

Power of Community: Lessons learned from working for affected communities in sexual health and HIV

Carmen Logie, PhD

Associate Professor, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto, Canada
Canada Research Chair in Global Health Equity & Social Justice with Marginalized Populations



Overview

- Power of storytelling
- Power of love and solidarity
- Power of critical hopefulness



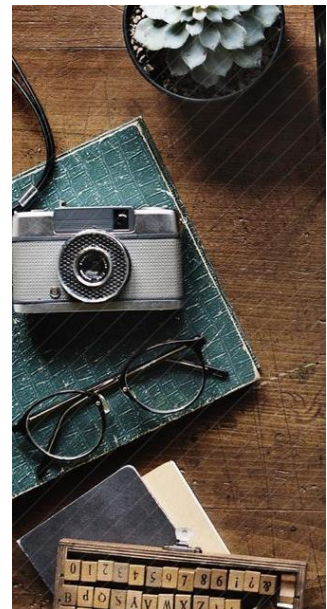


Objective

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1. The power of storytelling.



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Famn an Aksyon Pou Sante Yo



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Danger of a single story

"I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar."

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Power of storytelling: lessons learned from community

- Stories don't tell themselves.
- How people want their lives represented may extend beyond the research focus on HIV and sexual health.
- Shorter \neq better

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2. The power of love & solidarity.



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*"It is very important that we meet. **The togetherness has a lot of meaning. We are a chain.** When the link comes apart, it is a problem but it is better when we are together. We are together, we are sharing ideas, and I feel, we are better."*

(FASY focus group participant)



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Cultivating a love ethic

*"We do this by choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give our all to relationships; **by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet.**"*

bell hooks

Power of Community:



3. The power of critical hopefulness.



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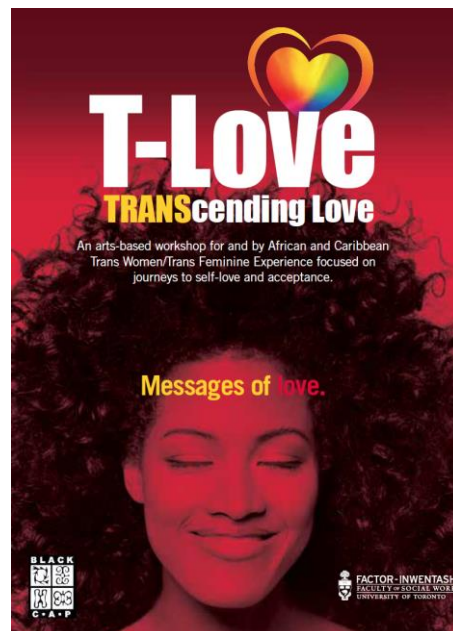
“There’s not enough outreach in those communities to really empower trans women to love their bodies and to be safe. So, when you don’t have that empowerment and you don’t have those resources, of course, women are at higher risk of HIV and STIs.”

“What about my life? What about me? What about what I want to be?”

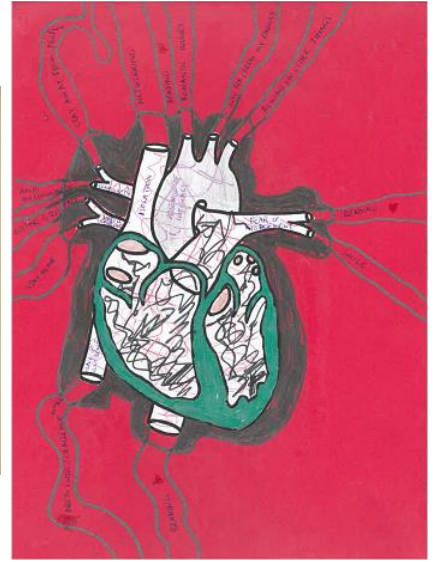
“We need to **validate** each and every one of our lives, that we are important.”

“We all deserve a balanced, joyful life. We have to learn how to love ourselves first. And **modules** have to be put into place to teach us how to love ourselves first.”

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A red hand mirror with a black frame and a red handle, decorated with silver rhinestones. The mirror reflects the text "This is the best in you".

8



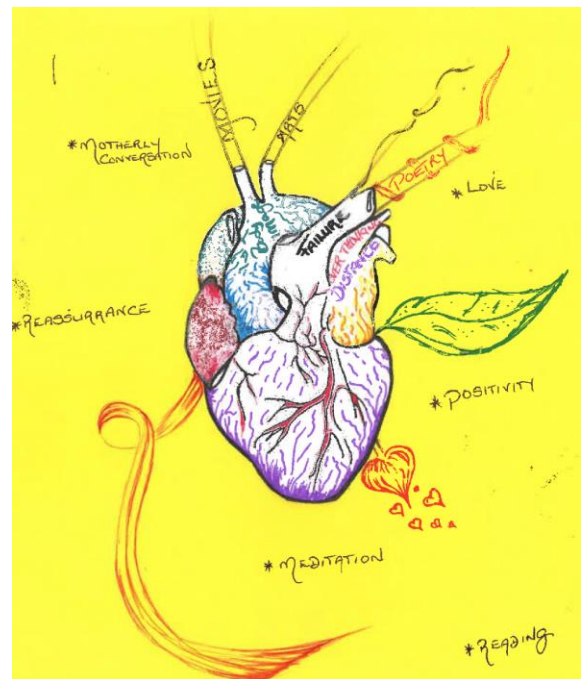
My mirror is just love and 'it'll be better'. I feel like a lot of people start off very rocky and it's good to remind you that things get better. So, that's my message to my younger self and also to any other person who wants motivation.

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The leaf represents growth. There were few things in my past that, at the time they felt very, very hard on me, and I wondered why they were happening. But when I sit back and look at those things, if those things didn't happen, I wouldn't be here today, and I wouldn't be who I am. So every time I encounter a struggle now, I don't see it as something bad, because I just look forward to what this struggle is going to bring in the future.

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Opportunity for Self-Reflection

*"This whole group allowed me to actually think about who I am today and **how far I have come**, and my own self love, **I totally love myself more today than I ever have.**"*

*"When you come into a space like this, and you talk about your own personal experience, you talk about 'Ok, I never looked at it in this perspective'. **There's a brighter, more fulfilling feeling of knowing a better way.**"*

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Opportunity for Sharing, Love & Support

"I think the more we can celebrate our love for each other, and doing that work of self-care of saying we're beautiful to each other. That's something that I think is hard for us to do, cause we get the opposite messages all the time. This was really magical."

"It is breathtaking to know that you can find trans women who would before knowing anything else about you, be open to share their stories, and be open to give you support."

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*I do not mean that, because I am hopeful, I attribute to this hope of mine the power to transform reality all by itself, so that I set out for the fray without taking account of concrete, material data, declaring, “my hope is enough!” No, **my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But, without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water.***

Paulo Freire

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Concluding thoughts

1. Stories (and how and what is told) matter.
2. Foster opportunities for love & solidarity.
3. Critical hopefulness.



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Our account of the social world reflects what we are willing—and able—to hear.

Fassin, Le Marcis, & Lethata



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carmen.logie@utoronto.ca



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