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*Women must ... be provided the opportunities to advance their own authority of authorship over their own stories and lives... Visual literacy comes from using art and visuals to teach us something 'about' the world. In feminist terms, this is teaching us visually 'about' women and their blank pages in history, as well as about gender and other forms of linked injustice and inequality.*

Clover, 2018

For women seeking to rebuild their lives following experiences of gendered violence, engagement with lifelong learning is imbued with transformational potential. Shifting from a subjective position of extreme vulnerability to empowered participant is however, complex for women survivors who have been persistently made subject to social discourses of lack and shame. Longitudinal research draws links between exposure to gendered violence and consequential risks to women's long-term health and wellbeing. In contrast, participation in lifelong learning evidences positive effects on personal wellbeing through the advancement of individual, social and economic empowerment. My contribution here outlines the development of an arts program in which I have co-developed rich and nuanced spaces of support with women, making meaning of their stories, reclaiming authorship over their lives and reimagining their place in lifelong learning.

Interweaving feminist principles with visual arts practice, Reclaiming My Place aims to open up an inclusive point of re-connection to learning for women situationally located at the fringes of traditional education pathways. It is here that imaginative processes and expressive art works become tools of enquiry for generating theory, practice and reflection. Together with human services practitioners and vocational and higher education learning partners, women are invited to immerse themselves in art-making, which privileges non-textual sites of knowing and authenticates experiential and multisensory ways of 'seeing' the world. Across nine weeks, the program aims to influence new ways of thinking, that interrupt narratives of victimhood which produce deficit constructions of lack of resilience and capability. The focus is on transcendence and building possibilities for their future lives.

A collective focus on the development of intuitive art inspires abstract rendering. Through this informal celebration of the women's sense of subjectivity and their engagement with symbolic forms of artistic expression, the participants are included in powerful forms of learning. Gentle yarning conversations initiated by learning partners, entwined with feminist approaches to art-making and lifelong learning, ebb and flow progressively across creative sessions. Women who share histories of violence are inspired to imagine a hopeful future, which transcends their exposure to traumatic life events. Inasmuch as an array of media facilitates processes of discovery, patient guidance and care-ful practice enables artistic achievement. From the outset, all women are regarded as emerging artists with the talent to develop and exhibit quality works, and this new dimension of identity generates new sensibilities of being a learner and knowledge-holder. These new encounters with learning contribute to new ways of 'being', and through the advancement of their creative skills, women begin to reclaim identities of confidence and capability. Opportunities for individual and collective empowerment are activated across public art spaces crafted at the culmination of each program, which openly challenge gendered stereotypes of vulnerability that are associated with lack and shame. Women are called to confirm their artistic selfhoods through the selection of their exhibition pieces which, through an emphasis on the 'seen', speak to the uniqueness of their

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personal stories and lived realities. Reclaiming My Place calls for courageous collaboration from learning partners, who find themselves situated at the 'deep end' of equity work as they engage side by side with women who are clients. The subjective nature of artmaking extends an invitation to ponder the silent and gendered histories of women who have experienced violence. Such reflexivity aims to critically deconstruct stories of shame, which are falsely transcribed into women's biographies and entwined with experiences of social misrecognition and educational exclusion. Learning partners are further afforded opportunities to increase their confidence in adopting creative practice methods, and to explore the adaptability of the program framework to meet the distinctive needs of their services.

Exploring underlying dynamics of hopeful change through a creative lens, Reclaiming My Place offers a non-formal model of enabling practice. This lifelong learning framework considers the potential of visual arts in reimagining pathways to learning, for women who have experienced the trauma of Domestic Violence. Sensitive to the lived experiences and social locations of participants, the program has a focus on co-developing safe and accessible points of re-connection. Personal strengths illuminated throughout women's survival narratives are recognised as valuable assets for transcending barriers to goal attainment, and the pedagogical contribution made by artistic experiences of knowing, being, meaning and belonging, invites an agentic reimagining of a myriad of possibilities for lifelong learning.

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## References and Further Reading

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