GENDERED EXPERIENCES, POLITICAL IDENTITIES, AND ARTISTIC INTENTIONS OF WOMEN PUBLIC ARTISTS

Zoë Grenier
Sociology and Women's Studies
University of New Hampshire

Dr. Catherine Moran
Department of Sociology
University of New Hampshire

Introduction

Public art has been researched as a practice and validation of masculinity. Looking at the experiences of women will provide a more balanced and complete look into the many realms of public art.

Due to the perceptions of public art by larger culture as vandalism destruction of property, and promotion of anarchism, power dynamics exist between authority and public artists.

Under this layer exists a power dynamic between women in public art and their legitimized counterparts.

Methodology

I will be conducting 7-10 semi-structured interviews with women public artists who are from or reside in the US, UK, and Australia. These interviews will be conducted using feminist interviewing methods. I have used a snowball sampling method, aiming to include a diverse population of artists. I am recruiting using social media, artists' blogs, websites, and existing interviews.

To analyze my data, I will be using qualitative data analysis software to code responses according to themes such as politicized identity, hegemonic cultural power dynamics, subculture and deviance, social change, and ideologies of public space. Finally, I will be using my data from these interviews to express the importance of including the voices of underrepresented people in academic research, especially in regards to social change.

Past Literature and Research

Key researchers in the field of subculture and deviance have briefly touched on gender in the graffiti and street art world. However, gaps remain regarding women's experiences and interactions.

Nancy MacDonald argues that subcultural studies have analyzed social class membership and has ignored other dynamics and identities. She found that "male" graffiti writers more easily achieve status because they are displaying masculine characteristics through risk-taking behavior (2001).

Allison Young emphasizes that crime is often seen as men's act, therefore, criminalization of graffiti has led to its masculine characterization through associations with destruction, aggressiveness, wastefulness, and intent to cultivate strong responses from the viewer. The risk involved with graffiti as a subculture is viewed often as something women would not do (2005).

Richard Lachmann identified that mentoring is an important right of passage to becoming a respected writer in the culture. However, many men would refuse to mentor women because they did not want them to have membership into their group (1988).

Working Model of Artistic Intentionality

	Political	Non-political
Individual	Contesting hypocrisy & market exploitation Autonomy of group	Self-Affirmation Autonomy of self
Collective	Voice of the community Response to political event Discourse	Enchanting urban space via gift Commissions

Description of Working Model

This model is based on Visconti and colleague's categorization of the ideologies of street artists and the perceptions of their audience or "dwellers." Looking at past literature from many disciplines on literature on art, consumer/producer relationships, political motivations, and politicized identities, I have created a model in which to place certain artist ideologies about public art.

This model does not use concrete parameters for each ideology, rather it is treated as a spectrum. Through the interview process, I will collect data and responses that will allow me to determine where these artist stand in terms of ideology, and eventually determine the ways identity can inform these placements when enough data is gathered.

Autonomy of a Group vs Autonomy of Self:
This is where I hypothesize that there will be a difference between men and women public artists. Having a politicized identity may incline artists to view their own call for autonomy as a symbol for the autonomy of a group.

Feminist Interviewing

In order to see and study women's experiences as they truly are, and resist conforming to traditional academic lenses that may unintentionally silence women, this study will utilize feminist interviewing methodologies.

This methodology includes:

- Using inclusive language
- Avoiding mislabeling of identities
- Understanding that women have different experiences in public and private life
- Resisting perpetration of power structures
- Listening thoroughly to anecdotal information and ideologies

Using this framework, I have researched my potential interviewees extensively to make myself aware of the identities they have. Also, I am sure to describe my participants as "women" instead of "female," because I am focusing on gender.

Sample Interview Questions

Because this research is not about the perceived meaning behind the art, but rather the perceptions and intentions of the artists, my interview questions focus on the perspective of the artists themselves.

- Do you feel that your art tries to beautify the space it occupies?
- Are there any social movements you are a part of or feel connected to?
- In what ways do you think your identities inform the subject matter of your art?
- In what ways do you think your identities provide a challenge in the creation of your art or make it difficult to feel legitimized as an artist?
- Do you think that graffiti is seen as masculine? Does this have to do with illegality?
- Have you ever had any interactions with authorities or others trying to regulate your art? What were these interactions like?
- Is there a person/group of people that serves as a muse for your work?
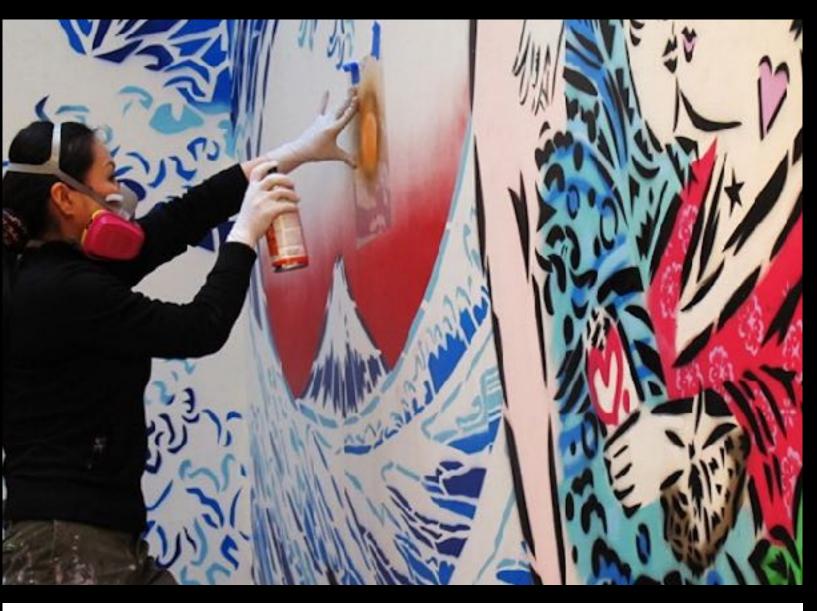
Goals and Objectives

This study uses theories of politicized identity, hegemonic cultural power dynamics, subculture and deviance, social change, and urban sociology to analyze the layered and culturally rich world of public art.

This analysis will examine the ways gender, race, social position, and place affect the experience in the graffiti and street art world, and how this informs their artistic expression.

The goal of this research is to include the voices of underrepresented identities into the sociological studies of art, race, and power.

Sources

Devault, Marjorie L. 1990. "Talking and Listening: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis." Social Problems 37(1): 96-116.
MacDonald, Nancy. 2001. The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity, and Identity in London and New York Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
Lachmann, Richard. 1988. "Graffiti as Career and Ideology." University of Chicago Press 94(2): 229-250.
Visconti, Luca M., John Sherry Jr., Stefania Borghini, and Laurel Anderson. 2010. "Street Art, Sweet Art? Reclaiming the 'Public' and Public Space." Journal of Consumer Research 37(3): 511-529.
Young, Alison. 2005. Judging the Image: Art, Value, Law. New York, New York: Routledge. Retrieved March 11, 2017

Contact

Zoë Grenier
She/Her/Hers
Department of Sociology
University of New Hampshire
Class of 2018

zag2002@wildcats.unh.edu
(603) 540-3007
McConnell Hall
15 Academic Way
Durham, NH
03824