



Research Article

Stories of women as a source of inspiration: Exploring the link between the stories we live and the stories we share

Urška Repar
Museum of Recent History Celje
Celje, Slovenia

Abstract

In this article I share three case studies of how three feminist artists told women's stories in Celje, Slovenia using a storytelling performance, feminist tours, and an acrobatic performance. Through the lens of feminist adult education and gender justice I explored how stories told about women said as much about them as the artists themselves because individual women's histories, personal circumstances and interests are very much collective experiences and consciousness. Through semi-structured interviews the artists shared how their work aimed to challenge perceptions and dynamics of gender, disrupt stereotypes and broaden knowledge of the historical expectations and limitations women have faced for decades. By illustrating the educational potential of these activities, I offer insights into how the background of the creator influences the creative process.

Keywords: women's stories, feminist perspective, storytelling as pedagogy, feminist tours, performance

Introduction

In Celje, a small and tranquil city in Slovenia, a recent series of events and activities took place that shared a common theme: they were stories about and for women that included feminist tours, round tables and presentations, dance and storytelling performances, educational workshops, and a museum exhibition. These activities were carried out by various public art and cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, as well as informal groups with the common objective of making the stories of women so often unaddressed, neglected, or presented wrongly from a certain vantage point, seen and heard from female perspectives. As a museum curator researching and teaching the history of women and

feminism, and a trained ethnographer and cultural anthropologist, I became interested in the processes behind the activities the audiences were viewing and what was happening within each woman who had created them. More specifically, I explored the stories behind the stories and their educational aims and values.

My study of these feminist events proceeded from two assumptions. Firstly, our choices as researchers or creators are rarely random but connected to our own personal experiences. We research what has drawn our attention, what has a more personal connection; we tell stories based on what has aroused our interest in our explorations. Secondly, by sharing our personal stories we make sense of our own lives and through them define our personal beliefs or how we see ourselves as belonging or not belonging to a group or cause (Zander, 2007). Therefore, the stories we convey to others and tell about ourselves enable us to (re)position ourselves and teach others differently about who we were and are. Insight into the process behind the creation of narratives enables understanding and critical reflection on how the presenter's personal experiences influence the presentation of, in the case of this article, women in art and culture. In this way, the artists enter in the role of adult educators using their own personal backgrounds to tell stories that will fill certain gaps in the participants' knowledge, leave certain new insights in their minds and memories and therefore resonate with them.

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In this article, I first provide a theoretical framework, specifically the place women's stories have had in the past and in today's society, which as I show is largely what determines where researchers and storytellers derive knowledge and inspiration from. Following this, I present three selected case studies: a storytelling performance, a feminist tour and an acrobatic performance. All three activities were linked through adult educational programming that accompanied an exhibition on women at the Museum of Recent History Celje. The exhibition, entitled (Be)coming a Woman, addressed different spheres of women's lives in the past decades, such as work, political activism, violence against women, and relations to the body and its associated taboos. All of them were updated with the stories from the present and in this way sought to provide insights into social and political change and how current circumstances affect women's life. The activities thematically complemented the content of the exhibition and engaged museum audiences through different approaches that were quite different to normative museum processes, which are at our museum mostly of guided tours on the exhibition, lectures and round tables.

To gather the data for the cases I first witnessed the activities and then conducted semi-structured interviews with the three creators. My focus was on their personal background and how it influenced their creative processes and what they saw as the outcomes. My analysis of this work is intricately woven into the descriptions of three cases, so I conclude simply with a summary of the key findings and suggest potential directions for future research.

Turning history into her story

Research on women's history, from which many women researchers draw their knowledge and stories, does not have a long history in the modern Western research tradition. According to the French historian Perrot (2016), women's history is primarily a history of silence, because women have been in many fields systematically excluded from dominant historical narratives. This silence has only been broken by the inscription of women's history into the humanities, which is in fact quite recent although individual efforts to inscribe women into history as a challenge to misogynist narrative traditions can be found as early as the fifteenth century in the work of Italian writer Christina de Pizan (e.g., Verginella, 2006). The current changes, however, came in the 1970s, when feminist scholars began to systematically research women's history. Rediscovery of women's history was one of the demands of feminist bell hooks (2000) which she framed as “one of more successful interventions of contemporary feminism” (p. 20). Up to then, she reminds us that across literary writing and academic scholarship, »works by women had historically received little or no attention as a consequence of gender discrimination.” (p. 20)

In Slovenia, cultural and educational engagement with women's issues began in the 1980s as part of the feminist movement, but it was not until the 1990s that women's studies was accepted in the academic sphere (Bahovec & Štinc, 2006). Still, interest in women's history remained confined to a small circle of feminists in science until the publication of a book of women's biographies entitled *Pozabljena polovica* (The Forgotten Half) in the year 2007. It introduced to the public many women from the arts, science and politics who, despite their achievements, had been all but unknown. It still remains the most significant breakthrough in the popularization of women's stories in Slovenia and shaped the understanding of the role of women in the 19th and 20th centuries. For the Slovenian milieu I outline through the case studies this fundamental work is embedded in women's collective memory, and it cannot be overlooked in any study of women's histories or stories.

Although the fact that women's history has started to be explored has not yet changed the place of women in society, it has enabled them to better understand their position and contributed to their self-confidence (Perrot, 2016). In fact, when women in the past won the right to be educated, to participate actively in the public sphere, in science, economy and culture, they won the right to have a voice - a right that is highly political in its essence (e.g., Repar, 2022). As Hvala (2021), a researcher of women's historiography, reminds us women who study history ask different questions, examine new sources and interpret what is already known differently, all from their own perspective. This led to the conclusion that women's history is not merely a supplement to general history as shaped by patriarchy, but that we need to rewrite our common history in which all gender perspectives are equally represented, which she justifies in the words of Gisele Bock: "The history of women concerns all humanity, not just half of the population." (p. 115)

Learning about the history of women has a significant impact on our perception of ourselves, our position in a society and the opportunities we have. In a world where, according to Ostrouch-Kamińska and Vieira (2015), gender stereotypes are only slowly changing, gender remains one of the main categories on the basis of which we understand our social worlds and position ourselves in a particular social role, creating social differences in personal and career spheres. This takes place in both non-formal and formal education. As Tašner (2021) notes in her research on opportunities for boys and girls in education, it is very problematic how women are under-represented in history textbooks (in Slovenia, only 11% of

historical personalities mentioned in history textbooks are female), and while men are mentioned with their full names, women are mostly referred to as mothers, sisters or wives. Introducing gender balance – equal presentation and representation in primary education could be a first step that has the potential, da bi would lead to more equal relations between genders and therefore greater social justice. This would give girls a different perspective on their roles in society and opportunities.

In Slovenia, but also other parts of the world, another source of under and misrepresentation of women is classic fairy tales, which are in need rewriting and explain further the gendered historical context of my study (e.g., Fisher & Silber, 2000). An examination of these pervasive stories tells us that the persistent qualities attributed to women such as passivity, silence demand a critical of simply being accepted normative of how women from an early age. As note in their contribution through fairy tales, to beliefs and ideas about feminist lens can play a by this they mean acting from the fictions and many decades have of ourselves as women. feminist perspective on highlighted by English (2000, p. 100), who argued that “feminist learning and citizen’s learning (are) intertwined” and in order to change relations of power, we need to create new, personal but more importantly collective understandings of the conditions that create us as gendered beings.

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submissiveness, and feminist analysis instead and allowed to shape a act and self-identify Fisher and Silber (2000) on teaching gender examine their underlying gender through a transformative role and as a form of liberation fabrications that for so shaped our expectations The importance of using stories that 'educate' was

Stories of the past, of our ancestors are an important source of inspiration in our daily lives and in our artistic expression. As stories evolve over time, reflecting the values, culture and meanings of certain temporal, geographical and cultural contexts, and as we identify with the characters, storytelling also has the power to construct and reshape our identity (Senehi et al., 2009). Stories affect what we see as real, as possible, what is worth pursuing and what would better be avoided, and thus they function or breathe, as Frank (2010) puts it, not only for individuals but also for the communities that believe in these stories. Further in his work on socio-narratology he presents the power of stories to create the social, which implies a symbiotic dependence between people and stories, but they also have the power to create interconnections and form communities. The latter, in addition to its educational function, is what has always been one of the most important roles that stories have played in society and have hence been created and perpetuated. In the context of women's stories, we can look at their production and transmission through the meaning it has for our identification, sense of belonging and right to a voice.

Drawing on already known stories about women and reshaping them to communicate new ideas through different forms of expression is important from a feminist adult education perspective if we are to “challenge dominant narratives which erase, oversimplify and universalize women’s voices and experiences” (De Nooijer & Sol Cueva, 2022, p. 234). In so

doing, we can expand the possibilities for “women tell their own stories in their own words.” (p. 234).

In this article, I build on the research and ideas of feminist historians and adult educators by exploring the importance of women’s stories from the background to their creation. I looked at who was telling the story, from what experiences did they emerge and what was it the narrators wanted to communicate? In other words, I focus not only on who or what the story is about, but who is behind it – the role and the background of the narrator.

Research methods

This study addresses the distortions and shortages of women’s stories by presenting three cases of storytelling. The first case uses the technique of modern storytelling which the theorist and storyteller Frilc (2020) defines as “a stage form that draws performatively from the traditional art of storytelling, mostly drawing from traditional folklore genres” (p. 13). The second case is about narrating women's stories on a walk around the city on a feminist tour, and the third is an embodied story that is told through movement and acrobatic techniques. The cases differ not only in the method of storytelling, but also in the content of the stories. This is because, as Frilc (2020) argues, the repertoire of stories selected by storytellers is very personal, reflecting the author's process, their worldview, and personal experiences.

The data were gathered through interviews with women who created the activities on the topic of women. I conducted three semi-structured interviews to illustrate each case through the perspective of one creator. The interviews were recorded so I was able to include particular quotes, and thus come closer to delivering the content in their own words. Apart from one of them, whom I had already known from previous collaborations in different projects, I met the other two during the curation of the museum's exhibition. Our relationship started professionally, but through shared interests and views developed into a personal one.

I present each case separately and place it in a theoretical framework related to the specific case, which enables the understanding of the method used and the conveyed meaning.

Case 1: Storytelling performances about women

Storytelling has been present throughout human history, and it accompanies us through all our lives. Stories are an important part of what determines an individual's social reality and they have a significant impact on her or his cultural determination, and thus also on gender imperatives (Komplet Peperko, 2022). The stories reflect the values and prejudices that we shape as a society and which we also internalize by listening to them throughout our lives. As noted by Kavanagh (2010), throughout history women have been strongly connected to storytelling, and it was mostly mothers, sisters, and daughters who told, repeated and thus preserved stories in the family environment. Today, women continue to promote the many benefits of storytelling in their professional and private roles and as a result of social changes brought about by modernity and feminist activism, and they are also among the scholars who study storytelling and its practice.

A storytelling collective named 'Bodice' (Spikes), based in the city of Celje, consists of a group of five women all engaged in storytelling, theater and music. I got to know them when I took part in a storytelling workshop that took place before the group started preparing

their first performance, and later I took part in several moderated and spontaneous conversations exploring women's stories, which provided me with information for the museum exhibition and them with the ideas for their performances. The collective was formed around the study of stories about women and has so far staged three different performances (Kuralt, 2023) through a creative process which uncovered the hidden or misinterpreted history and educated adult audiences about this new perspective of women's stories. A model of their performances is so-called modern storytelling and it was structured around different stories about women, chosen on the basis of how they are attracted to them. In a storytelling performance, they join them into a single narrative, bringing together several voices and narrative styles. I explored this process in the case of the first storytelling performance by group Bodice entitled 'We breathe the same air'. I interviewed Nuša Komplet Peperko, one of the members of the collective who chose two folktales. The first one was a Vietnamese folktale about a beautiful girl that comes out of the painting and becomes a perfect wife to a young fisherman, which means that she's beautiful, takes good care of her husband and keeps quiet. Komplet Peperko chose the story in which the girl in the picture depicts the very stereotypes that are her own biggest frustration, however, the message of the story resonated differently with different audiences. This is how she describes a reaction from the first iteration of the performance:

Some of the older ladies actually said that the girl from the painting represents what women were expected to be like in the past, but today women don't know what they should be anymore... They saw the girl as a positive image, and that was frustrating for me, so I included comments in the story to disable the possibility of such an interpretation and they could no longer understand it in such a way. I did not moralize, but I tried to break certain patterns with humor, which is sometimes easier to do with laughter than with reason.

Telling a story is about finding a balance between one's own creativity and fidelity to the original story that the storytellers take as the material for their storytelling performance. Through the act of storytelling, storytellers also reflect on their own aesthetic and ideological predispositions and establish a relationship with the content of the story. Unlike actors, they represent themselves on stage and not the character or the story they are telling. Therefore, by communicating what happens in the story, they convey their own attitude to the content of the story (Fricl, 2020). They do not inhabit the characters they are telling about, but convey their own emotions and feelings to show what the narratives evoke in them.

The second story that Komplet Peperko chose for the storytelling performance was a Hungarian folktale about a bright girl named Katarina who outsmarts an evil king with her daring nature and cleverness. This light and witty story represented a kind of antithesis to the first one, and Komplet Peperko was able to identify with the character who broke the stereotypes about what girls are able or allowed to do in a patriarchal society and in relation to superior men. The message that a story conveys depends to a large extent on the storyteller, who with his or her manner, intermediate comments and actualization of the content influences how the audience will experience it. Komplet Peperko explains:

I myself do not believe in the effect, when someone hears a story for the first time and it profoundly changes them. I think that the listener needs to hear ten stories with a certain theme, so that something slowly starts to change in them. The kind of stories we tell about women have a significant impact on shaping our ideas about how to be a woman and what we are expected to be. This is precisely why it is important that

stories about girls who are as beautiful as paintings are spiced up with bright and naughty ones, and at least open up the possibility of a range of different characters that we can identify with.

Stories do not only affect the audience, but as Komplet Peperko said, also the storyteller: “I tell stories differently according to my experiences. I would perhaps tell a certain story completely differently in a few years from now, and someone else would hear it differently if they were in a different situation.” Our experiences, whatever they might be, are intertwined with what we convey to others. As Ryan (2008) notes, the best storytellers source is their background which is incorporated into their narrative. In doing so, they maintain a connection with the environment and the individuals who shaped them.

When telling stories, the storytellers begin from the present and mostly the urban environment, adapting the traditional form – the narrative – to the new context. By doing this, they do not break the tradition, but continue it (Frlic, 2020). When choosing stories about women, the range of which is exceptional, it is essential to keep in mind that we need to choose them carefully and critically, according to which ones we want to live and which ones we have to resist (Komplet Peperko, 2022).

Case 2: Paths to feminist tours in Celje

Stories about women are not only found in books, galleries or cultural venues, but also in public spaces, where we meet them every day without even noticing or getting to know them, because nothing draws our attention to them. This results in not recognizing the historical role of women, their presence and importance, and we cannot refer to them or identify with them. Of all the areas of women's historical exclusion from public life, it is perhaps the exclusion from public places that is most illustrative of this today. When it comes to naming public institutions, streets, squares and memorials, we see a huge disproportion between genders (Žunič Fabjančič, 2022). The naming of places is a key component in the relationship between a place and the politics of identity, therefore names give legitimacy to those who dominate the politics of place representation (Berg and Kearns, 1996). Adult education about how public places are symbolically designed has an impact on how we experience these places and whether we continue the tradition of gender injustice or break it by raising awareness and incorporating a feminist perspective, thereby making it inclusive for all genders. This is just one aspect of the patriarchal nature of public spaces, which Jasmina Jerant, a guide of the Ljubljana feminist tour, tells through her stories.

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Feminist tours as a popular form of learning about cities through a feminist lens have existed in Slovenia since the 1990s (City of Women, 2021). The path to feminist tours in Celje therefore actually starts in Slovenia's capital Ljubljana, as the tour there inspired the idea for the guided tour entitled 'Celje, paths of women'. As a guide of feminist tours Jerant builds her repertoire of stories from numerous women's biographies and

significant points in public space, such as buildings, squares, monuments, and parks, when conducting feminist tours. What most of her stories have in common is that they contain a moment of resistance. It is a characteristic that she herself values as an important quality for pushing social boundaries. As Jerant notes:

Rebelliousness has been my *modus operandi* since childhood, because I grew up in a village where there were strong restrictions regarding what girls could do and how they were expected to behave. Everybody knows everything about others and so I felt like I was being observed all the time. It was an environment in which I was unable to fit in, so I constantly needed to rebel. Freedom was much more achievable for boys than girls, so I needed to behave in a boy-like way.

She therefore seeks out these very qualities in historical female figures and extracts them from their stories:

I never tell visitors who the women were married to, although of course marriage was an important institution of the 19th and early 20th century, which changed their social status and, above all, made many things easier for them. Maybe that's not completely fair, because it comes out of my own frustration. But I prefer to say other kinds of things. For example, in the case of one of my beloved poets and novelists, Lily Novy, I mention that she went to cafés by herself, she smoked, or that she wiped an apple on her skirt in public. I point out little naughty things, which are the opposite of the diligence we still expect from girls and women.

Another personal circumstance that she highlights and which influences her storytelling is her family background. As a daughter of a Slovenian language teacher, the first thing that came to her mind when creating the tour were women writers, poets and also literary figures. She included the latter in her guide because they have a certain place in our collective memory. By re-evaluating those stories and the actions of female figures through present values, we see them from a completely different perspective. Jerant calls this *the rehabilitation of literary figures* and gives the example of a poem from the Slovenian poet Prešeren. In his narrative ballad, which she mentions in the tour, a woman rejects a poet who asks her to dance, and so the Underwater man carries her into the river, where she drowns. The official interpretation, that she was arrogant and pretentious and therefore deserved to die, is known to all from primary school onwards and so firmly embedded in the collective memory as the only right that anyone who doubts this is considered a radical feminist. Jerant, on her tour on the bank of the Ljubljanica River, in which the woman from the poem is supposed to have drowned, points out the disproportionality between the act and its punishment, and ultimately asks why a woman is not allowed to refuse a man. Although it is in no way intended to degrade the poet who wrote according to norms of the 19th century, it is precisely these kinds of narratives that often provoke disapproval and are perceived as disrespectful to, as Jerant remarks, "mostly great white men from patriarchal history." Such pitfalls are also pointed out by Senehi et al. (2009), who draw on their own experience of telling the stories to note that stories that represent an important part of personal and social history, as well as local and cultural knowledge, are often burdened with the baggage of ethnic hatred, patriarchal repression or abuse. While this can be seen as a thing of the past, it can also have an impact in the present. They therefore wonder whether it is the path of forgetting or the path of remembering that is safer when it comes to stories.

The method Jerant uses on her tours is storytelling, and she avoids lecturing. As she argues in her article about the social impact of feminist tours, the audience remembers the stories easily, and they stay with them more than the biographical data would (Jerant, 2022). She alternates between a tragic and a comic approach in her guided tours, saying:

Many of the women's stories are really tragic and shocking, they cause a rush of emotions in the visitor, and if it was only negative, they might want to isolate

themselves from it. But I want them to think about these stories, to pass them on, and to thereby make a difference in our collective memory. That's why I also tell them in a comic way, because sometimes things are more perceptive and we have more permission to think about them if they make us laugh at the same time.

By selecting stories that tell visitors about the women who have been everything but what history books teach us, Jerant contributes to the kind of change she wants to see in the society. In her own words: "It gives me the satisfaction that I can contribute to changing the past and empowering others, as well as myself."

In setting up the guidance in Celje mentioned in the title, which were organized by Museum of Recent History Celje and took place as part of a programme on women, we drew on the idea put forward by Lombardo and Meier (2018) that symbolic representation is key to making citizens feel included. Part of gender-inclusive representation is naming public spaces and streets after women and presenting them in non-stereotypical ways and in public art. We therefore highlight how women's stories are embedded in historical memory and also to question how and to what extent women are visible and present in public places (Repar, 2022). Feminist tours in Celje thus attempt to gender-balance history from a feminist perspective by including women's stories (Pur & Repar, 2021). As they were organized as part of the museum's adult education programme, they mainly featured biographies of women from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, in addition to a discussion on the visibility of women's history in the city. Interpretations of their stories adhered to biographical data set in the broader social context of life in the city at a particular time and for a particular class of the population. The tour was complemented by anecdotes and stories about local incidents known to older generations of townspeople, some of which are recorded in books of memoirs.

Case 3: Passing stories swiftly through movement

On a Sunday in April 2022, a dance workshop entitled Passing Swiftly was organized by Center for Contemporary Arts Celje. Two dancers, acrobats and choreographers Špela Vodeb and Christine Daigle introduced the participants to the principles of partner body interaction. These are the basis for the acrobatics they perform in the French circus group Un loup pour l'homme, and represent the link between the physical and psychological aspects of acrobatics. The workshop encouraged participants to build confidence in themselves and in others, and its central approach was to continuously switch roles while doing different exercises (MNZC, 2022).

During the workshop participants practiced various acrobatic movements and a series of exercises that were strenuous for our bodies, which are not used to climbing, carrying our own and other's weight, and letting others control us. The workshop was followed by a performance of both professionals in the entrance hall of the Museum of Recent History Celje. Their performance consisted of repeating the same movements in succession: they climbed over each other's backs and shoulders, alternately carrying and transferring each other's weight. The performance became more and more demanding for the dancers, their breath shorter and their bodies sweaty. The guitar music, specially created for this performance, which was playing on a loudspeaker, ended, but the two of them continued. They kept going long after they seemed to have run out of energy. Then, as if they had both sensed the right moment at the same time, they stopped, tired, breathless, but with the expression of performers who are satisfied with their performance.

Their performance has come to my mind in different personal situations that have shaped how I have understood the message of the performance. My main question was related to when the acrobats finished the performance. This seemed to be crucially connected to its intended message. Was it a story of a burnout, of carrying too heavy of a load and pushing yourself beyond your limits? Or was her message about strength, listening to oneself and reciprocating with a partner through attentive attempts to the other?

My queries were answered by Špela Vodeb, with whom I discussed the correlation between her lifestyle, which she calls *nomadic*, and expressing herself through acrobatic techniques in the circus. Her personal challenges are related to the difficulty of balancing her private and professional life, as well as the frequent challenges and complications of the organizational, bureaucratic and financial aspects of being a freelance artist. The starting point of the interview was about understanding the message of *Passing Swiftly*. For them as artists, the message is crucially linked to the concrete story of how and why the performance was made. Although they have strived to convey a clear message to the audience throughout the production of the show, she says:

“Circus can be a powerful tool here because at its beating heart, circus is an artform that elevates the human body. The work of these women transcends ‘objectification’ because we are interested in these bodies for their strength, for their skills, for their ability.”

We have been aware that the audience would see the message differently depending on their own emotions around it, so we have left it open to interpretation. From our perspective, the message of the performance is that you never give up. It's about constantly moving forward, trying again and again. The end of the performance is not conditioned by how long it lasts or by a certain number of repetitions. We always stop just short of the breaking point. Not when we are so tired that we can't take it anymore, but when we tell ourselves that we have gone all the way, and now enough is enough.

Passing Swiftly was created during their road trip through the Balkans. Along the way, they faced a variety of situations, from the complications of crossing national borders during the COVID-19 pandemic to changing environments constantly to performing in very different locations and in conditions completely different from a circus tent or an auditorium. Therefore, they have woven into it a response to challenges, uncertainty and constant need to adapt.

Although technically very simple by the standards of acrobatic performances, the physical nature of this piece makes it challenging for them, Vodeb says:

The fact that two women, and small women at that, are lifting and carrying each other, speaks for itself. On some subtle level, the audience notices it, even if they don't think about it. The effort of us speaks to them differently than it would to someone who is big and muscular.

Therefore, she adds, a two-woman performance evokes certain situations that are more difficult for us precisely because we are women and we face challenges differently and society's expectations of us are often greater than our abilities.” The constant exchange of roles in performance is their response to the

discourse of dominance among acrobats, which is conditioned by gender, physical strength and numerical representation.

Due to the unique lifestyle of a circus group, there are fewer and fewer female acrobats at a certain age, as balancing family and professional life in this profession is extremely demanding. Vodeb only started to realize how her gender determined her when the number of women in her group started declining. Similarly, in other circus groups, there is only one woman among the six or seven members of the circus troupe, as Burton-Morgan (2018) of Metta Theatre notes in her article on female-led acrobatic companies: "Circus can be a powerful tool here because at its beating heart, circus is an artform that elevates the human body. The work of these women transcends 'objectification' because we are interested in these bodies for their strength, for their skills, for their ability." Because of the focus on abilities, the public often doesn't even perceive the gender of acrobats, but it comes out as a fact when women are not able to do certain exercises or tasks. For Vodeb, it's about the difficult physical tasks:

There are some things I can't do when I'm setting up a tent, even though that's exactly why I want to set it up, and also the scenes. Christine and I, because we are both women and on the road, had to give up the stage and that is actually a gender issue. I'm constantly aware of that, but also that what we do has to be *gender-kind*.

Conclusions

People sometimes find themselves in the role of those who listen, which is not necessarily a passive role, and at other times in the role of those who tell stories. In both cases, the kind of stories about other women that are part of our inner world, also affects how we will experience ourselves, what our prejudices are, where we see the boundaries of our gender, and many other things. The stories that we received through life and those that we live, shape our approach to the assignment, choice of focus and some of the questions we brought to it (Senehi et. al., 2009).

Women tell their own stories or the stories of others for different purposes and one of more important is educational. As stories reach the audience, they become embedded in their consciousness and by we can achieve a broader history and of the present. to tell them, because as historiography has been women, consequently, public space; if history is the narrative of the one who tells it, then maybe women should tell the story (of) themselves if no one else wants to" (p. 316) and they should tell their stories even if others do not want to hear them. When women tell these stories, they share their own perspectives from their own standpoints which challenges the male perspective of who they are.

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telling women's stories understanding of the Therefore, it is important Jerant (2022) writes: "If silent about women, and have been absent from

Despite the progress in recent decades, which is briefly outlined in the paper, it still has to be supplemented with findings and stories that are new, relevant and different, because only that way it can capture the reality of our experiences. For feminist adult educators

striving for greater gender justice, this remains an ongoing process, and the study cases presented in this article are a complement to the mosaic of women's stories.

The focus of this article was to present life circumstances and personal views, and how they influence the creative expression of three women who are united in telling women's stories. The process takes place on several levels, and as the study of the cases shows, women not only create and narrate but also live their stories, which interact with one another. In the first two study cases the personal stories of narrators have influenced the choice and the attitude of telling other women's biographies, while in the third one, first-hand experiences were expressed. It turned out that their personal experiences as women and their work are intertwined in many ways. These range from personal character traits and how others reacted to them, the frustrations and prejudices they faced, their family and professional backgrounds, to the very concrete experiences that were reflected in the creative and educational process. All three also included in their work the criticism of the attitude towards women in society and the challenges that women had to face in the past, many of which also apply to them. This study opens venues for future research, one of which could be comparing the responses of female visitors and analyzing the connections between their experiences and their perception of the messages of cultural activities in question. This is not only important for creators as a response to the stories they convey, but also from the point of view of the opportunity to create bonds between the participants.

All interviewed women presented in the study derive creativity from their personal experiences and inner worlds, and in line with my initial hypotheses, through the telling of stories they do not only convey their contents but also their own strengths or frustrations. As we can see from their quotes, this comes from their feelings of exclusion and lack of belonging, their discomfort with the roles that society assigns to them, and their confrontation with limitations and biases about what they can do as women. By recording, narrating and performing, they actively create an image of what it means to be a woman and pass it on. This image affects what is socially accepted, what we take for granted, what is expected of us and what gender relations are like. By hearing and telling more stories about empowerment, resistance and strengths of women, we are actively enabling to move towards a gender-equal, equally represented, safe and tolerant future when we will not only tell such stories, but also live them ourselves. When we'll convey more positive experiences than frustrations.

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Urška Repar holds a BA in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology and is a Curator of cultural anthropology in the Museum of Recent History Celje, Slovenia. Her work includes exhibition curation and educational programming and her research focusses on women's and gender representations in museums, popular culture, and urban life.

To cite this article:

Repar, U. (2024). Stories of women as a source of inspiration: Exploring the link between the stories we live and the stories we share. *Dialogues in Social Justice*. 9(1), Article 1690.