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'From the Space Between Us'

The Use of Poetics as a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Tool within Qualitative Physiotherapy Research

Diane Tasker, Stephen Loftus, & Joy Higgs

Abstract

People make meaning of their experiences in conversation with other people and poetic phrases within such dialogue can offer a means of coming to a deeper understanding of those personal meanings. In a hermeneutic phenomenological study of community-based physiotherapeutic relationships, generated and derived poetry was used within the research process as a means to aid reflection about the research and the primary researcher's continuing clinical practice in community-based physiotherapy. Poetics became part of the hermeneutic research process, articulating the primary practitioner-researcher's role in the research, facilitating data analysis and assisting presentation of phenomenological findings. Such pragmatic development of poetics provided intellectual momentum, assisting movement of the research findings from the local context of community-based physiotherapy towards wider issues of societal concern.

Background

In a hermeneutic phenomenological study of community-based physiotherapeutic relationships, poetry was used within the research process as a means to aid reflection about the research and the primary researcher's continuing clinical

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practice in community-based physiotherapy. Conversations were held with community-based physiotherapists, clients and the family care teams who cared for those people in their homes to discover how participants interpreted the meaning and importance of the relationship that developed between them and their visiting physiotherapist.

Within the field of healthcare, Dahlberg, Todres, & Galvin (2009) comment that phenomenological traditions incorporate and acknowledge that life cannot be truly compartmentalised and human beings cannot be objectified. Their theory of *lifeworld-led* healthcare posits that an authentic approach to relationship-centred healthcare requires a deeper, more layered and existential philosophy of care. People make meaning of their experiences in conversation with other people and poetic phrases within such talk offer a means of coming to a deeper understanding of those experiences. When seeking to access such human experience, the philosophy and methodology of phenomenology assisted the researcher to describe and explore the meaning that people ascribed to their *lifeworld*, that is, the world as subjectively experienced by that person (van Manen 1990).

In contrast to the quantitative study of the world that attempts to be completely detached and objective, the qualitative philosophical research method of phenomenology considers knowledge and understanding to be embedded in everyday life. Phenomenology's use of rich and descriptive writing attempts to describe and reveal the essence of experience of the world as lived by a person, not reality as something separate from that person (Valle, King & Halling, 1989). Phenomenological research writing aims to stimulate in readers "a sense of connection to actual or potential experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 27). Van Manen refers to "the phenomenological nod". While reading writing that resonates with their own experience, readers involuntarily nod in agreement, recognising the essence of the lived experience of another person and thereby acknowledging their humanity and individuality.

Resonance in itself can justify lived experience as "the starting point and the end point of phenomenological research" (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). The recognition that occurs within the experience of resonance may alert the reader to an aspect of their own experience or feelings, sensitising them to thoughts and issues not previously considered, confirming deeply held thoughts and convictions or opening up different avenues of future thought.

The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar.
In recognition what we know emerges. (Gadamer 1989, p. 113)

For this research project, deeper understanding of the complexity that is involved within community-based physiotherapeutic relationships was achieved by the methodology and philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology. The practice of

writing hermeneutically can reveal and develop knowledge found useful by local communities for those communities but it can also contribute to more universal knowledge (Eryaman, 2008). The researcher delves within a topic of interest to discover its parts and then stands back to perceive the whole and how those parts may contribute to that universal whole. Reflection on the themes of the phenomenon is supported by description through writing and rewriting to elicit a sense of resonance in readers. In the busy world of healthcare practice, where time is at a premium, the conversion of a moment of resonance by a practitioner into possible practice may be lost among the myriad words on the page of a research article sitting on a coffee table. Poetic language devices provide meaning markers for the practitioner reader. “The compression of a poem ... makes it more consumable than longer, less cooked, narratives” (Furman 2006, p. 561).

A wide range of poetic devices has been used in qualitative research: “poetic allusions, cultural poetry research, participants’ poetry as data, data poems, research experience poems or poems from the field, and autoethnographic poetry with data poems being employed and discussed most frequently” (Lahman et al 2009, p. 39). Poetry may also just be ‘found’ within research interview data (Richardson 1992). Within the literature regarding general poetry, the term ‘found poetry’ refers merely to the poetic appropriation of topics and words found in other non-poetic texts, such as interview transcripts. Qualitative researchers use such found poetry to focus on the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant. Glesne (1997) proposed further that this co-construction arises and exists from within the relationship that develops between the participants as well as within the relationship between the researcher and the reader (as quoted by Adame et al 2011, p. 376).

It has long been recognised in the world of hermeneutics that the sensitive use of words can bring to light an intense experience in a way that allows us to understand something of that experience and what it might mean for those involved (Davey 2006).

Modern poetry asks its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal reference can be apprehended as a unity. (p.230)

Poetry and poetic expressions are one way of using words sensitively. Health professionals often need to engage with patients who are undergoing the intense experience of disability or deteriorating health. Poetics offers a way to study how such intense experiences are expressed and understood by both patients and health professionals. Poetic phrases within conversation can crystallise meaning and poetry often has the capacity to penetrate experience more deeply than ordinary prose (Furman 2006 p. 561). The distillation of meaning experienced in a

poetic phrase, spoken or written, can seep into our consciousness and stay there for further reflection.

Social poetics explores the ways in which conventions of language and social processes are used by people within their interpersonal interactions. People make meaning as they seek to communicate with each other and establish interpersonal relationships. "My act of knowing must take into account the other's way of knowing me" (Schwandt 2003, p. 356). It can therefore be used in research about human relationships to articulate some of the ways in which knowledge is not merely individually generated but created collectively as a result of the nature of our interpersonal processes (Schwandt 2003). This kind of social research seeks to interact and connect with research participants, through forms of conversation and narrative. Participants' expressions can be used to focus attention on "relations between aspects of our own human activities, previously unnoticed in the everyday, background 'hurly-burly' to our lives, here and now" (Shotter 1997, Section 2).

Within the found poetry of a research poem, "the respondent's words and thoughts remained intact as they were re-worked into a poetry format" (Langer and Furman 2004, Section 4.2). This poetic technique is different to that used within an interpretive poem, where the researcher can "utilize poetic device to create an evocative and moving document which allows for the subjective responses of the researchers" (Section 4.3). Butler-Kisber (2010) calls interpretive poems, 'generated' poetry; a term, which may provide a clearer indication of the basis for their writing. "What we know and how we know are inextricably related" (Butler-Kisber 2002, *Personal Involvement in Arts-Based Work*, para 2). However, these different styles of poetic expression, the found and the interpretive, can be combined to enhance co-construction of meaning in qualitative research, especially in the field of research about practice conducted by research-practitioners. The combination allows us to re-see and re-tell the findings of our qualitative research (Richardson 1993). As Richardson also noted, these processes are inseparable.

Poetics Developed as a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research Tool

Poetic craft and practice are "tools" we should not overlook in the repertoire of devices we use for conveying meaning, analyzing data, and attracting a broader readership." (Cahnmann-Taylor 2009, p 24)

In the following research project, poetics became part of the hermeneutic phenomenological research process, reflectively preparing the primary researcher for the research process and assisting with analysis of the data and presentation of findings. Poetics provided a way of integrating the primary researcher's past

clinical experiences with the research data. This allowed the development of a higher degree of resonance and understanding, enabling interpretation of the phenomenon of interest to move from the local, specific and particular context of community-based physiotherapy towards wider issues of societal concern through recognition of more global themes emerging from the findings.

The study explored the ways in which five people receiving community-based physiotherapy and their family care team members made sense of the relationships that they developed with their physiotherapists. It asked the following research questions:

- How do community-based physiotherapists interpret relationship-centred care within the dynamic and ongoing therapeutic relationships they develop with clients, their families and carers?

- How do clients, their families and carers, interpret and manage these ongoing relationships with community-based physiotherapists?

Complex relationships develop in the home-based healthcare situation, especially with clients who must cope with chronic or complex health issues. The visiting physiotherapist becomes a 'guest' (Heckman & Cott 2005), who needs to carefully negotiate how he/she interacts with the people he/she has come to visit.

People with chronic health problems and disability living at home and their families are often fully occupied and fatigued by the exigencies of their daily lives and may find it difficult to advocate for their issues of concern.

*How can I tell a story if no-one will listen?
Does that mean no-one cares?*

*I'm living my story but I don't know
Who I am or what comes next.*

*The story I was, is gone
The story I am now, is lost as I tell it
Where is my story now?*

(interpretive poem)

This research study sought to access those quieter voices, combining them with the voices of their therapists to project issues of interest and concern about community-based physiotherapeutic relationships. "Our problem is not what to do; it is how to talk about it" (Judt 2010, p. 6).

*Where is my story now?
It is with you,
But only if you understand
My story becomes real, when it joins with yours
(interpretive poem)*

The findings revealed a lexicon of terms and concepts, based on the researcher's perception of what seemed to have meaning for the participants. This perception was based on the identification of poetic phrases within the data and enhanced by the primary researcher's writing of pieces of free verse.

Within the literature regarding the use of poetry in research, there is some concern expressed as to the qualification of the researcher in the area of writing poetry. Piirto (2002) suggests that a certain degree of education in the subject of poetics is needed and recommends that research students demonstrate a certain level of skill before embarking on such a project. The primary researcher in this project took a pragmatic view of the poetic process, using it to facilitate deeper thinking, reflection, writing and a more open view of the issues at hand. With respect for the academic process, contact was made with colleagues from literature and academia, who provided support and critique. With reference to the writing of interpretive free verse within a research project, it is the process that is of most interest, not necessarily the product; "The thinking is *within the material*" (Eisner 1996, as quoted in Piirto 2002 p.441).

Poetic 'Reflexive Referencing' by the Practitioner-Researcher

The primary researcher in this study was a practitioner-researcher located within the research process as a researcher, but also as a community-based physiotherapist in company with the therapist participants in the project. 'Being' in physiotherapy practice herself, she inhabited a similar practice *lifeworld* to that of the participants.

*I am here and you are there,
The space between us*

*I cannot simply sit, stare.
I have to give
To care*

(interpretive poem)

Poetic 'reflexive referencing' (Frank 1945) by the practitioner-researcher in this research occurred in a circular effort to integrate newly gained insights from the

literature with the craft knowledge gained from the therapist participants and the primary researcher's experience as a community-based physiotherapist. This process fitted well within the hermeneutic tradition.

Poetics of research is about searching, and returning to the texts of our searching, again and again, constantly ready for surprises. (Leggo 2006, p. 90)

Poetic 'reflexive referencing' may be a useful concept for practitioner-researchers to consider, especially within projects informed by a hermeneutic approach where intellectual movement between the parts and the whole of our understanding of a phenomenon forms an important part of a research project. For practitioners and researchers in healthcare, "the journey inward is undertaken in service of the journey outward toward improved relationships with patients, families and colleagues" (Stein 2004, p. 178). In particular, the idea of a 'hermeneutic circle' sets out the existential 'task' we all face: to achieve a compromise between our self-understanding and our understanding of the world. Within this research project, such compromise is also essential for all stakeholders of the 'family care team' if they are to achieve their desired goals of wellness and happiness.

Consideration of the primary researcher's personal, professional and research personas inevitably contributed to the research process and new knowledge gained as a researcher also contributed to her ongoing clinical practice via a 'research practice portal'; that liminal space which occurs between practice and research (Tasker, McLeod-Boyle & Bridges 2011).

Qualitative researchers adopt an involved, connected observer stance and immerse themselves; literally, in the concrete, everyday world they are studying. (Titchen & Hobson 2005, p. 123)

Spaces exist within both research and clinical practice processes for reflection on past practices and reflexive use of those ideas for future research and practice. In this project, poetics was used to assist the primary researcher to enter and move through such a research/practice portal.

*Patterns on the page
Of the thoughts in my mind
Tethering emotions from time gone by
Feelings that emerge from my time with you
Where did they come from, out of the blue?*

*No I don't think so
They were whirring there
Below the surface, away from the air*

*Subterranean feelings intertwined with my thoughts
Who I am and what I do
Often fraught...*

(interpretive poem)

Poetry in the form of interpretive free verse was generated throughout the process of thinking within the research process. The processes of hermeneutic thinking and phenomenological writing of poetry by the primary researcher assisted reflection, contemplation and reflexivity throughout the research project. In particular, the writing of poetry assisted the process of contemplation for the researcher; creating quiet intellectual space, which is an essential precursor for sustained and clear critical thought, allowing time and space for a 'hermeneutic dredging and sifting' of ideas, both of past practice and future clinical or research action.

*Thoughts in my mind
What can they be?
A wisp of memory or just part of me*

*Perhaps they might visit onto the page?
Patterns to be read by you
Thoughts that will loom
Out of the darkness that is the past
But together with the reading might just last*

*To form some connection deep in your mind
Connect with your feelings
Connect with your mind*

And intertwine with those of mine

(interpretive poem)

Initially, self-reflective dialogue was entered into with pieces of free verse arising from the primary practitioner/researcher's perceptions of herself as a person, a practitioner and a researcher. Within education discourse, Cahnmann-Taylor (2011) used an auto-ethnographic focus to study teacher-student relationships by examining her teacher/student/self personas but expressed this exploration in phenomenological prose. The following example reflects on some defining clinical situations experienced by our primary researcher. Such reflection opened up reflective spaces to explore previously unconsidered aspects of some of the pri-

mary researcher's past clinical relationships; a useful preparatory activity for this research project.

The other stories

*Sweat on my back makes my uniform stick as I lean forward,
holding my client's stump in my hands
seeing the tears run down his face.*

"Will anyone be able to love me now? I have no leg", he silently said.

*Knees shake and I stiffen them to stop the feeling of falling down
feeling the deep scarring across the neck of my client
hearing his soft voice, telling me of his attempted
execution.*

"Why am I still here? I should be dead", he silently said.

*Laughter swells but humility sits steady within me
crouching at the feet of my client
listening to his wry and gentle voice.*

*"I was a sergeant-major.
Do you know who I am?" he said.
"I was 'someone' once.
I am still that person", he silently said*

(interpretive poem)

When interacting with people clinically, physiotherapists may forget the previous lives and personas of their clients. It can be difficult to stay aware of the 'other stories' that people live and feel. Staying aware and sensitive to the presence of stories belonging to the 'other person' is important in both clinical practice and research and poetics can give a means of being sensitive.

Poetics to Locate Meaning in the Data

Use of poetic language forms can articulate the essential 'way of being' within the participant's own lifeworld, allowing us to more fully explore how we talk,

interact and make sense within human relationships. Unexpected and hidden thoughts, feelings and their meanings from the participant's particular point of view may then be accessed. An example of such access was seen in the expression below by one of the physiotherapist participants, who was explaining how it feels to visit someone's home to provide healthcare. "*Going into someone's own space is very different. This is their private domain. This is sacred space for them*" (Tasker, Loftus and Higgs 2012, in press).

The terms used by this participant; 'private domain' and 'sacred space', evoke particular respect for the world of the individual and their home. The terms are strengthened by their proximity to each other in this data piece. Coming as it did in a situation where great efforts are being made to provide home-based healthcare initiatives, this was a particularly important aspect of the interaction to consider. Karen was a very experienced physiotherapist for her young client ('Jack') who had a severe acquired brain injury. She had obviously reflected deeply on the effects of the dynamics operating within her home visiting role as a community-based physiotherapist. In this 'word for word' transcription of her interview conversation, she seems to express a deeper unease about the possible long-term effects that may be developing within society as a result of provided home-based healthcare. "*Home is the area they have always been able to escape to and now we are taking therapy into that area*" (Tasker, Loftus and Higgs, 2012).

Such discourse is of great relevance for society where the concept of 'hospital at home' is being explored and people's homes are increasingly being visited (if not occupied) by paid health carers. Karen's instinctive choice of words crystallises the issues of privacy and the intrusion of formalised home-based healthcare into personal spaces and places. The strength of her feeling about this situation led her to express herself as strongly as she could in her conversation with the interviewer and to choose words which would resonate more strongly with the listener. It is poetic in that strength. An extension of that meaning, albeit unspoken, lingers; *my body, my home*.

The evocative nature and use of a poetic turn of phrase in conversation cannot be underestimated in its ability to illuminate the many disconnects of feeling and thought that therapists inevitably encounter within their professional practice but which may stay hidden under the surface of practice, silenced by more dominant modes of professional discourse. Kinsella (2006) proposed that writing poetry about practice can be a form of 'poetic resistance' against a dominant discourse, which values accountability and evidence-based practice over the *lifeworld* of the practitioner. When practitioners experience a sense of disconnection between their need to be professionally objective and accountable and their essential wish to care for others (p. 36), the public sharing of a reflective poem can allow those tensions to be revealed. This provides an alternative style of critical thinking for

practitioners and can deepen understanding of issues considered by the practitioner to have broader implications (p. 45).

Poetics to Project the Participants' Voice

Identification of issues of importance and meaning from practice and the research process led to the construction of pieces of interpretive free verse; in an attempt to amplify the messages from participants and connect with practitioner readers. Such interpretive verse highlights an issue of perceived concern. Wherever possible, the essential themes and meaning from that data were iteratively checked and discussed with participants in subsequent in-depth interviews and a focus group with the participating physiotherapists. However, in this project, there was not always a way of checking the themes and meaning or co-creating with the participants to write the poetry, due to various communication and cognitive difficulties of participants. Accordingly, due to the inability of all participants to be fully engaged with the co-construction of the poetry pieces, we have denoted some of this poetry as 'derived poetry', rather than 'found poetry'.

'Interpretive' or 'generated' poems may sensitise the reader to an issue of concern for a participant.

*Be quiet
Listen to me
I need you to listen to me
I can't communicate as well as you.
So I need you to listen to me
and hear me!*

*Stay with me and be quiet, to listen to me
(interpretive poem)*

The above poem was inspired by one of the younger research participants, 'Jenny' who had a profound physical and intellectual disability and was unable to speak. She attended the research interview with her parents and her presence was essential to the interview, affecting every word spoken by everyone present because it was 'all about Jenny'. She was 'there' and 'with us'. It was important to highlight her need to be communicated with even though she was unable to communicate verbally.

The interview with Jenny's therapist ('John') reinforced his realisation of that need but in a longer piece of prose that might not always have been read through to its end by a reader. Using the same technique as Wiggins (2011, p. 4), parts of the data below were highlighted to distil the message heard by the researcher.

Like Wiggins, it was “the essence of the data, the story the data were telling, that became clearer and clearer through my process of choosing some words and eliminating others” (p. 7).

“In a situation when they can’t respond, I ask any question that I would ask you, you know, how are you, what did you have for dinner, did you have visitors today? I try to explain what the plan is, what’s going to happen and where we’re going and how long it’s going to take.

I also try to make physical contact, using voice and touch. I try to keep an eye on her face because her face will tell me how things are going. I try to make eye contact or she will look in the direction where sounds are coming from. Sometime she’ll turn her head when her carer and I talk. I don’t talk to staff about her. I have a conversation with Jenny. I keep eye contact with Jenny while I listen to what the carers say while I try to maintain the conversation with Jenny” (Jenny’s therapist, John).

A piece of poetry seems designed to be read aloud. In the following piece of ‘derived poetry’, taken directly from the data above, there is an essential and distilled feeling for the interaction between Jenny and her therapist. The juxtaposing of the above interpretive poem (‘Be quiet’) with the derived poem (‘A conversation with Jenny’) reinforces the message and therefore the meaning being spoken by the therapist participant. It also highlights the way that Jenny is able to communicate with her therapist non-verbally.

A Conversation with Jenny

*Ask any question that I would ask you
What’s going to happen? Where are we going?
How long is it going to take?*

Voice and touch?

*Keep an eye on her face
Her face will tell me
She will look
She’ll turn her head when her carer and I talk
But I don’t talk to staff about her.
I keep eye contact with Jenny while I listen to what the carers say
I have a conversation with Jenny*

(derived poem)

This interaction and the therapist's comments regarding his consciously relationship-centred approach offers another example of a clinical situation combining elements of the different aspects of healthcare which practitioners strive to combine in their practice; caring relational service and objective clinical attention to a client's healthcare needs. For John (pseudonym for this research participant), years of personal and professional experience and a careful mindfulness regarding the humanity and individuality of his young client enabled a blending of personal caring and professional attention that transcended the disconnect between feeling and professional accountability described by Kinsella (2006) and Mattingly & Lawlor (2001). Feedback from this therapist regarding the above derived poem and the process it described was given a phenomenological 'nod', physically and verbally: "Yes, that's it" (John, 'Jenny's therapist).

Poetry can give an opportunity to 'stay a while', to remember and ponder how an experience felt, with possibilities of future change or action arising in our minds. 'A Conversation with Jenny' crystallises the blended process that Jenny's physiotherapist mindfully created together with Jenny and her carers within the clinical relationship. It also highlights another difficulty or tension in physiotherapy practice when the therapist cannot know 'for sure' that they have interpreted the needs of the client accurately, for that client's best well-being or as that client may wish. Therapists practise in 'the space between', always striving to stay engaged and connected in order to achieve the best level of communication they can.

Conclusion

The writing of poetry throughout this research provided momentum and flow of ideas. It smoothed and integrated intellectual movement between the parts (the specific data items), and the whole (the emerging themes). The use of poetics and poetry within this research also increased the resonance of ideas and assisted the primary researcher to deepen the research process. The particular poetic devices of 'interpretive, generated' and 'derived' poetry provided a tailored hermeneutic phenomenological tool where participants' ability to co-construct meaning was varied. This 'tool' also highlighted tensions in practice experienced by the participating physiotherapists and how they sought to resolve them.

Poetics can illuminate a phenomenon of interest in ways that can resonate with readers and provoke thought in memorable ways. New ideas emerging from practice may then better succeed in entering the larger discourse of a professional practice, in this case; physiotherapy. If a poetic phrase moves from the conversation of a participant into the lexicon of practice for a particular discipline, then that participant's voice will have been truly heard. This is a powerful way in which our clients can collaborate in developing our healthcare practice.

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Cinderella, HerStory

An Alternate Pedagogical Approach to Aboriginal Women's History

Briony Lipton

Abstract

Australia has a shameful history of genocide, miscegenation, colonial violence and sexual objectification of Indigenous women and its legacy continues today with Aboriginal women subjected to violence, discrimination and marginalization. Indigenous women's writing draws attention to Australia's 'hidden history and colonial legacy' through the perspective of its authors as subjects. Aboriginal women's writing can be understood as a site of resistance against marginality and oppression. This paper adopts the familiar medium of the Western fairytale to create a dialogue about Indigenous women's history, whilst critiquing whiteness theories, and breaking down otherness. This story deconstructs one of the most well-known fables in the fairy tale cannon, Cinderella and subverts the anti-feminist narratives of popular fairy tales by challenging traditional gender and racial stereotypes. Jan Larbalestier proposes that understanding the past is "integral to both our individual and collective understandings of who we are, what we have been and what Australia is to become" (2007: 126). By bringing Aboriginal women writers' own experiences and narratives to the forefront, this creative essay proposes an alternative model of teaching Australian history that challenges western pedagogy. It is an opportunity for re and self-definition(s).

Once upon a time, not so long ago, there lived an unhappy girl. She was miserable because she'd been forcibly removed from her family as a child. She was informed that this was to improve her education. "It was common place for young Aboriginal women to be contracted out to those white people 'in need of domestic help' (Huggins 1998, p. 78). The girl thought to herself, "[w]hy did they tell my mother that lie? Why do white people tell so many lies? I got nothin' out of their promises. My mother wouldn't have let me go just to work" (Morgan 1987, p. 324). She lived and worked for a woman whom she called her step-mother, and with her two step-sisters. Her step-mother did not like her one little bit. Nevertheless, she was "owned by [them] and the government and anyone who wanted to pay five shillings a year to Mr Neville to have [her]" (Morgan 1987, p. 342).

"At this time," the young girl reflected, "our people still had traditional names, but they didn't fit in with the white ways of things" (Sykes 1981, p. 3). Now, everyone called her Cinderella. She got her nickname because her skin was dark like ash cinders from the fire. Cinderella's identity is facilitated through the construction of an 'Other' (Hollingsworth 2006, p. 61). All the nice things, kind thoughts and loving touches that her step-mother gave were for her daughters. And not just kind thoughts and love, but an education too, also dresses, shoes, shawls, delicious food, a soft bed, as well as every home comfort. All this was laid on for them. Whiteness determines belonging and possession (Moreton-Robinson 2003, p. 23), but for the poor unhappy black girl, there was nothing at all. No dresses for Cinderella, only her step-sisters' hand-me-downs. No lovely dinner, nothing but scraps. No nice rests and comfort for she had to work hard all day, and even when evening came she could not sleep. For Cinderella, "racist-sexual oppressions are experienced simultaneously" (Huggins 1998, p. 108). Aboriginal women have been subjected to sexual exploitation and enslavement since settlement (Collingwood-Whittick 2002, p. 51). Cinderella's testifies that "[w]e had no protection when we was in service. I know a lot of native servants had kids to white men because they was forced" (Morgan 1987, p. 329). Cinderella thought to herself, "[s]ome men can't be trusted. They just mongrels. They get you down on the floor and they won't let you get up" (Morgan 1987, p. 329). For Cinderella, her sexual objectification was indicative of being an Aboriginal woman (Bird, Haskell 1992, p. 61). The experience of rape is traumatic for any victim regardless of skin colour but the experiences are different because the assault is motivated by different power situations (Behrendt 1993, p. 30). "For indigenous women violence, and especially sexual violence, have been a legacy of colonization" (Behrendt 2005, p. 249). The combination of institutionalized sexual and racial violence against Cinderella perpetuates racist attitudes and further marginalises Indigenous women in all facets of political and social life (Behrendt 2000, p. 362).

Cinderella's step-mother asserted that she provided her with employment and a home and that she was treated like one of the family. However, Cinderella's "entire day revolved around catering for the white family's needs" (Huggins 1998, p. 81). She re-inscribes herstory: "I was black, I was a servant...I had my dinner in the kitchen. I never ate with the family. When they rang the bell, I knew they wanted me. After dinner, I'd clear up, wash up, dry up and put it all away. Then, the next morning, it'd start all over again. You see, it's no use them sayin' I was one of the family, cause I wasn't" (Morgan 1987, p. 326).

One day, two beautiful new dresses arrived at the house. A grand debutante ball was to be held at Government House and the step-sisters were getting ready to go to it. Cinderella didn't even dare ask, "What about me?" for she knew very well what the answer to that would be. "You? My dear girl, you're staying at home to wash the dishes, scrub the floors and turn down the beds for your step-sisters. They will come home tired and sleepy." "Government policies implemented on missions and reserves and by employers were aimed at producing disciplined servants, who would comply with the requirements of being in service, by alienating them from Indigenous culture and their country" (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 21). Cinderella had "learned from an early age the manners that whiteness expects and reflected that back to" her step-mother (Fredricks 2011, p.70). "White people made up a lot of things about Aboriginal people and about how they lived" and Cinderella had come to believe them (Sykes 1981, p.6). She sighed, "If you are white you can do anything" (Morgan 1987, p. 107). "Oh dear, I'm so unhappy!" Cinderella cried.

Suddenly something astonishing happened. In the kitchen, where Cinderella was sitting alone, there was a burst of light and a **fairy** appeared. "Don't be alarmed, Cinderella," said the fairy. "The wind blew me your sighs. I know you would love to go to the ball. And so you shall!" "How can I, dressed in rags?" Cinderella replied. "I will be turned away!" Moreover, Cinderella knew the punishment Indigenous women received for contravening the rules (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p 21). The fairy smiled. With a flick of her magic wand, Cinderella found herself wearing the most beautiful dress, the loveliest she had ever seen. "She was brainwashed into believing that white was best and that to become assimilated was the best thing for her" (Huggins 1998, p. 79). Cinderella laughed as she twirled around the room in her new gown. Normativity is equated with whiteness. As a consequence, the fairy attempts to help Cinderella to erase markers of her Aboriginal identity. It was Cinderella's naïve belief that if she looked white she could enjoy the same opportunities as white women in society (Collingwood-Whittick 2002, p. 55). For you see, Cinderella had always wanted to go to school. She wanted to be a doctor and work in rural communities to help improve the high mortality rate of Aboriginal people compared to white Australians. She was

oblivious to the gender-race battlefield that the fairy was constructing in her attempts to brand Cinderella ‘feminine’.

“Now that we have settled the matter of the dress,” said the fairy, “we’ll need to get you a coach. A real lady would never go to a ball on foot!” further insinuating Cinderella’s need to assimilate to a model of white femininity. “Quick! Get me a paddymelon!” she ordered. “Oh of course,” said Cinderella, rushing to the garden. With a flick of her magic wand — wonder of wonders! The paddymelon turned into a sparkling coach and a family of possums living in the roof became six white horses, while the beloved household pet dog, Dingo, was turned into a coachman in a smart uniform and carrying a whip. Cinderella could hardly believe her eyes. “I shall present you to the ball. You will soon see that the Governor, in whose honour the ball is being held, he will be enchanted by your loveliness. But remember! You must leave the ball at midnight and come home. For that is when the spell ends. Your coach will turn back into a paddymelon, the brumbies will become possums again, and Dingo will once again be a dog, and you will be dressed in your familiar rags and wear socks instead of these dainty little slippers! Do you understand?” Cinderella smiled and said, “Yes, I understand!”

When Cinderella entered the ballroom at Government House, a hush fell. Everyone stopped in mid-sentence. “Who can that be?” people asked each other. “Whiteness becomes visible only against the screen of other women’s blackness and then disappears” (Armour 1997, p. 110). Cinderella thought, “[t]he silence of our white sisters is almost deafening” (Stanton 2006, p.164). The two step-sisters also wondered who the newcomer was, for never in a month of Sundays, would they ever have guessed that the beautiful girl was really poor Cinderella. Were they admiring her elegance, beauty and grace, or were they interested in something else?

Free from her domestic duties and her step-mother, Cinderella felt a new found independence in attending the ball. Yet she also felt uncomfortable about the fairy’s attempts to accommodate her into this western institution that denied her Aboriginal identity. Cinderella pondered her institutionalization: “Indigenous women do not want to be white women; we want to be Indigenous women who exercise and maintain our cultural integrity in our struggle for self-determination as Indigenous people” (Moreton-Robinson 2000, p. 151).

When the Governor set eyes upon Cinderella, he was struck by her beauty. Walking over to her, he bowed deeply and asked her to dance. And to the great disappointment of all the young ladies, he danced with Cinderella all evening. “Who are you?” the Governor kept asking her. But Cinderella only replied: “What does it matter who I am! You will never see me again anyway.” Nevertheless, Cinderella had a wonderful time at the ball, but, she continued to feel uneasy about her identity and her future. One of the greatest challenges for Indigenous people is the widespread (mis)conception that Aboriginal people will not achieve any-

thing through education (AIATSIS 2008, p. 70). However, Cinderella was going to change all that. She thought to herself, “I should be proud of my Aboriginality and stand up for myself.”

All of a sudden, she heard the sound of a clock: the first stroke of midnight! She remembered what the fairy had said, and without a word of goodbye she slipped from the Governor’s arms and ran down the steps. As she ran she lost one of her slippers, but not for a moment did she dream of stopping to pick it up! If the last stroke of midnight were to sound... oh, what a disaster that would be! Out she fled and vanished into the night. Darkness wrapping her in a protective cloak of invisibility to make her escape. “Being born Woman is learning about the struggle, being born Black and Woman is knowing how to survive” (Holt 2008, p. 16).

The Governor, who was now madly in love with her, picked up her slipper and said to his ministers, “Go and search everywhere for the girl whose foot this slipper fits. I will never be content until I find her!” So the ministers tried the slipper on the foot of all the girls in town... and on Cinderella’s foot as well... Surprise! The slipper fitted her perfectly. “That awful untidy girl simply cannot have been at the ball,” snapped the step-mother. “Tell the Governor he ought to marry one of my two daughters! Can’t you see how ugly and stupid Cinderella is! Can’t you see?” Suddenly she broke off, for Cinderella had raised her voice. “That’s enough!” she exclaimed. “I did attend the ball”. She pulled from her pocket her invitation. Her step-mother and step-sisters gaped at her in amazement and the ministers said, “Come with us, my dear! The Governor waits to present you with his engagement ring!”

However, Cinderella had decided to break away from conventional literary endings where female protagonists resort to madness, suicide or solutions offered by male characters as an appropriate narrative conclusion. Instead, her identity as Cinderella was no longer exclusively constructed or controlled by her step-mother and step-sisters, white Australians, and their government and policies.

Cinderella felt empowered by her protest. It gave her feelings of self-(re)definition as an Aboriginal woman. Although her step-mother and step-sisters had done erasable emotional and physical damage to Cinderella, understanding the past and recognizing its mistakes is less about revenge and guilt than it is about self-determination, respect and learning from these (Huggins & Blake 1992, p. 57). “I am sorry” she said. “I [am] flattered but I [am] only fifteen and have a lot of living to do yet” (Ginibi 1988, p. 41). As a form of self-healing and rediscovery of her (Ab)originality, Cinderella wanted to go *Home*¹ to find her family and discover her birth name. She also planned to enroll in a course at the University

1 *Home* is Indigenous activist and academic Larissa Behrendt’s first novel. It won the 2002 David Unaipon Award for best unpublished work by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander author. It was published by the University of Queensland Press in 2004.

of Queensland that a group of guests at the ball had been avidly discussing. In the “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit” she thought she heard them say².

And did Cinderella live happily ever after? Certainly her situation improved significantly once she’d left the confines of her step-mother’s control. As to her future, I suppose we will have to wait and see. Tomorrow is a *Bran Nue Dae*³.

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2 I gratefully acknowledge the teachings of the University of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit, in particular, Dr Payi Linda Ford and Associate Professor Liz Mackinlay, who have greatly influenced my university education. Perhaps in the future, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy will be further incorporated into western education institutions and improve Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples understandings of social, political, cultural and economic issues affecting one another.

3 *Bran Nue Dae* is Australia’s first Aboriginal musical written by playwright Jimmy Chi and the Knuckles band in 1990. It is a semi-autobiographical story of family, forgiveness and reconciliation.

A Difficult Dinner Party — Being Loved and Safe

How Spirituality in Education Can Open Inclusive Practices ...

Sue Erica Smith, Flossie Peitch, Tarquam McKenna & Aue Te Ava

Abstract

Four guest joined a dinner party conversation to discuss youth. Each guest was interested in and had some formal affiliation with spiritual practices, whether through the lens of the Indigenous, Mormon, Buddhist, Christian or “spiritual” beliefs in their orientation. The performance is a form of critical pedagogy, as the event was one in which the four presenters were actively considering dissenting and disaffected voices, querying the regulatory processes of many empirical and analytical approaches in advancing our understanding of the educational and social phenomena of youth. The performance setting of a dinner party was aspirational. An expanded view of spirituality and love provided common ground.

Key words: religion, spirituality, critical pedagogy, ethnmethology

Introduction

This paper was presented using a performative form of representation at the a Conference in Darwin in 2013 and is to be read as one would read a play – the public performance of the four characters became a form of qualitative inquiry in which the four world narratives addressed the lived experiences of youth

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they had worked with, within universities, churches, communities and schools. This style of performance is perhaps viewed as a form of “reflexive ethnomethodology” as we as a group, at a dinner party, set out to document the defining and confining practices for a young people or youth, through the eyes of the people sitting at the table. The performance gave voice to the narratives of the young people through these elders’ perceptions, and the “guests” at the dinner deliberated on how we could consider the nature of the belonging and alienation young people experience. Each guest was interested in and had some formal affiliation with spiritual practices, whether through the lens of the Indigenous, Mormon, Buddhist, Christian or “spiritual” beliefs in their orientation. The performance is a form of critical pedagogy, as the event was one in which the four presenters were actively considering dissenting and disaffected voices, querying the regulatory processes of many empirical and analytical approaches in advancing our understanding of the educational and social phenomena of youth. The performance setting of a dinner party was aspirational. The four researchers wanted to share the dialogue that follows as four stories that can be read as a script or as orthodox theoretical positionings.

Dramatis Personae

Sarah – the Buddhist; a university academic

Flavia – the Artist and a Lutheran; and a visual arts teacher

Alan – an indigenous man who also identifies as a Mormon

Thomas – a university academic

Sarah – The Buddhist Story

Sarah: Hello. I am exploring strategies that might help promote the wellbeing of young people. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) frames wellbeing around young people feeling loved and safe, and being provided with material basics, health, and happiness, which includes a positive outlook and self-esteem. So I hold to the belief that young people value participation in education and opportunities to grow and develop their sense of self. This includes developing values and morals, being involved in community, having freedom, independence and having a voice that is heard. Young people also require leisure and fun. *The Report Card: The Wellbeing of Young Australians* found that the most consistent theme considered by the youth participants was being loved and valued.

In the ARACY work, young participants stated they considered wellbeing should be based on interconnections and loving relationships. From my own Buddhist perspective, observing the dynamics of interdependence and developing loving kindness and compassion is how spirituality is framed, ethical living is

pursued and, with that, happiness and wellbeing are cultivated. Our young people need this opportunity for cultivation.

Love and interconnection are embedded in the ARACY domains but are yet to hold overt and easily seen status. Spiritual education was included in the Adelaide Declaration and has retained a place in the Melbourne Declaration of Goals for Australian Schooling, yet this remains primarily the preserve of religious schools. A mounting body of research into youth wellbeing has noted spiritual or religious affiliations were significant as indicators of wellbeing and resilience (Osser, Scarlett and Bucher 2006; Roehlkepartain, Benson, Scales, Kimball and King 2008). Smith, Webber, and DeFrain (2013) argue that spiritual wellbeing and resilience were shown to be interrelated and ecologically bound, as the ARACY study suggests. They also found that when spiritual wellbeing was present, and it was largely from a Christian cohort's perspective, the attractiveness of risk-taking behaviour was weakened.

It is interesting, however, that the uptake of religions among Australia's young people is scant. While exploring young people's spirituality, Mason, Singleton, and Webber (2007), found that almost half of Australian young people between the ages of 13 and 24 do not belong to or identify with any religion or denomination. The majority of "Generation Y", while agreeing that morals are relative, note there are no definitive right or wrong ways of doing things, and yet they indicated that they placed a high value on close relationships with friends and family, and on having an exciting and enjoyable life. Our youth also want a peaceful, cooperative, just and secure world, but religious or spiritual concerns were generally not considered important. Most young people said they had purpose in their lives, although some felt that their lives did not fit into any wider cosmological scheme and they did not really belong anywhere or "were hurting deep inside". The activities that they rated as most important for enjoying peace and happiness were listening to music, work or study. Most rated meditation as very unimportant. They do not look to organisations (including religious communities) for spiritual support, but made meaning in their lives via friendship networks, music activities and electronic media/the internet.

I do not think we can expect young people to become religious, nor can we blame them for not knowing what spirituality is, or its potentials. My sense is that most young people have not had exposure to the concept of spirituality, but if it is decoupled from religion, it is worthy of understanding more fully because of the potential impacts on wellbeing.

What is interesting to me, too, is that these young people are defining their wellbeing solely in terms of consumption and external relationships. Their inner lives are seldom nurtured in our schools. "Inner technologies", such as quiet reflection and kindness towards oneself and others, are for the most part lacking in our young people.

Too often “spirituality” connotes an “amorphous” or “nebulous” domain, or a realm that is prescriptively and even proscriptively religious in focus. As a Buddhist, I am too often caught in a default position of equating religion with spirituality, which is not helpful. Sure, Buddhism is a “religion” in that it has rituals, prayers and devotional practices, but Buddhism is not concerned with a creator being, and it promotes individual effort and responsibility rather than subscribing to a set of beliefs. There is a teaching in which the Kalama Sutta exhorts that we and our youth should “make the knowledge (y)our own”. In this way, many Buddhists would see the Dharma, as the epistemology is called, as a pedagogy for personal development. Spirituality is demystified and proactive: it is the cultivation of wisdom and compassion that Buddhism espouses and that our young people need.

Buddhism, however, is already influencing contemporary education, with borrowings of Buddhist teachings appearing in positive psychology, social and emotional learning, and mindfulness practices in particular. Mindfulness points the way to what a secular spiritual education might be, and there is a growing body of work that suggests secular spiritual education makes a contribution to resilience and wellbeing in adults. This was the case with my own work (Smith 2010, 2013) with children. Yet, as a mindfulness practitioner I draw on the tradition of the practice; I also know that mindfulness does not operate in an ethical vacuum. It is a mind/body and cognitive/affective exercise that develops awareness of thoughts and feelings and provides the space to consider and determine activity. Mindful contemplation for all people, and our youth especially, facilitates the apprehension of interconnections and being part of a dynamic process of change, and with that loses the sense of ego-bound self-importance and separate individuality.

Interconnection is present in all of the wellbeing strategies mentioned above, but the ethics of kindness, love and compassion, though implied, is yet to receive overt and strategic attention. This can be taught and will effect change; for example, Fox (2006) found in his study that compassion is an antidote to cruelty. With loving kindness come other values such as empathy, tolerance, patience that impact on wellbeing and happiness.

So, it is clear young people need to have hope, as do we all. Buddhist teachings can facilitate this and sustain life through cooperation, consideration, service and kindness. Developing a sense of innate goodness and to extend this to a kindly understanding of others can be taught, and indeed should be taught.

Love, too, often has a spurious, overly sexualised, and commoditised status in our society, but:

A commitment to spiritual life necessarily means we embrace the eternal principle that love is all, everything, our true destiny. Despite overwhelming pressure

to conform to the culture of lovelessness, we still seek to know love. That seeking is itself a manifestation of divine spirit. (bell hooks, 2000, p. 78)

Wisely, we can call on hooks as she does not opt for a soft-serve notion of love, but for one that is empowering, bold, empathetic, and has an active concern for other beings, which is totally relevant to young people. She sees love as “the primary way we end domination and oppression” (p. 76). In our struggles for social justice and equity, love is often overlooked.

Holistic education has been around for a long time and it has been argued in other contexts that the curriculum should focus primarily on “relationships” and connections so that the student can become aware of the interdependence of life (Miller 2007). I guess I am saying it is wise to be kind, and an act of kindness to be wise, and to consider the flow-on effect of thoughts and words and deeds.

Buddhism is growing in momentum in Australia, and the Nest project suggests best practice is a whole of community and long-term project. As Palmer has called to us for three decades now, spirituality is always present in education, in our quest for connectedness and is waiting to be brought forth.

It is in our sameness: same biology, psychology, emotionality, temporality and same world.

There is a deepening awareness of spirituality that many researchers and writers have now identified as being a potential vehicle for change in public education: a change that values connection and is based on loving kindness. With hope and optimism, I think Palmer is right when he says that we are entering a new era when spirituality and education need not be seen as “enemies” but as partners in a conversation about the future of public schooling (Palmer 1998). It seems wise and is inextricably kind.

Allen — The Indigenous Story

Allen: In my community and as an indigenous man, spirituality is an integral part of Cook Islands society and a motivational factor for indigenous Cook Islands Maori youth. An example of this is found in the proverb cited in the Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2004) curriculum framework:

Takai koe te papa enua (You step on to solid land)

Akamou te pitoenua (Affix the umbilical chord)

Au I toou rangi (And carve out your world)

This proverb highlights the significance of cultural values and practices and how these play an important part in culturally responsive practice. The proverb reflects the idea of a young person being anchored in an environment where they live (Te Ava 2011). It also explains how while the child is growing in the mother’s womb,

he or she is fed from their environment by way of the *pitoenua* (placenta). Outside the womb, the young child is nourished, influenced and developed by learning his or her cultural values and identity. The *pitoenua* represents the centre of balance through which the physical, mental and emotional, social and particularly spiritual dimensions of wellbeing are interconnected. To be interconnected the young child remembers his or her past, such as understanding his or her cultural heritage, which goes back to his or her *enua* (land). This encourages the young child to stay anchored, along with the strength of the relationships he or she develops. If young people want to survive in contemporary society, it is important that they understand their cultural values and how this helps them overcome challenges and difficulties in life.

It is therefore integral to culturally responsive pedagogy, for Cook Islanders and I am sure many other indigenous cultures, to include games such as *putoto taura* (tug-o-war) and *utiuti rima* (pulling interlocking fingers), which also include cultural rites such as the *peu taito* (legends and chants), the *akataoanga ariki* (title investitures), the *ura tamataora* (Cook Islands traditional dance), the *pe'e* (chants), the *pe'e tuketuke* (different kinds of chants) and the *akairo* (signs) (Te Ava 2001). With a sense of fun and community, the social, cultural, emotional, and spiritual components that keep Cook Islands cultural practices alive are taught and shared.

From an indigenous Canadian perspective, Sackney and Walker (2006) identified the centrality of values of respect and honour, similar to those encapsulated in the Cook Islands value of *peu puapinga* (cultural significance). Ama (2003) believed that Cook Islands' *peu puapinga* are essential for the development of a healthy society and an enriching environment that prepares a challenging pathway for Cook Islands youth to achieve goals and objectives in schooling. These values are all reflected in the thoughts of the *pa metua* (elders) as important to schooling and wider social practices.

A Framing of “Self” Connection, or Wearing a Cloak of Invisibility in a Design School

Flavia: Once, I took a class of tertiary students to see Ben Quilty’s highly profiled commissioned exhibition entitled “After Afghanistan”. It is a gritty portrayal of weary military personnel, facing the artist as requested — in a most vulnerable way — nude.

I teach Professional Communication, and my task is to facilitate academic papers by third-year School of Design students. The gallery we visited also featured an entire floor of background information to this war, and art about war. The purpose of the excursion was to help students discover the many ways this exhibition was researched by the curator. I allowed just 15 minutes to consider

and document the resources before we were to visit the paintings. Within several brief minutes, groups of students were gathering at the exit, clucking inanely or distractedly texting on their phones.

Intrigued, I asked why they were so disengaged. I was told that it did not involve them and they “just weren’t interested”. Like me, no one in the group had had any personal experience with war – no lost father, no maimed or severely troubled brother or sister. But, unlike me, these students had no desire to become aware of the journey of others. No interest in weaving their place into “community”. No curiosity about Australians their own age who had taken an alternate route involving discomfort and loss. No community sentiment or expanded forbearance. No sense of respect or tolerance for something outside their social contact. The students ostensibly chose to exclude themselves.

The exclusion was not forced upon them. It was a prerogative they casually sanctioned. This position seems to counter Joanna Macy’s (Brussat 1996) dictum: “Our lives extend beyond our skins, in radical interdependence with the rest of the world” (p.472). Somehow, even against an academic directive, the students apparently found it completely plausible to be independent of the rest of the world.

My students had donned their protecting vestments. Known to under-25s, Harry Potter’s familiar Cloak of Invisibility is a sought after and desired item. It is a magical artefact used to render the wearer invisible. Ultimately, the wearer is rendered invisible even to Death, its original owner. Thus, even Death can be assuaged. In the students’ case, to not be seen also seemed to shield the wearer from seeing what is there. Yet, indifference does not bode well for a group of design students, whose intended profession demands enthused contemporary connection to create inspired fashion, striking interior design or dynamic creative styling. Spirituality in culture in community and creativity are closely linked: “The culture that trivializes and spurns [creatives] would also, paradoxically, look to them for hope of transformation” (Norris 1993, p. 59). Successful design requires research from a deep place interrogating a combination of the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual elements of existence as perceived within one’s own self-hood.

Wilber and Wilber (2000) nominated four basic human necessities that need to be met – physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. Three of these needs are well recognized by the norm. The fourth one listed, spiritual need, is less widely acknowledged to exist. When it is allowed as a consideration, there is confusion between religion and spirituality. By replacing “traditional religion” as the dominant vehicle for spirituality today with the understanding and general endorsement of spirituality as, mostly, either “indigenous” or “Buddhist/Dharmaistic”, obstructions are meant to diminish. However, barriers to perceiving one’s own “self-hood” and that of another dogmatically persist. It is possible that someone

neither genetically privileged as in the former nor subscribing to the spiritual parameters of the latter, could see themselves as marginalized today.

I have experienced cultural and spiritual invisibility since immigrating to Australia. As a Canadian, I have been included under the label of “Invader”. I would like to declare now that neither I nor my ancestors entered this country enacting violent domination. I came only to find work. Yet, I am unable to return to Canada to be free from labels. As I am not indigenous there, I would be labelled a “Settler” (The Galloping Beaver 2012). This is not much of an improvement, so belonging still eludes me. It appears that I have no deserved home. Even my spirituality is considered exploitive.

Thought by some to be oppressive, repressive and suppressive, spiritually I call myself a Christian. There is no need to expand on the disfavor – not completely without reason – Christianity holds in the wider world view at present. At times, instead of declaration, I would prefer a Cloak of Invisibility.

In the absence of this Cloak, with or without the assistance of religion or faith of any description, it seems that people attempt to answer life’s ultimate questions in various ways – “Where am I? Why am I here? Who am I?” (Walsh 2003). As such, there is a search for a home for the spiritual self; spirituality enfolded by community and belonging needs to be acknowledged as a creative consideration.

In *Art and the Question of Meaning*, Hans Kung emphasizes that the artist should not leave unanswered the great questions of ground and meaning; “to know whence we come, whither we are going, who we are” (p. 39). The artist who knows this makes possible a new relationship with the past, the present and the future. Theologian John Cobb (Norris 1999) describes artists as vessels or conduits of the divine, and Oscar Wilde sees creatives as the only people who can inspire hope in a sometimes hopeless world.

Being hopeful suggests being creative. Being “creative” suggests a “spiritual” process, and being “spiritual”, a “creative” process. While the now slippery concepts of creativity and spirituality may not be interchangeable, as they are often located together, a similar search for meaning is suggested. As Hegel writes: “The task and aim of art is to bring home to our sense, our feeling, and our inspiration everything which has a place in the human spirit” (p 46). Perhaps “the ground of being” is the ground needing recovery by weaving the appropriate cloak.

Fabricating the Cloak of Spiritual Visibility

The material of the desired cloak is found in the threads of the everyday. As a way of ascertaining interest in spirituality among my seemingly community-challenged, detached students, I developed a class survey for willing participants. I required partakers to write two words: (1) one word describing what they know about “the divine”, and (2) one word describing something they would like to

find out about “the divine”. These words were then shared with the person sitting beside them and then shared with the group, if they wished to do so. The reactions to these questions are encouraging. Although the young participants felt that interpretation of “the divine” is completely open, most are interested in finding out more about this “element”. This information seems to indicate that spiritual need appears alive and well and requiring attention.

The LGBTIQ Sexuality Story

Thomas: The particular landscape around youth sexuality has radically altered over the past few decades, and the literature focused on sexuality-related diversity has routinely centered on interrogation into how the wider educational communities of practice still reify institutional heterogendered practices. We all know “heterogendered” means believing there is only one way of being affirmed. In Australia as recently as 18 June 2013, when Labor Senator Penny Wong voted for the same sex marriage bill it was noted that she simply substituted words such as “interracial” or “different age” for “same-sex” in the debate to see if that changed people’s view of this. So research in the inclusive educational field still indicates gay and lesbian identities as problematic, particularly when considering the worlds of educational practitioners (McKenna & Vicars 2013). The assumption is that the heteronormative worldview is the only “correct” or real view, and lesbian and gay youth are therefore a problematic presence. In schools, churches and temples they are a “problem” needing to be changed, rather than becoming a legitimate challenge to epistemic or theological inquiry and indeed nurturance (Riddle 1994). It was Riddle who in 1974 was appointed to the American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force for the Status of Lesbian and Gay Male Psychologists, to direct the revised APA mandate in 1975 that declared gay men’s sexuality is not a mental disorder. So Riddle uses the notion of “nurturance” here to remind us that society requires differences in people and that these need to be greeted with genuine appreciation and an imperative for advocacy for those who might be labelled different.

I ask where are the places of genuine affection and delight in the belonging of lesbian and gay youth in our churches, temples, synagogues and educational institutions?

They are not openly neglected but are deliberately “blocked” from view. An assumption that the heteronormative worldview is the only “correct” or real view to be considered can be read into anti-homophobic discourse that interpolates religion and schooling. So we get to be seen, or rather not seen, as a partial sexuality. In the past, lesbian and gay sexuality and gender expression was considered “curable”, but again, as recently as 21 June 2013, USA Exodus International, a 37-year-old Christian ministry focused on “faith” and homosexuality, closed its

doors. The day after, its president apologized for causing “undue suffering and judgment” with its programs aimed at “curing” gay people through prayer and therapy.

The immediate past president of Exodus International, Alan Chambers, stated: “Exodus was an institution in the conservative Christian world, but they have ceased to be a living, breathing organism.” He went on to say: “For quite some time we have been imprisoned in a worldview that’s neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical.” Chambers, who left his gay life as a teenager, said in a disingenuous announcement on the group’s website that he wanted to apologize “to the gay community for years of undue suffering and judgment at the hands of the organization and the church as a whole” (Stanglin 2013). In his own words, the gay and lesbian youth they cured “were asked to cease being living breathing organisms”.

Any alienation or practices that make people, irrespective of their sexuality, dispensable generates an impossible psychic distance from one’s self and ultimate detachment (McKenna 2009, p. 107). This, added to the still prevalent pejorative name-calling and physical harassment is rewarded with the fallacious promise that “It gets better” (Savage 2013) – a media program for “liberation” that genuinely sets out to bring a more optimistic take on the LGBTQ notion of visibility. But the matter of how the space for LGBTQ emancipation and belonging is created still needs to be addressed as we ask what was and is still wrong that needs to be changed? How can the “It Gets Better” campaign be used to valuably critique what it was that happened, as it also disrupts the unexamined heteronormative privilege?

What about a critical contestation of what is wrong in churches and the religious world that needs to get “better”? What can religious leaders do to redress the unspoken and normatively constructed LGBTQ spiritual and pedagogical problem that they have actually created themselves? Ultimately, this article asks, does it in truth “get better”?

In 2013, I still hold to the notion that the rhetoric that politicizes the American, Australian and British religious systems, while in an “emerging” sense has the intention of being democratic and inclusive, still homogenises the diversity of gay and lesbian young people. They are made invisible, while still being positioned in a tokenistic way, and their and my marginality is inhabited alongside people with learning challenges, other able-bodied people and people who are culturally or linguistically diverse. Lesbian and gay youth serve to meet the heterogendered privileged groups’ need for “the inclusive agenda”. I noted in 2009 that there is a need to “emphasise inclusivity, [which] now requires that greater attention be given to the voices which have traditionally been excluded or made invisible” (McKenna 2009, p. 5). That was in 2009, and we still need to move beyond the categorization of a collective marginality. Perhaps it is the very nature of the mat-

ter of sexuality that is the great taboo that works against inclusion of Gay and Lesbian people?

The Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission (2103) brings our diversity to the fore in the campaign “We are not all the same. But we are equal.” How do you critically reflect on how it is positioning rituals of conformity, sexuality and gender practices (McKenna 2009) in our religious and spiritual institutions when working alongside youth? How do we as leaders and “elders” of young people with a unique range of embodied narratives let them tell us what can emerge when they are given occasion for personal and professional reflection to happen? Youth’s resistance, submission and resignation are pervasive when looked at as heteronormative capital within the institutions of the churches as they are currently constructed. They simply cannot easily belong because of the rigidity of the churches and religious institutions.

For young people in the field of education, I am cognizant and mindful about revisiting once again the interpretive locations of the silencing which privileges so-called normalcy. In her seminal text, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick (1990) wrote of the power of the silence — how it is not just one silence, but several “that accrue particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (p 3). We need a spirituality and a religious sense of belonging that approaches the re/presentation of the lived experience of young people through what I call transformative praxis, as outlined by McKenna (2012), where there are:

- places that are co-created for learning about and alongside lesbian and gay youth;
- opportunities for collaborative inquiry and connectivity through purposeful engagement to build respectful and collective knowing around their spiritual quest;
- critical interrogation of assumptions and beliefs that mistreat personal narratives and the notion of a one-size-fits-all lesbian and gay youth identity;
- occasions to use the knowledge already created in relation to psychosocial wellness, to build an affirming nurturing identity;
- locales for reviewing of the tensions and anomalies generating opportunities for integration around the identities of lesbian and gay youth into churches and other hegemonic agencies;
- opportunities for collaborative discussions of social justice, equity, respect, and mutuality for the unique needs of this group;

- more accounts of the reflexive knowing and the self-hoods and life-worlds of all those involved in and engaging with these young people; and
- unconditional opportunities to co-create ways in which these women and men can belong to a respectful community.

When discussions with the LGBTQ youth occur, we need to draw upon deconstructive, critical and potentially transformative involvements and responses, to potentially raise questions about their reclamation of power and identity in collaborative relationships with churches, synagogues and temple. I seek to use perspectival dispositions constructed outside dominant discourses to further explore “what if” and “what could” become constituted in the right world for these young women and men.

Conclusion

The four voices or characters who performed at our dinner party called for you as the reader to rediscover and reinvent research. As the critical theorist and self-styled ethnographer McLaren reminds us, this group of performers have placed emancipation at the core of the work that based the stand of “hope” at the centre of the performative practice when considering the needs of youth. The hope that we can see in the performative sharing of ideas is that these characters will be seen as a vehicle leading to social and cultural transformation. But, before we could examine the possibility of transformative practices for youth, we set out to establish to what extent there is need for transformation – that is, how much our youth perceive themselves as disaffected or dissenting, or to what extent they become compliant with the prevailing hegemony when considering spirituality, identity, sexuality and indigeneity.

This performance was not an occasion to test hypotheses as such, but rather an occasion to gather the stories of the four participants’ encounters with young people. The body of meaning that is generated in the performance and the “scripts” and narratives is the self-reflective discovery and description of phenomena, naming and ordering of the phenomena of “youth” and how they can be considered through the lens of spirituality, identity, sexuality and indigeneity.

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On Writing A Poem

A Phenomenological Inquiry

Anar Rajabali

*The sky
Is a suspended blue ocean
The stars are fish
That swim
The planets are the white whales
I sometimes hitch a ride on
And the sun and all light
Have forever fused themselves
Into my heart and upon
My skin - Hafiz
(Ladinsky, 1996, p. 67)*

“Not unlike the poet, the phenomenologist directs the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates through the porous membranes of past sedimentations – and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us...” (van Manen, 2007, p. 11)

This piece is a personal and poetic exploration on the kinship between phenomenology and poetry as being evocative representations that place primacy on the sensual experiences of living and being in the world. It is in this

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space wherein the attending to language reawakens the essence of what is lived, breathed and burned through. As does poetry, phenomenology requires a heightened attentiveness, a poetic sensibility attuning oneself to the subtle movements of the body experiencing, this in-being (Heidegger, 1985) and in-seeing (Rilke, 1987) awakened when the “phenomenon finds an echo within” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 369) resonating with both presence and possibility. Both representations of language can be dually evoked from a breathing sensing body in an ongoing body world conversation that reciprocates and generates each other, experiencing the embodied flesh of an experience relived through the flesh and eros of language (Abram, 1997). In this breadth, the writer/poet/researcher “speak on the threshold of being” (Bachelard, 1969, p. xvi) wherein being creates expression and expression in turn, creates being and in this deepening of human understanding, language is then a “medium for experiencing experience” (Hejinian, 2000, p. 3).

In willingly participating in this act of writing the body in the world, the process becomes one that is not only poetic in its keen attention to language as it reduces and also exceeds its own capacities, but it also becomes a pedagogical encounter in which “knowledge always speaks” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p.57). In crystallizing this encounter through the act of writing, the union of experience and word becomes a practice of perceiving perceptions from within in which the quest is not only to bring some aspect of the living quivering world into being, but it is also fuelled with the desire to become the world itself. The singing of a life world (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) is a provocative metaphor for a primal telling where each organism plays a part into its own becoming. In bridging both poetry and phenomenology, the intention of what is to be lifted off the page in reader experience is essence; the essence of an experience, a moment, an emotion, a feeling, an encounter, a snapshot of humanity in its vulnerability and resiliency. Although they operate at different levels of directness (van Manen, 1997)—that is, the integrity of phenomenological writing as being explicit as opposed to implicit and more grounded in living breathing moments of a body experiencing experience—both modes of representation can bestow a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations in illuminating some poignant aspect of human endeavor. In turn, opening the possibility of being transformative for writer and reader.

Richardson’s (2000) metaphor of the crystal in her discussion of a genre of social science research texts that are “evocative representations” cast light on the notion of the interplay of diverse truth(s) that can deepen, refract, generate, give and come into its own shining (Heidegger, 1971) “because evocative writing touches where we live, in our bodies” (Richardson, p. 931). These words not reaching for some conclusive evidence rather some sense of what lies at the ontological core of our being, our seeing and our becoming in a world between the interplay of reflection and memory that inspirits our personal investigations.

Ultimately, writing itself is the inquiry and intention where what is in process is the coming to know what things are. It is in this writerly space, where absence is as telling as presence and where language as a discourse of representation substitutes for the phenomenon itself. It is here where “one can run up against the human wall of language or where one might be permitted a momentarily gaze through its crevices” (van Manen, 2006, p. 718). The sheer potential and possibility of openings, of gaining some aspect of human understanding transcends the words themselves wherein what exists between the gaps and spaces and writer and page escapes definition but is brimming with both desire and hope. In this breadth, writing itself becomes a process of the flickering between light and dark where lightness and darkness ebb and flow in circular and generative cycles of knowing and not knowing resulting in glimpses of meaning. To bring an object into one’s gaze is mediated by the tension of rendering it to the page in seeking understanding as well as being understood.

The core intimacy of poetic expression leads Bachelard (1969) to state “poetry as a phenomenology of the soul” (p. xxii) in language that takes its very root in us. In the vulnerable vibrancy of the poetic image, sets off phenomenological reverberations in language that sings to and about the world. This notion of language that takes root in us then speaks to the nature of an experience that calls for it to be named where in “writing creates a space that belongs to the unsayable” (van Manen, 2006, p. 718). In this process of naming the unnamed (Derrida, 1978), there is then a renewal where one emerges in the awakening of creation (Bachelard, 1969), in the process of becoming said. To evoke a lived burned through experience is then also to critically engage and emerge and in this sense, writing both poetically and phenomenologically can have liberatory effects. To enter or puncture liminal spaces is also to dwell in places that are painful and yet need to be claimed and contained onto the page. Writing becomes a political and pedagogical act. It is also in this act of writing that as hooks (1999) states for her in the “moment I whirl with words, when I dance in the ecstatic circle of love surrounded by ideas, it is act of transgression...there are no binding limitations” (p.45). In Yancy’s (2012) provocative and jarring phenomenological treatment of what he calls “Embedded racism and white opacity”, the *click click click* of the car doors relay, reverberate and resonate with race as lived and in this word, in its essence, lies the power of evocative phenomenological writing as a tool for deeper understanding of ‘living’ human diversity but also as vehicle in which to fearlessly say the unsayable, “to see the nakedness of the now” (van Manen, 2006, p.718) in its very rawness.

Van Manen (2007) writes that phenomenological writing is a sobering project, one in which is “free from theoretical, prejudicial, and suppositional intoxications” (p.12). However, he also puts forth that it has to be fueled by fascination. Poetry, in the Rumiesque sense, requires certain “drunkenness”, revelry with the

world and the word, a relinquishing of boundaries, a stripping down of self, this nakedness. What calls an experience to the page? In the broad spectrum of human emotions, the notion that something has to echo or has to speak to our consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) in the very depths of our being, bridges the sheer diversity of feelings that can evoke one into writing. Merleau-Ponty (2002) eloquently puts forth that the impetus for this desire is a call to wonder as we are “drawn by the gaze of something that stares back at us” (van Manen, 2002, p.5). In this premise, we are then to acknowledge the reciprocity of the world, as it becomes us as much as we become it in this “wider dance of the human body with the larger body of the earth” (Searle, 2012, p.53). To be thrown into the natural world is to consider how much our own perceptions are determined by our own presence at a given time and space and what factors may limit or expand the field of our experiences. Phenomenology and poetry call to a heightened attentive sense of being in moments in this “in-seeing”, this living inquiry wherein the communion with and through the world lies vast infinite possibilities of a landscape that anticipates our own vision (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). The poet Rumi captures the essence of this sentiment when he once exclaimed, “What you seek is seeking you” (n.d.)

As I enter the personal and poetic space of this inquiry, I acknowledge the act of “poetry as a site for the consciousness of perception” (Hejinian, 2000, p.67) and in doing so I also consider that “even the most subtle poem destroys what it names” (van Manen, 2006, p. 719). As language can lift an experience into heightened ways of seeing and understanding, the full breadth of what occurs is left to remain and linger in the gaps. In presenting a poem followed by the lived experience of writing the poem, I engage in poetics in my phenomenological reflection. There could be in fact very little separation in the space in between the poem and the experience of writing it; both inspired with the process of a phenomenological investigation. In writing the lived experience, the question of how this poem has come into being becomes a philosophical question over a literary question. The process of engaging in meta poetics or meta poetry with the lens of phenomenology has in turn, called my attention to writer as a feeling sensing body.

Promise

I place my foot
 Upon the sand
 That gives gently
 To the presence of
 My body
 On this slightly frigid December
 Morning

Where the cold air fills my eyes
With an awakened intensity
A sudden expansion of the
Landscape before me
Where I witness the eager rays
Of light
Break through
The horizon
With a pronounced promise
Of a day
Peaking
To the rhythms
Of the ocean
That I now too
Inhabit

My life world –
In the very breath
That appears
Lingers
Disappears
Before
Me
Breath upon breath
This milky cloud of being
That keeps me moving
As the sand upon sand upon sand
Is lifting
Shifting
Releasing
Remaining
Becoming part of
The journey
I purposefully make
To the edge of the morning's shore

Where I observe
A lone seagull
Steadying the waters
Steadying the lone seagull
Momentarily

Communing
With the ocean in the between
Of flight

This line of flight
That I am now a part of
A Bird
An Ocean
Sand
A Woman
Its own Rhizome ¹
That
Gives
Moves
Generates
Produces
Desires
My own
Maternal consciousness
That heightens
And
Aches
As She
Sits
On the womb
Of the ocean
That supports her
As the sand supports
Me
In a state of becoming

And
The bird, Now
As if sensing the sudden keenness of my own horizons
The sheer intensity of my thinking
Takes flight into her own
As if to answer my unsaid
Question on this now
Sacred slightly frigid December

¹ Deleuze & Guattari, 1987

Morning
 Leaving
 Me
 To ponder
 With wonder
 The part we all play
 In each others
 Veritable
 Becomings

Entering

I stare at the barren page that seems to blink blankly back at me as if to question my own readiness to write this poem. I sit on my cluttered dark wood stained slightly key scratched dining table which is in the state of becoming my personal library, a testament to my own evolving thinking and burgeoning interests where now Heidegger, Ponty, Dilthey, Gadamer, Derrida, Irigaray, hooks, Van Manen and Hafeez and Rumi live, dwell and linger and bare witness to my mission. This poem that I try to create in this very space, the place, to write the words that have been burning in and through my mind for 4 months since that morning in Parksville in December. But like every poem I write, I need to walk with it first, to let the words find their way, their own rhyme and reason to commit to the page. This blank page – which feels lonely as I sit in my white robe still and sip a dark now lukewarm espresso that in its bitterness gives a sense of the comfort of the morning listening to the ebb and flow of the raindrops light to heavy and back to light drops that find themselves on the window that I turn my gaze to without moving by body.

I keenly sense my own loneliness on this Saturday, which is unlike the others, where I have a rare morning of silence coupled with a surge of ensuing creativity and I feel that surge in my very flesh of being, stronger than it has been for some time. But I want music, a little Marvin Gaye, a little “What’s Going On?” But I resist, as if calling to the words themselves to fill this void. I sense the tension, the vulnerability of rendering oneself to the page, the tightness in my upper spine, and I feel my eyebrows lift as I think about the sand, the beach, the air, my breath, the sadness that has been sitting in the core of my chest with these words that I lived but still do not know. That epiphanic moment on the beach that lives in my memory compelling me at this very moment to be brought to fruition to the page and does not allow me to leave it—to relive it.

My mind takes me to Anne Dillard and how she laments that the only thing that will teach you to write is the blank page itself and I feel the pull towards it.

The pull I feel to sit and write is more than the pull to get up and leave it. I feel a moment of inbetweenness of almost getting up off the chair...

But my desire is greater and I feel my feet firmly rooted and I lean in to it. I submit willingly to this communion with word in a journey of both desire and doubt. My eyes shift only for a fleeting moment to the cherry tree filled pink blossoms outside the window gathering rain as if to give the sudden inspiration...

I type...*I am*. No! I delete.

I type...*I enter*. No! I delete.

I type...*I see*. No! I delete again. My throat tightened and trapped with restrained breath.

I sense the familiar line between my forehead wrinkle and deepen as hear my sister's voice : *You will need Botox if you keep doing that...*

My wrist and forearm tense as I go again to the again stark page...

I talk to myself out loud and pronounced and close my eyes while my fingers still hover over the keyboard.

See it, smell it...sense it...start at the beginning...

I smell the air of that morning, summoning the moment, the salty sharpness, and the beachness.

I see myself there. I remember vividly placing my foot upon the sand and my eyes filling with the scene before me.

I shall pause there. I shall start here.

I open my eyes and breathe into the first verse:

I place my foot (enter)

Upon the sand (enter)

That gives gently (enter)

To the presence of (enter)

My body

My lips come together and I exhale loudly as I enter this sacred sublime place evoking the words evoking me giving into them as they come now with grace and purpose... a knowing...a sensing ...an attending to its rhythms and form and where I should "enter".

I feel the familiar tears filling my eyes in the humbling beauty of this moment of creation coming through me as I linger in a space of which I can only call *spirit*,

this commitment I make to what is in me, transcending me in wanting and wonder.

And the rain continues to fall almost lovingly now as I lean into this poetic calling on what was once a lonely Saturday morning.

(Re)turnings

By intentionally engaging in this multilayered inquiry, I have stood at different points of distance. From first, unpacking the notion of poetry and phenomenology as kindred concepts, I have placed myself somewhat on the outside of each realm to be able to see in. To stand back here is to give vision. Secondly, the personal experience as told through poetry then profoundly and suddenly bridges this distance, in which it becomes an intimate and vulnerable telling which gives light to the very nature of an experience that has endured. Dilthey (1985) writes that it is the calling of the poet to explicate lived experience, this lived experience that is “a structural nexus which preserves the past as ‘presence’ in the present” (p. 16). Moreover, the notion of experiencing an absolute presence and expansive perception both as heightened states of being in moments that render it with meaning and purpose, then leaves one to consider what could have possibly been left as fleeting and unnoticed. Merleau-Ponty (2007) states that what makes an event lived is one that occurs at “close quarters” and Dilthey (1985) puts forth that “a feeling is a relatively fleeting subjective state related to representational consciousness, a lived experience is described as a more lasting mode in which reality is possessed” (p. 16). In the context of my poem, “Promise”, in both its creation and content, I consider the nature of a lived experience with the readiness, willingness and openness of both heart and perception that it entails, but also how the world gives and reciprocates to us in this infinite meditation (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) of meanings. These meanings, in turn, are given to us as much as we are rendering them upon the world. The rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) as a metaphor to be drawn into a phenomenological inquiry is to consider the in-between spaces and places where meanings live and linger and also the reciprocal role and nature of each of its intertwined parts that give it its very foundation. As well as relational meaning making in which “we are through and through relation to the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 67), the notion of multiple non-hierarchical entry and exit points carry the sheer diversity and complexity of human experience. To inherently know that “I am not the spectator, I am involved” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 354) is to poignantly acknowledge the potential of our own being in and with the world and the sheer promise of revelations that can enrich human understandings. The poetic eye and the phenomenological eye are both motivated by

attentiveness of perception, of a moment of wonder that echoes and resonates in a place where knowledge can speak most profoundly in silences.

Merleau-Ponty writes “It is in ourselves that we shall find the unity of phenomenology and its true sense” (2007, p.56). The word “unity” provokes a process where the interplay of perception and reflection, of living through a “lived through” encounter leads to a coming together of self in world and moreover, an elevated sense of one in the world. I would claim standing in the experience and yet above it at the same time. To me, pure phenomenology is not a possibility and this is perhaps due to my poetic sensibility that wants to speak in metaphors and implicitly. Nonetheless, the third space of this paper in my phenomenological treatment of my lived experiencing of writing “Promise”, poignantly allowed me to enter this third space of knowing. In my dialogue highlighting the concept of distance, this particular process was driven with the intention to become bodily aware in and to the very flesh of my experience. In this regard, it became the most intimate layer in its call for explicitly and the breathing sensing sensual body that goes first into the world readily.

To dwell in this textorium (van Manen, 2002) was to enter by way of deep reflection as a pathway in which to appropriate aspects of the lived experience in the very nature of its primal impressional life as it was revealed through. As I consider this phenomenological process, I contemplate how the experience is relived to the page and how in turn, this leads to a deepening and strengthening of the very experience. Evoking these particular and chosen moments of my lifeworld onto a contained space is both to reduce the experience to its essence and lift it at the same time. The notion of evoking is powerful in the nature of phenomenological inquiry in that we evoke the experience through the act of writing as much as the text itself bring us face to face with what we have lived through. Like a piece of poetry, the words continue to generate meanings as we return and I put forth here that both poetry and phenomenology is writing with wings.

To turn to things themselves (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) is to be seeing with a certain courtesy (Lilburn, 1997). I present this idea of turning to conceptualize a body moving and facing an object of inquiry that resonates with a keen wanting to know or understand. Wonder, as a Merleau-Pontian (2002) prerequisite, is also fuelled by a sheer desire to claim the experience. To consider the notion of presence is also intriguing in that to be present in the writing of a lived experience is to possess a different type of presence in comparison to the presence felt at the time of the living through. What I found is that to bring that same sort of presence to the page, the burned through experience that has imprinted itself on the body, is to be present to the presence of what occurred. To get to essence is no easy endeavor. As I was writing about writing, these layers of presence became more pronounced and to be engaged in both a meta poetic and phenomenological

treatment is to exercise the nature of my consciousness as it cycles in perception, memory and reflection in body, in mind and in soul.

As the poet's intention is to create the appearance of experience (Leavy, 2009) phenomenology is to explicate the essence of this experience with a primacy that perhaps is what van Manen (2007) meant when he refers to it as a "sobering". As poetry lives in metaphors, much of "Promise" relies on the unsaid and the power of the poetic image. I also consider this act of negotiation in "Entering" in what is chosen and what ultimately is not brought to the page. What factors govern my own powers of perception upon reflection? What moments have value over the others? What is remembered and what lays hidden? What is lost and what is gained? In my future revisiting of this phenomenological inquiry, I am intrigued in what it can still become in the spirit of the unfinished nature of phenomenology. I perceive the willingness to relearn and to return as the integrity of this inquiry. It is in the state of becomings that I understand being in the world as an eternal process of experiencing experience, this infinite meditation (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) that continues to be giving. It is also here that I have now come to know philosophy as a place for perpetual beginnings (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) and becomings. Phenomenology, like poetry, has not only given rise to a heightened attentiveness of seeing and being but a space to continue to wander in the wonder (Leggo, 2004) and to stand as both witness and participant. I affirm that writing, for me, is a sacred place of entering into boundless rays of light.

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The Inquisition/Torture of the Tenure Track

Gresilda A. Tilley-Lubbs

Abstract

This autoethnographic narrative addresses the mental anguish and chaos that were the author's constant companions during the year of waiting for the results of her tenure decision at a Research I university. Having chosen a non-traditional path to tenure, she found that autoethnography and critical pedagogy could be acceptable forms of scholarship despite their creating numerous questions and consternations on the part of all involved in the process. She uses autoethnography to make sense of the process of moving through self-questioning and doubt into a place of renewed and revitalized strength and belief in her Self and her writing. She concludes with further questions about the tenure and promotion process and the devastating effect it can produce on faculty who covet the assurance of a permanent position in a university.

A huge cardboard envelope protruding from my mailbox cubbyhole.
Curious.
Cold fingers.
Thumping heart.

Carefully extracting it
From the middle of all other campus mail detritus
Stuffed in the box.

Confidential/Personal/Confidential/Personal

Words in alternating red and blue trace a diagonal path
On the large cardboard mailer
From the Provost's Office.

Hands trembling, I open the mailer and take out the letter inside.

Dear Dr. Tilly-Lubbs:
(Paranoia kicks in—was the misspelling of my name intentional?)

At its meeting on June 4, 2012, the University Board of Visitors reviewed the promotion, tenure, and continued appointment recommendations brought by President . . .

Quickened breath.
How can I go on to read this news without anyone here to catch me if I faint from . . . from what?
Anger?
Disappointment?
. . . Joy?

I read on, skipping to the dreaded words:

I am pleased to inform you that the Board approved your tenure with promotion to associate professor . . . a deserved acknowledgment of your exemplary achievements on behalf of your students, your profession, and the university

There must be some mistake.

After a year of interrogation and grief about everything I do
How did I receive a letter that acknowledged my

“Exemplary achievement.”

Will this news restore my life?
Will it help me to reclaim my pre-tenure-decision-year-priorities?
Will I ever be able to *fully* reclaim the Self that matters. . .

Wife/Mother/Grandmother/Mother-in-law
Friend/confidante
Advisor/teacher/friend
Activist in the Spanish-speaking community
Member of a pacifist denomination based on the servanthood of radical love
Critical pedagogue
Writer/thinker?

Will I ever lose the sense
That the tenure process
Robbed me of some of the most important aspects of my life
For seven long years?

Will I ever lose the regret I feel
For messing up my family's life,
For being distant/distracted/preoccupied/
Short-tempered/lacking in patience
During those seven years plus the six before
In pursuit of a Ph.D. as a non-traditional woman

Who had taught Spanish and piano and voice
For more years than most of her students
Had been alive?

Who had continued to love and treasure
Her husband
Her three children
Who grew up,
Married,
Lived their lives;

Her mother
Who aged and died in the process of the Ph.D./tenure gerbil wheel
Of late nights
Skipped meals prepared by that same mother

Who lived across the street and
Also took care of those children while they
Grew up,
Married,
Lived their lives?

The questions slap me in the face.

The guilt and remorse about my mom
Still sit stagnant in a painful memory.

Why as a fifty-one-year old mother did I decide
To leave my position of respect and tenure
As Department Head of Foreign Languages
In a high school where my students and their families
Not only respected me, but also demonstrated deep affection?
Why did I decide to start a doctoral program?

In the alien world of the academy. . . .

Where competition and criticism
Define the climate and culture. . . .

Not the ivy-covered tower
Of higher learning
And intellectual discussions
And collegiality
That I remembered
From my years as a graduate student
In Spanish literature
At a major mid-western university.

That Self receded for all those years. . .

And almost completely disappeared

During The Year.

The Year of
GOING UP FOR TENURE.

Peers going up at the same time
Seemed to feel some tension. . . .

But not the grinding anxiety,
The reality of the years of
Refusing to play the game,
But knowing it existed.
Denying that the hoops existed,
Much less jumping through them.

Spending an entire year
Thinking about retiring,
Withdrawing my dossier.

Fantasizing about
Refusing to go through the academic process
Of criticism and judgment.

Yet continuing to perservere.

Becoming decimated in
Body
Mind
Spirit
Self.

June 2011.
The deadline for submitting my papers for tenure and promotion

Beginning in November of that year
A black cloud of negativity over my head,
Matching the bleakness of the late autumn days outside my window,
Following me from place to place,
Occasionally raining on me with more interrogation
About my right to call myself a scholar, a writer, a poet.

Every ring of my office phone
Sped up heartbeat.
Freezing cold hands.

The unwelcome tremor in my voice . . .

If I decided to answer the phone.

Harder to get up every morning
An hour-long drive to my office
So bothered I couldn't even pay attention to the audiobook mysteries
Keeping me company as I drove.

So distracted I received a reckless driving ticket
Zipping along in the little red Beetle at 65 mph

Total obsession with retirement,
Escaping,
Moving on,
Thumbing my nose at the university and the entire academic system.

Joseph Roach's words resonate:
Memory serving as both "quotation and invention,
An improvisation on borrowed themes,
With claims on the future as well as the past" (1996, p. 33).

A conversation with my husband Dan
After an interrogating phone call from the Promotion and Tenure Committee.
Anger contorting my face,
Rage coloring my voice red:
"I am so sick of all of them,
So fed up with the system.
I just want to retire.
But as my choice, not theirs."

Such an oppressive belittling burden
Going through this process. . .
Leading me to question myself
As critically as they were questioning me.

And now this letter,
This affirmation
This blessing of my work.

Now part of the sacred fraternity
Of survivors of the process
The President of the university later calls

“The longest job interview you’ll ever have.”

Remembering
Early April 2012.

A letter from the Provost’s Office.

I have passed through
The department,
The college,
The university committees.

Now I wait for
The formal vote by the Board of Visitors in June.

Am I really on a terrorists list
For signing a petition
Stating that Bill Ayers’ involvement
With the Underground Weathermen
Was irrelevant to Obama’s election campaign?

New worries set in.
Is the person who wrote the hate letter
Offering to pay my way to Europe
To live with the other Socialists
On the Board of Visitors?

Could that be used against me?

In the conservative environment of the academy,
Will someone look at my Facebook page and realize
How radical love (Freire, 2000/1970)
And radical teaching (Kincheloe, 2006/2003; Freire, 2005/1997)
And radical thought
Shape my world
My scholarship
My teaching
My outreach—
The triad that defines my academic persona?

Years of bravado about living the academic life
That allows me to live with myself,
Following my dad's advice
To look in the mirror in the morning
As a measuring stick for integrity. . . .

Was it all going to come back and haunt me?

September 2012.
This official letter.

Does this letter erase months of agony and anger
Roiling in my gut,
Transforming my way of regarding the world?
Of regarding my work?

Sapping my energy,
Leaving me apathetic and lethargic,
Affecting not only my career,
But also my personal life.

A year of considering retirement,
Applying for Social Security—
Eligible on June 7,
Two days after the vote by the Board of Visitors
Three months before my official notification.

Summer 2012.
Plotting my retirement

No book order for my classes.
No preparation of syllabi.

Plotting how to send a letter of resignation.

Setting up my choice to leave, not theirs.

Move to Mexico.

My escape pod from this hell was ready.

Through the years, colleagues had escaped
Rather than endure the process.

Should I follow the lemmings?

Two things kept my fingers off the keyboard to write the resignation letter—
The thought of leaving my grandsons
Gavin and Isaac. . . .

And the fact that I had not yet received an official letter.

My dad's words kept me going.
"You don't ever give up."

I had to see it through.

Summer 2011.
Phone calls and conversations about my dossier,
About the committee
Constantly recycling through my head.

December 2011.
My doctoral student/friend/co-author Jennifer and me
At my house
Sitting on the leather couch
In front of the fire,
Writing furiously
Sipping French press coffee with milk and sugar.

Ring. Ring. Ring.
"Hi Kris. Sharon¹ here.
Sorry to bother you at home,
But I have a few questions.
As you know,
Your dossier is with the Department Promotion and Tenure Committee."

As I know!
I know little else these days!

"There are a few points they would like for you to clarify."

Chest constricts,
Breath chokes my voice,
No breath.

“You apparently submitted to the committee two articles in which you used the same paragraph.”

Taken aback.

“What articles?
What paragraph?”

Racing through my mind,
“What in the world are you talking about?”

“I believe they were about your service-learning.
Does that ring a bell?”

“Well, I submitted two articles about service-learning (2009a; 2009b)
To provide evidence of the excellence of my
Scholarship, teaching, and outreach.

To match my Candidate’s Statement
My focus on critical pedagogy and autoethnography
My line of inquiry.”

Even in a state of panic and mounting hysteria,
Academic language and robot thinking prevail.

Well indoctrinated, no?

“Talk to me about how the same paragraph appeared in both?
One external reviewer commented on that.
There is a concern about self-plagiarism.”

Hands cold, trembling,
White face
Drained of all blood
Or maybe red due to
Heart thudding against my ribcage.

What if I have a stroke right now?
Then at least I could end this awful conversation.

Sudden clear mind.
Words tumbling out
Filling the need to chronologically order
At least some of the craziness of the years leading up to this moment:

June 2008,
Submission of an article to Norman Denzin.
Invitation to revise and resubmit.
Too many discourses:

Critical pedagogy
Service-learning
Mystory.

Suggestion:
Submit to a critical pedagogy journal
Or a service-learning journal.
Norman writes,
“I am only interested in the mystory.”

Total revision.

September 2008.
Submission to a critical pedagogy journal.

Mid-December 2008.
Journal editor Joe Kincheloe’s death.
Journal on hiatus.

What about my article?

Late December 2008.
A call for proposals for a service-learning article
Return to the original article
To extract the service-learning piece.

Expression of concern to a trusted colleague
Two articles that dealt with the same teaching practice,

But one informed by critical pedagogy,
One by service-learning.

He tells me,
“That’s really not a problem, Kris.
That establishes your line of inquiry.”

Both articles coming from the same source.
Both significantly, totally, revised.
Both accepted at the same time.
Both published at the same time.

My ethics questioned.
But not my senior memory.
Self plagiarism:
Not a privilege for senior professors?

“Well, as I said one reviewer raised a question
About ownership of your words,
But this explanation makes good sense.
Can you provide documentation for all this?”

Sure.
I can provide documentation
That my words that fell onto the computer page
Fell out of my own mind.

But that’s not enough.

The hard copy of Norman’s letter.
All my email correspondence from the editors.

“Will that be sufficient?”

“That will be fine.
I can cite those when I write your letter of support.”

....

“There *IS* one more question from another reviewer:

Why weren't your major articles about teaching ESL?"

Visions of the Inquisitor floating through my mind
Pointed hat puncturing my soul.

Phone still in my hand,
Attempting to get my voice out of my mouth.
Anger at the system strangling my words.

I remind my interrogator that
At every pre-tenure review since 2005,
I was asked the same question:

"Do you have any concerns?"

At every review
I gave the same answer:

"I don't write about teaching ESL.
I write about immigrant students and their communities.
I write about preparing a bunch of white middle class pre-service teachers
To understand the issues these kids face."

"Talk to me some more about that."

Breathing slows.
Heart still races,
But more slowly.

"The Coal Miner's Daughter Gets a Ph.D." (2011)
The impact of social class in the academy.
Using autoethnography to talk about working class kids
Outsiders due to social class
Navigating the school system,
Then the academy.

"Border Crossing: (Auto)Ethnography that Transcends Immigration/Imagination" (2012)
The perspectives of the families who immigrate to the US
The perspectives of their families who stayed behind.

Always a focus on the stories people tell,
Not on statistics about a group.
Not about linguistics or language learning.
Always issues of social class, gender, ethnicity, nationality
About teaching marginalized kids.”

“Okay.
That’s all I need to write the letter.”

Breathing space until January.
Then more academic game-playing.

Questions continuing.
Sporadic intervals.
Dossier traveling through the rest of the hierarchy.

Why weren’t my reviewers from peer institutions?

They were.

Why did I submit articles that weren’t really articles. . . .
They were just poems?

Did they read them?

“Under the cloak of rigor and academic rhetoric, meritocratic hierarchies are encouraged; we, as academics look upon our own, and each other’s scholarship with suspicion, rather than healthy skepticism. Who’s producing, who is worthy?”
(Spooner, 2010).

But it’s more complex than that.

Or is it?

My tenure committee.

Basically good people trying to follow
Bureaucratic university guidelines.

Basically people who especially respect my extensive, authentic work
In the local immigrant and refugee community.

So why the questions?
I had the requirements.
The requisite number of articles in top-tier peer-reviewed journals.
Over a half million dollars in grant funding.
A good teaching record.
Numerous programs in the community.
Countless hours of university service.

So why the questions?
Why the red flags?

Why the resistance to a line of inquiry
That did not fit into the expected mold?

The strict and stringent expectations for
An “Assistant Professor of Second Language Education”
To write about second language acquisition.

The expectations for “scientific inquiry” as defined by the academy.
The (lack of) rhythm of
Introduction
Lit review
Methodology
Findings
Discussion.

Poems!
Critical pedagogy!
Autoethnography!

The torn veil of secrecy
That allowed me to be privy to information I shouldn’t have known
About the goings-on of the secret inquisition team
Known as
The Promotion and Tenure Committee.

Walking down the hall in my building
Paranoid
Wondering who knows about my interrogation. . . .
Who is tearing my work and me to shreds behind closed doors?

Good I didn't find out about
One negative vote from a colleague on the department committee
Until after I received the final letter.

And that I didn't know that one negative vote
Often rings the death knell for a tenure case
As it moves up through the hierarchy. . . .
Department. . .
College. . .
University. . .
Provost. . .
Board of Visitors.

Interrogation.
Inquisition.
Torture.

Where's the research!
Where's the meaning in those
Meaningless poems?

Are those the same poems that people read
And send me emails thanking me
For being brave enough to write about the unspoken?

Voices playing through my head
Stuck on play and repeat.

Moving through the first year with tenure.

Moving from deep anger
To a sense of sadness.

How many assistant professors share these experiences?

How many have mostly good people on their committees?

How many people have colleagues who fight for them
As they slog through the hierarchy
As mine did for me?

Couldn't there could be a more humane way to work through the tenure process,
Especially for those of us who choose to follow a less common path?

I chose my path.

I knew my world would be there even if I was denied tenure.

I would still have my husband.
My kids and their families.
My world outside the academy.

I knew that my roles of
Wife
Mother
Grandmother
Would still be waiting for me
At the end of the endless road.

I had the luxury of knowing that I could retire
And my life would continue as usual. . . .

Except for the remembered pain of failure in the tenure process.

Once again I write as inquiry (Richardson, 1994)
To understand my pain.
But also to heal
Mind
Spirit
Body
Intellect
Self.

The monkey of anxiety
No longer perched on my shoulder
Slobbering
Dripping his stinking saliva on all my thoughts
And making them incomprehensible.

Gone.

Free.

I had the courage to transgress and follow the call to autoethnography
And I won the fight (Poulos, 2010).

Ron Pelias' (2011) words speak to me,
Reminding me that I now have
Time to sit with friends
And to be pleased by their presence
And needing their presence
But yet feeling disconnected
Wanting more,
Wanting the words that might penetrate.

And so I continue to write my poems
And to sit in the presence of family and friends,
To seek the words that heal my
Mind
Spirit
Body
Intellect
Self.

“Writing out helps me heal. . . .
[My poems] come out like a baby,
Cutting out the words that don't belong” (Mary Weems at ICQI, May 17, 2013).

The ethical questions.

Not wanting to hurt my colleagues
Who did the best they knew how to do,
But wanting to find healing
And closure
And the path to peace.

My friend Silvia Benard tells me
That I am not narrating what happened,
But rather how I lived what happened.
Now I try to understand what happened and
To share my experience (Benard, 2013).

Silvia even shares Anne Lamott's (1994) words with me:
We all have the right to tell our own story.

And I have tried to do so
 In the most honest way possible,
 Knowing that what I tell is
 What I perceive today
 About what happened almost three years ago
 During one of the most emotion-laden times
 Of my entire life. . . .

Trying to process and understand.

I am following a dear colleague's advice to "refocus on [myself]"
 And "to not let anyone pull [me] away from my passionate center."
 He tells me that I have found my "spiritual center" and
 I "can look forward to doing the things that really matter to [me]
 And those [I] care about."

My struggle has yielded my [S]elf and my art. (Oates, 2003).

Endnotes

- 1 All the names of the guilty/innocent/guilty have been changed to protect their identity. I'm not sure if it's due to fear for my job, or if it's because I know that good intentions were the underlying force for all the events/situations/circumstances that made my year such a tortured inquisition.

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Silkscreen

Experience of Living and Leaving Abuse

Sherrie Gurel, B. Lee Murray, & Tim Claypool

Abstract

Male Partner Violence (MPV) involves repeated abuse, committed by an intimate partner, someone you know and care about, over a long period of time. A woman who has experienced this unimaginable betrayal by her intimate partner, the man she believed would protect and cherish her, struggles with the many complexities of the experience. I use art in the form of a silkscreen to illustrate my own experience of MPV, where I have come from, what I have been through, and who I am today. My creative expression is multi-faceted in its portrayal of male partner violence. It displays the emotional, psychological, and spiritual violence I endured, the fears that paralyzed me, along with my hope for a future free from violence. I have come to see this print as valuable and representative of my significance and worth. It has come to represent a monumental paradigm shift in my life; it has grown into a candid trophy, a heraldic sign of transforming trauma into triumph. I share my silkscreen and my interpretation of its meaning and significance in the hope that it will resonate with others who have experienced MPV and/or those who seek to more fully understand the experience. I understand that women experience MPV in many ways but my hope is that my silkscreen will serve as a mirror for other women to view “their own unvoiced aspirations” (Smith and Watson, 1998).

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and just above it is a bronze three-dimensional metal star with torch-cut swirls and circles on all three surfaces. The position of the star and drawing create the illusion that the woman in the silkscreen is reaching for the stars. And yet, this diametric juxtaposition of a personal treasure with a toilet is fitting because male partner violence is such a waste of human dignity.

As I create the silkscreen I include words and phrases that represent my experience of living in an abusive marriage and reflect the fears I faced when leaving and moving on with my life alone. So many words and phrases whirl around in my head. It's like gazing into a kaleidoscope of my life: violence, questions, doubts, self-blame, and fear twirling together and eventually transforming to hope, inspiration, and self-worth. Sitting in front of my easel feeling panicked and overwhelmed, I rest my head in my hands, my heart racing. I frantically search for the words to best describe the horror I lived. Some words resonate strongly as I begin to grasp at the ones that best fit. I highlight the importance of each word or phrase for the silkscreen by putting them in bold and using handwriting or capital letters: **YOU ARE NOTHING WITHOUT ME; YOU CANNOT MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN; I WILL NEVER LET YOU GO; Consider yourself lucky I want you. No-one else would;** and **USELESS**. Like a jellyfish wrapping its tentacles around my heart, the sting of these words continue to linger and torment my soul, such debilitating words like **COW, STUPID BITCH, and DUMB CUNT**. Words like **worthless, Shame, AFRAID, ANXIOUS, OVERWHELMED, NUMB,** and **grieving** represent the emotions that cripple me and leave me weak. Questions and fears that kept me captive in a loveless marriage for so long are represented by the phrases: **CAN I MAKE IT ON MY OWN? NO MONEY, living alone,** and **Where Do I Go From Here?** I ask myself, Can I really use such intimately personal thoughts? Is there a purpose for all this rumination? Then words flood my soul like a cool drink refreshing me with the courage to conquer my fears, persist, and move forward with my life, words like **uprooting, breaking free, growth, feeling free to be something more . . . , discovering self-identity, UNLIMITED POTENTIAL,** and **Love**.

I contemplate colours for each of the pieces and decide on life-like representations for the male hands and the female form. I decide the woman will remain faceless. In place of facial features I create a mask to represent the silence and loss of self-related to male partner violence. The mask is mostly amethyst with dark brown streaks, creating borders and depicting phases while giving this cover a sense of dimension. I also use amethyst streaks to highlight the feminine aspects of the woman's body and her curves. Amethyst is a strong yet soft shade of purple and comprised of blue, green, and red. The woman's pink skin and the man's hands are a shade of red, as is the brown tree and the outlines of the hands. It's as if these three colours come together and separate to reveal the image on the paper.

I feel challenged to create a background that will adequately represent this tumultuous time in my life. Blue is the colour of the sky and has always been a favourite colour of mine, so a deeper muted blue becomes the dominant part of the background. A modest blue infused with purple tones denotes a majestic aspect to the print. Green seems appropriate to represent growth and renewal; however, this change was difficult and painful, so the green I choose is a sullen mossy green. I put the colours together, and the interlinking yet separate patches of blue and green illustrate my journey through abuse.

The bottom third of the picture is heavy, weighted with dark shades of brown root-like stumps surrounded by two large hands outlined in dark brown. This area is also filled with violent words and phrases printed in capital black letters. The hands seem to have recently released the woman; although they are open they remain close enough to grab her again at any moment. The hands simultaneously represent the all-encompassing abuser's hold on the woman emotionally, psychologically, sexually, spiritually, and physically, and a divine grace supporting the woman and giving her strength to move through and beyond the abuse. Being called "stupid," "fat," "lazy," and "useless" changed how I saw myself. Abuse is ugly, and when I see my former self believing those destructive messages, I am ugly, stuck, rooted in shame, believing that I am responsible for my suffering. Also at the bottom of the drawing, are the woman's legs depicted as tree stumps, representing my rootedness in values, giving me the strength to parent on my own.

The central portion of the piece depicts the abdomen and reproductive area of the woman. The focal point is the woman's navel. This area is outlined with vibrant sweeping amethyst and bronze strokes highlighting the woman's sexuality and reproductive function. The background consists of prominent patches of blue, smaller areas of moss green, and small snippets of visible white paper.

The top third of the print focuses on the woman's breasts and raised arms. One arm is wrapped around the head, and the other is reaching upward out of view, giving the impression that it is moving beyond the print. The hand-written question, *Where Do I Go From Here?* signifies the uncertainty and fear involved in this critical journey.

The head is depicted as an amethyst and dark-brown mask, and the words *Unlimited Potential,* are directly behind the head in a peach- and bronze-coloured area and speaks of the endless possibilities of my healing journey and holding on to the hope for a better life for myself and my children.

* * *

Some days when I look at the print, I feel the piercing impact of the violent words written on it. So many years I have mourned the shattering of my reality and like a bow's arrows; these words still plunge into me. I recognize that I will never *get over* what happened and although the fabric of my being is forever altered I can weave my pain and suffering into golden threads that aid in accepting my per-

sonal worth, strength, and ability. The words depicted are cutting and cruel, but I no longer bleed. I have a new awareness that these words are indeed violent and they represent the anguish and the magnitude of the violence in my marriage. The encouraging factor is that I have replaced the disempowering nature of the words with courage, strength, and optimism.

* * *

The silkscreen reveals the multifaceted effects of male partner violence and the impact on mothers and their children from a socioeconomic and the sociopolitical perspective. Visual representations such as art work or photographs portray a moment in time and a created perspective. Leavy (2009) elaborated that “visual art inherently opens up multiple meanings that are determined not only by the artist but also the viewer and the context of viewing (both the immediate circumstance and the larger socio-historical context)” (p. 215). Stories and personal artwork transcends and crosses cultures.

When I dig in to categorically examine aspects of my personal experience of living with and leaving male partner violence I am open myself up to relive previous suffering. As I delve into the caverns of past despair, pain, and shame I grapple with my imperfections and limitations. The silkscreen represents my experience of living and leaving MPV in the hope of creating understanding, connection and empathy, so others may learn from my personal struggles.

Similar to Freda Kahlo (1910-1954), who created autobiographical paintings filled with symbolic images depicting her emotional frame of mind, my silkscreen portrays personal meaning full of emotion and affect. When creating this print, emotions and feelings flowed through me and were imprinted onto the canvas. Mamet (1998) describes art as a synthesis of our conscious and unconscious minds, a creative process that can bring us peace (p. 50). I have found peace and a hope that my vulnerability as an artist will bring hope for other survivors of MPV and an opportunity for societal and personal change. Similar to Poulos (2009) I move “the secret out of its place of captivity into the communicative repertoire of the family” ((p. 18), to find restoration through images of my thoughts, feelings and experiences.

“Vulnerability is not weakness; it is our most accurate measurement of courage. Vulnerability is the birth place of innovation, creativity, and change,” declared Brown (2012). Beginning a new life involves healing and accepting the harsh, dissonant reality of my past. Creating this silkscreen a mere four years after leaving my 17-year marriage represents a critical juncture in this journey, although I was not aware of this truth at the time.

The silkscreen represents where I have come from, what I have been through, and who I am today. My creative expression is multi-faceted in its portrayal of male partner violence. It displays the emotional, psychological, and spiritual violence I endured, the fears that paralyzed me, along with my hope for a future free

from violence. I have come to see this print as valuable and representative of my significance and worth. It has come to represent a monumental paradigm shift in my life; it has grown into a candid trophy, a heraldic sign of transforming trauma into triumph.

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Dr. Murray and Dr. Claypool co-supervised Sherrie Gurel's thesis work.

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