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"Stepping back" as researchers: Addressing ethics in arts-based approaches to working with war-affected children in school and community settings

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Abstract

There is a need for an ethically responsible means of conducting arts-based research with children affected by global adversity, including children affected by war. The multiple effects of war on children remains a global issue. While there are many approaches to working with war-affected children, participatory arts-based methods such as photovoice, drama, and drawing are being increasingly relied upon. However, what are the ethical issues and how are researchers and practitioners taking up these issues in school, community, and "on the street" settings? By reviewing the literature on ethical issues that may arise when working with children through arts-based methods, this article identifies four critical ethical issues that represent specific challenges in relation to children affected by war: (1) informed consent; (2) truth, interpretation, and representation; (3) dangerous emotional terrain; and (4) aesthetics. The article highlights current gaps in the research and poses several unanswered questions in arts-based research with war-affected children.

Keywords: Arts-based Research; War-affected Children; Ethics; Informed Consent; Interpretation.

Introduction

As a team of researchers[1] working in the area of arts-based approaches to engaging in research with children affected by global adversity, and especially those affected by war, we have been interested in deepening our understanding of what it means to be ethically responsible in the research process itself. The issue of children affected by war remains a particularly complex one. This is a global issue, both in relation to new, ongoing, and recently resolved conflicts around the world, and also in relation to forced migration and the ways in which children are reintegrated into new country contexts through schools and communities.

There are numerous participatory arts-based approaches to working with war-affected children. The Suitcase Project, for example, initiated by Clacherty (2006) in her work with refugee children in South Africa demonstrates how using the arts and working with material culture can help to frame support for war-affected children *alongside* research that allows the researcher or practitioner to deepen an understanding of the issues. The Suitcase Project was developed out of the need to provide accessible psychosocial support for refugee children who struggled daily with issues of identity, voicelessness, xenophobia, and marginalisation in their host country, and psychological trauma from past experiences of war and displacement. Through a therapeutic and creative mixed media approach, children were encouraged to use suitcases to conceptualise their lives, both past and present, and to use their artwork to tell their stories and express themselves. Researchers ensured at all stages that children had the power to determine their level of engagement and emotional involvement. The project was guided by the notion that children are capable of contributing to their own healing, reclaiming their identities, and building their sense of self-worth.

In this article we are interested in "stepping back" to re-examine participatory arts-based approaches to working with war-affected children. What has guided our work has been a concern for the ethical dimensions of research with war-affected children. Clacherty's (2006) methodology is a good example of an approach that seeks to use the arts in ways that address the particular situation of the war-affected child. How might we look again at common arts-based tools and methods such as photovoice, drama, and drawing through the lens of ethics? What methodologies are appropriate for carrying out the stepping back process and how might they contribute to a deeper understanding of work with special populations such as war-affected children?

In the first section, we offer a brief overview of methodologies in arts-based research, focusing in particular on ones that are most frequently used in studies with war-affected children. In the second section of the article, we use a stepping back process to briefly describe and reflect on our methodology for carrying out the literature review. In the third section, we offer an analysis of four key areas of review related to ethics and arts-based research. We end the article with a consideration of the implications of this work for future research and programming.

[1]All authors contributed equally to the production of this article; the authors are listed alphabetically.

Arts-based research

There are numerous participatory arts-based research approaches that examine the lives and experiences of war-affected children. This section will focus on three methods: photovoice, drawing, and drama. We chose these methods because they engage war-affected children in an effective process of dialogue and creative expression. Furthermore, each research method contributes significantly to providing children with opportunities to understand and construct meaning from their past and present experiences in challenging and adverse settings.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a visual participatory approach whereby people can "identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). Such an approach is primarily used to engage marginalised groups in artistic expressions of issues that are of significance to them. According to Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice has three objectives: firstly, it enables people to document the strengths and weaknesses of their community; secondly, it promotes grassroots knowledge construction and critical dialogue; and thirdly, it strives to impact policymakers through dissemination of photographs in the hopes of effecting social change. Through the use of cameras, participants are able to produce visual representations of their individual and collective narratives, which give insight into how they make sense of their surrounding environments and experiences (Green & Kloos, 2009). Numerous projects employing this method have been conducted with marginalised communities facing critical issues such as women's health (Wang, 1999), forced migration (Green & Kloos, 2009), and HIV and AIDS (Larkin et al., 2007; Mitchell, De Lange, Moletsane, Stuart, & Buthelezi, 2005).

Photovoice is a particularly useful method for youth who have experienced the devastating effects of war. They need programs that provide them with avenues for "emotional expression, personal support, and opportunities to enhance their past experiences" (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008, p. 534). Through creative and artistic expression, children can construct meaning and come to terms with the trauma experienced through armed conflict. In a study conducted in Sierra Leone (Denov, Doucet, & Kamara, 2012), photovoice was successfully employed to highlight the post-conflict lives of former child soldiers and their reintegration into mainstream society. The youth who participated were able to represent crucial issues that had an impact on their lives such as social connections, wartime experiences, economic survival, and education. Through intense discussions with researchers and fellow participants and reflection on their photographs, the youth were able to give voice to controversial issues as well as their own experiences. Furthermore, they played an integral role in choosing photographs to display for their exhibitions, which attracted the interest of the community, local and international non-governmental organisations, and policy-makers.

Drawing

Drawing, as an arts-based research method, is an important tool for contributing to the understanding of children's and adults' thoughts, memories, feelings, and aspirations formed by their sociocultural context (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011). As a form of knowledge production and sharing, visual images through drawing can sometimes be more accessible and powerful than academic text. Drawings require participants to reflect, contemplate, and conceptualise their responses to research inquiries. Researchers and participants collaborate to analyse and make meaning from their drawings. As producers of knowledge, participants are encouraged to contribute to the interpretations of their drawings, either verbally or through writing. This strategy can be used to educate others on significant social, cultural, and political practices as well as enable participants to promote community empowerment and social change (Literat, 2013).

War-affected children are encouraged to creatively express themselves through drawings and subsequent in-depth discussions. This strategy has been used in many studies to ascertain their psychosocial wellbeing and mental health (Jordans, 2009; Kalksma-Van Lith, 2007; Wessells & Monteiro, 2001). Drawings indirectly help children to learn how to express their emotions, communicate their ideas, and build relationships (Angel, Hjern, & Ingleby, 2001; Kalksma-Van Lith, 2007). In order to acquire a greater sense of meaning from drawings, it is essential for researchers and children to engage in a "shared analysis" by giving the child a voice to express his or her intentions. Through collaborative knowledge production, drawings can then be used to facilitate critical dialogue amongst war-affected children, researchers, and communities to advocate for social change.

International organisations, including Save the Children and UNICEF, have used drawings as a psychosocial support strategy for children affected by the current Syrian conflict. One such project took place within the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, where children aged 14 to 18 years were provided artistic avenues to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Save the Children & UNICEF, 2013). Their visual work ranged from depicting prewar memories, to scenes of atrocities and death, as well as hopes of peace and security for the future. Drawings can thus serve the psychosocial needs of traumatised youth while mobilising community members to seek changes in policy and development within conflict zones.

Drama

Creative activities, such as drama, allow participants to transform themselves and represent others through role-play, movement, and storytelling (Moneta & Rousseau, 2008). Drama provides an innovative outlet to play with different identities while enacting stories, images, and emotions. Drama therapy is defined as "the intentional use of creative drama towards the psychotherapeutic goals of symptom relief, emotional and physical integration, and personal growth" (Johnson, 1982, p. 83).

Drama therapy programs encourage youth to create meaning and identity through their personal stories by visually representing internal reflections onto their external surroundings (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). According to Emunah (1990), there is a significant relationship between creativity and healing whereby youth can ameliorate their emotional struggles by exploring them through artistic and imaginative strategies as well as in safe and nonthreatening spaces.

One study that employed drama therapy to address the psychosocial needs of refugees took place in a multiethnic neighbourhood in Montreal (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). The goal was to give young immigrants and refugees a platform to voice their stories and construct meaning out of their past and present experiences. The drama therapy workshops successfully integrated the participation of youth in developing and sharing their stories through sound, movement, images, rhythm, and improvisation. As engaged and enthusiastic participants, the youth felt safe to express themselves and confront their past experiences through reenactment and metaphorical representations (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008).

Stepping back: About method

We are a team of Montreal-based researchers, working in a variety of national and global contexts (Palestine, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Pakistan) with war-affected children and using arts-based methods, who came together as part of a study on Children in Global Adversity[1] to consider critical issues related to arts-based research in this work. In our discussions over eight months, we began to raise what might be described as "productive unknowing" questions (Vasudevan, 2011): Why are arts-based approaches so

[1] Myriam Denov and a multidisciplinary team of 15 Québec researchers launched this multi-institutional study in 2012. Funded by *Fonds de recherché du Québec–Société et culture* (FRQSC), this research aims to explore the complex realities of war-affected children living in Québec.

significant in work with war-affected children? Where is this type of work being done (which countries)? Where is it being published (journals, reports of NGOs)? Who is doing this research—independent researchers? NGOs? Who are the participants and how are issues of sex and age factored in? We also explored questions related to power and how it plays out in work with marginalised children. Coming out of this concern for power—and one that caused us to engage in stepping back—is the critical issue of ethics in arts-based work with war-affected children. While we found a rich body of work on ethics in working with children, more broadly—even (and perhaps especially) in the context of participatory visual research (Mitchell, 2011; Theron, Mitchell, Smith, & Stuart, 2011)—we became interested in deepening an understanding of the ethical issues related to arts-based research with war-affected children. This stepping back process provided us with an opportunity to look anew at some of the concerns that are unique to arts-based methods. For example, the fact that the children are themselves "producers" through their photos or drawings may put them in new positions of vulnerability. Are there particular issues related to the aesthetics of this work? We know that these methods are powerful in evoking stories, but how do we work ethically with those stories?

While the product of reviewing literature (the published review itself) might attract scholarly attention, the actual process behind its production typically does not. As a team, we started out by reviewing literature on arts-based research methods used with war-affected children. Using academic databases such as Academic Search Complete, PsycInfo, Medline, ERIC, Education Full Text, Art Full text, and Art Index Retrospective we searched out relevant article and chapters. In order to better analyse trends, we organised the literature by author/title, geographic location, methods, findings, terminology employed, age, and gender categories. But we also regularly shared our findings during face-to-face meetings over a period of six to eight months, and through email. It was in this context that we collectively realised that issues of power and ethics might be read in unique contexts because of the nature of the approach (creating artistic productions) and the participants (marginalised children), and that it was critical that we try to shed light on the question of "what counts as ethics, anyway?" in studies with war-affected children. This shifted the process somewhat to one where the review was less about being systematic and more about "digging deeper" and asking new questions even in relation to the literature we had already reviewed. Through an iterative process of review, reporting back, discussion, more review, and reflection, we arrived at four critical ethical issues that seemed to us to represent specific challenges in relation to children affected by war, but which were not always written about directly: (1) informed consent; (2) truth, interpretation, and representation; (3) dangerous emotional terrain; and (4) aesthetics.

Critical Issues

In this section we map out the scholarly terrain in relation to the four critical issues related to participatory arts-based work and ethics in work with war-affected children. While these are by no means the only issues, they are ones that might be seen as crosscutting in relation to arts-based research and that are particularly relevant to work with children in war-affected contexts.

Informed Consent

Any research involving children is delimited by the ethical guidelines of the professional field in which the research is situated. Research on war-affected children further extends these guidelines by raising important and unique developmental concerns that must be addressed when children consent to participate in research. Can children competently give informed consent to research (Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Adams, 2006)? It is generally believed that any competent participant is free to make a decision on the right to participate in research, because the participant understands what they are engaging in, that participation is voluntary, given freely, and not as a result of any kind of pressure (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010). Yet, this becomes a fundamental ethical issue when

working with children. Embedded in policies and guidelines on ethics is the fact that because children "have varying degrees of maturity" (CIHR et al., 2010, p. 49) they are not considered to have the authority to consent to participate in research on their own. In most cases, children need to provide their assent as confirmation of a desire to participate in research. This differs from consent, which is granted from an individual who meets the age requirements—usually a parent with the legal authority to do so. Even very young children or those with limited cognitive ability can assent or indicate a desire not to participate which, in all cases, must be respected. If the individual giving assent is able to read and write, then assent is documented using an assent form, otherwise assent is obtained though a conversation with the participant (CIHR et al., 2010).

However, when designing research with children, several questions remain: is parental consent always necessary? At what age are children and adolescents truly able to give informed consent? In addition, the research agenda and ethical issues one has to consider when working with children who have been exposed to the trauma of war and/or forced migration is complicated by other belief systems. Björn and Björn (2004) stated:

> Within the broader area of culture there are many concepts of interest in the discussion of ethical aspects in treatment of refugees, such as autonomy of children, children's rights, education, women's liberation, socio-economic groups, freedom of religion, and other values and norms that might pose ethical questions into clinical praxis. (p. 194)

Culture-bound attitudes to research might influence the willingness of the child to fully participate in research. Therefore, lack of trust and communication issues should be considered. Striking a delicate balance between these issues is paramount for researchers not only to gain trust, but also to keep in mind the consequences that the decision to participate might have for the person in the future (Björn & Björn, 2004). Seedat, Pienaar, Williams, and Stein (2004) stated that "careful negotiation with the child and parent may be critical in trauma research, especially when a child's wish to please the parents or a fear of stigmatisation may impede his or her ability to make a truly informed and objective decision" (p. 265).

A study that examined children's assent to clinical research found the quality of assent in children younger than 9 years old to be poor; that is, children at this stage could not assent or consent to clinical research in any meaningful way (Seedat et al., 2004). The study recommended that children be consistently reminded of their right to refuse to answer any questions they choose, and that they may end their participation at any time (Seedat et al., 2004). Conversely, Dyregrov, Dyregrov, and Raundalen (2000) found that asking parents to inform their children about, and getting, consent is inadequate because, in their study, many parents consented without asking or informing their children, thus, precluding children from giving fully informed consent. In their study, children said it was acceptable that their parents gave consent on their behalf. In this case, the right of the parent to decide for their children was very evident. However, "the study reminds researchers of the vital ethical issue of informed consent and that it must be based on *real* understanding of each participant" (Dyregrov et al., 2000, p. 425).

What is the right thing to do at this moment from an ethical point of view? Can children give informed consent and/or is it always necessary to get parental or adult approval? Carried out sensitively and appropriately, informed consent by children can deepen the researcher's understanding while attending to the child's well-being (Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Adams, 2006). Given that much arts-based research is public and that participating children are credited for their contribution, public acknowledgement of research participants is the norm. In this case, informed consent becomes critically important to ensure adequate protection of the child so that the child will not face any repercussions when confidentiality cannot be assured (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee, 2008).

When designing studies that use arts-based methodologies, researchers are advised to consider the risks and benefits of children's participation and to develop specific protocols and safeguards to ensure that children understand the benefit of participating in research, that the participation is voluntary, and that informed consent is an ongoing process (CIHR et al., 2010).

Telling the story: Truth, interpretation, and representation

Whose truth is it?

Arts-based research with children affected by war conveys multiple meanings, complexities, and contradictions. This type of research can provide important insight into children's everyday wartime experiences, because it is based on what children (rather than adults) determine to be important. Researchers have suggested that adults are unable to be full participants in children's social worlds because the very nature of adulthood can never truly understand a child's point of view (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Hill, 1997; Punch, 2002). We suggest that this also serves as an ethical problem, begging the question, whose truth is being represented in the data—the child participant's or the adult researcher's?

Arts-based research can challenge the position of the adult researcher by providing child participants with a common tool to access the research project and minimise the adult researcher's potential "outsider" views. In other words, child participants may be more engaged with the methodologies than with the researcher. In this way, arts-based research helps move away from an adultist orientation that produces research *on* children to a more participatory and child-sensitive research *with* children (Alderson, 1996). Adult researchers should strive to abandon the assumption that adult-produced knowledge/truth is superior to knowledge/truth produced by children (Alderson & Goodey, 1996; Punch, 2002). Arts-based research provides a way to do this. Adult researchers must aim to uncover the multiple truths that might exist within their research projects.

Interpretation and representation

How do we best interpret and represent data from arts-based research with children affected by war? This question is based on the potential ambiguity of interpreting arts-based data as compared to other forms of "traditional" data. Critics suggest that the inherent polysemic nature of arts-based material creates a more subjective analysis, which can be problematic among certain research traditions. Yet, Knowles and Sweetman (2004) remarked that the alleged ambiguity of visual material is only challenging if one is "seeking to establish truths rather than interpretations" (p. 13).

Data from arts-based research methods with children has little meaning in and of itself. Rather, it is the interpretation and explanation from the child participant that is important. Boyden and Ennew (1997) recommended not conducting visual methods with children if there is no opportunity for children to explain or interpret the images they have produced, or if the researchers are not familiar with children's cultural "ways of seeing" (p. 116). The authors claim that visual research that fails to follow these basic procedures cannot be called participatory, will not likely be considered scientifically valid, and may be unethical. For example, Darbyshire, MacDougall, and Schiller, (2005) acknowledged that they did not create a space for children to discuss their visual documents (photographs and maps), leading to an adultist approach to their research. Upon reflection, the authors noted, "While a picture may indeed be worth a thousand words, we have no doubt that the children's thousand words would have enhanced this aspect of the study" (p. 429). Clark (2004) addressed the issue of interpretation in research with visual methodologies, not as a way to unearth one truth, but rather to provide children with multiple opportunities to express their views and experiences.

Furthermore, research with children affected by war should include a reflexive component, with researchers critically reflecting on both their role and their assumptions (Davis, 1998) and also, on their choice of methods and their application (Punch, 2002). In arts-based research—and especially when working with children's visual representations of their experiences of war—the researcher should allow for multiple ways of knowing, whether during data collection, analysis, or representation and dissemination of results. In practice, children must be allowed to provide insight into the representation part of the process—essentially becoming co-constructors of knowledge with adult researchers. Furthermore, the research process should allow child participants to challenge the interpretation that the adult researcher has given. If the interpretations are vastly different, another important ethical question is, how should divergent interpretations be understood and ultimately represented within the research project?

Dangerous emotional terrain

The benefits of employing arts-based methods, particularly with marginalised children, continue to be well documented. Emerging research has highlighted that art and music allow children to represent their experiences in contexts of reduced stress (Harris, 2007), and can promote activism and empowerment (Moletsane et al., 2007). Moreover, arts-based methods are said to be particularly successful with younger children, who often have limited vocabulary to verbalise their feelings (Gangi & Barowsky, 2009). At the same time, arts-based methods may plunge into "dangerous emotional terrain" (Boydell et al., 2012, pg. 4) for both the researcher and the researched. This section explores the ethical realities and implications of conducting arts-based participatory research, particularly as it relates to sensitive research topics, issues of power and accountability, and participant expectations.

Sensitive research: Exploring and depicting the realities of war

Lee and Renzetti (1993) defined a sensitive research topic as one that potentially poses a substantial threat for those involved in the research, and which may have an impact on the collection, holding, or dissemination of research data. Sensitive topics are those that seek to explore deeply personal and valued experiences—experiences that people being studied do not wish to be misused. When conducting sensitive research, there may be psychological or social costs to those being researched, including guilt, shame, or embarrassment. Importantly, the sensitive nature of the research can affect every stage of the research process, from formulation through design to implementation and dissemination (Sieber, 1993). When considering children affected by war, while gaining an understanding of children's perspectives and experiences is essential to recognising the diverse realities of children caught up in the maelstrom of war, this can have serious implications. Participants are being asked to delve into potentially traumatic and painful memories of war and violence that could evoke varying levels of distress. Those who are still suffering from the trauma of war and its related effects could experience heightened anxiety by reliving it through participatory research. Individuals who have begun to come to terms with their wartime experiences of violence and are beginning to move forward in their lives may feel that they are being asked to reopen old psychosocial wounds. Additional difficulties can arise as a result of participants' discomfort and anxiety in openly discussing their experiences, or from their fear of reprisal as a result of sharing their stories through art or other participatory approaches. Participants could also face social stigmatisation and judgment as a result of speaking about their direct involvement in violence. These diverse issues undoubtedly represent a few of the "ethical minefields" (Boyden & De Berry, 2004) that require constant care, attention, and mitigation in the research process. Moreover, while some research has found that sensitive topics, including war, may be easier to address through the use of creative arts (Harris, 2007), depicting acts of wartime violence—as victims, witnesses, and/or participants—remains relatively unexplored. For example, how can issues of vulnerability and safety be addressed and assured in the context of arts-based participatory research? How do issues of anonymity play out in the context of arts-based representations, particularly as they relate to children? What are the consequences of public disclosures and portrayals of war-related experiences for the individual children, their families, and

community? Little is known about the implications of portraying and/or embodying wartime or post-war experiences for both the child participant and the audience—both of which are critical to ensuring participant safety and security and researcher accountability.

Power and accountability

Traditionally, within research, children have been constructed as vulnerable, dependent, and "objects" of research (Boyden & De Berry, 2004). Moreover, while ethical issues are unquestionably present in all research—whether with children or adults—issues of power in the researcher–participant relationship present themselves more sharply when study participants are children. In light of these realities and given the increasing efforts to recognise children's rights and their capacity to act in competent and thoughtful ways, researchers have begun to include children as coresearchers alongside adults (Maclure, 2011). Alderson (2000) argued that using such participatory approaches may not only neutralise power differentials and ethical concerns, and engage children as active citizens, but may also increase reliability and validity. Importantly, in relation to war-affected children, research has revealed the high cost of not involving war-affected youth in projects where they are stakeholders. For example, programming on child soldiers has been deemed to be less effective when young people's views and perspectives are not included in program development (Peters, 2007). Indeed, giving greater control to participants ensures that the research process works to empower them and serve their interests. However, this can potentially bring forth ethical dilemmas for researchers. Key questions include: Who holds the "last word" in relation to project decision-making? What do adult researchers do when they perceive the project moving in an inappropriate direction, or in situations where children may be putting themselves or others at risk? In such situations, to whom are the researchers accountable? Who holds the reins and the power and authority to control and decide? The dangers and risks of tokenistic power are significant.

Participant expectations

Effective research depends on building relationships of confidence, trust, and openness with participants. Such conditions can be empowering to children who have experienced war and the adversity that often accompanies it. In fact, for some children, being involved in research may be the first experience where they feel they are being listened to and taken seriously. At the same time, there is a real danger for researchers to engender false hopes or make promises that cannot be realistically fulfilled through the course of the research. As such, while acknowledging their distress and providing reassurance is essential, it is vital not to mislead or raise unrealistic expectations. Many arts-based participatory approaches are said to include a component of social change, and scholarship has documented their transformative possibilities (Wang & Burris, 1994). Moreover, a goal for participatory arts-based methods is often to reach policymakers who have the power to implement changes within that community (Wang & Burris, 1997). However, what are the ethical implications when meaningful transformation is, at best, challenging or, at worst, an impossibility? For example, in a photovoice project with former child soldiers, Denov et al. (2012) noted that as a participatory method, photovoice was successful in raising community awareness of the youth's challenges within their community. Policymakers who were present at the photo exhibitions, were touched by the youth's photographs and voiced their outrage about the youth's socioeconomic conditions. However, discussions with policymakers during and following the exhibitions ultimately failed to yield concrete changes for the youth. This left the participants and the entire research team with concerns about the feasibility of photovoice as a truly viable tool for social change. What are the ethical implications of employing methods that seek transformation where such transformation can in no way be guaranteed?

Aesthetics

Because of the prominent place of artistic production in this work, we consider the issue of aesthetics. Boydell et al. (2012) outlined the discussions they had at a conference on ethics in arts-based health

research. When they turned to aesthetics and its role in ethics, they identified that the problem was how to determine what is "good" and who gets to determine this. They wrote that "aesthetics in [arts-based health research] highlight problems of emphasis in representations of complex human experience and whether the weight of judging the quality of 'goodness' of the work should rest with aesthetic principles and/or those of research" (p. 6).

They further noted that discussions about aesthetics frequently focus on the product (the artwork). However, Gladstone, Volpe, Stasiulis, and Boydell (2012) asserted that judging goodness in the context of producing data is linked to the "ethics as process" literature defined by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) as the exploration of ethically important moments; "the difficult, often subtle, and usually unpredictable situations that arise in the practice of doing research" (p. 262). These are factors that are key to the everyday practice of research, where even when it is clear what should be done there remains the possibility for harm.

Ethical moments

This idea of ethically important moments is what Varela (1999) defined as exploring lived everyday situations as "micro-worlds" (p. 10) where what we notice in those situations brings up questions for further reflection and inquiry. Rather than presenting a full review of aesthetics' role in the ethics of working with children affected by war, we examine a particular ethical moment in research (Spackman & Zaytzeff, 2012) that highlights the complex nature of working with children in terms of both aesthetics and issues related to power noted earlier. We hope that this will point to some emergent questions that need to be addressed when thinking about aesthetics and ethics, and further elaborate on the power dynamics noted earlier within arts-based research in particular situations.

In this ethical moment, researcher-practitioners worked with former child soldiers (between 12 and 18 years old) from Rwandan families living in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These children had either left Rwanda when they were babies or were born in DRC. They had then been abducted and forced to fight in the Congo alongside the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR). The boys had then escaped the FDLR to reach the United Nations mission in Congo and eventually ended up in Rwanda at a children's rehabilitation centre. The researcher-practitioners worked with these children to help them understand their experiences in DRC and talked about the difficulties of reintegrating into a country now considered their "home" but where they had never lived nor known anyone. The researcher-practitioners used theatre as a way for the youth to talk about their experiences in a safe, playful, and imaginative way. Through games, activities, and storytelling, the youth developed a story that, metaphorically and through puppets, conveyed their journey from children to soldiers to former child soldiers. In the story, Mahirwe (*Luck* in Kinyarwanda) magically flies back to visit his family, but he does not forgive them. Mahirwe leaves his family after showing them that, despite their rejection, he managed to do something with his life (Spackman & Zayteff, 2012). Adults who were part of the project raised concerns about Mahirwe's story, stating that the ending was too harsh and contrasted sharply with the research project's goal of reintegrating the former child soldiers into Rwanda. The adults felt that the conclusion needed to be reconsidered in light of the goal of the centre. However, the researcher-practitioners who had been working with the youth felt that this was a

> rupture in the tacit contract we had created with them. Our role was to create a framework for the boys to tell the stories they want to tell. Intervening to change their story would counter what we had already built. (Spackman & Zaytzeff, 2012, p. 328)

The youth eventually agreed to change the ending. The researcher-practitioners felt that the process of creating ownership and self-assertion had been strong. Though the youth understood why the original ending would not be appropriate, they explained that they had wanted to show parents that they

> should not reject their child because they cannot know how he will turn out in the future. The boys personally know kids disabled by war whose parents refused to take them back, and, yes, it makes them angry and sad. (Spackman & Zaytzeff, 2012, p. 328)

The researcher-practitioners concluded that "the point of our work with them was not to be literal but to encourage them to create metaphors—like the fish—in order to express their anger and other feelings in a safe way" (Spackman & Zaytzeff, 2012, p. 328). This example frames the question of ethics, aesthetics, and power in a focused way. Who decides what a good story is? What is the intention of telling stories? Who has the power when adults are working with children and how can that power be negotiated in terms of the production and process of story? How does it serve the children? The proposed audience? The parents? The future? The present? The past?

Boydell et al. (2012) suggested that "determining the goodness of art in terms of its role in research is even more complex, requiring attention to the aims of the research and the context in which the research is being conducted" (p. 12). By examining the ethics of the process in Rwanda we see that a complex inter-relationship of aesthetics, context, and purpose emerges. Clearly, then, each decision on a particular individual ethical micro-world will elicit more questions.

Conclusions and Implications

In an era of increased awareness of human rights in response to the global conflicts that continue to affect children, there is also increased attention to the specific ethical issues when working with war-affected children. As we have highlighted throughout, there has been an increased focus on participatory work. Children who are often denied basic human rights because of conflicts are the very children whose voices should be heard in programming and research in both schools and community settings. However, there are often new and complex issues that arise because of the nature of working in participatory ways with war-affected children. It is critical that children feel accepted and able to tell their story through arts-based methods such as photovoice, drawing, or drama. But there may be new ethical dimensions that we have not yet contemplated in relation to the story and what can be told. How do we ensure sensitivity especially in the public settings of schools and community centres where much of this work takes place? How do we stop the zealous researcher or practitioner from immediately displaying the work when the child who produced the drawing or photo may have no idea of what "making public" means and no power to say no?

Our intention was to highlight these critical issues with the idea that we have a responsibility to do least harm and most good as researchers. Part of that work is to deepen an understanding of the ways in which specific ethical issues may have an impact on war-affected children. The four areas we chose to focus on here—informed consent; truth, interpretation, and representation; dangerous emotional terrain; and aesthetics—have theoretical significance in relation to such issues as power and participation, as well as practical significance. But they also affirm the fact that as researchers we need tools for reflection. While there are various studies that highlight reflexivity in team research particularly in relation to the collaborative process of data analysis (see Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1999), we are not aware of studies that have drawn attention to team the role of reflexivity within the review process. The stepping back that we describe here calls for opportunities for back-and-forth discussion, continuous re-engagement with the literature, and a sense of what can be gained when we work collaboratively.

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