Opening up Spaces and Narratives of (Non-) Acceptance

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Abstract

This arts-based research is about *spaces; perceptions of space, contexts of space, movement within/from/through spaces, and the meanings associated with spaces. The purpose of this post-modern narrative research was to explore personal expressions and understandings of spaces of (non)-acceptance. The focus of this idea of 'space'—in relation to perceived contexts of acceptance –was informed by three methods: 1) an unstructured narrative interview with one participant; 2) the primary author's written, personal narrative account; and 3) visually representing these narratives spatially and temporally through a series of three abstract paintings. By illustrating and narrating these understandings of spaces of acceptance in textual and visual forms, the constituted 'meanings' of those spaces and the self over time were concurrently explored. It was found that both forms of representation were and are methods of thinking and analyzing, as well as rhetorical devices that can be used to convey those illuminated meanings.*

Keywords: Arts-based research; post-modern; narrative inquiry; space; dementia

Introduction

This is a personal story about spaces: perceptions of space, contexts of space, movement within/from/through spaces, and the meanings associated with spaces. This story about spaces is also not the story I (the primary author) intended to tell. Throughout the process of learning different ways of doing qualitative inquiry, I felt challenged to turn the analytic lens upon myself, and upon one another, to explore, describe, and understand the nature of spaces of acceptance.

What emerged through the 'doing,' was a shift in my research gaze; I was challenged to stretch my understanding of reflexivity in the space of research. In some ways, exploring meanings of acceptance challenged me to re-examine my ontological foundations. Through this reflection, the different meanings of acceptance changed for me. I began to ask questions about the nature of spaces of acceptance, and how an individual's perceptions of those spaces can shift, change, and evolve over time. Further, I began to question whether the associated meanings of these spaces were static, and whether meaning could be fundamentally different between persons, and over time.

These questions surrounding spaces of acceptance were crystalized during the process of conducting a phenomenological interview with Collette.[1] I was surprised and invigorated by the discussions surrounding construction and meaning-making in spaces of acceptance. I was also fascinated by how discussing these spaces raised questions for the interview participant, as well as an individual awareness of contradictory personal descriptions and understandings of those spaces. In other words, the process of discussing spaces of (non)-acceptance raised questions for both my participant Collette, and for me.

Admittedly, I have always been fascinated with the construction of spaces. This fascination began with my previous vocation as a classical pianist. I was always amazed by the complexity of a musical space: how the sound from a single instrument could evoke a relational experience with persons within a space; how the arrangement of sounds into music could transform a space; how the physical features of the space could transform the sound; how the act of playing forced me to consider myself in relation to the sound and the place. This fascination with space followed me into my fine art training in University. I became fascinated by the physical features of spaces, particularly the architecture, lighting, colour, and placement of elements of space. Creation of these spaces and manipulation of features of these spaces seemed to change some perceptible relational quality.

The relational elements of space, whereby the individual is constituted, have been a primary focus of my previous research on social experiences of persons within caring spaces. However, thinking about the movement of the person

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1.   Pseudonym has been used to protect the privacy of the participant

through spaces of acceptance (via narrative accounts) has challenged me to consider these different elements of created spaces (e.g. light, sound, architecture, social/relational, and etc.) together. Additionally, this particular research has allowed me to further explore my own understandings of these spaces, and begin to answer some the fundamental questions about the constitution of the self through time and across spaces.

What I present is a post-modern narrative of spaces of acceptance. My personal narrative is presented in a written personal account of one space that holds particular meaning for me: my childhood home. My narrative and Collette's narrative of space are illustrated through a series of three abstract paintings; by illustrating and narrating my understandings of spaces of acceptance in both textual and visual forms, I was concurrently exploring the constituted 'meanings' of those spaces over time.

Bochner (2000) states that the "purpose of self-narratives is to extract meaning from experiences, rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived… we narrate to make sense of experience over the course of time," (p. 270). In this way, Bochner (2000) called narrative inquiry a poetic social science, whereby the "beauty and tragedy of the world are textually empowered by the carefully chosen constructions and subjective understandings of the author," (p. 269-270). This is a reflection of Heidegger (2013) who argued that the language of thinking is inherently poetic.

This idea is echoed by Ely (2007) and Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005) who described how the process of writing is a unique method of inquiry; writing is a way of thinking, knowing, learning, and discovering meaning. In other words, writing allows for concurrent data collection and data analysis (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005). In this regard, the processes of writing and painting spaces of acceptance enabled me to more deeply explore and reflect upon the meanings these spaces held.

Although Ely (2005) and Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005) were speaking explicitly about the process of *writing* a narrative, the process of *painting* a narrative served a similar function. Heidegger (2013) discussed the idea of *thinking* and *uncovering* through art, and the limitations of using singular modes of representation:

> In the art work the truth of what is, has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work…The attempt to interpret this thing-character of the work with the aid of the usual thing-concepts failed—not only because these concepts do not lay hold of the thingly feature, but because, in raising the question of its thingly substructure, we force the work into a preconceived framework by which we obstruct our own access to the work-being of the work. (p.38-39)

Surprisingly, new meanings (meanings I did not know were there) were illuminated as I made choices about what themes were represented, and how they were visually represented spatially and temporally on the canvas. In this way, I would argue that both forms of representation were (i.e. writing and painting - are methods of thinking, as well as rhetorical devices that can be used to convey those illuminated meanings; the subsequent narrative research presented in this paper considers this through an exploration of spaces of acceptance.

Methodology

The purpose of this narrative research was to explore personal expressions and understandings of spaces of (non)-acceptance. The focus of this idea of 'space'—in relation to perceived contexts of acceptance—was informed by:

1. An unstructured, narrative interview with one participant - Collette—to explore spaces of acceptance;

2. The creation of a written, personal narrative by the primary author related to spaces of acceptance;

3. A visual illustration of the key thematic elements of spaces of acceptance through a series of three abstract paintings.

Unstructured Interview

Interview questions and probes were guided by van Manen's (1997) focus on embodied, temporal, spatial, and relational experiences of acceptance. The interview lasted approximately 80 minutes, and was digitally recorded and transcribed. Identifiers were removed from the transcripts to maintain the participant's confidentiality. Collette's interview transcript was thematically analyzed by both authors/researchers in order to identify passages pertaining to the creation of spaces of acceptance.

Interview 'data' was qualitatively analyzed by following Wertz's (2011) phenomenological approach. Data analysis began by becoming acquainted with the data set by openly reading each interview transcript without the research agenda in mind, and then re-reading and highlighting key quotes; what Wertz (2011) refers to as "reading for a sense of the whole" (p. 131). Then a process of eidetic analysis (Wertz, 2011) commenced where meaning units were derived from the data by segmenting portions of each transcript into themes relevant to the research questions. This resulted in the creation of 'meaning' units. The researchers psychologically reflected on the essence of each meaning unit in the transcript, and then began naming and describing them (Wertz, 2011).

After the researchers independently developed their meaning units, they collectively examined them by being reflective, critical and collegial. This collaborative process of discussing meaning units led to the mutually agreed thematic essences.

Personal Narrative

Ellis' (1999) approach to writing personal narratives was used to construct the written narrative. This process involved "using main events to structure the narrative, and filling in the emotional memories retrospectively (Ellis, 1999). Additionally, Ellis' (1999) process of 'emotional recall' was used to explore and describe the emotional experiences associated with these events. This involved using memories to revisit the emotional and physical feelings associated the past (Ellis, 1999).

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000; as cited in Creswell, 2007) approach to narrative analysis was used to analyze the post-modern narrative. This involved analyzing the three-dimensional space of the narrative by examining interaction (i.e. personal and social), continuity (i.e. time), and situation (i.e. places and spaces).

The Visual as an Analytic Tool and Form of Representation

The thematic ideas explored by Collette through the interview process simultaneously raised questions about spaces of acceptance, and suggested a need to further explore personal understandings of space using a post-modern approach to narrative inquiry. The choice to use both written and visual forms of representation was an acknowledgement of the complex nature of experience, expression, and modes of representation. To adequately reflect this complexity, Parry and Johnson (2007) and Sermijn, Devlieger and Loots (2008) argued that expressing learned meanings can involve a variety of creative writing techniques, visual representations, genres, and so forth.

For the purposes of this research, key themes related to spaces of acceptance described by Collette and the primary author, were chosen to be further explored using visual representation (i.e. painting). A series of three paintings were constructed to visually narrate emergent themes identified through the analysis of Collette's interview transcripts, and analysis of the post-modern narrative. A series of preliminary pencil sketches were completed prior to painting. A style of abstract impressionism was chosen, which included the use of visual symbols, abstract representations, colour, form, texture, and so forth. The chosen medium was acrylic paint on canvas pad, arranged in a triptych. The paintings were completed in a single session lasting approximately 5 hours.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000; as cited in Creswell, 2007) three-dimensional approach to analysis was used concurrently with a visual analysis of the three paintings. Elements of form, shape, lighting, placement, and colour were examined, in addition to interaction, continuity, and situational elements.

Findings of the analyses are presented concurrently with reflexive commentary in the proceeding sections.

Findings and Discussion

Collette's Visual Narrative

Collette described, in vivid detail, the construction of spaces of acceptance; the spaces of acceptance created a shared, relational sense of connectivity with other persons. Two key themes emerged: space being created by people and physical features of the environment; and lingering in spaces of connectivity. These thematic elements were questioned by both the primary researcher and Collette during the interview. What emerged were questions of complexity.

Collette discussed complex perceptions of spaces, which were both created by the persons within the space, and/or the physical features (e.g. architectural design, colour, temperature, sound, size, and etc.). In some of the discussions, Collette described how the social interactions within the space dictated whether or not the space was one of acceptance, while in other discussions she described how the physical features of the space limited the feelings of connectivity with persons (and therefore feelings of acceptance). For example, Collette described "funnels" of space (i.e. the yoga studio and the hallways of a University), which were purposeful designs; the architecture limited the social interaction, and even promoted movement away from the space itself:

> "within that space that you know that people are there… for a purpose, they're not just there to hang out…you might only have a couple seconds or, you know, it might turn into something more where you go and you go and sit down and talk to the person for a couple of minutes… the space does seem to be more of a, I don't know what the word is, not a deterrent, but it can kind of change or influence maybe just what the interaction is or what the length of interaction could be…. yeah it almost acts maybe more like a funnel or something."

In *The Funnel* (see Figure 1), I attempted to visually represent the physical features of a space that Collette described as dissuading acceptance. The intention of the design was to mimic Collette's perceived feelings of being "funnelled" by the space. Contrasting shades of black, grey, and white were used to represent sharp architectural elements of spaces like the yoga studio and the University hallways. The steep contrasts of shape and shade are meant to convey a sense of intention, just as Collette described in her description; these are time-bound spaces created to deter prolonged interaction, and ultimately acceptance.

The upper portion of the canvas shows containment, but the triangular frame also pulls your eye downwards to a blurred outward space. Painting this space was a process of discovery; although Collette described how the spaces were de-

Figure 1: "The Funnel" (2014) Acrylic on Canvas

signed to move persons through an environment, the external world (outside of the space) was not generally described. There seemed to be some notions of other potential spaces of acceptance outside of the 'bubble.' In this way, the bottom space of the canvas was not depicted with such sharp contrast as the upper portion. Rather, this area was blurred, suggesting the potential for emergent spaces of acceptance.

Collette contrasted these funnels of space (depicted in Figure 1) with physical features that seemed to promote interaction and connection. For example, she described a large area in one of the academic buildings where placement of furniture and the size of the space seemed to imply that students were free to linger and interact with others. She also described these elements in a discussion of two different yoga studios:

> "in terms of the physical differences, both the studios kind of have a warm, I guess, surroundings, either with their paint colours and that they'd use wooden floors, or the one studio had cork flooring, so they were both- both the layouts was fairly natural and warm, but yeah there was definitely a difference in terms of just how the space was laid out and how people's attitudes were- yeah so it's kind of weird like that, that even though these little things in space and attitude can make that much of a difference… through the space that they had there, it almost made it easier for people as they were coming and going from the change room and from the studio room that they have this seating area with tea and these little… Asian tea bowls… the type of environment that they were trying to create there really just fostered people being able to, you know, see each other and to take the time to stop and talk even if you only have, you know, 5 minutes after class, then just be able to get to know some of the people that you're that in class."

In her descriptions of the physical features, Collette also described how the social features (i.e. nature of social interactions with other persons) promoted feelings of connectivity. In those spaces—which seemed to encompass both elements of physical design and social connectivity—Collette discussed a desire to linger in the "positive energy," or "vibe." For example, she described her desire to linger at the yoga studio:

> "they have this like seating area and they always have tea before and after class and they say, you know, "if anyone has time please hang out for tea," and, if you have to go home [or] whatever after then they don't have any problems with that…the type of feeling and environment that you want to be in and to not really feel worried or self-conscious… that time that I have been sitting there and having tea with people… just to be able to sit and find out what other people are up to, or just sit and have a tea quietly."

Figure 2: "The Lingering" (2014) Acrylic on Canvas

In this regard, her emotional response to the features of the space seemed to result in a desire to remain. *The Lingering* (see Figure 2) depicts the shared sense of connectivity described by Collette in spaces of acceptance. Complementary hues of greens, blues, and yellows are used to represent similarities between persons within the space, and rejuvenation (e.g. through drinking green tea). Connected rings in a chain-like pattern span the space of the canvas, and extend beyond. Gentle, sweeping-brush strokes suggest movement between the rings, and the blurred smokiness conveys a sense of lingering. However, the lack of clarity in the movement and placement of the forms suggests an underlying complexity and unanswered questions of self.

Collette's description raised some questions about the perception of spaces of acceptance. In her descriptions of three different spaces—each of which served different purposes—she seemed to convey that a space of acceptance was more of a static process (i.e. subject to change, transition, new meanings), rather than a definitive thing. *The Lingering* is a reflection of the static nature spaces of acceptance. Further, Collette's descriptions suggest a process of ongoing construction, whereby meaning associated with that space was malleable. I explored this malleability through proceeding personal narrative on the transformation of the home, and the accompanying painting *"The Ascension,"* (see Figure 3).

Personal Narrative

"Open Doors—Transformation of Home to House"

There is a space. It is a space, a place that has constantly changed, and is constantly changing. The changes involve the people who enter, occupy, and leave. I call it home, but it is a home in name only. It is a house: a structure, a shell, and a shelf for the living, being, and dying that happens within. The dying within the space seems to be ever-present now, and the living and being seem ever-distant.

I have returned again to this space after a process of trying to forget the last time I was here. Just enough time has passed, where I feel recovered enough to attempt to enter the house. I make the turn in my car onto the road that leads to home, and I begin an ascent, up the winding hill that leads to the house. The house is at the end of the road. I don't think about the familiarity of the turns; the car seems to know where I am going. I have driven this road so many times before; I swear I could do it blind-folded, in a snow-storm, in the middle of the night.

Today I am optimistic: today will be different than the last. Things will be normal.

When I pull into the driveway, I am jarred back to the reality of now: there is a car in the driveway. Another car… a different car…always a different car. "For

Figure 3: "The Ascension" (2014) Acrylic on Canvas

fuck sakes." I start wondering what the hell I am going to encounter when I walk through the door.

I sit for a second with the car running, wondering if I should turn around and leave. I see a head appear in the window. "Fuck." Someone saw me. Now I have to go in or it will go in **the notes** that I showed up and left without coming inside. That or Mum will go into hysterics because she thinks I didn't want to see her.

FAMILY CARE JOURNAL ENTRY:

Thursday, November 10, 2008 - Stacey

- Came home around 2:15 am and doors were all open (steel and wooden doors propped open). House smelled like something had been or was on fire.

- I found Mum in the washroom, on the toilet, crying again.

- Couldn't explain what happened. She just kept saying: "He's going to be mad at me," and, "Jim was here."

- Saw the microwave was unplugged and pulled out from the wall. It was hot, and I found something charred inside.

- Half-burned container in the sink.

- Mum was very shaken, scared, and worried (VERY STRESSED AND AGITATED)

- Mum could not figure out how to use her pads (has her period).

    - Blood all over herself and all over the bathroom

    - Had to show her how to wipe, and then had to clean her up (she had made a mess of herself; back of her legs and thighs were soiled)

    - Had to prompt her to wash her hands.

- I made her lunch and a cup of tea—I don't think she ate anything today.

- She kept wincing, so I gave her 400 mg ibuprofen—I am guessing she might be having menstrual pains, but she can't clearly tell me.

- Put on some classical music. This really calmed her down. She actually picked up the newspaper and started reading (hasn't done that in a while!)

- Could not find Dad's pager # - not sure who to call.

- Perhaps time to consider:

  - Meals on wheels

  - A home security system that has a connection to the fire alarms (we were lucky Jim was home from work and heard her screaming from next-door)

  - One of those children's emergency cell phones (the kinds with the pre-programmed phone numbers & single button call placement???)

I AM SO FRUSTRATED.

END OF ENTRY

What will it be today? I wonder. One of the PSWs[2] is here, so he/she will undoubtedly be annoyed that I am here.

I take a deep breath, and I get out of the car.

As I walk toward the front door, I notice the homemade coffee-can, butt-stop my Dad has placed at the edge of the walkway… I also notice about a billion cigarette butts littered along the porch and in the garden. "Ignorant." I bet that annoys the shit out of my Dad.

I approach the screen-door, and hear the scamper of the cat running down the wooden stairs to hide, and I hear someone say, "Brenda. Brenda—can you come back for a second." As I step in the front door, Mum steps out from the hallway and says, "Hi!"

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2. Personal Support Worker (PSW)

"Hi Mum! How are 'ya?" I say. She doesn't reply, but a PSW walks out behind her and says awkwardly, "Hello. Who are you?"

I tell her I am her daughter, and she says, "Oh really. I have never seen you before."

Fuck you. You're like one of 20 different PSWs I have seen in this house. What, is this your third time being here and suddenly you and my Mum are old friends? This is my house. You're the stranger. Fuck off.

"Nice to meet you. I don't usually visit during the day, but I had some time off today," I say. I think, 'fuck you,' one last time.

She squints at me, and then says, "Well, Brenda and I have a busy morning. We were just going to have a shower. Come on honey." She directs my Mum down the hallway and continually prompts her about 300 times with so many 'dears,' 'sweeties,' and 'darlings' that I want to puke. The door is left open for the whole shower battle… as usual.

I put the kettle on, and then proceed to rustle about in my bedroom. There was something I needed to bring back with me, but what it was escapes me now. I notice things have been moved slightly. There is now an old bath-chair sitting in my room. There is also a stockpile of incontinence briefs on my bed—Dad must have found a sale or something.

Mum finishes her shower and I hear the PSW begin the prompting-war: trying to dry Mum off and put the robe on her. I then feel someone looking at me, and turn around to find Mum in her robe at the doorway. I say "how was your shower?" and then the PSW appears to direct her to the bedroom to change.

Mum is at my bedroom door again. The PSW returns again, and this time is clearly annoyed. Her face is red, and she's shooting me daggers. "Brenda, we really need to get some clothes on you before we have lunch."

They return to the bedroom again, and I return to rustling about. I have remembered what I needed—my black portable music stand—but it's not where I left it. I start moving through the other bedrooms, the basement, under the stairs… where the fuck is this thing? And who the fuck has been in my room, moving things around? The rooms smell curiously of baby-powder, pine-sol, strawberry-flavoured Ensure mixed with saliva, sweat laced with medication; the house smells like a ward. It is nauseating.

The PSW walks up to me and says, "You know, it's really distracting for your Mum when you're walking about while we're trying to take showers and get dressed."

My eyebrow arches up, and I stare at her. I say nothing, and she walks away.

I am irrationally angry. I am pissed off. In my mind, I am blowing up: Fuck, fuck, fuck. It's always something. Fuck this, fuck this place.

I mutter, "whatever… see you later." No one notices me leave, no one will know I was there… unless the PSW puts it in the log.

I get in the car, slam the door, and grab at the seatbelt. The starter screams as I turn the ignition too forcefully. I back out of the driveway, feeling a rush of adrenaline as I fly into a rage. Descending the hill is a bizarre sensation. My anger is bubbling over, yet I am physically descending. I feel as though I can't breathe, and I start to shake under the weight of the fury, wishing for something to release the feeling upon. As I move through this odd desire, I become frustrated that no release is possible or available, and an emotional descent begins to mirror the physical descent. I see the bottom of the hill—the road leading out—and I hit a bottom. The road becomes blurry and I squeeze the steering wheel until I can no longer feel my fingers. I pull the car over and sit. I can't move. I am stuck here for a while.

Reflections: Storied Representations of Space

Looking back on my personal narrative of the home, I am left wondering if I was not the visitor and the PSW was the family member. My visit was not a routine part of my day. However, the PSWs were there on a schedule. They had learned the intimate details of the house: the idiosyncrasies, the secret places. Not only did they know these spaces intimately, but they had learned them through a relational, intimate experience shared with my Mum. They knew where the teaspoons were; they could prepare a sandwich or a cup of tea as though they had been living there for years; they could fold the laundry and direct my Mum to place her socks in the right drawer, and the tea towels on the proper shelf in the linen closet. They knew which shampoo my Mum used; they knew they could put the dishwasher on before they left each morning, and my Dad would empty it when he got home from work. There were new routines and different actors who knew how things played out. I was no longer one of those players; I was no longer part of the play.

When I came to visit—and one of the PSWs was there—I felt like I was the stranger, stepping into an unknown space. It was not the space of my home, but someone's nursing home where someone's custodial care was performed. I became the outsider, the other, the foreign. I was angry that someone had decided that my family's house should no longer be a home; the space had been aggressively taken over from my family and had been re-appropriated as a nursing home.

The transformation of the space always disturbed me. I could not stand to be in it for too long before I would find something that irritated me, focus on it, and then bolt. In reality, the rationale for leaving in a hurry was never a true reflection of what I was feeling. The reason was always far greater than the little

things I chose to dwell on. I would run out because I could not stand how I felt when I was in that environment: I felt angry, invaded, and out-of-place. I felt as though I couldn't breathe, and I would shake under the weight of the fury, wishing for something to release the feeling upon. As I moved through this odd desire, I would inevitably become frustrated that no release was possible or available. Exasperation always followed the hatred. I couldn't point to who was to blame for this hostile takeover, and so I collapsed under the weight of the hopelessness. For the first time in my life, I hated.

There was a new hierarchy in our house. What had once been a family structure, became a care provision factory. I went from being a daughter, to a place near the bottom. I was below the formal care providers, and far below the cat (who was now an official therapeutic resource under this new structure of care). When I was home, I was there to watch and wait until the care processes were completed. The PSWs knew more, and were better equipped to interact with my Mum. My 27 year relationship with my Mum was only called upon as a last resort to bathe Mum or toilet her when the PSW called in sick for work. I was always the alternate. My relationship with my Mum was gone, and irrelevant; our relationship did not relate to her care, so it was of no value. The past was gone.

People continued to come and go as they pleased. There was no privacy, no boundaries within the space, and everything that happened in that space was documented, recorded, and scrutinized. I felt like I was in some sort of laboratory. The formal care providers were like researchers, and my Mum—because of her advancing dementia symptoms—had become a research subject; not actively participating, but being put through the motions of living. They would direct my Mum, "Brenda sweetheart: lift your arms, take a bite, let me shave your legs, don't touch the stove." I saw the people who lived in the space, like my Dad, transform from loving partners to mere participants in care. I was something lower… a lurking variable perhaps. I was someone who could unexpectedly move into the space and disrupt the experiment.

I continually avoided the house. It was no longer a home, and it no longer contained a family. The warm, familial feelings were replaced with hatred. I hated my house. I hate the space the house contained. "It" no longer contained my family. It was a custodial space, a medical space. The rooms had been re-purposed, and transformed. Artifacts of this transformation were scattered in every corner of the space: packs of incontinence products, bathing devices, ointments, pills, health records, care notes, and cigarette butts left by the custodians of this space. The place smelled like strawberry Ensure, pine-sol, baby powder. To this day, I am transported back to this space when I encounter these same smells, and I panic and run away. I wanted to remove these things and smells from the space, but their presence was necessary. I was not necessary.

In the piece *The Ascension* (see Figure 3), I visually represented the process of coming and going from the space of the home through the vertical pathway; this pathway was a representation of the complex feelings of guilt, pain, rejection, anger, and grief I described through the preceding personal narrative. The smell of strawberry Ensure is visually represented through the contrasting shades of pink following the path of ascension. The subtle greys represent the cement roadways and walkways of the journeying to and from the space of the home. The cigarette butts left by the PSWs were depicted in yellow-staining on the grey pathways.

Colour and form were important elements of this piece. Together, they were intended to convey the emotional characteristics of the movement between spaces. The swirling pathway is complex, messy, and descending, just like the emotional falling described in my narrative. The strong use of black conveyed the emotional darkness, the stark use of white (contrasted against the black) depicts the complexity of this emotion: it is static, changing, and difficult to define.

The process of creating the piece - the act of painting the emotions of changing spaces of acceptance—was a transformative process. This echoes the ideas of Heidegger (2013), who argued that art opens up the world and de-conceals the truth of beings. He stated that, "this opening up…happens in the work… [but] Nothing can be discovered… so long as the pure self-subsistence of the work has not distinctly displayed itself," (Heidegger, 2013, p. 38-39).

The act of painting and visually representing the emotions revealed new meanings about the nature of spaces of acceptance. Initially, I intended to represent my family home at the top of the canvas, with a road descending downs to the negative emotional state I experienced as I left the home. However, something happened through the process of painting, where the 'emotional state' and the exterior space of the home was visually reversed. The bottom blackness became a place (not an emotional state), in this case the family home, and the top portion became a city skyline (presumably my home in Hamilton).

The painting changed my perception of spaces of acceptance. Jones (2005) described a similar process whereby the act of writing can change our perception of our emotional experiences, and ultimately have a changing effect on the author. By rejecting a visual descent from my family home to an emotional state of being, and instead depicting an ascension from the family home (which held such negative emotions) to my Hamilton home, it was clear that somehow the meaning of 'home' had shifted. It was also clear that the emotional reaction to changing family home was not an end state, rather it was journey. Upon moving through this emotional journey, I opted to seek out a place associated with acceptance (in this case my Hamilton home).

The Ascension is a deliberate title chosen to describe the process of seeking out spaces of acceptance. It is also largely representative of the implied social-relational hierarchies described in the personal narrative, and visually illustrated

in the painting. These are ultimately hierarchies of personal meaning. The process of understanding how these meanings can change—over time—are described in the personal narrative, but are perhaps more apparent in the visual representation.

Conclusions

Daly (2007) states that "stories are the primary means by which we organize human experience and make it meaningful…individuals use story to make sense of their own lives," (p. 109). However, how those stories are represented is not limited to written representations. In the preceding post-modern narrative analysis I presented a written narrative concurrently with a series of three visual illustrations of spaces of acceptance. The "post-modern approach to narrative celebrates the presence of many different stories," (Daly, 2007, p. 118). The process of constructing post-modern written and visual narratives of spaces of acceptance revealed new understandings, and personal meanings.

Further, the process of representing and expressing through textual methods affirmed Ely (2007) and Richardson and Adams St. Pierre's (2005) idea that writing can be both a vehicle of analysis and representation in research. Additionally, this research demonstrates that visual methods can serve a similar function, whereby the process of representing by painting can also serve an analytic purpose. In a similar way, the use of visual expression as a means of 'setting up a world' (Heidegger, 2013) concurrently allowed for an opening up of the spaces of (non)-acceptance within this research.

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