ART AS A MIRROR FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: AN EXPLORATION OF ART’S REFLECTIVE POWERS TO RAISE AWARENESS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

By

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Abstract
This study addresses ways in which art can transmit meaning and increase awareness of complex social issues. Authentic qualitative research methods such as Arts-Based Educational Research, A/r/tography and Ethnography, were used to explore the role visual art and culture can play in anti-human trafficking efforts. The author uses performative social science (artmaking) as a means to establish connection between personal passion and humanity and demonstrates their contribution to an active transformative process. She argues that engagement with artwork and visual imagery is a powerful way to extrapolate meaning from human suffering by looking inward and carefully examining factors that trigger individual passion, connection, and ultimately the impetus to act for social change.
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Art is the lie that enables us to realize the truth – Pablo Picasso

Art offers a reflection of society, but the image in the mirror is often complex. While some art holds a mirror up to social reality so it can see itself exactly as it is, other times it depicts a view that cannot be seen without such a mirror. Such art presents a picture of the way reality is not (Kelly, 2003). Accordingly, there is a long tradition of artists concerned with social justice; Thomas Hart Benton, Diane Arbus, Pablo Picasso, Francisco Goya, William Blake, and Kara Walker just to name a few. In fact, many artists have looked at the theme of justice in society which is not surprising given that the use and abuse of power is so prominent a part of the human condition. It is not a question of whether art and social justice are connected, but rather, the forms and intensity that connection takes (Cocke, 2013).

Since the beginning of modern times, there existed an innate tropism toward suffering. As observed by Edmund Burke in “A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), “…we have a degree of delight…in the real misfortunes and pains of others” (Burke as reported in Sontag, 2003). Similarly, William Hazlitt, in his essay on Shakespeare’s Iago underscores this point by examining the attraction of villainy (Hazlitt as reported by Sontag, 2003).

Human trafficking represents one of the greatest social issues and human rights abuses of our time. Demand for sex trafficking can be traced to a visual culture that supports objectification of women, “…wherein women’s bodies and sexual capability are seen as commodities” (Myers, 2011, p. 3). My research explores ways in which art can transmit meaning and increase awareness of complex social issues like human trafficking.
Statement of the Problem

According to Sidford (2010):

Culture and the arts are essential means by which all people explain their experience, shape their identity and imagine the future. In their constancy and their variety, culture and the arts allow us to explore our individual humanity, and to see our society whole. People need the arts to make sense of their lives and to know who they are. They increase our compassion for others by providing creative ways for use to understand and deal with differences (p. 8).

However, compassion, as noted by Sontag, is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action or it withers (Sontag, 2003). Social movements often suffer from a level of apathy that mirrors something known as the "bystander effect." Bibb Latane and John Darley (1964) attributed this term to the diffusion of responsibility and social influence (as cited in www.psychologytoday.com/basics/bystander-effect). Variations of the bystander effect have been pervasive throughout history and responsible for some of its greatest atrocities – slavery, human-trafficking, and genocide, to name a few. Wherever people feel safe they will be complacent. How do we use art to un-numb the oversaturation of current day causes to provide real and meaningful connection to incite action?

Significant evidence shows that exposure to art changes a person's physiology and attitude (Samuels, 2013) however details of this transformative process remain somewhat of an enigma. I argue in this study that art can be used as a vehicle for transmission of meaning and greater understanding of personal connection with complex societal issues. My investigative research seeks to provide greater insight into the role of art and visual culture in personal reflection, identity, and connection that can lead to social action. It is my hope that results of this
research will foster a reexamination of modern thought paradigms associated with accepted practices (visual culture) that lead to the objectification and commodification of women. Study results are relevant to the fields of behavioral health, political science, sociology, psychology, public relations and marketing, and art education.

**Purpose of the Study**

In this study, I investigated the linkages between art, visual culture, and identity, and their subsequent role in the transformative journey to action. The goal of this study was to represent the process of identification with human suffering that can result in personal connection and action. This was done through examining the issue of human trafficking:

- Human trafficking is a sensitive and complex issue.
- Human trafficking is impacting millions of people around the world.
- Trafficking occurs within and across the border. It is a local, national, and international issue.
- Trafficking is happening not just because of poverty, but also due to many other social, political, and cultural factors.
- A multi-dimensional and integrated approach is needed to eradicate human trafficking from the face of the earth.
- Many lack understanding of the complexities of this issue thus necessitating a new model of integrated trafficking prevention activities (Gulzar, 2010.)

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided my investigation and were explored using empirical, phenomenological, and creative methods:
1) How can observation of visual arts create a connection with viewers and tap into personal journeys?

2) How can engagement with the arts aid personal connection with emotions and passion that can give voice to individual action?

3) How can exploration of personal connection through the visual arts foster greater understanding and awareness of self, others and society as a whole?

4) How can art give voice to victims to create a powerful connection with viewers?

**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

Data about human trafficking, while horrifying, can’t do justice to the concept of captivity and enslavement. “Visual images – with the capacity to draw us into another human being’s existence – have a vital role to play as powerful storytelling vehicles. Absent this personal connection, people remain detached” (Hamman, 2010, p. 4).

Investigation through using various supporting qualitative research methods can make for a transformative process for researchers, participants, and viewers alike and can be a convincing and impactful contribution to social science and the field of art education (Glass, 2008).

**Assumptions**

Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) \(^1\) methodology can produce outcomes not anticipated by the researcher at the onset of the study. This can be positive in that it can acknowledge, “the value of the less definable and often holistic kinds of knowing that may result through the use of art tools and aesthetic analysis” (Greewood, 2012, p. 1). However, the nature of the data collected and the types of analysis required by this kind of study create potential for bias as well potential risks associated with the level of personal disclosure that might arise. Due

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\(^1\) Arts-Based Educational Research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or *design elements* that infuse the inquiry process and the research “text” (Barone & Eisner, 1997).
to the flexible and less “controlled” nature of the case study method, observer bias is frequently considered to be the main problem in observation (Fidel, 1984). Along these same lines, the background and personal experiences of the observer may also introduce bias. These areas were paid special attention in an attempt to preserve objectivity of data and outcomes.

**Limitations**

The breadth of the subject of human trafficking and its multidisciplinary reach make it difficult to capture in its entirety and that is not the goal of this study. Additionally, this is not a comprehensive analysis of the issue of human trafficking, debate on the definition of human trafficking, or discussion on strategies necessary to employ to eradicate the scourge of human trafficking on a global level. Although art can be used effectively for therapeutic practices with trauma victims, that is not the focus of this study either. Rather, this is a limited study and examination of the role visual arts and culture can play in forming ideas and values to create connection to, and increase the possibility for action against social issues such as human trafficking and other human rights atrocities. The chosen methods of qualitative research for this study are meant to inspire further investigation of these complex topics through invitation to dig deeper into our own life stories and personal journeys.

**Definition of Terms**

*Art.* The word “art” conjures up images that are so diverse and inherently subjective that a mental coralling of the term is elusive at best. For the purposes of defining art in the broad context of human community, we look at the definition suggested by John Dewey and Albert Murray in which both thinkers described art as, “the medium through which the possibilities of life are both discovered and realized – which is another way of saying that art is fundamentally a (perhaps the) means of education (hence, growth) for humankind” (Hill, 2001, p. 1). Taking this
further from a cultural standpoint, art serves as, “an imaginative report of how certain folks get along in the precariousness of the human predicament” (Hill, 2001, p. 7).

*Human Trafficking.* This study focuses on sexual exploitation primarily but the global definition of human trafficking includes both the buying and selling of humans for sexual and labor exploitation through force, fraud or coercion.

*Objectification.* For the purposes of this study, objectification of women is understood through examination of women’s bodies and sexual capability as commodities within the context of sex trafficking (Myers, 2011).

*Commodification.* The term, commodification, is examined in the context of women’s bodies as, “objects of desire and objects to be desired, limiting a woman’s full humanity and laying claim to her body as a form of property” (Nelson, 2013, p. 1).

*Visual Rhetoric.* Visual Rhetoric is marked by the presence of 3 characteristics; the image must be symbolic, involve human intervention, and be presented to an audience for the purpose of communicating with that audience (Smith, 2005). Simply stated, visual rhetoric is a form of communication that uses images to create meaning or construct an argument to move an audience ([www.stanford.edu/~steener/f03/PWR1/whatisvisrhet.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/~steener/f03/PWR1/whatisvisrhet.htm)).

*Performative Social Science.* Performative Social Science is a term that reflects the, “efforts of social science researchers who are exploring the use of tools from the arts in research itself and/or using them to enhance, or move beyond…those engaging in this new ‘performative social science’ are often shifting existing boundaries or transforming them through relational processes” (Yallop, Vallejo & Wright, 2008, p. 1). This term is used to describe the arts-based activities employed within the other chosen methodologies for this study.
Literature Review

From the earliest records of history, there has been evidence that visual art and imagery play a significant role in both recording historical atrocities as well as serving as a catalyst for change through alteration of the conversation or societal debate on human rights issues. This literature review examines the intrinsic interrelationships between art and social justice by taking a close look at specific relational factors as well as the role of visual imagery and creative engagement in the areas of human suffering and social justice.

Art as a Vehicle for Truth Telling

Within the field of aesthetics, the relationship between truth and works of art is of considerable interest. Philosophers such as Danto and Adorno skillfully debate the role of art in communicating universal meaning and truth. According to Adorno, “…art is critical of reality (whether empirical or social) just by being there, just by existing” (As reported in Kelly, 2003, p. 68). Michael Kelly elaborates this in his book, “Iconoclasm in Aesthetics” by pointing out that, “…art’s autonomy is a precondition of its critical stance toward society…by emphatically severing all ties with the empirical world, art in an unconscious way expresses its desire to change the world” (p. 68). The nuanced complexities inherent in this discussion can be better understood through consideration of Leon Trotsky’s reflection that, “art…is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes” (Trotsky, 1991, p. 129).

Role of Visual Rhetoric in Public Discourse and Social Justice Movements

Visual rhetoric has a long history of serving as a powerful voice and catalyst for change. Kansas painter, John Steuart Curry’s famous mural, "Tragic Prelude," completed in the state capitol building in Topeka, depicts Curry’s interpretation of John Brown and the anti-slavery
movement in pre-Civil War Kansas Territory. Rich in symbolism, the painting illustrates a fierce John Brown holding a Bible in one hand and a rifle in the other (See Figure 1).

![“Tragic Prelude,” by John Steuart Curry.](image)

Curry’s mural incited much controversy and conversation when completed in 1940 due to its’ graphic representational nature and ominous foreshadowing. Curry refused to sign the murals and left Topeka in anger due to public backlash. As a result, the murals were not on the walls of the statehouse when he died in 1942. Today, “Tragic Prelude” hangs in the Kansas statehouse and is an important aspect of Kansas history and recognized as the most significant piece John Stewart Curry completed during his artistic career (Kendall, 1986).
National Geographic’s 1985 cover of an Afghan girl served as a symbol of what has come to be known as, “representational politics of pity” (Hesford & Kozol, 2005). (See Figure 2)

![1985 National Geographic cover of an Afghan girl. By Steve McCurry.](image)

*Figure 2. 1985 National Geographic cover of an Afghan girl. By Steve McCurry.*

National Geographic has served as a powerful voice for over one hundred years in the visual representation of the non-Western world for American audiences. This visual rhetoric of rescue relies on the, “narrative dualism of tradition and modernity to champion human rights within the framework of Western liberation” (Hesford & Kozol, 2005, p. 1). Similarly, Susan Sontag suggests that…”pity can entail a moral judgment if, as Aristotle maintains, pity is considered to be the emotion that we owe only to those enduring underserved misfortune” (Sontag, 2003, p. 75).
The powerful role of photographs to illustrate as well as corroborate atrocities, “…lay down routes of reference and serve as totems of causes…” (Sontag, 2003, p. 85). This trumps verbal slogans time and time again. Sontag also suggests that, “making suffering loom larger, by globalizing it, may spur people to feel they ought to ‘care’ more” (Sontag, 2003, p. 79).

Present day advertising often uses images to communicate horror and mobilize action in public awareness and advocacy campaigns. #StopTheNightmare is series of compelling Public Service Announcements that depart from traditional models that focus on the power of voiceover to arouse and call viewers to action. Instead, they rely solely on nightmarish imagery to implicate the horrors of human trafficking and sex slavery. It has been identified as particularly innovative and powerful because of its reliance on imagery to both depict and communicate message (Oster, 2014).

**Visual Culture and Imagery in Feminist Discourse**

Many theorists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon have studied the role of pornography in objectification, specifically the implications on visual culture, on violence against women, domestic violence, sex trafficking, and other feminist issues. Our current culture of objectification has been created and nurtured through visual imagery ranging from historical depictions of women in subversive circumstances through artistic renderings, media and advertising’s sexualization of women and girls, and cultural acceptance and tolerance for pornography. Adam Myers (2011) in his paper, “The Objectification of Women as a Facilitator of Sex Trafficking Demand,” concludes that objectification through repeated viewing of sexualized or pornographic imagery of women leads directly to depersonalization and its accompanying denial of human considerations or concern towards women in the mind of the viewer, whether the viewer is male or female.
Sontag compares and contrasts the role of the camera in objectification by pointing out that “beautifying” tends to bleach out a moral response to what is shown while the process of “uglifying” a subject invites an active response (Sontag, 2003). This is an area that begs additional study and consideration.

In final analysis of the literature reviewed on objectification and commodification of women, it becomes apparent that the process of transformation of women and girls into an acceptably traded commodity both by themselves and by the user or trafficker is important in defining and understanding human trafficking and the role of visual imagery and culture. This is especially pertinent to our present-day obsession with “selfies” and the issue of over-exposure. Does the urge to compulsively express oneself via social media actually contribute to a culture of misplaced attribution and value?

**Psychological Aspects of Observation of Human Suffering**

Susan Sontag (2003) explores the mysteries of vicarious pain and its purpose in her book, “Regarding the Pain of Others.” Sontag discusses the complexities involved through examination of the role shocking photographic visual imagery plays in capturing empathy and compassion of the masses. “…photographs are a means of making ‘real’ (or “more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore” (Sontag, 2003, p. 7). She purports that the shock of images of human suffering cannot fail to unite people of good will through the shared experience of witnessing such atrocities of war and other human rights violations. The resulting outrage often gives rise to opposing responses such as a global call for action or sometimes, “…a bemused awareness…that terrible things happen” (Sontag, 2003, p.13). The role of human memory is explored in Sontag’s book with the power of visual imagery taking
center stage in the process of remembering. “To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture” (Sontag, 2003, p. 89).

**Methodology**

Three forms of qualitative research were engaged for this project: Arts-Based Educational Research, A/r/tography and Ethnography. Art processes were used for collecting data, for analyzing it, and for presenting findings. The artworks were developed while collecting data and during data analysis. The images form a body of work that will be available for public exhibition at selected academic institutions with an active anti-human trafficking presence (see Appendix B).

I choose to represent my data as both artwork and written text in order to bring together multiple viewing positions (Glass, 2008) and attribute appropriate depth to participant experiences. As both researcher and subject, I participated in an “ongoing process of artmaking…and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 8).

**Subjects**

I was the primary subject of this study, using art processes to collect, process, and represent data. Additionally, critical conversations were undertaken with professionals in key fields to augment and support my personal research (see Appendix A).

**Research Site**

My research site consisted primarily of my personal art studio. Conversations with experts in the field of the arts, advocacy, non-profit, law, and psychology took place in person in Topeka and Lawrence, Kansas, and by telephone.
Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

In this study, active analysis of visual processes was done using both created images and written text/results of critical conversations and interviews with survivors and experts in the field of anti-human trafficking. Outcomes include increased understanding of the contributing factors that foster personal transformation that can inspire social change. First, I explored the history of visual rhetoric in social justice movements through visual ethnographic methods using both written text as well as visual images. The arts can be a powerful path…elevating and amplifying the voices of those most affected by injustice (LaMarche, 2010.)

Second, I examined the role of visual art and culture in ancillary issues affecting sex trafficking and other atrocities. Applicability of these tactics to the “bystander effect” and other psycho-social processes were considered. Do not underestimate the power of art to transmute minds and souls. We have never before had a platform as large nor connective as the world wide web that can pass insight so efficiently (Stanfield, 2013.) According to Beit-Hallahmi (1983), “the major function of art has been considered, since the days of Aristotle, that of catharsis, i.e. the production of a (vicarious) emotional experience, through the arousal and ventilation of strong emotion” (p. 238). Humans are constantly searching for cathartic experiences.

Third, I created a body of artwork consisting of sketches, collage and paintings that reflect reaction to human trafficking and its’ ancillary issues such as freedom, oppression, repression, villainy, power, fear and safety through personal reflection and expressive art techniques. A/r/tography was used to explore questions that, “engage emotional, intuitive, personal, spiritual, and embodied ways of knowing” (Springgay et al, p. 902.)
Fourth, I augmented my personal research with “views from the field” about the potential role of the visual arts and culture in anti-human trafficking prevention efforts through a series of interviews with experts.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was examined using many interpretations to find linkages between the subject and outcome with reference to the original research questions (Soy, 1997). Using the arts and aesthetic experiences both in the research and presentation of data is an important part of discovering and understanding multiple perspectives (Given, 2008.) Exploration of the issue of human trafficking occurred through analysis of visual and textual means using A/r/tography focusing on reflective inquiry to closely examine aspects of meaning. Thorough investigation of how arts and visual images can catalyze processes of change were considered and have been represented both in written and visual form. The process of analysis was congruent with the process of data collection.

**Findings**

The goal of my research was to uncover linkages between art, visual culture, and identity and examine their potential role in the transformative journey to action. There are many opportunities to witness human suffering on a daily basis in our society. But I wonder, what elements need to be present to forge a meaningful personal connection and inspire some sort of action or advocacy?

**The Psychology of Oppression**

Objectification and commodification are heavy words that imply entitlement, control, and oppression. I explored these outcomes with experts in the mental health and social services field to fully understand the pathological roots of how they are manifested and frequently acted upon
to impose suffering on others. I also queried the potential role of visual culture in this cycle of dysfunction.

Steve Halley, a social worker who works with male domestic batterers in group therapy suggested that objectification and the commodification of women are symptoms of deeper issues men hold. Visual culture, through the proliferation of sexualized imagery and disempowerment, skillfully reinforce this on a regular basis. These issues are typically the result of cruelty or childhood trauma that remains unprocessed or unresolved leading men to “give it away” in the form of violence or cruelty upon another (S. Halley, interview, March 14, 2014). He underscored this by explaining that this phenomenon often leads to “stolen empathy” which as a result leads men to see women as objects or means of another’s pleasure – depersonalized and dehumanized. This breakdown can result in many forms of dysfunction including domestic violence, intimate partner violence and behaviors involved in human trafficking. When the conversation shifted to preventive efforts, art and visual imagery were suggested as powerful tools in the education and treatment of perpetrators of this kind of victimization. Steve’s wife and colleague, Dorthy Stucky Halley, LMSW, added that the key to affecting social change is at the experiential level. According to Halley, this involves visual memories and associations which can be very powerful and help with both message delivery and message impact when working with perpetrators (D. Halley, interview, March 14, 2014).

**Art as a Mirror**

The role of art as a mirror can be explored both on a societal level and on a personal, more intimate level. I approached this concept from the standpoint of the two being inherently intertwined. That is, in order for individuals to understand art’s role as a reflection and conduit
on a societal level, one must first use art to reflect and cultivate personal connection to an issue or topic. This can be a revealing and sometimes painful exercise.

I used two processes for doing this: One was the compilation of anecdotal information gained from conversations with survivors of human trafficking, legal case reviews, various professional materials and other creative outlets depicting the realities of human trafficking. These were studied and used to inform my creative practice. The second was more complicated and more personal and involved a focused word association with themes of human trafficking on paper (See Figure 2) that ultimately led to an in-depth personal excavation and exploration of the theme of sexual exploitation through watercolor, ink, and acrylic mediums. I began with a “scratching process” (Tharp, 2003) where I used experiences gained through my professional work to provide inspiration for sketches that illustrated personal thoughts and feelings about the issues involved in human trafficking. That part of my creative process lasted several weeks.

Figure 3. Focused word search.
Various themes emerged from this initial process that informed my final work including: danger, fear, vulnerability, exposure, and resilience. These themes evolved from both my professional experience with human trafficking victims and personal issues resurfacing from my own childhood and young adulthood that dealt with identity and objectification. This opportunity to uncover personal feelings and connections to the themes involved with human trafficking allowed me to get closer to the issue and understand the deep complexities involved. While not a survivor of human trafficking, I was able to understand the issues involved and make associations as a woman and as a mother of a teenage daughter. This led to the creation of a series of watercolor images using a bruise as a metaphor to represent the layers of injury involved in human trafficking (see Appendix A). They evolved from my initial scratching period where I weeded out other more obvious and cliché ideas.

The goal of my work is to be thought-provoking; inviting viewers to explore personal connections through feelings evoked by the act of viewing the work. I hope this helps foster a greater understanding and motivation to learn more about the complexities of human trafficking.

This exercise was a distinctly different process for me as an artist and took me out of my comfort zone for several reasons. Besides the difficult subject matter, the introduction of unfamiliar media, tools and processes such as sketching and watercolor proved challenging. Usually, I use oil and acrylic paint on various surfaces so using new mediums forced me to stretch myself and surrender the predictability and control that comes with the familiar and comfortable. I chose to use watercolor to illustrate the layers and complexity of human trafficking as well as the loss of control which is common to both being trafficked and the application of watercolor to surface. Additionally, the conception of ideas was the most radical change for me as an artist. Typically, I begin a work by engaging in a creative process and the
meaning emerges through this process. This project led me to both find meanings first through intentionality and also allow the residue of exploring the emotional subject matter to drive creative output. This transfer of power and control from the process (subconscious) to my own mind (conscious) proved somewhat pressurized and uncomfortable for me.

**Engagement and Public Awareness**

The use of visual imagery as a communications tool can be a powerful way to engage and mobilize for a cause. “The arts have a unique capacity to raise awareness, build bigger constituencies for social justice and meet people where they are. The arts are also participatory, engaging affected communities directly in advocating for themselves” (LaMarche, 2010, para 4). I interviewed several professionals working in the social justice field and asked what role visual art and imagery plays in the work they do.

Two women from academia spoke about the power art holds to make a statement and reach a broad audience. Sharon Sullivan, a gender studies professor at Washburn University and leader of an anti-slavery coalition, observed that all art is political, “you’re either with the status quo or against it” (S. Sullivan, interview, March 12, 2014). Laura Dean, a PhD student studying human trafficking in Eastern European countries, noted that art can insert compassion into the examination of human trafficking issues. She also pointed out that art hits a different audience which can expand the reach of social justice issues outside of typical audiences (L. Dean, interview, March 11, 2014).

Margeaux Gray, a survivor and anti-human trafficking advocate pointed out that, “art is a different neural pathway…to see things from a different perspective” (M. Gray, interview, March 9, 2014). She added that visual learning is another tool we can use to raise awareness and educate children and adults. She cautioned, however, about the dangers of misinformation and
re-exploitation of victims through inaccurate or sensationalized portrayals. “Art can give voice to victims. A lot of people can see themselves in the art – it creates a connection” (M. Gray, interview, March 12, 2014).

Nola Theiss runs a program in south Florida for teens based on empowerment, education and awareness of human trafficking. Her program creates peer educators through art. I asked about the nature of the artwork produced and learned that the younger the child, the more representational the artwork was. As children get older she said the artwork becomes more abstract, more “emblematic.” (See Figure 3)

![Figure 3](image)

Figure 4. ARTREACH slide show screen shot.

The key to using art to communicate and empower kids is the ability to “meet them where they are” (N. Theiss, March 19, 2014). The ARTREACH program teaches the power to change through art. They focus on children ages 10-18 but she said the target group where the most impact has been seen is with children between 12 and 15 years old – the target age group for recruitment by pimps and traffickers.
Crystal Freed, an attorney and social activist explained that art can transmit meaning in a unique way that words cannot. She shared the types of exhibits and opportunities she initiated during a public awareness campaign in Jacksonville, Florida, in January and February of 2014. As the architect of this campaign, she was able to use art and visual imagery on a multitude of levels to create connection. These offerings included visual arts displays with accompanying auditory recordings of survivor stories, an actual simulation of a labor trafficking situation which included local actors serving as catalysts, topical lectures from national experts, and theatrical performances at area universities. She identified the strategic placement of these offerings as key in achieving maximum impact.

**Summary Across All Findings**

Interview results supported my own personal research through my artmaking process for this project – there is a strong link between self-awareness, tapping into personal experiential data, and connection to social justice issues. The theme of self awareness and the importance of personal experience cropped up in almost every interview I conducted with subjects and obviously was inherent in my own personal research.

Through a lengthy interview with a Crystal Freed I explored a connection I had made through my own artwork. We discussed the need to make social issues such as human trafficking resonate with people on a personal level in order for them to be inspired to act. Art can draw people in on this level by tapping into an individual’s self-awareness and start a discussion but as she astutely pointed out, in order to be effective with such sensitive issues, art has to “meet people where they are on the awareness spectrum” (C. Freed, March 18, 2014). This observation was also echoed by Nola Theiss in her comments about impact and engagement with children on human trafficking related issues.
Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

“The role of art within society is complex, predominately due to the many functions it serves, and through its very existence as a creative process” (Parkes, 2013). What is clear is that there is sufficient evidence among current scholarly research to merit serious consideration of the implications of visual imagery through art making and media dissemination on creating and facilitating the tolerance and demand for sex trafficking. This is not a new phenomena but one that needs special attention and consideration of our digital age and advanced technology that depends on delivery of visual imagery for messaging, personal pleasure, and potentially nefarious purposes.

Artists, like William Hogarth in his early depiction of slavery call for the audience to, “find a sense of their moral obligation” (Parkes, 2013). Sometimes this requires us to tap into our own personal journeys which can be difficult but rewarding. Successful personal excavation can lead to confident compassion and an enhanced ability to deal with other people’s pain. The bottom line is that the key to the connection between visual imagery and social causes, action etc. is self awareness. That predicts a person’s motivation and ability to connect and potentially act. Furthermore, social justice is linked to self-reflection as Tyler & Smith (1995) point out, “people’s actual behavior is (also) strongly linked to views about justice and injustice…justice is connected to people’s feelings about the status of their group and within that group their social standing, their self-worth, and their self-concept” (p. 3).

As previously noted, through this research my personal artmaking process was challenged and re-arranged. This required me to push boundaries, move boundaries and change things around. It also required a major leap of faith which has resulted in lingering uncertainty
about some of the work I created – a questioning of authenticity based on the both the vantage point and the process employed. While uncomfortable, it allowed me to grow as an artist. Artists, “not only document social change; they promote, inform, and shape it” (Martinez as reported in David and McCaughan, 2007, p. 1).

**Significance, Implications, and Recommendations**

Case studies present data in very publicly accessible ways and can lead participants to apply the experience in his or her own real-life situation (Soy, 1997). By examining visual art and visual culture’s role in some of the underlying issues associated with human trafficking, we are able to understand history as well as forge new ground. As these types of issues are identified and understood through the chosen lens of visual imagery, what are the next steps? And, is there any knowledge gained from this analysis that can be applied directly to anti-human trafficking efforts locally, nationally and internationally? What form should this take – through prevention efforts by addressing the larger societal issues of objectification culture, commodification, prevalence of pornography in our society? This could be done through careful consideration of the, “encouragement of social factors and reinforcing media” (Myers, 2011, p. 60).

Art can be a powerful vehicle for increasing awareness but there needs to be sensitivity to its capacity to re-victimize victims through the urge to pathologize and sensationalize via the media and/or creative process. As Rachel Lloyd expressed, “there is a level of voyeurism within the antihuman trafficking movement that does a disservice to survivors and the movement as a whole” (Lloyd, personal communication, March 19, 2014).² We need to seek a balance between representation and empowerment and be careful not to use visual art and imagery to

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² Personal communication during a live interactive webinar, GEMS Training Institute Webinar: How to be a Good Ally, March 19, 2014.
sensationalize by creating “tragedy porn” (Lloyd, 2014). This research has highlighted the need for a closer look at the sensitivities and ethical considerations involved in representing others’ stories through creative expression. However shocking visual imagery can be as an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering, these images are merely symbolic and cannot possibly convey the full reality of what they refer to (Sontag, 2003). On a big picture level, “…art should not be an escape from daily events, but rather it should make visible the violence, chaos and hypocracies of contemporary life…art is not an end in itself…but an opportunity for the true perception and criticism of the time we live in” (National Gallery of Art, 2006, p. 1).

**Conclusion**

According to Sidford, (2011) the arts can reflect a society’s customs and fortify its conventions and ideologies or they can catalyze processes of change and propel social and political movements. These movements can be for greater justice and equality and for the repression of human rights (p. 3).

This research allowed me to examine the role of visual art and imagery in social justice through the lens of human trafficking as a case study from the perspective of both the researcher and the subject. This is valuable to my professional work in public awareness, outreach, and education efforts, and the prevention of human trafficking. It provided multiple contexts with which to consider the issue and insight and direction for establishing effective practice in the field. This project has sparked my interest in additional study about the larger role art can play in self-awareness and self-actualization in public awareness campaigns.

The more that is learned about human trafficking, the uglier it gets. For any thinking person, it is impossible to face the truth of it without undergoing profound change. That’s why so
few people are willing to even look at it. We want to believe it is something that can be solved easily and quickly. It can’t. While the media treats it as a new problem, it has been around for over two hundred years. Trafficking is a disturbingly accepted part of our culture and it will take generations of understanding and focused effort to stop it. For example, shifting attitudes about men’s access to women’s bodies could shift the demand for sex-trafficked individuals, but this requires an ideological change within society as a whole.

My personal artwork from this project is meant to be a departure point and strategy or tactic for viewers to look closer at the issue of human trafficking. My hope is that it makes awareness of the issue more accessible through visual imagery. My complete body of work is available for viewing at: www.artandatrocities.blogspot.com and http://issuu.com/ufarted/docs/rapp_issuu_pglr. Selected pieces with an accompanying narrative and description of this research project will be featured in a special exhibit at the Kansas Crime Victim’s Rights Conference in May 2014, in Topeka, Kansas.

You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know. - William Wilberforce
References


Appendix A
ART AS A MIRROR FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
Appendix B

List of Interviewees

Laura Dean is a candidate for a Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Kansas (2014) and has a Graduate Certificate in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (2013) and a Master of Arts in Political Science (2011) from the University of Kansas, a Master of Arts in International Studies focusing on Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies (2006) from the University of Washington, and a Bachelor of Arts in World Politics (2003) from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Laura was also awarded a Fulbright Research Fellowship in 2007 to Latvia where she examined the exploitation of women, focusing on sex tourism and trafficking.

Crystal Freed is an attorney in Jacksonville, Florida. In 2013, Crystal decided to use the arts as a platform to educate the public on modern-day slavery. While serving as the co-Chair of the Northeast Florida Human Trafficking Task Force, Crystal organized Jacksonville’s first city-wide human trafficking awareness campaign. She frequently speaks on the issue of human trafficking and has also planned and organized legal education seminars for attorneys. In 2012, Crystal was appointed to the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission where she serves on its Community Relations Committee. She also serves as the co-Chair of the Jacksonville Bar Association’s Human Rights Section.

Margeaux Gray is a survivor of child sex trafficking from Louisville, Kentucky. She is an independent anti-human trafficking activist, policy advocate, public speaker, and artist. Margeaux uses her voice and art to educate, inspire, and empower others. She uses found objects to create tactile works through the restoration of trash and uses this as a metaphor for telling her personal story. Accompanied by her guide dog due to sight loss acquired during her
victimization, she recently provided compelling testimony at a Congressional briefing on combating modern slavery.

Steve Halley is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and has been in private practice for over ten years. He has developed specialized skills in working with teenagers, troubled relationships, and with those who use violence and abuse in relationships. Steve currently leads Batterer Intervention Programs at the YMCA Center for Safety and Empowerment in Topeka, Kansas, and is an expert in connection theory and has also worked with the court system as a probation officer.

Dorthy Stucky Halley, LMSW, has been Director of the Victim Services Division of the Office of the Kansa Attorney General since 2007. Halley served as Coordinator of the Attorney General’s Human Trafficking Advisory Board, and continues to serve on the Board and chair the Victim Services Committee. Halley was the Practicum Director and Assistant Professor at Pittsburg State University in the Social Work Program from 1997 to 2007, before accepting her current position. She is the past president of the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence, and the Kansas Organization for Victim Assistance.

Sharon Sullivan, PhD, is an associate professor of Theatre at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas. She is also the founder of STARS, Stop Trafficking and Reject Slavery, an educational group dedicating to bringing awareness to the issue of modern day slavery. Sharon was chosen as a delegate to the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2013.
Nola Theiss is the Executive Director of Human Trafficking Awareness Partnerships which is an organization located in Lee County, Florida, that has created a model program called ARTREACH. ARTREACH is an interactive creative arts program designed to instill a sense of awareness of human trafficking in our community’s boys and girls and to empower them to become peer spokespersons.
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Author Biography

Jennifer Rapp is currently the Deputy Director of the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit in the office of the Kansas Attorney General. In addition, she is a professional artist and previously served as the Arts in Medicine coordinator for the development, design and implementation of arts programs in 3 hospitals that are part of a large non-profit health system in the Florida panhandle. Prior to this, she was a Congressional staffer for healthcare and judicial policy in Washington D.C. After living abroad for several years she moved to Jacksonville, Florida, in 2001, and volunteered as an arts educator in the St. John’s County public school system.

A fourth generation Kansan, Jennifer comes from a family of artists and professional musicians. She earned her B.A. in Communication Studies from the University of Kansas and is currently a Master’s Degree candidate at the University of Florida. She decided to pursue a Master’s Degree in Art Education in order to meld her professional background in the non-profit and public policy arena, volunteer work as an art educator, and experience as a working and exhibiting artist. She believes her graduate program is a perfect synthesis of her over 20 years of work experience in advocacy and public policy, passion for the arts, creative talents, and desire to make the world a more compassionate and beautiful place.

More about Jennifer and her artwork can be seen at:

www.jenniferrappcontemporaryart.weebly.com and www.artandatrocities.blogspot.com