



Awareness Creation of Sexual Violence through Conceptual Apparel Design

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Introduction

Sexual violence is experienced by thirty-five percent (35%) of women worldwide, during their lifetime (DV Report, 2016). The Domestic Violence Report also posits that assault similarly denoted as sexual mishandling is an unwarranted sensual attitude by one individual on a different individual. Deducing from the report emphasis is laid on sexual abuse being commonly perpetrated by an offender, as using force or by taking advantage of a person. Such a wrongdoer is declared as being a sexual offender and a molester (DV Report, 2016). The terminology of sexual exploitation also discloses a behaviour in an older person or a ripe infantile as directed to a juvenile, this is usually towards the stimulation of/or the involved usage of a child in a sexually explicit manner; including the use of additional personalities beginning than the age of consent for carnal act, for sensual stimulation; and thus is referred to as adolescent or child sexual abuse or statutory rape (DV Report, 2016). This practice which is commonly verbal and physical assault (Luman, 2018), is experienced by both males and females even though quarter to eight in ten women are victims (Feldblum and Lipnic, 2016). This largely influences the cognitive abilities, performance, emotions and psychological well-being (Jewkes, Sen and Garcia-Moreno, 2002; Shaw, Hegewisch and Hess, 2018; Schneider, Swan, and Fitzgerald, 1997).

To draw a spotlight of this recurring practice in our communities, contemporary artists through different media have produced artworks that seeks to highlight and create awareness on sexual violence and harassment. France Presse (2019) cites artist Alicia Framis in her work *Life Dress* (Plate 1) who employ mannequins with white dresses to create awareness on workplace women harassment. These styled dresses were made of airbag materials inflated to protect vital parts of the female body that are commonly harassed by the opposite sex. In a report by Weisman Art Museum (2017), Yoko Ono in a performing art activity invited viewers to cut a piece of her clothing in a work titled *Cut Piece* as shown in Plate 2. This practice held in a Japanese concert hall in Kyoto illustrated the struggle victims encounter when been harassed by another person.



Plate 1: *Life Dress* by Alicia Framis



Plate 2: *Cut Piece* by Yoko Ono

Ono

(Source: FrancePresse, 2019)

(Source:

Weisman Art Museum, 2017)

Furthermore, Weisman Art Museum (2017) cited another art installation *Retracing the Trace* (Plate 3) performed by Luzene Hill with the artist laying on 3780 pieces of red *kipu* style incan knots carefully arranged on the floor of the exhibition center. She associates the traditional knot style of *kipu* to the silence of survivors of sexual violence. In a similar conceptual performing art approach, Princenthal (2019) referenced Suzanne Lucy's feminist work *Ablutions, 1972* (Plate 4) whose performance projected testimonies of female rape, assault and harassment victims. This art form represented the terrifying situation women face after been assaulted by their offenders.



Plate 3: *Retracing the Trace* by Luzene Hill

(Source: Weisman Art Museum, 2017)



Plate 4: *Ablutions* by Suzanne Lucy's

(Source: Princenthal, 2019)

In an exhibition titled *Pressing*, Hale (2018) cites painted artworks (Plate 5) produced by artist Madison Cowles to give voices to survivors of abuse and rape. These works employed stenciled images of sexual offenders, billboard vinyl, poetry reflecting their emotional pain and 3D printed wall sculptures of passages.

Fryd (2019) cited a 2002 installation *Rape Garage* (Plate 7) highlighting on the narratives of sexual trauma of rape victims produced by Stefanie Bruser, Josh Edwards, Katie Grone and Lindsey Lee.



Plate 6: *Pressing* by Madison Cowles Serna
(Source: Hale, 2018)



Plate 7: *Rape Garage* by Stefanie Bruser, Josh Edwards, Katie Grone and Lindsey Lee

Grone and Lindsey Lee

(Source: Fryd, 2019)

Concept-based artworks continue to exist to propagate a message and create the needed awareness on a subject matter that are vital in our very existence. This studio-based practice further adds up to contemporary creative path by artists on sexual violence or harassment which remain a societal canker. Additionally, techniques such as letterism, dyeing, stenciling, applique and pictorial batik were employed in designing and producing conceptual apparel on sexual violence.

Methodology

The study employed the Art Studio based research in the design or creative process coupled with the production of the apparel. This method is deemed necessary because the findings or results are obtained without any statistical process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) but rather obtained from studio practice which according to Sullivan as cited in Marshall (2010) contributes to the knowledge and practice of the creative process. The method illustrates the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of art as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by researchers involved in their studies (McNiff, 2013). Various fabrics were experimented to assess their feasibility for the production of the garments, of which garment designs were developed from the mood board, and produced using the batik, dyeing and screen-printing techniques in a studio condition using varying fabrics on the market. To achieve the focus of the study, a five (5) stage conceptual framework was developed to guide in the creative process.

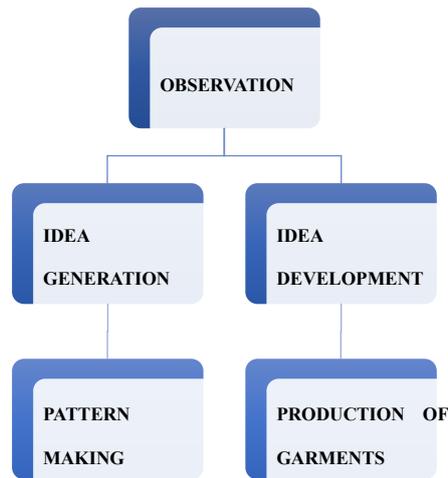


Plate 8: Conceptual Framework for the study
(Source: Authors Construction, 2019)

Idea Generation (Mood Board)

The inspiration board or mood board (Plate 9) was a tool which aided wholly in the design process. It is a collage of images meant to kick-start one’s imagination or creativity. Images were selected based on their relevance and the bearing it had on the theme and research work which dovetails into violent acts against women. Ideas from the collated data and responses from DOVVSU and ATU guided the researchers in the selection of images and texts for the production and decoration of the garments.

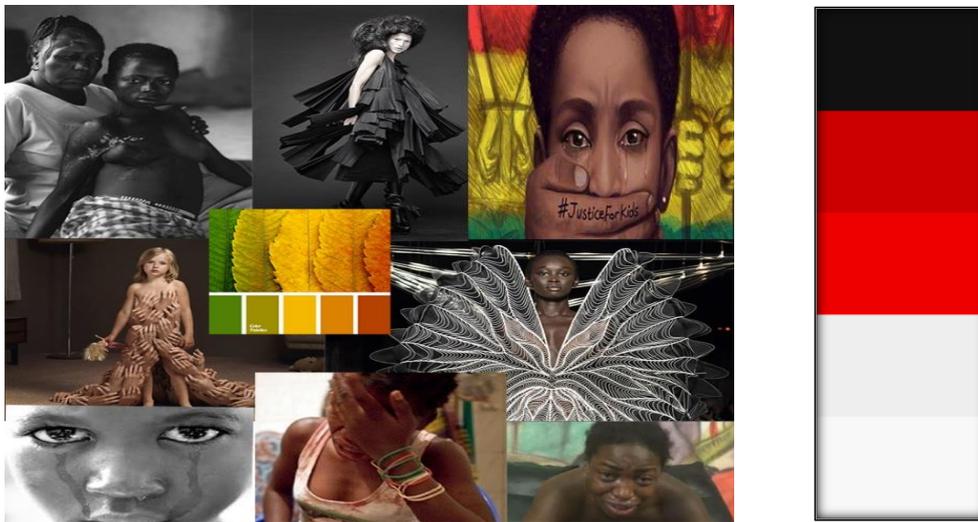


Plate 9: Mood board
(Source: Studio Practice, 2019)

Idea Development (Sketches)

Idea Development constitutes creative thinking and the exploration of concepts in different ways. It is the selection of ideas comprising of visual elements, compositions and techniques from this initial work and using them in new ways. The general idea for the research and the construction of these eventual garments was to create a clothing line that speaks against sexual abuse of Ghanaian women, which would consequently spark

an intellectual discourse on the subject. They researchers were inspired by the idea to generate the under listed sketches (Plate 10 a,b).



A - Front View



B - Back View

Plate 10: Illustration of Final Garments

(Source: Studio Practice, 2019)

Drafting of Patterns

Pattern making is a bridge function between garment design and production. A sketch can be turned into a garment via a pattern which interprets the design in the form of the garment components (Cooklin, 2019). This stage of the garment construction process comprises of the drafting of patterns for the various garments. The figure ten (10) and twelve (12) basic blocks were used and later adapted to the style and design of the particular garment and measurements of the selected models.

Production of Garments

The production of garments was carefully outlined in critical stages; pattern making, creation of screen from graphic images, dyeing of the cut out patterns at different portions, stretching of the fabric on the printing table coupled with printing the graphic images using red and black paste and lastly the attachment of the “stop-hand” template on specific parts of the garment. As mentioned early on, the size 10 and 12 basic blocks were used in cutting the patterns. The laid-out patterns/ fabric cut outs were further pinned into garment samples (Plate 11) in order to check out for mistakes and corrected on the selected specifications.



Plate 11: Pining of fabric cut outs to form the final garments
(Source: Studio Practice, 2019)

The next stage clearly involved the development of graphic images (Plate 12) on a stretched screen. Here, graphic newspapers with stories highlighting on social abuse or assault on women were sampled from news-stands for the screen development process. An A3 size wooden frame with a stretched mesh was created with photo sensitive chemicals (comprises of white glue, dye and potassium dichromate). Under appropriate conditions, the coated mesh was left to dry of which the screens together with the newspapers (made transparent using oil) were exposed to light for approximately 3mins to develop.



Plate 12: Screen development stages
(Source: Studio Practice, 2019)

The choice of a black printing paste was employed and squeegeed through the developed areas of the mesh on the fabrics. These fabrics were carefully gathered (using the marbling technique) and dyed using red vat dyes (Plate 13) which are common and widely used by dye practitioners. With a mixture of 3 table spoons of caustic soda, sodium hydrosulphite and red vat dyes, a solution was made ready for the colouring process. Employing such dye chemicals poses some critical risk (Howard, Frimpong and Seidu, 2019) of which PPEs are recommended for use to ensure an injurious free dyeing process.



Plate 13: Printing and Dyeing stages
(Source: Studio Practice, 2019)

Findings

An empirical survey was carried out at the DOVVSU Headquarters in Accra to uncover relevant data on sexual abuse related cases against women from the 2016 to 2017 under review (Plate 14). It was evident from the statistics of 2016 that, 59% of females were raped coupled with 18% and 13% for Indecent assault and Defilement cases respectively. These practices as earlier stated influences the cognitive abilities, emotions and psychological well-being of the victim (Jewkes et al., 2002). This additionally creates a permanent scar and pains on the minds and bodies of such victims that can affect their physical well-being and interactions.

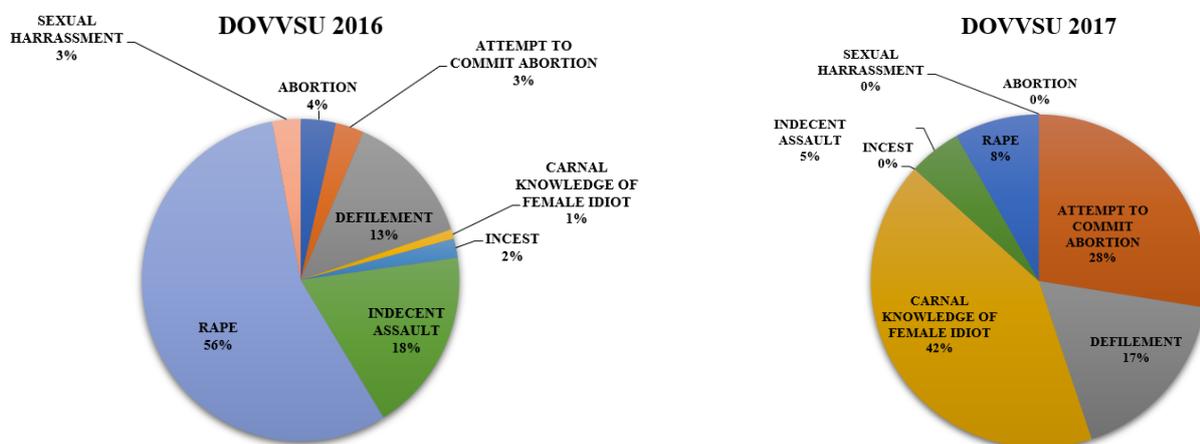


Plate 14: Statistical Data on Sexual Abuse Cases from DOVVSU (2016-2017)

Similar cases were recorded in 2017 under review with carnal knowledge of female at 42%, attempt to commit abortion 28% and defilement 17%. These records highlight the depth of suffering of struggle females has to go through in the society.

Premise on such data set, a field research was carried out at Accra Technical University to obtain information on the percentage of females that have been sexually abused and the role art can play in curbing such canker in the society. To achieve this, responses were gathered from participants on two critical questions: (1) What was your age group at the time of abuse? (2) Do you think fashion and textile designers can play a role in creating awareness on sexual abuse from the Ghanaian Society?

Information sourced from participants at ATU clearly points that they experienced at different age levels (Table 1) some forms of sexual abuse from the males in the society. This phenomenon as stated by some of the female respondents influenced their relationship, thoughts and care for the opposite sex. This affirms Shaw et al. (2018) position on the effects sexual abuse has on the psychological well-being of the victims involved.

Table 1: Age of participants at the time of sexual abuse

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 10yrs	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
	10-18yrs	12	17.6	17.6	19.1
	18 and above	55	80.9	80.9	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Field research from ATU, 2018)

Even though relevant laws have been outlined to protect the rights of females against sexual abuse with its related cases, many females still remain victims of this unlawful act. Affirming this, in a 2018 publication on Ghana Web, Madam Esther Armah member of the Coalition Against Sexual Abuse stipulated that limited charges and punishment were faced by sexual predators, a situation that is not deterrent enough. Just as stated in the introductory part, works of artists have also helped in creating the effects sexual abuse has on the victims. Considering this, as shown in Table 2, 79.4% of the respondents agreed that fashion and textile designers coupled with their works can contribute to creating the relevant awareness on sexual abuse. These works which may be applied as installations and commercial usage creates visual imagery on the minds of viewers and users on the need to help stop this canker in the society. They further opined that the choice of graphical imagery and text on fashion coupled with installation works of garments would aid in achieving the such focus. Aside, 20.6% of the respondents however had a contrary view and established the need for enforced laws.

Table 2: Can Fashion/Textile designer help in curbing sexual abuse in the society?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	54	79.4	79.4	79.4
	No	14	20.6	20.6	100.0
	Total	68	100.0	100.0	

(Source: Field research from ATU, 2018)

Appreciation of Apparels

This studio-practice employed marbling as a dyeing technique, beadworks and hand screen printing resulted in the final garments as illustrated in Table 3. The choice of the marbling technique seeks to create an illusion of blood spill and stains from the victims. This philosophically translated to the blood lost and trauma such victims live with throughout their growth. Such stain in their minds would undoubtedly affect their well-being in the community.

Apparels 1 and 2 was named *Ny3 kpaa yei yakayakanii ni feemo* in the Ga language and *Y3n gyae mbaa mmɔnatɔ* in Akan language respectively which collectively means “Stop sexual violence against Women”. These apparels feature the choice of red, brown and black colours to depict the illusion of blood spill and stains. Alternatively, the hand screen printing method was exercised in printing newspaper articles on sexual assaults on Apparel 1 to communicate to society and create awareness on the canker. Apparel 2 however used the batik technique to create a pictorial image on sexual assault, which displayed a female being strangled by an older man. Additionally, stencilling was used to couch out the word ‘stop sexual abuse’ of which beadwork was done by hand to fill up the word ‘STOP’ in the phrase; the intent of this, was to communicate to the general public and create a consciousness on the immorality.



Apparel 1: *Ny3 kpaɔ yei yakayakanii ni feemo*



Apparel 2: *Y3n gyae mbaa mmɔnatɔɔ*



Apparel 3: *Tɔdi*

Apparel 4:

Dakatar da zina

The Ewe phrase selected for Apparel 3 was *Tɔdi*, which is translated to mean “Stop!”. The applique, screen printing, dyeing (marbling), painting and beading techniques were used in the creative process. Synthetic black leather fabric was applied in opposite sides of the apparel to grant an aesthetic appeal. The garment tells a story using Lettrism incorporated screen printing and applique. An image of the human hand (palm), which displayed a gesture of an outstretched hand depicting the stop sign was designed and printed out on a mercerized cotton fabric. The fabric was laid out onto a yard of hard ‘Vilene’, pressed and then fixated onto selected portions of the apparel using the hemming tape. The affixed image was then attached onto the actual garment using an embroidery machine. The palm image comprises of words such as; stop rape, stop sexual abuse etc. The intent of this was to interconnect ideologies on the theme and also awaken the consciousness of society on the immorality. Screen printing, and marbling, as well as applique, was used to create a form/ an idea that communicated on the theme. An illusion of blood spill and stain in was also created on the apparel, as prepared dyes were poured in horizontal and vertical lines; the colour red, brown and black were applied with brush using print paste and subsequently dyes. Subsequently the print paste was also applied on the detachable cape (made of organza fabric), that fell over the apparel.

Apparel 4 was *Dakatar da zina*, in Hausa translates as “Stop sexual violence against Women”. Similar techniques used for the pervious apparel designs were applied same in Apparel 4. In addition, an image of the human hand (palm), which displayed a gesture of an outstretched hand depicting the stop sign was designed and printed out on a mercerized cotton fabric. The fabric was then laid out onto a yard of hard ‘Vilene’, pressed and then fixated onto selected portions of the garment using the hemming tape. The affixed image was then attached onto the actual garment (trouser and top) using an embroidery machine and the zig zag stiches. The palm image comprises of words such as; stop rape, stop sexual abuse etc. The intent of this was to communicate ideas on the theme and also awaken the consciousness of society on the immorality.

Conclusion

It is an established fact that the identity of most sexual offender is known to their victims, this disheartening act clearly shows that society is gradually failing women. In a pre-survey interview with ten (10) women, it was clear the imminent danger of sexual abuse against Ghanaian Women of which nine (9) out of every ten (10) women, has already been sexually assaulted at a young age of eighteen (18) years. As alarming as this information sounds, it would interest the reader to know that these threats of sexual abuse had majority of the offenders being a close friend or relative of the victims. These revelations coupled with design path of most artists stated in the literature, contributed to the authors’ motivations to create apparel that seeks to make individuals aware of such canker in the community and the need to fervently fight against this all-consuming menace and to stand for what is morally right and acceptable. In an exhibition at the forecourt of the Faculty of Art building in KNUST-Kumasi, most of the students who engaged with us stated the ordeals the faced in

everyday setting, of which such acts have affected with perception and interaction with the opposite sex. Others agreed that, fashion design can engage strongly in contributing to creating an awareness of sexual assault against women. In our strife to protect our rich culture, let's not paint the picture of patriarchy to seem as what it is not. Feminism is as diverse and acceptable as patriarchy, let society embrace both. Social actions represented by diverse textiles and garment production techniques are a 21st century art practice that is here to stay. Highly used garment production of techniques in the not too far future will be replaced by such intriguing trends in Textiles and Fashion.