



Liminal Identities: Portraits of Surviving Domestic Violence

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Abstract: *The paper looks into a participatory art project developed in two women's refuges, one in Portugal and the other in England. Addressing liminality after surviving violence, the project constructs a portrait of survivors, utilising feminist pragmatist aesthetics to transfer representational agency to participants. Against a background where women who have experienced domestic violence have often been portrayed in simplistic representations of damaged beauty, the study sought to gain a deeper understanding by holding visual art workshops with participants (Portugal, England) and analysing data from verbal testimonies (England). The paper contributes to a discussion of the practical issues negotiated when establishing a representational power balance between researchers and research participants. It does this by providing a critical discussion of three ethical problems emerging in relation to the project. The first concerns the dominant representation of survivors, the second the need for participants' anonymity and the third the challenges of inequality in qualitative research.*

Keywords: gender-based violence; participatory art; pragmatist aesthetics; feminist methods; ethics in research.

DOI: 10.22618/TP.PJCv.20193.1.192011

The PJCv Journal is published by Trivent Publishing



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I. Introduction

This paper focuses on domestic abuse, using arts-based research to examine how survivors express their identities' transitions from 'victims' to 'survivors', and how much the perceptions of these identities are affected by gendered narratives on violence. It examines the principles we drew on to establish a methodology to implement a participatory project, proceeds to discuss some of the ethical problems we encountered, and finally it describes the artistic outcomes while confronting them with the aforementioned issues.

The research was conducted in women's refuges, which can be seen as liminal spaces between past experiences of domestic violence and a yet-to-be determined future. The portrayal of the transition between the past and the future was the focus of the initial art project seeking to represent female survivors of intimate partnership abuse, set in motion in Portugal in 2015.

The project was designed as a work in progress, characterised by the intersection of expertise within the research team, and also by emerging lines of research uncovered in the course of the project's subsequent implementation in England. It changed from intending to

portray survivors, with a side-serving of art workshops, into a participatory project investigating liminality in refuges for women, both from an artistic perspective and from a sociological one. A new element was attached to the study's art-based methodology, focusing on personal objects and on how participants navigated between past, present, and future possessions. Although this paper occasionally makes reference to the work developed in Portugal in order to address the general context and establish relevant comparisons, the main focus of this paper is on the participatory project in England.

To implement a participatory feminist art project, we drew on principles of pragmatist aesthetics within a feminist framework, enabling us to attend to power imbalances and to appreciate the contribution of those who have not necessarily been trained in art. The interaction with the research participants consisted of a series of seven workshops in a refuge where conversations were recorded and one-to-one interviews; they also attended the final pop-up exhibition, entitled 'Displaced'. Aimed at raising consciousness and self-confidence in participants, as well as being an instrument for the dissemination of results, it generated interest amongst colleagues, students and practitioners.

Three ethical problems emerged from the project at different moments. The first arose at the start, when trying to define the contours of the first iterations of the transition to be represented. It concerns a dominant representation of female targets of male violence appearing in very visible campaigns, and prevalent in online browsing with popular search engines. As will be discussed below, such a representation follows a stereotype. We wanted to portray variety, both in singular expression and in layers of lived experience, and we felt that these mainstream images were stigmatising and otherwise problematic for their reductionist effect. Furthermore, it soon became apparent that survivors of abuse often do not feel these images are representative of their identity status, not even within victimhood.

The second problem arising from the ongoing research concerns the need for participants' anonymity and the resulting challenge in portraying them in a way that does not put them at risk. Devising artistic designs to build up portraits that were genuine but did not put participants at risk by rendering them identifiable, presented the inevitability of refusing to display their appearance and any distinctive aspects, losing authenticity. Either we represented individuality, risking each individual's safety, or we chose not to, protecting them, but further defacing them in the process. Our portraits resulted in solutions which highlighted the collective and individual intrinsic expression, but also accentuated the suppression of identity features, normalised the subjects by grouping them in a social segment and construed images that were violent in themselves. Some examples of this design will be discussed below.

The final ethical problem to be discussed only became fully apparent at the exhibitions in which the series of workshops culminated in London. It involves the problem of levelling equality in authorship, since there is a body of art work following guidelines devised by the artist-researcher, but also made by participants, who could not be acknowledged due to their anonymity status. Creating conditions for real power equality would have required that everyone could be visible. However, participants had to remain anonymous. We could have joined them in a pseudonym, which would be compatible with an art project (which is only completed when it reaches the public) and would have enabled us to be levelled with the project participants in that context. Otherwise, even if we acknowledged the collective, we would always stand out, bearing precise names, bodies and contexts. Becoming anonymous, however, would have prevented us from disseminating results in the formal context of research outcomes. This problem was bound up with the emotional relationships developed in the fieldwork and led the research team to recognize the inevitability of unequal power relations.

II. Framing a participatory art project in a liminal space

The project's approach of art-based methods rested on three premises. The first is the assumption that art making is an activity that benefits well-being and primes self-awareness. Generating pleasure and reducing stress through sensory experience and catharsis, it unpacks symbolic representations by drawing upon unconscious, emotional and cognitive elements which become tangible in visual descriptions.

The second concerns the need for an increase in parity between researchers and research participants, so as to attenuate power imbalances. Lying at the core of the decision to implement action research in the form of a participatory art project, this is consistent with an aesthetic framework that integrates action research and artistic validation with plural experiential backgrounds. Drawing on pragmatist aesthetics from a feminist perspective, we engaged with the value of art as experience, the notion of talent as embodied, and the view of art works as subjective objects with interdependent meaning acquired through personal interpretation.

The final premise concerns liminality after surviving abuse. Deriving from studies in Anthropology concerning rites of passage,¹ the term 'liminality' broadened to describe a large scope of transitions between two contrasting life stages. Referring to a period where an individual no longer belongs to the previous stage but has not yet integrated into the following one, it is marked by indeterminacy of many aspects of identity. Despite the scarcity of literature on surviving abuse as a liminal stage, studies on life after trauma can be used by way of extrapolation. To understand this journey in liminality, we examined different forms of oppression and the need to implement creative modes of communication for overcoming structures of domination. Observed through interactive dynamics, this transition involved changes in self-image and adaption to new provisional environments. Thus, the project required a flexible and manifold scaffolding, consistent with the expectation of multi-layered, unpredictable findings.

A. Art-based methodologies as tools for inclusive research

In support of our application of art-based methodologies, we draw upon literature that establishes a holistic connection between artistic engagement and health, where health involves the whole of a person's well-being besides pathogenic conditions, as defined by WHO.² Stuckey and Nobel, in their review of literature on art therapy, state that the initiation "of one's own creative efforts can enhance one's moods, emotions, and other psychological states as well as have a salient impact on important physiological parameters."³ In the broader domain of arts and health, psychology has shown that the arts can work on emotional trauma, promoting self-understanding, empathy, self-reflection, and a change in perceived patterns,⁴ facilitating the integration of traumatic experience in meaningful representations.

¹ See Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

² WHO, *Constitution of the World Health Organization* (1946), 1.
<https://www.who.int/about/mission/en/> (accessed September 23, 2018)

³ HL Stuckey and J. Nobel. "The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature," *American Journal of Public Health*, 100/2 (2010): 254-63, 254.

⁴ Ibid. See also P.M. Camic, "Playing in the Mud," *Journal of Health Psychology* 13/2 (2008): 287-298, and CA Ryan, "Reflective Inquiry in the Medical profession," in *Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Inquiry: Mapping a Way of Knowing for Professional Reflective Inquiry*, ed. Nona Lyons, 101-130 (New York: Springer, 2010).

Artistic creativity as a tool within social work and social research is viewed as therapeutic and inclusive,⁵ suiting reflective practice among at-risk populations.⁶ In liminality after domestic abuse, art was found to reduce post-traumatic symptoms⁷ and to favour bonding, self-reflection and expression, where combining objects with imagery has been suggested to be relevant.⁸

Art-based research has shown that visual representation can go beyond its common therapeutic and cathartic roles. It can break language barriers, as was seen both in Portugal and England, where participants who were not fluent in the local language were still able to understand some of the tasks and to express their memories and feelings. Making space for discussion through elicitation, it is also a means for communicating when words would require a degree of intimacy that participants in research may withdraw from. Visual art works function as objective versions of symbolic representation deriving from unconscious ideations⁹ — externalised representations which generate a distance allowing for observation and reflection, while constituting an opportunity for discussing interpretations. Furthermore, art-products tend to be less compromised with respect to specific meanings than verbal accounts, since they are inherently open to interpretation.

Regarding the purpose and value of aesthetic engagement, John Dewey's views on the meaning and scope of art in a multicultural background guided our perspectives. According to Dewey, the salient aspect of art and aesthetics is the qualitative enhancement of any experience.¹⁰ His line of thought emphasizes art as a process in its entirety, rather than as a means aiming to produce material 'works of art'. Seen as practices whose purposes are to affect people's lives, artistic activities become significant societal experiences, which allow for encounters between maker and perceiver. Such encounters are particularly relevant when makers and perceivers are confronted with experiential similarities, as in the case of a collective sharing a transitional space while recovering from violence, since they favour empathy, bonding and reflection. Moreover, art is a motor for participation between members of a particular community, where common experiences acquire an aesthetic value, which is both somatic and political, as well as an everyday celebration of life in civilization. This was explicitly noted by participants and staff in the London refuge:

"I would say another good thing about the project was it brought us closer together and it made us talk now. [...] For the weeks we did that it helped a lot because there were some

⁵ See L. Schubert, and M. Gray, "The Death of Emancipatory Social Work as Art and Birth of Socially Engaged Art Practice," *The British Journal of Social Work* 45/1 (2015): 1349-1356; Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art. Arts-Based Research Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2015).

⁶ E. Huss et al, "Using arts-based research to help visualize community intervention in international aid," *International Social Work* 58/5 (2015): 673-688; E. Huss et al, "Children's Drawings and Social Change: Food Insecurity and Hunger among Israeli Bedouin Children," *British Journal of Social Work* 44 /7 (2013): 1857-1878.

⁷ D.F. Wozniak, and K.N. Allen, "Ritual and performance in domestic violence healing: from survivor to thrive through rites of passage," *Culture, medicine and psychiatry* 36/1 (2012): 80-101, and *Surviving domestic violence: A guide to healing your soul and building your future* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2013); K. Allen and D.F. Wozniak, "The Language of Healing: Women's Voices in Healing and Recovering from Domestic Violence," *Social Work in Mental Health*, 9/1 (2011): 37-55.

⁸ M. Stokrocki et al, "The Role of Art for Homeless Women and Survivors of Domestic Violence," *Visual Arts Research* 30/1 (2004): 73-82.

⁹ M. McMurray et al, "Art therapy: Indications for treatment of choice," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 27/3 (2000): 191-196.

¹⁰ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee, 2005), 199. See also Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty. A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1929), <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/quest-certainty> (accessed May 17 2019).

people here that I didn't necessarily get along with and it helped to break the ice. When you are sitting in front of someone staring at them you can't really... You know, so it helped. I was comfortable, it was good" (Lucy).

"I think it's like socialising. And I think we all need that after going through some stuff. But I think it's beneficial for everyone, because it's like bringing out something from inside" (Fatima).

"They reported to me saying that they could express through drawing or art in an easier way than talking." [...] And it's really surprising because for some of our other activities we have to go and knock on their doors, ask them to come downstairs. But with this particular one they are always ready for you, you may come. [...] And they found it really easier to express what they feel through drawing. [...] the feeling that I have is that I am so sad that it is finished because I saw the women, for the first time, really engage and enjoy one activity" (Social worker).

Neurologists and evolutionary psychologists agree on the likelihood that art has ethological significance,¹¹ which might explain art's value as a means of bringing people together. One consequence of art meeting considerable consensus within a wide range of disciplines is summarized by Bruce Mangan: "what art does — when it succeeds — is to intensify or deepen the contents of emotional, perceptual and cognitive experiences (...) for consciousness research, the central fact about art is its ability to enhance and intensify experience."¹² This corroborates Dewey's assertion that art accounts for fuller and better experience. Art becomes an embodied expression deriving from one's engagement with context, offering fulfilment and tools to actively implement this improvement.¹³

The opening of paths to read between the lines, fostering unexpected links, is stimulated through the interpretative nature of art,¹⁴ generating new lines of storytelling. Kahneman states that "the brain constructs a running affective commentary, which evaluates the current state on a Good/Bad dimension" and that "the commentary has physiological and behavioural manifestations."¹⁵ Data on the value of art for shaping personal stories when both verbal and visual contents are available as material, suggests that in painful elicitations the weight of words might be diminished by the perception of beauty. The enactment of aesthetic experience comes to the rescue, bringing solace; provided the means, expression occurs. Despite having the potential to make experience easier to integrate meaningfully in the conscious narrative that forms self-identity, it also presents the risk of aestheticizing negative aspects, which must be taken into account.

¹¹ See *Art, Aesthetics, and the Brain*, ed. J.P. Huston et al (Oxford: Scholarship Online, August 2015), <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com> (accessed May 10 2019); *Art and the Brain II. Investigations into the Science of Art*, ed. J.A. Goguen and E. Myin (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 1999); W. Sütterlin et al, "Art as behaviour – an ethological approach to visual and verbal art, music and architecture," *Journal of Biological and Clinical Anthropology*, 71/1-2 (2014), 3-13; P.M. Camic, "Playing in the Mud," *Journal of Health Psychology* 13/2 (2008): 287-98; D. Hodgson, "Graphic Primitives and the Embedded Figure in 20th Century Art: Insights from Neuroscience," *Leonardo*, 38/1 (2005), 55-58.

¹² B. Mangan, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing," in *Art and the Brain II. Investigations into the Science of Art*, ed. J.A. Goguen and E. Myin (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 1999), 56-58: 56.

¹³ R. Shusterman, "The fine art of rap," *New Literary History*, 22/3 (1991): 613-632; "Dewey's Art as Experience: The Psychological Background Author(s)," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 44/1 (2010), 26-43: 28-9.

¹⁴ C.A. Ryan, "Reflective Inquiry in the Medical profession," in *Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Inquiry: Mapping a Way of Knowing for Professional Reflective Inquiry*, ed. Nona Lyons (New York: Springer, 2010), 101-130: 121.

¹⁵ Daniel Kahneman, "Objective Happiness", in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, ed. Daniel Kahneman et al (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 3-25: 3.

B. Building up content production in an informal feminist setting

Dewey was influential in shaping a feminist perspective on the role of art. Some contemporary theorists, such as Duran (2001),¹⁶ Siegfried (1996),¹⁷ and Thayer Bacon (2003),¹⁸ have highlighted issues common to Deweyan thought and feminist aestheticians: the democratic sphere where experience actually happens and the way knowledge is learned from everyday life; the notion that experience is undetermined and irreducible to particular meanings, since we are contextual and embodied, and have limitations, but still “[strive] to communicate with a plurality of others”;¹⁹ the rejection of mind-body dualism; the counter-movement of seeking to deconstruct traditional distinctions, classifications, or institutions. The “gynocentric emphasis on connectedness and the world of having-and-doing”²⁰ is explicitly related to Dewey’s ‘learning by doing’.²¹ The emphasis Dewey placed on empirical methods and experimentation provides us with artistic substantiation when applied to aesthetics, since they lead to innovative solutions in artistic inquiries outside the scope of ‘high art’, as is the case of our project.

The legitimization of non-traditional forms of art as fully artistic is enabled by a dismissal of clear classificatory terms and by the inclusion of the principles and consequences of popular art, highlighting the body of knowledge contained in somatic experience and intuitive actions.²² We contend that our participants have an experiential knowledge of the subject matters under investigation,²³ having developed an “adaptive behavioural repertoire”²⁴ informed by prevalent narratives in their environments.²⁵ Therefore, they can be perceived as having practical (personal) expertise, which complements the external investigator’s theoretical knowledge, closing the gap.

Looking at our participants as artists instead of positioning them as uneducated on the subjects at hand, their work acquires integrative significance in the broad context of informal learning, whereby they use means, materials and contents easily accessed through non-specialized transmission. In pragmatist aesthetics the broader scope of social factors available for intersectional analysis redefines the limits of artistic practices or dispositions, both in creation and reception. Such an aesthetics encompasses diverse forms of personal expression using artistic instruments, resulting in original forms of communication, even if originality can merely be found as a variation or a subtle twist. This was fully visible in the outcomes of the project, in the form of minute picture stories in which text and image revealed personal meanings that could be disturbing, moving — or, in some cases, surprisingly mundane given the

¹⁶ Jane Duran, “A Holistically Deweyan Feminism,” *Metaphilosophy*, 32 (2001): 279-292.

¹⁷ C. Siegfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁸ B. Thayer Bacon, “Pragmatism and feminism as qualified relativism,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 22 (2003): 417-438.

¹⁹ Ibid: 429.

²⁰ Jane Duran, “A Holistically Deweyan Feminism,” *Metaphilosophy*, 32 (2001): 279-292: 282.

²¹ See John Dewey, *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books, 1963, https://archive.org/details/experienceducat00dewe_0 (accessed 15 May 2019)

²² See Richard Shusterman, “The fine art of rap,” *New Literary History*, 22/3 (1991): 613-632; and *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²³ Arthur S. Reber, *Implicit learning and tacit knowledge: An essay on the cognitive unconscious* (Oxford: University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Ibid: 5.

²⁵ See Janice Haaken, *Hard knocks: Domestic violence and the psychology of storytelling* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2010).

context of the project, where public expectations could focus exclusively on connotations with abuse.

“Interaction”, in Deweyan terms, is a convenient tool for any design concept.²⁶ We have drawn upon this concept to frame the artwork as a levelled artistic project between a professional artist and non-professional ones, since it shapes the present in a unique, personal way, and the richness of an enquiry increases with the number of connections and interactions we can associate it with. Talent is viewed as a result of the interaction between materials, techniques, and the maker’s imagination, all contributing to the organisation of experience that becomes the artistic form.

Art results from the interaction between artists and media, personal experiences and cultural matrices, art works and audiences. Interaction extends to public dissemination; shared symbols, which shape narratives in accordance with each participant’s and recipient’s background, mediate the way the work acquires meaning and artistic status. Participatory work is better fulfilled when the audience becomes part of it, actively adding its own meaning. To enhance this effect, a public activity was designed for the pop-up exhibitions, replicating one of the activities developed in the workshops.

Pragmatist aesthetics is characterised by diffuse boundaries and by the willingness to integrate diverse factors of existence in a plural landscape. Integration of non-specialised art forms in aesthetic legitimisation also implicates social and political segments that have used the power of art to promote the dissemination of particular values (gender equality, political struggle, human rights, ecological militancy, religious freedom, etc.). Following the perspective that aesthetic experience does not have to be intellectually specialised, but rather embodied in real-life stances, we can use the potential of art-making to bring to experience aesthetic components by using artistic instruments and practices, and to generate visual storytelling about real life problems. We can also rely on the resulting products to disseminate findings and to draw attention to the problematic issues implicated in the subject matter.

C. Travelling in the liminal space of survivors

Liminality is an ambiguous stage: a period of variable length and blurred margins; a space of transition characterised by identity non-definition; a state of not belonging; a place to inhabit without actually living there. In our particular setting, liminality occupied a concrete space, an architectural one — with locus, function, design, and users. A threshold where transformation occurs, usually between separation and reaggregation, it is marked by disorientation, not knowing, and waiting. Domestic abuse survivors who escape from their aggressors cannot be easily categorised in their flow of existence. Their “social limbo”²⁷ is characterised by a disconnection from both the previous status and the following (or predictable) one. While we may tend to look at survivors as victims, they are actually taking a step beyond victimhood, and going through a process of redefinition, both of their social boundaries and of themselves. Integrating personal traumatic representations through art in a timeline (past, present

²⁶ R. Buchanan, in “Branzi’s Dilemma: Design in Contemporary Culture,” in *The Designed World: Images, Objects, Environments*, ed. R. Buchanan et al (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 13-27: 21, develops the concept of Deweyan interaction as applied to design. This concept can be found in Dewey’s *The Quest for Certainty. A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1929, <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/quest-certainty> (accessed May 17 2019), and in his *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), https://archive.org/details/experienceeducat00dewe_0 (accessed 15 May 2019)

²⁷ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), 57.

and future) has been proposed to contribute to a positive reconstruction of self-identity, and to help manage traumatic events in liminality.²⁸

Domestic abuse has been deemed more damaging to 16-44 years-old women than cancer, traffic accidents and war.²⁹ This indicates that it is more common and widespread than the rhetoric propagated by the media leads us to imagine, with spectacular accounts of episodic violence shaping the perception of exceptional victims and perpetrators, a view discrepant with the victim's perspective. Stanko gives an account of women's experiences of domestic abuse that highlights concurrent sources of oppression from the battering partner to the policeman in disbelief, casting a social portrait of the victim as someone to blame for not leaving, a masochistic woman, while the aggressor is excused.³⁰ Self-blame, resulting from stress, loss of self-esteem and societal views of abuse, affects women's social integration within shelters, which is harder the fewer the resources and external support made available to them.³¹

When staying in refuges, survivors are removed from previous contexts, rejecting part of their identity, and reconfiguring narratives of the self.³² Rejections and acquisitions, connoted to the past, or symbols of a change of status are characteristic of liminal stages.³³ Their loss of context and belongings, due to escaping from home, suggested a widening of the project to include representations of personal objects, known to actualise the self in everyday life.

There is a long history in self-portrayal as a mode to represent autobiographical stories of gender-based oppression, injustice, and violence,³⁴ from Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653), the painter who turned into biblical themes traumatic events such as rape or revengeful impulses towards men, to Jenny Saville's (1970-) mix of empowerment with self-loathing in a nude self-portrait that critiques the conception of the female body as destined for the male gaze. Women who managed to break through male domination in the art world often used self-portraits as an opportunity to affirm themselves as artists, to tell otherwise little-known stories of their existence and to confront female roles and models created by the patriarchy.³⁵ Thus, the portraits designed in the course of the project fit this feminist genre, combining the

²⁸ See M. McMurray et al, "Art therapy: Indications for treatment of choice," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 27/3 (2000): 191-196; and F. Reynolds, and S. Prior, "A lifestyle coat-hanger: a phenomenological study of the meanings of artwork for women coping with chronic illness and disability," *Disability & Rehabilitation*, 25/14 (2003): 785-794.

²⁹ European Parliament Association. *Domestic violence against women*, 2002 (Recommendation 1582), <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-EN.asp?FileID=17055&lang=EN> (accessed 15 May 2019). The recommendation states specifically that "violence committed within the family is still considered to be a private matter. Statistics shows that for women between 16 and 44 years of age, domestic violence is thought to be the major cause of death and invalidity, ahead of cancer, road accidents and even war. Therefore, domestic violence should be treated as a political and public problem, and a violation of human rights."

³⁰ Elizabeth A. Stanko, *Intimate intrusions: Women's experience of male violence* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 48-58.

³¹ RE Mitchell, C.A. Hodson. "Coping with domestic violence: social support and psychological health among battered women," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 11/6 (1983): 629-654.

³² J.W. Schouten, "Selves in transition: symbolic consumption in personal rites of passage and identity reconstruction," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17/4 (1991): 412-425.

³³ A. Shankar et al, "Identity, consumption and narratives of socialization," *Marketing Theory* 9/1 (2009): 75-94; R.W. Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research* 15/2 (1988): 139-168; C.H. Noble and B.A. Walker, "Exploring the relationships among liminal transitions, symbolic consumption, and the extended self," *Psychology and Marketing*, 14/1 (1997): 29-47.

³⁴ See J Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); and *Mirror Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists*, ed. Liz Rideal (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2002).

³⁵ Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves. Women's Self-Portraits* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2016).

discreteness of anonymity with the violent operation of effacement resulting from society's oppressive standards.

Any story needs to have an ending if it is to acquire meaning and the ending is crucial to its role in affective identity. According to the 'peak-end rule', it is the narrative's denouement that will retrospectively define the story's qualification by the subject, and how its associated memories will be integrated into life's conscious narrative.³⁶ In the liminal phase we are investigating, women have escaped domestic abuse, so we could see this as an ending. But they are also rebuilding their lives, starting over on most circumstantial everyday aspects, while having unclear prospects of a future.

We can never be sure that survivors will be able to reach a secure everyday life. It must thus be noted that our use of the term 'liminality' in this context follows van Gennep's concept, rather than Turner's.³⁷ The original term was applied more broadly to different contemporary life situations where there is a change in social status, whereas for Turner the threshold considered by the term requires the certainty of reaggregation. Following van Gennep, we assume that despite the presupposition that liminal people wander through a middle ground between two socially defined statuses, it is possible that they never leave the liminal space. Accordingly, Wozniak argues that unless proper care is taken in order to ensure that healing takes place, many women are left in this critical phase, bound to the identity of victim or of survivor of abuse.³⁸

III. Replacing the victim with the survivor: the challenge in representation

In December 2015, the artist aleXsandro Palombo posted on his Facebook page a new series of images campaigning against domestic violence. He had previously addressed the issue by manipulating icons from cartoons, such as Disney princesses or female characters from popular TV shows (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. © aleXsandro Palombo (2014), 'Coward' (composite). Courtesy of the artist

³⁶ Daniel Kahneman, "Objective Happiness," in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, ed. Daniel Kahneman et al (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 3-25.

³⁷ According to Turner, reaggregation is required to consider the phase as liminal, in which he differs from Arnold Van Gennep's, view in *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

³⁸ D.F. Wozniak, "Rites of passage and healing efficacy: an ethnographic study of an intimate partner violence intervention," *Global Public Health*, 4/5 (2009): 453-463.



Fig. 2. © aleXsandro Palombo (2015), 'Life can be a fairy tale if you break the silence' (4/7).
Courtesy of the artist

Palombo's new series, with the phrase "Life can be a fairy tale if you break the silence", was widely republished. The wording was unfortunate: an elaboration on a previous one, "Life is not a fairy tale", which would enjoy consensus, it now suggested that victims' lives would magically become ideal if they came forward with a denunciation. However, it is most

likely that a victim will be haunted by memories, sometimes be irreversibly scarred, and in many cases suffer mental health sequelae, such as PTSD, depression and anxiety.³⁹

Just as before, Palombo showed bruised faces, only this time these were real women: simulacra of victims obtained through digital editing of celebrities' photographic portraits (Fig. 2). The images bear a striking resemblance to the ones in the "What is it going to take take?" campaign by Women's Aid, designed by Grey London in 2007.⁴⁰ In the latter, nine British female celebrities are staring at us, photographed from the shoulders up, while seemingly naked, like Palombo's celebrities. Their hair in disarray, all of them display a beaten-up face, namely black eyes, stitches, busted lips, excoriations and bruises. Both the campaign by Women's Aid and Palombo's work draw on celebrity culture to raise awareness of domestic violence, and they do garner public attention. But the effect might come at a cost: their nakedness, the silhouette against a plain white background resembling a bust sculpture, the glamorization of violence inherent in celebrity status, as well as the general attractiveness and polished demeanour still apparent underneath the cuts and bruises, all enhance the objectifying notion of damaged beauty.

Departing from a standpoint somewhat similar to Palombo's, Susana Campos's initial idea for the art project consisted in working with women in refuges to visually record in drawings the changes observed throughout their transition. These changes, also informed by portraits made by participants in visual art workshops, would be used to produce animated portraits in painting. A sketch exploring this idea resorting to self-portraiture can be seen in Fig. 3.

Susana expected to start portraying depressed expressions, lost gazes, in some cases possibly bruised or even scarred faces. She would then witness a variety of states, until the final, resolute expression of independence, observed when survivors were ready to lead an autonomous life in a different place. The final positive image would remain materialised on each painting's surface, masking all previous states underneath — and in this way replacing them. Upon starting the field work in Portugal, she immediately realised that she was driven by a simplistic view of the recovery process. It was as though these survivors were expected to be reborn as free and strong individuals through their stay in a refuge, when both the facts reported by the refuges' psychologists and the countenance of the resident women told a different story.

Having singled out Palombo, since we admired his wittiness and his persistent feminism in raising awareness for women's causes, we regretted his falling into a common trap by choosing a representation of victimhood easily recognised through a stereotype: the black eye from a right-handed punch, with a streak of blood running from the corner of the lips, maybe a bruise on the forehead, on top of an otherwise still recognisable face. It is the prevalent type appearing on Google Images when searching "domestic violence campaign", whereas "domestic violence victims" returns a mix of this type and of more gruesome depictions, featuring real victims.⁴¹ Such a discrepancy raises a question concerning perception versus reality. Campaigns draw on public perception in order to be effective. It became clear to us, however, that

³⁹ A.M Nathanson et al, "The Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders in a Community Sample of Female Victims of Intimate Partner Violence," *Partner Abuse*, 3/1 (2012): 59-75; J.M. Golding, "Intimate Partner Violence as a Risk Factor for Mental Disorders: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Family Violence*, 14/2 (1999): 99-132; D.M. Johnson and C. Zlotnick. "HOPE for battered women with PTSD in domestic violence shelters," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 40 (2009): 234-241.

⁴⁰ Print campaign. Models are wearing prosthetic effects make up to simulate injuries. See at: Osocio.org: <https://osocio.org/message/act-until-women-and-children-are-safe/> (accessed 24 August 2019)

⁴¹ When searching "domestic violence survivors", the focus of our inquest into this liminal space, the result was mostly poster type images featuring text only, interspersed with the odd facial picture. Searches with DuckduckGo and Bing produced similar results, with lesser prevalence of each of the three types on Bing.

there is a conspicuous difference between the portrayal of victims directed at eliciting the drama within the public sphere and the actual appearance of violence sufferers, in need of our attention.



Fig. 3: © Susana Campos, 2015, 'Life Changes', selection of 14/124 frames. Click on picture to watch animation or got to <http://www.trivent-publishing.eu/pjcv/animation/animation.gif>

When the Daily Mail reported Palombo's new series,⁴² the number of comments rose to 577. It was not, however, the slogan that caused the greatest negative reactions among the general public. The comments' section contained a significant sample of mainstream reactions, showing how the public relates to the representation of domestic violence, with a prevalence of variations around the contents of the top-rated ones. Domestic violence begins with control and isolation, having many different manifestations besides physical abuse. Even when it consists in bodily harm, it is not always visible. These aspects, illustrated by the Duluth model (Fig. 4)⁴³, the most disseminated standard for identification of domestic abuse, were noted by victims' alleged friends or family members.

⁴² Mail Online (2015), "Kim Kardashian, Kendall Jenner and Emma Watson given black eyes and bruises for shocking domestic violence campaign," 1 December. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3341485/Kim-Kardashian-Kendall-Jenner-Emma-Watson-given-black-eyes-bruises-shocking-domestic-violence-campaign.html#ixzz4Lq1IOEAR> (accessed: 15 September 2016)

⁴³ Image from *Free Social work Tools and Resources: SocialWorkersToolbox.com* at: <http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com>



Fig. 1: Duluth Power and Control Model.

The best rated comment, with 3558 votes, was from an alleged survivor: "This annoys me a little as someone who was in an abusive relationship. (...) I don't think any of these celebs can truly relate". The second-best rated comment, with 2794 votes, summarised an overall feeling: "This is incredibly insulting". And the third, with 2516 votes, featured another general complaint: "Why not use real victims? Wouldn't that speak to the public more than photo shopped celebs?"

These three instances were all relevant to the work we were developing. First, survivors of domestic violence are not well served by being stigmatised by a stereotype, the image of the helpless vulnerable woman translated into a beaten-up face.⁴⁴ Second, using celebrities in a sensationalistic depiction glamorises violence, creating an iconography that neither the survivors nor the sympathisers identify with. Third, real survivors seldom come forward. Shame is a common cause, since the prevalent media representation frames it as a family problem, rather than a societal consequence of inequality. Fear is another frequent motive, since statistics on femicide do not differentiate between current or ex-partners⁴⁵ and hiding not only is hard, but it is also risky.

For the art project, these crucial ethical aspects, to be borne in mind when representing survivors, led to an emphasis on the need to transfer agency to the represented subjects. A participatory art project, rather than a one-sided observer's artistic interpretation, might provide an adequate solution. Another question, however, emerged from this episode: why are targets of domestic abuse represented as celebrities, models, or princesses, who display a beaten-up face with voyeuristic appeal?

⁴⁴ See Birgit Wollf, "Gender-based violence and the challenge of visual representation," *Comunicació: Revista de Recerca i d'Anàlisi*, 30/1 (2013): 193-216; and P. Wilcox, "Constructing the Victim and Perpetrator of Domestic Violence," in *Cont_xts: Media, Representation and Society*, ed M. D'Artrey (Chester: Academic Press, 2008), 76-98.

⁴⁵ H. Stöckl, H. et al, "The global prevalence of intimate partner homicide: a systematic review," *The Lancet*, 382 (2013): 859-65.

A. Framing vandalised perfection

The naked-passport-photo style disseminated by Women's Aid was replicated in a 2014 campaign. Although the agency Y&R Dubai focused on verbal abuse, which was an important addition to the imagery that exposes domestic violence, the design concept resorted to yet the same theme for the Lebanese non-profit Kafa (Fig. 5), where audio waveforms of verbal insults are mimicked by the wounds. The naked upper body appears again in a setting where it defies conservatism, the "What Shocks You More" campaign by the NGO March Lebanon, also in 2014 (Fig. 6). Seizing the opportunity afforded by the polemic involving Lebanese Olympic Skier Jackie Chamoun's topless images from a photo shoot,⁴⁶ it calls for authorities to focus on women's rights, rather than on women's modesty. Cosmopolitan Australia had a 2015 campaign reminiscent of those by Women's Aid and Kafa (without the nudity), where the classic wounds on celebrities' faces and necks were made to denounce emotional abuse by being composed of clusters of abusive words and phrases, only perceptible as text upon close inspection.⁴⁷ Avon Foundation for Women also chose the image of a young model with a black eye to champion women's rights.⁴⁸ The Avon ads compared the ephemeral effect of cosmetics to the enduring trauma resulting from abuse, with the phrase "Colours that last".

However, the association of the image with the brand and the wording induced some criticism: a common interpretation was that Avon was suggesting the quality of their products ensured convenient cover for the bruises.

It is not surprising that this theme came to be perceived as an archetype of intimate partner violence, influencing interventions by people outside the advertising industry. Perceived



Fig. 5: © Kafa Lebanon (2014)

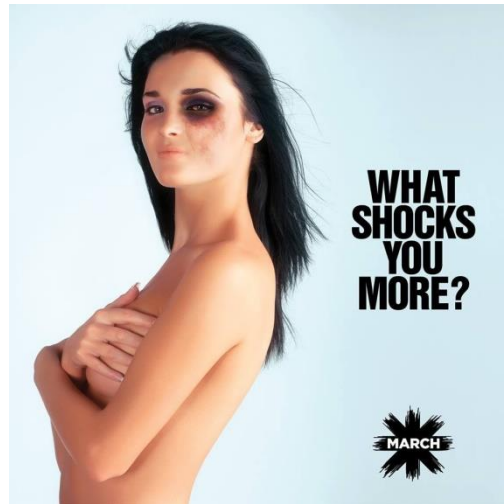


Fig. 6: © March Lebanon (2014)

⁴⁶ The photos were taken from the distance during a photo shoot where Chamoun was posing for an annual Austrian cult calendar featuring male and female Olympic ski instructors.

⁴⁷ See at: <https://www.qt.com.au/news/footy-shows-erin-molan-fights-abuse-shock-campaign/3097102/> (accessed April 9, 2019).

⁴⁸ <https://weddingsatwhisperingoaks.com/avon-ad/avon-advert-to-support-the-stop-violence-against-women-day> (accessed April 9, 2019).

as a marker, it signals to a wide audience that the pertinent issue is domestic abuse. It was adopted by artists, such as Palombo, as we have seen, or Saint Hoax, who gave Jasmine, Aurora, Cinderella and Ariel naked shoulders, a black eye and busted lips.⁴⁹

In 2014, the episode of Belgian student Nicolas Gillon proved how much the stereotypical marker had taken over public perception. For an assignment, in which the sole requirement was to design a classic shocking advertising campaign with a wide public reach, he chose this theme of domestic violence (Fig. 7), becoming an overnight celebrity in France. His images went viral after they were shared on social media, concurrently contributing to further the theme's hegemony in mainstream perceptions. All these widely disseminated images have in common the formal portrait composition genre, the isolation of an attractive female as sole subject matter and centre piece, displaying a beaten-up face while still keeping her looks.



Figure 7: © Nicolas Gillon (2014), Shocking social advertising campaign.
Courtesy of the author

Although different in composition, another campaign used a classic version of the female pose, the reclining body, in 2015. Collective ID seized an opportunity, by putting the blue/white dress meme to powerful use for the Salvation Army South Africa (Fig. 8).⁵⁰ The ad, asking “Why is it so hard to see black and blue?”, went viral worldwide. It granted wide media coverage, more than 30 million Twitter impressions, and greater visibility for the organisation in other parts of the world (The Chronicle of Philanthropy 2015). A later ad replied, “Because they cover it with white and gold” (Fig. 9).

Despite spreading the message against violence to women, these images also spread the stereotype. This was perfectly expressed by the interactive billboards produced by Ocean Outdoor for Women’s Aid in 2016, where facial recognition and tracking technology permitted the bruised portraits of (yet again) naked women to heal faster, the more they were looked at, until they smiled back, fully healed.⁵¹ They falsify the narrative as it applies to targets of

⁴⁹ <http://www.sainthoax.com/campaigns/happy-never-after> (accessed April 9, 2019)

⁵⁰ See also the video reporting the ad’s reception on the agency’s website at: <https://collectiveid.co.za/portfolio-item/salvation-army/> (accessed April 9, 2019)

⁵¹ See the campaign at: <https://econsultancy.com/how-women-s-aid-used-digital-ooh-ads-to-make-327m-people-stop-look/> (accessed April 9, 2019)

abuse, by claiming that by being the objects of attention, by making a denunciation or escaping, the violence will stop and they will be content.

Such images, in addition to maintaining the status quo with regard to women's objectifi-



Fig. 8: © Collective ID (2015), campaign for Salvation Army South Africa



Fig. 9: © Collective ID (2015), campaign for Salvation Army South Africa

cation in advertising, fall within a narrow scope regarding gender diversity, ethnicity, and race, and do not reflect the variety of abusive harm. Such a reductionist view concerning both the range of harms that can target women, and the variety of women likely to be targeted, perpetuates a one-sided vision. Besides not helping to ameliorate the conditions for viewing abuse as a social problem, it might prevent the public or potential victims from recognising the wider scope of victimization and subtler manifestations of abuse as parts of societal plotlines.

Resorting to voyeurism and glamorization as means to draw public attention, they sometimes offend survivors, who do not relate to this representation. Finally, they forget the pain of surviving, the struggles of liminality and the depth of the subsequent losses.

B. Stories of devaluation: beauty and the absent beast?

The pervasiveness of voyeuristic appeal in representing violence, which contaminates collective imagery to the point that it appears to define survivors, was to be avoided in the project. As a limitation preventing accounts whose cumulative result might be closer to a fuller portrait

of survivors' diversity and complexity, it also hinders the perception of the multiple plot lines that intersect and overlap to form an integrated story of struggles and wounds. Furthermore, liminal phases in this context are characterised by further oppression in the form of loss of intrinsic identity, precisely when identity needs to be actualised in order to survive socially.

Our primary hypothesis that the stereotype functioned as a marker with 'clickbait' potential, a way to gain an immediate attentive response from the public, gave way to a pluriform approach. Janice Haaken's seminal publication, *Hard Knocks: Domestic Violence and the Psychology of Storytelling*,⁵² offers an understanding of the social and cultural stances that make the concept of male violence towards women so elusive and argues that the broad and complex scope of abuse is better explained in terms of intersectional chains of oppression. Adopting a psychoanalytic perspective, the book frames aggression in intimate partners' relationships within its intersectional sources – family tensions, gender inequality, skin colour, ethnicity, social class, history, cultural and artistic constructs, or the effects of colonisation in a contemporary cosmopolitan society.

We were trying to devise a way to portray survivors during their stay in a women's refuge — and a portrait is only effective when it elicits recognition — and were therefore interested in the public perception of a profile of the abused female. In *Hard Knocks*, the author distinguishes three prevalent plot lines in the literary references to domestic abuse, starting at the gothic novel. The first, she calls "stories of bondage"; the second, "stories of deliverance"; the third, "stories of struggle and reparation". In the first two, the protagonist is similar: a virtuous woman, a person of principle, the central figure of tales that speak of "damsels in distress,"⁵³ in Haaken's own words. Between these two strands, only the outcomes are different: in one case there is transcendence of violence through a notion of moral superiority; in the other the heroic woman concocts a strategy to elope. In order to justify in the public eye that they did not deserve their punishment, these women are portrayed as kind, innocent, even flawless, targets of male anger. The third strand, however, "dramatizes engagement in ideals that elude full realisation, and exceeds the standard denouements that offer means of containing the conflict. [It] also gives rise to new ethical demands. (...) From a psychoanalytic perspective [it] encompasses a more complex morality."⁵⁴

The idealisation of the victim as seen in the first two strands, where she is merely a target of violence and never its enactor, is reminiscent of the representation of ideal wives in early modern England. In Shakespeare's play "The Taming of the Shrew," Kate is the shrew, an outspoken woman who does not comply with the acceptance of male authority, and the last choice for a female partner. Since it is a farcical genre of play, it makes perfectly clear that wife abuse was socially accepted in its time. Winking at a complicit public, it shows us that violence was more than tolerated: it was seen as a useful means of disciplining wives and making better women out of them. We are looking at a period when public shaming of disobedient wives was so common that the use of the scold's bridle was instrumental in eliciting repentance among shrews, scolds, or gossipers, in England, Scotland and Wales. An iron muzzle in an iron framework placed around the head, with a piece inserted in the mouth and pressing the tongue down (Fig. 10), the bridle was both chastising and pedagogical, as women

⁵² Janice Haaken, *Hard knocks: Domestic violence and the psychology of storytelling* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2010).

⁵³ Ibid: 78-100.

⁵⁴ Ibid: 84.

would be paraded in a process of humiliation (Fig.11),⁵⁵ reminding the female public of the consequences of being riotous, troublesome, or speaking their minds.



Fig. 10 and Fig 11 Scold's bridle, from W. Andrews *Old time punishments*, 1890.



Fig. 12. Gillray (1782), "Judge Thumb"

⁵⁵ Fig. 10 and Fig. 11 (detail) from William Andrews, *Old Time Punishments*, 1890, p. 38, and p. 140, <https://archive.org/details/oldtimepunishmen00andruoft/> (accessed April 9, 2019)

Wife beating continued to be the social norm throughout the following centuries, despite not being overtly condoned within higher social status. One well known illustration by Gill-ray depicts Judge Thumb (Fig. 12),⁵⁶ proposing that wife-beating was lawful, provided that the instrument used was no thicker than the man's thumb. Although there is no record of such a law being passed by Judge Buller, as Gillray claimed at the time, the image trivialises what was publicly accepted, or the 'rule of thumb': one could beat his wife for discipline's sake, provided one was not too harsh; the aggressor would be the judge in his own cause.

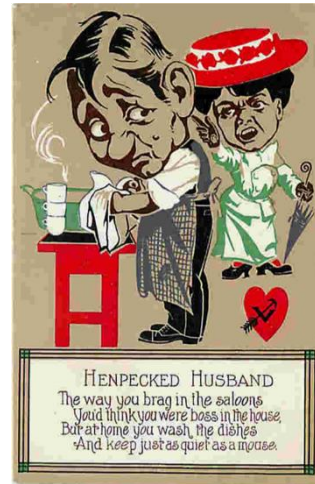


Fig. 13. Butler Clowes (1768), "The Hen-Peckt Husband" Fig. 14. Valentine Comics (1900's)

Women's much lower status was common knowledge. First recorded in the late 17th century, the term "henpecked" describes a man who allows himself to be browbeaten, bullied, or coerced by his female partner. A treatment of men similar to that commonly accepted with regard to women, it inspired a poem by Robert Burns and a few illustrations over time (Fig. 13 and Fig. 14).⁵⁷ What is striking about these images is that chastising men could mean simply to berate them, or even to make them take a woman's point of view. The status quo had not been broken in the early twentieth century, as we find a similar concept in images criticising the suffragettes' movement. Their fight for equality was seen as a violence to men (Fig. 15, 16, 17)⁵⁸ — a perception deriving from the gendered nature of social constructions of power

⁵⁶ Fig. 13 from The British Museum Collection Online, at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1638612&partId=1&searchText=6122&page=1 (accessed April 9, 2019)

⁵⁷ Fig 14 from Collector's Weekly, at: <https://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/happy-valentines-day-i-hate-you/#More%20Vinegar%20Valentines> (accessed April 9, 2019); The British Museum Collection Online, at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1667388&partId=1&searchtext=shoe+horn&page=4 (accessed April 9, 2019)

⁵⁸ Fig 15 and Fig. 16 from the Palczewski, Catherine H. Postcard Archive. University of Northern Iowa. Cedar Falls, IA, https://scholarworks.uni.edu/suffrage_images/ (accessed April 9, 2019); Fig 17 from the National Women's History Museum, at: <http://www.crusadeforthetvote.org/naows-opposition> (accessed April 9, 2019)

and interpersonal violence.⁵⁹ Coherent with Marianne Hester's recent findings in a comparative study of male-versus-female-perpetrated abuse in relationships, the perception of victimhood in men seems to require a lesser degree of harm and fewer incidents of violent behaviour from their female partners than the reverse case.⁶⁰ The perception of domestic violence as experienced by men, reported from Hester's interviews, was dramatically different from that by women, including the number of incidents required before subjects reported to the police. Self-defence accounts were prevalent concerning violence in women, the majority of whom used it to protect themselves or to escape from their partners.⁶¹ Control and coercion, the primary forms of violence against women, were rarely experienced by men reported in this study.

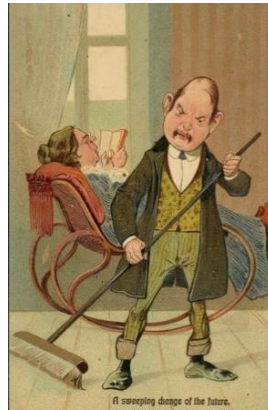


Fig. 15. Bamforth Postcard, 1910; Fig. 16. Paul Finkenrath Postcard, 1900's. Fig. 17. Library of Congress, "Election Day", c.1909;

It is also striking, when we compare these images of male suffering at the hands of women portrayed as prepotent (or the equivalent images of wife beating) with the images of fake survivors shown at the beginning, that in the latter no source of violence is shown. In a conspicuous difference, no couple is represented, there is no enactment of conflict nor a depiction of the perpetrator. No account of action further renders passive the subject displayed. The fight against male abuse appears to have chosen to leave the aggressor out of the picture, removing him from the narrative.

C. Beauty and the gazing rescuer

Haaken describes a considerable loss of enthusiasm among feminists in support networks for domestic violence, patent in an increasingly conservative discourse, and attributes it to the institutionalisation of services and the professionalisation of advocates. If we look specifically

⁵⁹ R.W. Connell, "Gender Politics for Men," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17/1-2 (1997): 62-77; R.W. Connell and J.W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19/6 (2005): 829-859

⁶⁰ Marianne Hester, *Who Does What to Whom? Gender and Domestic Violence Perpetrators* (Bristol: University of Bristol in association with the Northern Rock Foundation, 2009).

⁶¹ Marianne Hester, "Portrayal of Women as Intimate Partner Domestic Violence Perpetrators," *Violence Against Women* 18/9 (2012): 1067-1082.

at the idealisation of the victim, we can see that it remained essentially within a conservative plot. At the beginning, this was due to feminist critiques of patriarchy, a precarious struggle requiring an untouchable victim, so as not to allow for a subversion of the narrative. Presently, it is to facilitate alliances of charities and other institutions with the state, or to engage donors.

Social marketing is increasingly employed in initiatives aiming to diminish the incidence of intimate partners' violence. The depiction of the effects of violence shocks, and draws attention, gaining discernibility in the midst of a visual jumble.⁶² Research shows that in its shocking modes it is scarcely effective with perpetrators, having sometimes a "boomerang effect."⁶³ Its impact on the general public is significant, but the subsequent influence appears to be ephemeral. It is known that advertising for charities often displays pictures of the segment of the population to which they devote their efforts. By exploring what is termed "emotional contagion,"⁶⁴ they manipulate the public, more likely to engage with these images in a sympathetic and generous way when they stand before sadness and misery. But in the case of our images these are not real victims, they are fake. The public is well aware of this, since these are either women with public visibility (and therefore not 'any woman'), or they are likely to be viewed as professional models (when, of course, they are not Disney princesses). Looking at those images from the point of view of what might be their ultimate intent — capturing the attention of powerful men, who are ultimately the major influencers or donors — these translations of damaged beauty can become a perverse medium to reach a desirable goal. A representation of abuse to women resting on "hegemonic masculinity"⁶⁵ may be effective in drawing the public's attention, but in the long run also has negative effects on the general public's perceptions.

Misogynistic and sexist representation of women is prevalent in advertising, where from the fashion industry to car sales they are presented for the male gaze, within stereotyped, heterosexual gender-polarity. So pervasive is the acceptance of violence to women, that in many cases it is presented as 'sexy'. This could justify the gory faces of damaged beauty seeking to break through immunity to scenes with tortured women, which habit has managed to install.

Gendered discourse, such as the one predominant in mainstream activism against violence to women, contributes to a possible anchoring to the liminal space. Perceptions, actions and choices within editorial, artistic, or advertising initiatives are not immune from the contexts in which they occur. They have political dimensions, cultural biases and social prejudices, and therefore reproduce "masculinist" "visual grammars" which perpetuate "non-agential articulations of 'woman' as victim" and "[reduce] the marker 'woman' to an elaboration of sex."⁶⁶

The graphic nature of this presentation of domestic violence typifies the 'appropriate victim', which only occurs in the presence of a 'monster', disregarding forms of violence not

⁶² S. Parry et al, "Shockvertising?: An exploratory investigation into attitudinal variations and emotional reactions to shock advertising," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12 (2013): 112–121; P. Skorupa, "Shocking contents in social and commercial advertising," *Creativity Studies*, 7/2 (2014): 69–81.

⁶³ D. Gadd et al, "This is Abuse... Or is it? Domestic abuse perpetrators' responses to anti-domestic violence publicity," *Crime, Media, Culture*, 10/1(2014): 3–22.

⁶⁴ D.A. Small and N.V. Coleman, "The Face of Need: Facial Emotion Expression on Charity Advertisements," *Journal of Marketing Research* 47/6 (2007): 777–787.

⁶⁵ R. Jewkes et al, "Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender interventions," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17/sup2 (2015): 96–111. As the authors highlight, the concept is fluid, and its implications also depend on "the content of hegemonic masculinity in different settings" (p. 115).

⁶⁶ Robin Redhead, "Imag(in)ing Women's Agency," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9/2 (2007): 218–238.

visually conspicuous. Not only are they limited to the first two storylines that Haaken describes, they can never capture the singularity of real cases, nor the complexity of any given group of survivors.

Shocking advertising is meant to break through the excess of stimuli in public space. In social situations, particularly when reporting on social dramas that require donations, it often relies on fear to draw the public's attention.⁶⁷ Our suggestion is that in the aforementioned alliance with a mainly patriarchal sphere, encompassing state and wealth, agencies that conceive shocking campaigns based on the fear of damaging beauty explore the attraction of voyeurism and the appeal to the male gaze. Given the genuine sympathy transpiring from their discourse, they are likely to do so unwillingly, while standing on cultural selection processes.

IV. Anonymised composite portraits

Collaborative and participatory art are terms loosely applied to mean rather disparate things. Both are used to designate socially engaged work with random volunteers, organised groups, or individuals working with a particular segment or community. These terms cover a range of possibilities, from the activation of an audience that becomes the medium for the artist's idea, to the complete erasure of the artist from the final outcome, and from artist-driven to process-driven methodologies. In any case, they usually play with notions of authorship and dismiss talent as a higher endowment. Our participatory project cuts across several conceptions: socially engaged, collaborative, interactive, and artist- or process-driven, depending on the exercises that were involved in art-making.

Set around a kitchen table, the workshops in England had a format similar to that of art classes. To enable a greater power balance between the artist and research participants, the project emulated a coordinator-team relationship. The team included the two researchers from Sociology, Benedetta Cappellini and Vicki Harman, and a social worker from Solace Women's Aid, the charity hosting the project. While Susana, as coordinator-artist, conducted the activities and designed the format of the outcomes through the choice of exercises, these were directed to a considerable extent by the participants' previous responses.

During the workshops, participants were invited to elaborate verbally on the developing work through informal conversation. Vicki and Benedetta were also sharing their experiences in drawings and words, therefore they helped to keep the conversation going. The use of images to communicate experiences was an alternative or complementary to words, but it also enabled women who had no command of the local language to express themselves through their drawings. Work on objects was usually proposed at the start of each session, moving on to portraits. Drawing certain objects could elicit painful memories and objects were sometimes perceived as implements of violence (a gun, alcoholic drinks, a curtain hiding something dangerous), therefore the activities of making the portraits were welcomed as an opportunity for tension release and an opportunity for relaxation.

Mutual portraits were occasions of some uneasiness, due to gazing at people and having them gazing back. But these were also moments of conviviality and laughter, since the artistic solutions encountered were specifically directed at providing close interaction, and to the impossibility of facial recognition, which generated 'funny' pictures. Susana was the first to pose,

⁶⁷ S. Parry et al, "Shockvertising?: An exploratory investigation into attitudinal variations and emotional reactions to shock advertising," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12 (2013): 112–121; P. Skorupa, "Shocking contents in social and commercial advertising," *Creativity Studies*, 7/2 (2014): 69–81.

to break inhibitions, to make herself equally vulnerable to the cohort's gaze and to set a standard for casual posing. Despite the occasional discomfort reported by participants, they all considered these were enjoyable and fruitful experiences that drew them closer together.

Displaced came to be a singular installation, morphing to be presented at different settings.⁶⁸ At the exhibitions, a selection of the original art works was exhibited alongside the posters containing articulations of images and participants' quotes. A video made by Susana was projected (see Fig. 18). Consisting of a stop motion animated painting, it was obtained by photographing consecutive moments of a repeatedly destroyed portrait. Aiming to capture a composite portrait of all participants involved, each moment gave way to a different face, which was a mashup of different women. Directed to a representation of particulars rather than standard concepts, it makes visible the 'normalcy' perceived in individual women, while describing some of the different emotional states observed during the interaction.

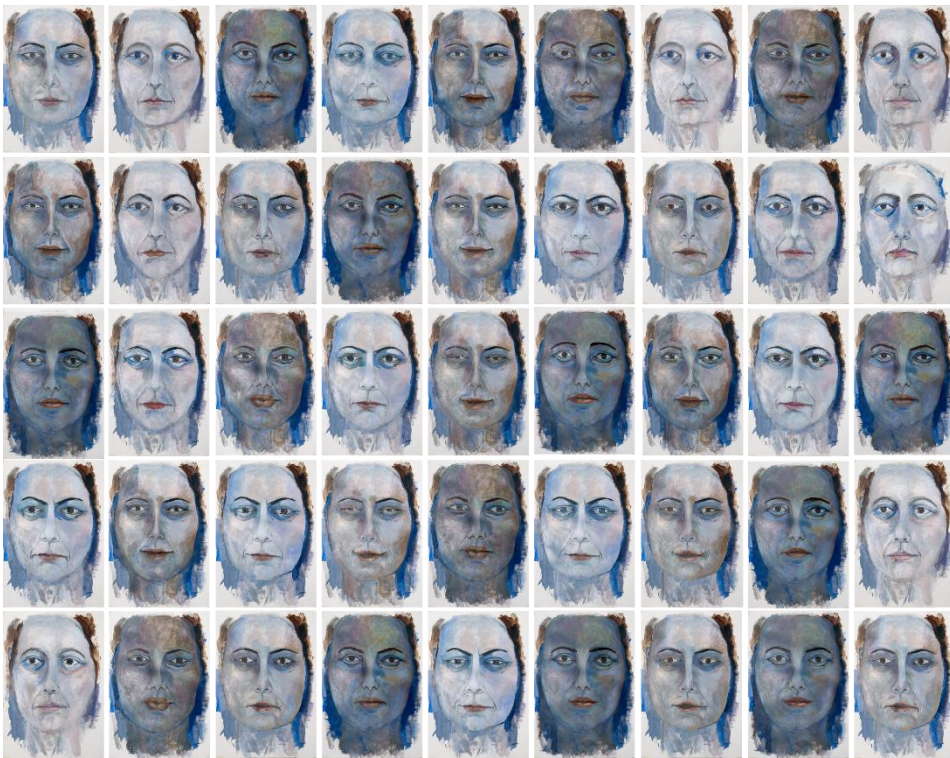


Fig. 18: S. © Campos, 2016), “Liminal Identities” (sketch), selection of 45/196 video frames.

Click on the image to watch animation, or go to
<http://www.trivent-publishing.eu/sequence/sequence.mp4>

The contextual composite portraits were arranged around the four pre-defined categories: loved, hated, missed, and wanted objects (Fig. 19-20). We saw these objects as identity probes, translating permanence, loss, rejection and actualisation.

⁶⁸ See project's Website, *Displaced*, at <https://displacedweb.wordpress.com/>



Fig. 19: © Displaced Collective (2016), “Loved Objects” (poster and detail).



Fig. 20: © Displaced Collective (2016), “Hated Objects” (detail).

Participants’ intrinsic behaviour as draftspersons was captured through making portraits of others using blind contour, a classic exercise where the eyes never move from the subject matter and therefore never look at the paper (Fig.21). Highly idiosyncratic, the process results in drawings unable to describe faithfully the object of observation, but very similar to each other per participant, which translates the author into maker.



Fig. 21: © Displaced Collective (2016), 'Personal idiosyncrasy'. Left: original blind contour portraits by Fatima and Mona; right: posters for Kaira's and Lucy's blind contour portraits

A controlled activity was designed to produce composite self-portraits, fixing on mirrors partial reflexions of participants, members of refuge staff and research team. These mashups are genuine as self-portraits, since they contain features from everyone, but they do not allow for recognition. (Fig. 22). When looked at by a spectator, the observer's reflection falls on top of the drawing, bringing an overlap where the contours dissolve into a fleeting line. The procedure was reproduced in a public activity at the exhibitions, meant to provide a number of 'onlookers' to be displayed in the future in front of the composite portraits of project participants.



Fig. 22: © Displaced Collective (2016), 'Anonymised Composite Self-portrait'. Permanent pen on mirrors. Bottom right, a view of the public activity, next to exhibited art work

The fusing of text with image generated powerful storytelling. Supported by meanings connected to either material or immaterial objects, which contextualised everyday life, they also offered a perspective on the singularity and nature of each 'speaker.' These stories give us glimpses of the control and coercion the women were subjected to, of the amputation of their existence, but also of how they could be you and me, if only you could see them.

V. Violent portraits: anonymity as erasure

Sharing agency with research participants in order to design a portrait that contains their plurality, with the capacity to change and reorganize, requires abandoning the position of the external observer. We cannot probe the unpredictable nature of their experiences and perceptions, nor the layers of their distinct perspectives of suffering and violence, deeply embedded in their private stories. Objectivity and ethics were challenged through the implications of anonymity: the co-authors of the art project were simultaneously its subject, and therefore erased on multiple dimensions, after having been subtracted from their original world. This further cut from their social image implicated additional loss of identity on top of their liminality, extending the violence exerted upon them.

Portraying someone without revealing their visual appearance is always an exercise of abstraction. Anonymity was an established requirement, and its effacement operation had to be surmounted somehow. Although we still explored the gratifying alley of conventional resemblant portraits, in displaying the outputs we had to eliminate their most *virtuoso* work. The quotes were selected from one-to-one interviews, recorded conversations, and field notes. Despite the discourse for public audiences being exclusively in their voice, the researchers were the ones selecting what was to be heard; we had the power of translating.

What will follow surviving is not known yet, but “survivor” is where each of these women stands in liminality, so she is in a position of having resisted domination. Acknowledging it, we recognise the barriers are on our side, it is we who see ourselves in a position of power. We find it difficult to ‘un-see’ her label of victim with all the associated imagery; even if we have never seen any signs of the violence that she endured; we presume her vulnerability. By rejecting such an imagined power, and making ourselves equally vulnerable, we throw down the barriers, allowing for intelligible exchange.

Then we become productive. But we are not just that group that is making art together. We are also subjugated by other power structures, we are researchers, we have funding, we have to disseminate findings, we have to ‘show off’ what we have done. So, we pull-up new barriers when they are out of sight, we talk about them as if they were alien, different, particular — others.

The requirement to keep survivors anonymous resulted in an unfavourable situation for our project’s participants, only fully apparent at the exhibitions. We were sorry that some contributors were not able to attend the private view and complete the journey. Despite having dressed-up for it, the few participants attending were there off-record, and we sensed a feeling of not-belonging, prolonging the title, *Displaced*, to yet another dimension. Now in a foreign territory, it was still just them and us; as any artist would know, the work is only completed when it reaches the public, some public, any public. They had no audience.

The fact that the co-authors of the art work were not permitted to have a part in its public display was odd, and their absence soon started to fill the room in other ways. Not only they could not be complimented by the public who saw their work, but they also had to be absent from the art works themselves. Their signature had to be erased when it was proudly appended to a drawing, if they wanted that drawing to be seen; their best portraits had to be left out from public display; their faces had to be deformed or ‘cut into pieces’ to be visually recorded. In the public session the absent co-authors gave a ghostly appearance to the characters of the storytelling. Nonetheless, it made them visible, in their invisible sort of way.

Acknowledgements

We thank AleXsandro Palombo, Kafa Lebanon, March Lebanon, Nicolas Gillon and Collective ID for their kind copyright permission regarding image use.

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