapeutic” (personal communication, September 10, 2016). As testimony may reinscribe the survivor as a victim (Oliver, 2001), a survivor’s testimony can become a moment of re-traumatization, victimization, and objectification. Yet, in the presence of empathetic companions, Laub (1995) analyzed that “the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive” (p. 63). While the ability to articulate trauma signifies an increase in one’s subjectivity, readily empathetic listeners prompted such a verbalization and, thereby, helped trauma subjects to survive.

Chicago (2014) recollected that hearing about a man as the victim of sexual violence was so unprecedented that she had to resist her inclination to invalidate his experience. However, by practicing strategic empathy, Chicago decided to believe Edwards, and formed a group with Grone, Edwards, and two volunteers (Bruser and Lee) to collaboratively work on an artwork about sexual violence. Zembylas (2013) identified “strategic empathy” as teachers’ willingness to “make [themselves] strategically skeptical, [to] sometimes work against [their] own emotions and to empathize with the troubled knowledge [and experience] students carry with them” (p. 186). In addition to being compassionate and empathic, Chicago worked against her own, and popular, perceptions of male victims of sexual violence and connected formerly disconnected subjects, in this case both male and female subjects of sexual trauma.

Along with the verbalization of trauma as a signifier of subjectivity, persistent searching for content and collaborative artmaking connected disparate emotions, ideas, and images regarding sexual trauma, thereby providing a different understanding of sexual trauma. Despite a lack of research on female-on-male rape, Edwards discovered that “both genders are affected similarly by anxiety, shame, humiliation, anger, and self-blame” (Chicago, 2014, p. 144). Although individuals may not be traumatized equally (Caruth, 1995), knowing what was shared between trauma subjects of different genders was not only empowering in this case, but it also led to a discussion about how power imbalance affected sexual violence. Grone mentioned, “We weren’t blaming guys. It wasn’t male versus female, it was a shared experience that I never thought [of] before” (personal communication, September 10, 2016). This demonstrated how new emotions (man as an ally, not the default perpetrator) and ideas (power imbalance) can be integrated within a sociopolitical context.

Their acknowledgement of what caused sexual violence and sustained sexual trauma was further incorporated into their use of pornographic images, which covered the platform of an empty bed that was located in the center of the garage. Likewise, tools on the left wall, outlined by phalluses, were accompanied by text that read, “Every tool is a weapon if you know how to use it.” In this way, Grone, Edwards, Bruser, and Lee considered that pornography was the context in which rape became permissible (Chicago, 2014) and the means through which

⁴ Interviews were excerpted from the author’s dissertation. The IRB approved the interviews with Katie Grone and Joshua Edwards, both of which agreed to have their names identified.

sexuality was used as a tool for violation. Additionally, Grone, Edwards, Bruser, and Lee recorded interviews with trauma subjects in a women's health clinic and played the recorded interviews in the garage. They also placed broken mirrors on the back wall and included black and white images of the artists' portraits, along with statistics of sexual violence (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Photo of the art installation *Rape Garage*. Edwards, J., Grone, K., Bruser, S., & Lee, L. (2001). *Rape garage* [Installation]. The Special Collections at The Pennsylvania State University. Permission granted by the Through the Flower Archives.

Transferential Relations in Participatory Art Pedagogy

Although transferential relations are particularly necessary for “most value-laden, affectively charged issues,” such as trauma (LaCapra, 2014, p. 141), it is possible that Bruser and Lee, who collaborated with Grone and Edwards on the art installation *Rape Garage*, would involuntarily repeat Grone and Edwards' traumas. However, with an increased subjectivity to respond to oneself and others, LaCapra (2014) argued that transcending trauma is necessary to provide a possible

“thought-provoking way to rethink the trauma” and to thereby work through it (p. 142). Grone (2016) mentioned that this is how “we were collaborators. Not to say that we sat around to have a mini therapy session, but we were able to talk about trauma without talking about what happened” (personal communication, September 10, 2016). Grone's account demonstrated how a new, impactful relationship had formed between the male and female trauma subjects by situating their trauma within a larger framework, which helped them *feel for* each other and *understand* their traumas from different perspectives.

Participatory Art Pedagogy and the Teaching of *Rape Garage*

After interviewing Grone and analyzing the influence of Chicago's participatory art pedagogy on the creation of *Rape Garage*, I implemented similar pedagogical approaches to teach *Rape Garage* with the goal for students to witness Grone's traumas embodied in art. It is important for students to understand sexual trauma from multiple perspectives without being overwhelmed by the subject matter.

My use of participatory art pedagogy was not identical to Chicago's because our classes were different. While her course was a university studio art course, my class was an introductory Women's Studies course in which students navigated feminist theories and issues with relevant art. My class was large with 50 to 60 college students (3% male). In this analysis, I examine my own approach to teaching with the *Rape Garage* art installation as content to facilitate the formation of subjectivity and transferential relations.

Subjectivity in Participatory Art Pedagogy

Due to the size of the class, instead of self-presentations, I asked students to choose a topic (i.e., girlhood, media, LGBTQIA+, race, health, sexual violence, sexual trauma, global feminism, etc.) with which they had an interest or relatable experience. I formed groups by topic, and asked students to write a research paper in which they included relevant art and their own experiences, another's experience, or an experience depicted in the media by analyzing the political background of such experiences. Students then shared what they wrote in class (to the extent they wished to share) and led a group discussion on their topics. All students were also required to study the assigned readings for each topic and to

write short reflections.

In addition to students' active roles, I also facilitated discussions about artworks to elicit responses to sexual trauma as a way to focus on related, yet dissociated, emotions and ideas within a wider context. In doing so, student responses indicated their increased sense of their own agency, which is the enactment of their subjectivity in relation to trauma subjects and in *understanding* trauma in a new and different manner. For example, after viewing photographs of *Rape Garage*, students and I discussed the primary emotions evoked by the art, artists, and within themselves, including shame and guilt. Students identified the power imbalance between perpetrators and victims, and between direct experience of trauma and secondary experience of trauma from learning about others' experiences.

Students discussed the feeling of shame as it related to broken mirrors and pornography. A noticeable difference between those who directly experienced trauma and those who learn about particular traumatic events from others is that the former cannot distance themselves from their publicly constituted position as shameful victims; instead, they perceive their bodies as damaged (Jolly, 2010). Similar to broken mirrors, sociocultural norms of purity and female virtue often define victims' bodies as damaged objects. In the preceding week, during which we studied sexual violence, students had willingly discussed the pervasiveness of sexual violence, their own and others' experiences with it (i.e., most of the female students had experienced sexual harassment), and the often-harmful impact pornography has upon cultural and, in particular, on women. Thus, the use of pornographic images in *Rape Garage* seemed to be justifiable as the foundation for sexual violence, just as Grone and Edwards intended. While students *felt for* trauma subjects' shame, they also criticized the cultural context which produces a sense of shame.

Further, in their reflections, several students who did not experience trauma commented, "I feel fortunate not to be a sexual assault survivor, although I feel bad to say this." This shows their mixed emotions of relief (for not being victims) and guilt (for being relieved). While guilt occurred as a form of self-reflection, the students' expressions of guilt also revealed how they implicitly contribute to maintaining us-versus-them hierarchies. A few other students, who

identified with the trauma from their firsthand experiences of sexual violence, wrote: "This topic should be discussed more in education, because no one talks about this;" indicating the necessity to educate people about the complacency and impact of sexual violence to confront stigmas about sexual trauma. As evidenced in their written reflections, the artwork provoked some students to discuss and challenge their accustomed emotions (i.e., shame, guilt) and ideas (i.e., power imbalance, stigma) regarding sexual trauma. When some students understand their own or others' difficult life experiences differently from their habituated emotions and ideas, they became increasingly able to respond to themselves and others. Such enhanced subjectivity and response-ability is similar to Grone and Edwards' experiences during their process of art creation (Oliver, 2001).

Transfential Relations in Participatory Art Pedagogy

My class could not be as intimate as Chicago's, due to its fairly large size. Thus, students' collaboration was limited to leading discussions. Yet, according to the limited information regarding my class (i.e., educator observations, students' reflections, course evaluations), I was seen as a facilitator, similar to the way in which Grone viewed Chicago. For example, one student wrote, "I feel like she was more of a facilitator than a teacher," while the majority of students mentioned that discussions greatly furthered their learning.

When a teacher acts as a facilitator, students' dialogic transfential relations and subjectivity increase, enabling them to be able to discuss disturbing issues and share difficult experiences to the extent to which they are comfortable. In teaching the class, I also emphasized students' ability to opt out of related class activities (i.e., lecture, discussion, reflection) at any time due to distress; it was my aim that they recognize this is a means through which they could demonstrate their agency, rather than as an escape or evasion.⁵

For the final assignment in my class, students created and presented a work of uterus art. Art professors Helen Klebesadel and Alison Gates created the Exquisite Uterus Project (n.d.) based on a line drawing of a uterus on plain cloth for artists to "articulate their outrage at recent increased restrictions on women's full access to good sexual and reproductive healthcare" (para. 1). Instead of

⁵ Only one student chose to opt out for the topic of sexual trauma.

women's health, students chose one topic from the course by reflecting on a theory and experiences (i.e., their own, other's, or experiences depicted in media) that may connect previously unrecognized emotions, ideas, and images.

Despite knowing that their work will be shared via presentation, several female students focused on sexual violence. For some students, their interaction with *Rape Garage* may have resulted in becoming eyewitnesses to their own traumas, or co-witnesses that actively processed the trauma of others. As an example of eyewitnessing, a student added women's underpants on the uterus and a splash of red paint. She mentioned how her work represents her account of sexual violence. As an example of witnessing someone else's trauma, a student drew barbed wire over the uterus and explained how her mother's sexual assault perpetrator went to prison for the crime. Also, another student transformed a uterus into the bruised face of a victim of domestic violence along with comments for victim blaming. The majority of students visualized the pervasiveness of direct and indirect violence against women, including how women's bodies became objects and how they are depicted in media. This self-reflexive and critical practice involving different feelings and understanding about trauma itself is an act of witnessing.

Art theorist Jill Bennett (2005) suggests that some artworks can lead to witnessing (i.e., witnessing one's own trauma or other's) especially art created by individuals who have experienced trauma or were eyewitness to trauma. Creating art for witnessing one's own trauma is similar to how Grone considered that creating *Rape Garage* helped save her life (personal communication, September 10, 2016). However, some artists or students may not need art creation as an intervention for witnessing their own trauma, as Edwards had already worked through his trauma prior to *Rape Garage*. However, Chicago's and my use of participatory art pedagogy functioned as an intervention to challenge established, dominant emotions (shame, humiliation) and power dynamics surrounding sexual trauma (the powerlessness of trauma subjects). Using participatory art pedagogy may enable educators and students to understand trauma differently. Participatory art pedagogy and witnessing, which share subjectivity and transferential relations as their structure and process, may be mutually inclusive and effective for prompting and sustaining each other.

Toward Further Inclusion of Trauma in Art Education

Due to the complexity and unpredictability of trauma, the possibility of traumatization always exists, especially for sexual trauma, which has a more sensitive nature than many other forms of trauma. While I cannot generalize the probability of witnessing trauma in educational settings, I propose that subjectivity—formed by challenging unrecognized emotions and ideas about sexual trauma in a sociopolitical context and supported by transferential relations in a classroom—may promote the potential for witnessing, as witnessing helps perceive and deal with trauma rather than compulsively and destructively repeating trauma.

Since I understand and empathize with the concerns, caution, and skepticism regarding how to “witness” sexual trauma in a classroom, I implement other pedagogical strategies, including advanced warning about sexual trauma on my syllabus, in email announcements, and in the presentation at the beginning of classes. I provide students with the option to share their personal experiences, or to not participate, in related class activities (i.e., lecture, discussion, reflection). I also inform students of the institution's available professional services in case they are distressed from the topic; however, no particular students appeared to need further assistance that prompted me to approach and suggest available services.

Additionally, when viewing *Rape Garage* in the class, I utilized several “distancing devices” that could allow viewers to keep their distance from the issue. I chose a nonrepresentational work of art, which in itself was the result of artists witnessing. I would not have played the recorded narration if it existed (the archival tape was missing). Additionally, I showed a physical miniature of *Rape Garage*, as it was a small-scale recreation of the original work and thus less intimate as students were not immersed in the art installation. Having made *Rape Garage* a distanced object (via nonrepresentational art, no narration, miniature) may have been necessary to preserve the *feeling for* the trauma subject and not to be absorbed by it, allowing one to *analyze* one's own established emotions and ideas regarding the issue of sexual violence. In Laub's (1995) terms, this is the process of “alternating between moving closer and then retreating from” trauma (p. 62). The Holocaust scholars and teachers Hirsch and Kacandes (2004) asserted that such a distancing device is needed to lessen and mediate the sensations that trauma

triggers, while simultaneously sustaining students' engagement with trauma.

Chicago's and my implementation of participatory art pedagogy regarding sexual trauma may not be applicable at the K-12 grade levels, and some communities and individuals in higher education. However, I suggest that participatory art pedagogy can be effective when working with different age groups for other types of difficult topics (i.e., racism, sexism). Such educational approaches allow for connecting one's lived experience to a larger context through formerly dissociated emotions, ideas, and images and by implementing carefully selected artworks and pedagogical approaches. Yet, it is important to highlight that peoples' suffering of various forms of trauma is very similar, regardless of the type of trauma (i.e., war, sexual violence) (Leys, 2000). Through participatory pedagogy, students' empathic and critical witnessing can occur.

I hope that more teachers will create a site for witnessing in art education by increasing students' sense of agency and trusting relations that promote empathy and connectivity. In doing so, trauma can become something that is no longer only individual and harmful. Instead, students can be connected with those who have endured trauma while understanding trauma differently and in a larger sociopolitical context.

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About the Author

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