



A visual showcase display of: 'ArtActivistBarbie': the digital deployment of Barbie for social justice

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"All of us, female and male have been socialised from birth on, to accept sexist thought and action" (hooks, 2015, p. 1). In many art galleries and museums, particularly those with historical collections, visitors are socialised and culturally conditioned to accept a gendered art world with its gendered language of 'old masters' and 'masterpieces', and the "white Euro-American-centrism of the always masculinist canon" (Reilly, 2017, p. 30). My feminist 'ArtActivistBarbie' project has found a way to reveal the practices of galleries and museums which continue to represent and display centuries of male power and domination. It reveals the male-commissioned, male-produced, male-collected art canon which has viewed the world through a male perspective and a male gaze. Barbie is an internationally recognised cultural icon who narrowly-defines and stereotypes gender and femininity. My reconstruction of her as feminist activist 'ArtActivistBarbie' explores the potential of Barbie's popularity and status to be subverted to promote social and gender justice. Using an aesthetic and playful pedagogic approach, Barbie dolls are staged and posed in art galleries and museums to draw attention to gender representation, inequality and injustice. The main focus is on gender inequality and injustice, but constructions and exclusions of race and class also intersect. My ArtActivistBarbie campaign is an innovative practice of feminist intentionality, 'bringing a political learning agenda to the table and reaching toward the kinds of political action and learning that are necessary' (English & Irving, 2015, p. 3) to promote gender justice and change. I not only highlight gender statistics, but also their societal and historical context, probing and challenging the reasons, biases and prejudices behind them. My students in professional adult education engage with the work, and I invite members of the public to participate too. The activism of ArtActivistBarbie is documented on Twitter @BarbieReports and has an international following of over 16k followers. The pinned tweet has reached over 293k impressions, and some tweets have achieved over 50k engagements. The Twitter account provides an effective platform to disseminate research findings and publications to not only academics but also to the general public as a form of public pedagogy. Social media has the potential to bring "critical-pedagogical work into public spaces even as social media redefine what "public" might mean" (Reid 2010, p.199). Social media has provided a 'public space', a platform for the 'critical-pedagogical' ArtActivistBarbie project to be enacted and digitally documented in cyberspace.