

Intertwining Hope, Strengths, and Resistance as Transformative: Women's Verbal and Visual Narratives



(1)

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Our dialogical dance together...



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Intertwining Hope, Strengths, and Resistance as Transformative: Women's Verbal and Visual Narratives

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in Psychological Sciences at de Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

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Abstract

Social construction invites us to engage in meaningful conversations, to be curious about new possibilities, and to co-create alternative ways of being-with one another in the world. It counters notions of individualism and nurtures dialogical engagement. It challenges our knowing and certainty, and asks us to embrace un-knowing and un-certainty to co-construct emergent ideas, meaning making, and transformative possibilities in our re-search and future practice. The stance of relational construction, being-in the discourse of 'we,' moved this re-search into new terrain and un-mapped territory. Relational inquiry cultivated our curiosity about the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance, and the fluidity of the transformative dynamic portrayed through our verbal and visual narratives. The re-search presented in this dissertation focused on the stories and art created by nine co-inquirers and how their invited conversations, rich in meaning and deeply experiential, illuminated the importance of story and art in therapeutic practice. Rhizomatic thought flourished. This narrative of re-search and practice is based not on 'I the researcher' but on 'we the co-inquirers,' collaboratively co-constructing counter-stories of relational practice for discursive therapeutic space. The everyday-ness of our conversations encourages multiplicity of voice and deconstructs the power differentials of researcher/researched and of therapist/client. This re-search opens new ways of relationally being-with in therapeutic space. This project originated as *Curious conversations: Verbal and visual narratives, relationally co-creating the meaning of strengths, resistance and hope with women in discursive therapeutic space. What is this intertwined, transformative dynamic?* ... and became so much more for all nine co-inquirers.

Dedication

This work from so many hearts is dedicated to Beautiful Sadie 'G'

Your beautiful verbal and visual narrative inspires the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance. On August 7, 2015 you transformed my life like never before. Your being-with and being-in the world has taught me a new relational dimension of love and togetherness. We will be telling stories and making art together for a long time. I look forward to our relational journey together...

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From the inception of this re-search my beautiful daughters Amy and Ali and their respective partners Roxan and Jason stood by me and listened relentlessly to my PhD journey narrative. Despite their graciousness, I know I bored them many times with my continued social constructionist banter. I am grateful for all your encouragement and motivation when I felt bemused or simply stuck. Your love, support, and endurance cannot be voiced enough, thank you, thank you, thank you all for putting up with me. Ali without your computer magic this manuscript would not be.

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Prologue: Connecting the Dots... A New Hope for Practice

As a therapist and re-searcher¹ who practices from a relational stance, I position my professional and personal being-with others using a social constructionist approach. Social constructionism invites creativity and collaboration in constructing alternatives and expanding possibilities, requiring collaboration in different ways (Gergen, 2009b), inviting relational participation. From a social constructionist stance, the world comes to be for us through relationships. This happens through participation with others and our relation to the collective meaning making we create together. Social construction is a means to relationally situate re-search and practice as 'we' – not 'I' – and to construct meaning making as located relationally in both action and practice. Re-search then has new utility in relational practice; it is an open invitation to participate in a dialogical, relational process of continual movement (Gergen, 2009a, 2009b). Social construction is a way of talking and doing re-search and therapy, it is important to note that this is only one language of many (Gergen, 2009a, 2009b; McNamee and Hosking 2012). While this re-search is not meant to profess Truth, it is a means to navigate different and unknown directions and new terrain that I have not traveled before. As a re-searcher, a therapist, and an instructor I do not approach this work from a positivist perspective, either knowing or wearing the cloak of an objective researcher in a laboratory. Because my epistemological position is constructionist, the tenor of this dissertation is of a poetically narrative-based, arts-based, and appreciative inquiry-based composition, interconnected in the language of relational dialogical engagement and curious conversations that embrace verbal and visual narratives, stories and art. The focus of the re-search in this dissertation is to learn more about hope, strengths, and resistance and an un-named transformative dynamic in therapeutic space. I call this the poetic art of therapy, a situated and relational conversation that can "expand the array of possibilities – of images – for future forms of social life" (McNamee, 2000, pp. 155-156). This form of dialogical engagement contrasts with traditional therapeutic approaches that situate the therapist as expert and the client as unknowing.

I include mystory² and an original piece of my art at the end of Chapter One, an attempt to think and write beyond traditional methods (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Ulmer 1989, 1994). Mystory is a poetic experiential construction of my personal and historical curiosity, my ground zero narrative that I share as a

¹ To 're-search' is to search and search again for alternatives and possibilities in both re-search and therapeutic space.

² Gregory Ulmer (1994) coined the term 'mystory'. Ulmer (1994) explains, "The modes of academic writing now taught in school tend to be positioned on the side of the already known rather than on the side of wanting to find out (of theoretical curiosity) and hence discourage learning how to learn" (1994, p. xii). In the same way, I deconstruct traditional knowledge acquisition in the practice of conventional academic discourse to reintroduce experience of the other co-inquirers with the use of the term 'herstory' in Chapter Five.

co-inquirer throughout this inquiry. I do this to set the story telling tone; the narrative poetic of lived experiences throughout this manuscript. In so doing, I position myself as a co-re-searcher or co-inquirer, not the researcher as expert, studying her subjects, but a co-inquirer who is an active receiver in conversation (Ulmer, 1989). Mystory provides form and shape to my reflective historical narrative experience, my personal inquiry, my unknowing and uncertainty in the collaborative and curious re-search process.

The love of stories and art and their relational meaning are primary threads woven throughout this manuscript. Stories and art are an essential part of my therapeutic practice, as they are relational and co-create opportunities to make meaning with others. New possibilities for practice are constructed through the stories and art of the co-inquirers in this re-search. The verbal and visual narrative that both our stories and art relationally create about strengths, resistance, and hope is the heart of this dissertation.

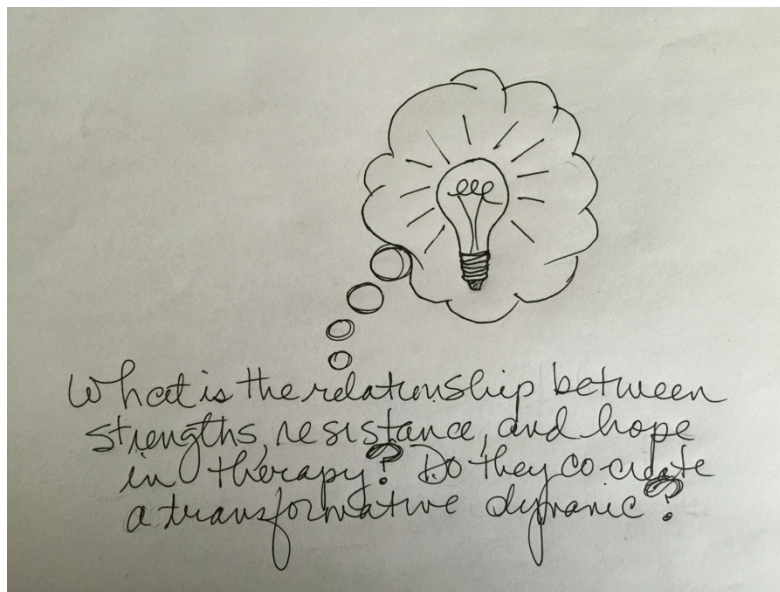


Figure 1. Initial Notes, (McKinnon, 2015).

Curiosity is the impetus for this work, “a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things” (Foucault, 1996, p. 305). As Figure 1., Initial Notes illustrates, my curiosity gave birth to the idea and purpose of this re-search – to better understand the relationship between strengths, resistance, and hope³ and any resulting transformative dynamic that may occur in therapeutic space through the use of verbal and visual narratives. We attempt in this re-search to be curious and to name a transformative dynamic that embraces change and/or growth through our verbal and visual narrative engagements about the three entities of strengths, resistance, and hope in therapeutic space. This transformative dynamic is not theory driven or technique focused, but relationally inspired through our collaborative conversational

³ In this manuscript strengths, resistance, and hope will also be referred to as the ‘three entities.’

constructions about the deeper meaning making of the interconnections of strengths, resistance, and hope and any arising transformation created in our lived narratives. A lack of curiosity engenders an uninspired way of knowing. In the past when I met people in my therapeutic practice, my focus was on building strengths. I framed resistance from a medical model as obstinacy or defiance, a reluctance or refusal to change. When I reflect back on that practice, I question if hope ever entered the dialogue. As I began this re-search I wondered if these three entities could work together, and if they did, would they create a dynamic of transformation. The intent of this re-search is to change the way I relationally position myself with those I engage in therapy; to see if the three entities and an un-named transformative dynamic may find new application in the poetic art of therapy.

In this re-search I use the term 'de-methodology' to emphasize a movement away from traditional research, where research is about discovery. To the constructionist, re-search is about social transformation (McNamee and Hosking, 2012). This is a significant shift, from discovery (traditional research) to transformation (constructionist re-search). I refer to my methodological approach as 'de-methodological' because it does not follow the tradition wherein research is presumed to uncover what already exists in the world.

Understanding de-methodology was a challenge at the beginning of this dissertation. My past knowing and past experiences in modernist theory and positivist research approaches created barriers for me and some of the co-inquirers. Those barriers included the unquestioned presumption that, for example, there must be a 'correct' method and a 'correct' form of analysis that, if utilized properly, would yield the answer to the research question. At times this presumption derailed our position of relational constructionism in the re-search. Nevertheless, a relational constructionist approach of de-methodology soon became a means of deconstruction, a way to intentionally un-map old ways of knowing and old ways of being-in research. Deconstructing knowing and the notion that the researcher is objective, and deconstructing the notion that research is about discovery, were reoccurring themes in our process. As co-inquirers, we developed the de-methodological method. We started from the assumption that, as we re-search, we create change. This re-search generates new methods and new forms of therapy, as therapy is reconstructed by the re-search. It is this transformative understanding of the re-search process that I refer to as a de-methodological approach throughout the manuscript. To the re-searcher this means that the participants in research and the re-searcher are continually engaged in a process of un-mapping or deconstructing the taken-for-granted ideas about research.

As I searched the literature, I found no empirical evidence linking the notions of strengths, resistance, and hope, and any resultant transformative dynamic. The distinct significance of this re-search is to connect these three entities and any transformative process from a relational orientation both academically and in practice. The relational orientation of these interconnected notions challenges current academic literature and therapeutic practice, which presents the three entities as singular, to be addressed individually, and therefore

misses the opportunity to weave them together into a transformative dynamic. The exploration of the three entities and a transformative dynamic are conceptually situated within the literature concerning:

- Stories
- Art
- Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy
- The Three Entities: Strength, Resistance, and Hope

This dissertation is not envisioned as a mere academic representation of theoretical ideas and concepts, although a considerable amount of literature is reviewed. Much of the literature supports central concepts that relate to the verbal and visual narratives. It demonstrates how the three entities can be creatively, practically, and efficiently applied to benefit dialogical engagement and future possibilities in practice.

This re-search focused on curious conversations with nine women. Eight co-inquirers agreed to participate in the re-search; I refer to myself as the ninth. Our work included lengthy one-with-one interviews, participant-to-participant dialogues, and a wrap up focus group that generated alternative ideas, multiplicity, and diverse realities. As co-re-searchers, we co-constructed possibilities for future therapeutic practice. Curiosity and creativity invited a means to relationally challenge the dominant discourse of both research and therapy, engaging new rich forms of inquiry, practice, ways of life, and being-with in therapeutic space. Our relational re-search design supported the concept of co-re-search; the concept of subject was dispelled and a new way of being-with and being-in re-search emerged. We were nine co-inquirers – dialogical dance partners. As will be seen in the discussion of this project, the co-inquirers' diligence in this re-search reflects our collaborative process, a process of searching and re-searching, because inquiry is intended to make a difference. Our continued conversational process of re-visiting and reflecting led to a rich analysis of concepts related to the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance, and a fluid process of transformation.

Respectful dialogues with the co-inquirers evolved to co-create stories and art that were central to this re-search. Analysis of these stories and the accompanying art showed how the three entities – strengths, resistance, and hope – emerged in all verbal and visual narratives, intertwined and interrelated. When I first envisioned my re-search, my thought was that the three entities would appear in a linear progression as strengths, resistance, and hope. Through the verbal and visual narratives it became evident that, while there was no set linear progression, more often than not, hope emerged as forerunner to strengths and resistance.

Constructionism, as an orientation in the world, invites us to view the process of therapy as a conversation or dialogue with no techniques, strategies or specific therapeutic modalities. Relational constructionism invites us to co-create together; being-with, making and doing appreciative and inclusive inquiry is highlighted. Discussions ensue about rhizomatic thought (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and the multiplicity of voices in this relational dialogical journey both in the context of re-search and therapeutic practice. As a result of this

inquiry, I discuss the relationship of hope, strengths, and resistance as a confluence and consider the implications and practical applications of this conceptualization. The co-inquirers and I established through our conversational narratives that the confluence created a fluid transformative process that informed change in therapeutic space. The visual narratives, the art chosen by each co-inquirer to accompany their story, supported the verbal narratives, providing rich images of the confluence and the fluidity of the transformative process. These are beneficial contributions that create different kinds of conversations in the relational practice of therapy and re-search. This re-search is a resource that resists dominant conceptualizations of therapeutic practice and research discourse. To that end, it must be noted that this re-search does not embody the True or only way to practice therapy; our conversations assert no “T” truth, no measurable data. This re-search is an illustration of what is possible and expresses a relationally conversational alternative to traditional research and prescriptive practice discourse. It does not privilege a conclusive meaning. It invites open dialogue to initiate further conversations about the poetic art of therapy.

The following section provides an introduction to the focus of each chapter in my dissertation.

Introducing the Chapters

Chapter One: Introduction

I locate myself, and my interest in this topic, in my own personal and professional journey. I situate my philosophical approach about the spirit of curiosity in appreciative inquiry and relational practice. My interest in verbal and visual narratives – stories and art – is experienced as a relational dialogical dance theoretically positioned in narrative and arts-based re-search epistemology, and social construction. It looks at how we relationally co-create meaning making and co-construct possibilities. I speak to the purpose of our conversational inquiry as addressivity (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) with participants in relational orientation. Curiously I wonder how the three non-discrete entities of strengths, resistance, and hope inform one another to generate a transformative dynamic and therefore inspire dialogical relational practice in therapy. At the end of this chapter, I share my story; my verbal and visual narrative underscores my own understanding as a re-researcher in the leaning-in, being-in, and being-with other participants in the re-research process. In my story I see the hope of the little girl who un-knowingly and un-certainly overcomes her trauma, finds her strengths, resists the snapping turtle, and experiences the transformative dynamic that shoots her to the surface – *swimming!* As a therapist and re-researcher I appreciate the possibilities of the three entities co-creating a transformative dynamic that informs growth in therapeutic space.

Chapter Two: Social Construction and De-methodology

At the beginning of this chapter I highlight principles of social and relational constructionism (Gergen, 1985, 1994, 2009a, 2009b, 2013; McNamee 1988, 1989, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014; McNamee and Hosking, 2012). Individualist ideas of knowing and certainty are critiqued as I position myself in a curious and self-reflexive stance of un-learning, un-knowing, un-certainty, and a not taken-for-granted stance of expert. The role of language in collaborative meaning making and the resultant co-creation of possibilities are discussed. Relational dialogical discourse is emphasized because I work from a social constructionist way of thinking and a relational way of continuing the conversation. The notions of relationality – relational ethics, relational response-ability, and relational respect – are explored in the context of social construction as inquiry and therapy. This speaks to what we do together and what our doing makes. Modernist thinking and traditional research is acknowledged, critiqued, and juxtaposed with the deconstruction of methodology. De-methodology, the reconstruction of relational engagement as movement away from conventional methodology is discussed in detail to illustrate the importance of practice and re-research from a collaborative stance.

Chapter Three: The Multiple Layers of Knowing and Un-knowing

The vast and diversified literature related to the central concepts that develop a deeper understanding of the three entities and the un-named transformative dynamic, as well as their significance in therapeutic space, is explored in this chapter. As a storying being and in keeping with mystory, I visit, reflect on, and speak to the literature on stories as I begin this chapter, learning from the notion of unconditional hospitality (Anderson, 2012). I speak to the cultural significance and relevance of Aboriginal oral traditions – story telling through my experiences and learning with Elders in the Secwepemc Territory. In that world, stories and art shape our experiences of being with others and ourselves and explore how we make sense of our world together, generating new meaning despite difference. Verbal and visual narratives speak to the multilogic, multivocality, and dialogical process in the co-creation of meaning making. I go on to explore art as a concept in relation to the visual narrative component of relationally engaging, a way of knowing or a manner of speaking with others. Preconceived ideas, notions of language, reconstructed realities, and meaning making are explored through examples of art. An appreciative critique of the theoretical concepts of Narrative Therapy (Epston, 1989, 1999, 2009; White, 1989/1997, 2005, 2007, 2011; White & Epston, 1990, 1992) and Art Therapy (Betensky, 1973, 1995; Kramer, 1958, 1971; Malchiodi, 2006; 2012; Naumburg, 1950, 1966) is explored in detail. I propose that both Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy, as forms of practice, represent important and creative contributions to the theorizing of therapeutic practice as relational. In addition, social constructionist thinking names no constructionist therapies, that is, as McNamee suggests, there is no social constructionist therapy (Guanaes & Rasera, 2006). Therapy is viewed as a conversational, dialogical process; therefore, I suggest that both Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy are relationally relevant to constructionist philosophy.

The chapter ends with a comprehensive analysis of literature relative to the three entities – strengths (Saleebey, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2002), resistance (Wade 1997, 2000, 2007), and hope (Weingarten, 2000, 2003, 2010). I situate human experiences and stories shared from my practice within the context of literature reviewing the three entities.

Chapter Four: Un-mapping the Intersections of Knowing and Un-knowing

In keeping with a social constructionist stance, I present narrative-based (Clandinin, 2013), arts-based (Leavy, 2009) and appreciative inquiry (McNamee, 2006; McNamee and Hosking, 2012) to further explore the de-methodological journey. Un-mapping conventional methods of past knowing affirms our lack of adherence to objective rules or procedures in the re-search design. The process of un-learning research is deconstructed. I construct a relational framework for inquiry that highlights the role of the multiple perspectives as a dialogical process in the co-construction of meaning making. The social poetics of re-search as

practice is discussed, constructing a strong appreciation of relational engagement and being-with the nine participants in this inquiry. Their multiple verbal and visual narratives are told and retold, lived and relived to relationally co-create new ideas of how we make meaning that matters. A detailed analysis of the re-search design, the selection criteria for participation in the re-search, co-construction of interview questions, audio recordings, and interview transcripts created thematic relationships in the analysis of our stories and our selected pieces of art. In the co-authorship, writing and re-writing the verbal and visual narratives, we engaged in curious conversations, striking moments, and reflective analysis as discussed throughout this chapter. I emphasize the social constructionist metaphor of 'inquiry as conversation' and the idea that knowledge and inquiry are generated out of everyday-ness or everyday practice.

Chapter Five: Strengths, Resistance, and Hope?

The thoughtful women who participated in the re-search are introduced in this chapter. It is dedicated to their courageous stories and the poignant pieces of art that they shared – the heart of this dissertation. Discussion and analysis of the verbal and visual narratives relative to the three intertwined entities of hope, strengths, and resistance and the transformative dynamic they create is considered throughout this chapter.

Chapter Six: All Together Now

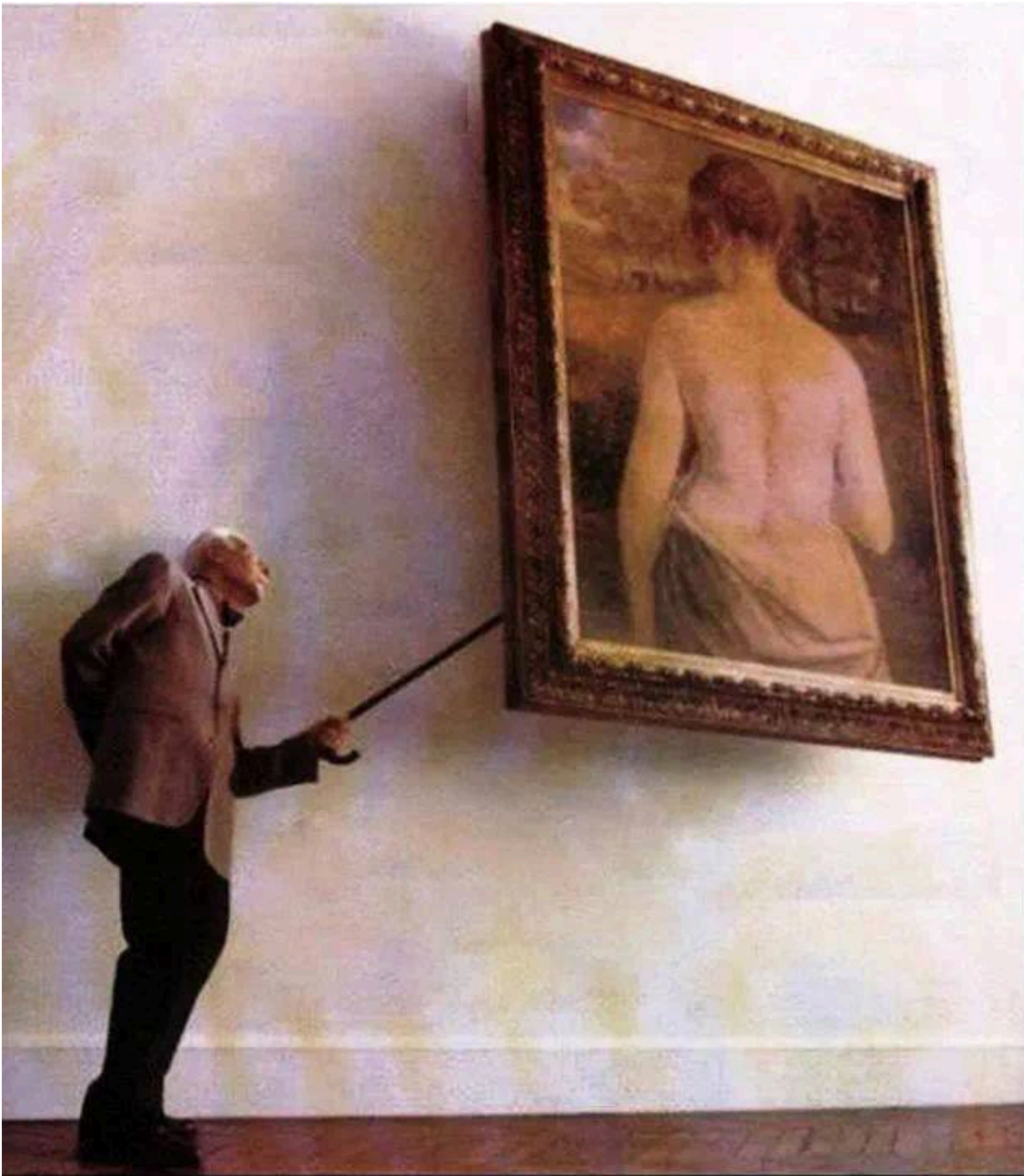
Embedded in a social constructionist approach and in keeping with our un-mapping and de-methodology, we engaged in a continued dialogical process to de-construct and re-construct the re-search. Our analysis redefined the title for this manuscript to *Intertwining Hope, Strengths, and Resistance as Transformative: Women's Verbal and Visual Narratives* from the original, but tentative, title of *Verbal and Visual Narratives: Conversations that Co-create Meaning of Strengths, Resistance, and Hope with Women in Discursive Therapeutic Spaces. What is this Intertwined, Transformative Dynamic?* We celebrated the re-visioned confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance in our stories and art and their future implications for practice. We engaged in much thought and dialogue about the un-named transformative dynamic as a thing – or not a thing. We decided it was unimportant to reify or name the dynamic, as categorizing or labeling would be incongruent with our constructionist viewpoint. Descriptive and representational views of language were challenged and de-constructed as new ideas co-emerged and new possibilities were co-created. This chapter speaks in detail to relational re-search.

Chapter Seven: What Next? A Conversational Invitation

I conclude with my final – but not finalizing – reflections on this inquiry (Frank, 2012). Power differentials, rhizomatic thought, and the multiplicity of voices related to the context of the appreciative inquiry are curiously pondered through continual conversations. Our verbal and visual narratives are further

analyzed to co-create future possibilities for practice. I discuss implications of the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and a fluid process of transformation as movement in relational re-search and relational therapeutic practice. I explore the significance in pursuing this inclusive inquiry and the implications of the findings for practice from a social constructionist lens. I invite continued dialogue for further re-search and meaningful conversations in practice.

Chapter One: Introduction



(2)

As This Chapter Begins ...

I start this dissertation from a place of curiosity and my lifelong love of verbal and visual narratives – stories and art. This rich and detailed narrative of curiosity invites the reader to wonder and to question the importance of curiosity in therapy, re-search, and everyday life. Curiosity invites relational dialogical engagement, addressivity, emergent ideas, intra-action, and future possibilities. I awaken the metaphor of the dialogical dance and speak to the meaning of dialogical engagement and conversation in the contexts of story telling, art making, therapy, and re-search as a means to foreshadow this appreciative inquiry. Here I propose that conversations about the stories we tell and the art we share are at the heart of new possibilities. From this position of social construction and relational inquiry I create a conversation of curiosity for the purpose of this journey. I ponder how the three entities of strengths, resistance, and hope relationally interact and inform our multi-storied lives to co-construct transformative possibilities in discursive therapeutic space. To set the story telling tone of this dissertation I end this chapter by sharing mystory and art. I insert myself into the text in a meaningful way to prepare myself for future conversations. My dual narrative perspectives of childhood and adulthood inform my work as a co-inquirer in the application of dialogical approaches to relational inquiry.

Curiosity?

As a young girl, I was enchanted with wonderment by stories and art, the spirit of words and images danced through my ears and eyes and into my head whether I was the creator or the witness. Just like Alice cried, when she was stretching very tall toward the ceiling before she unlocked the door with the golden key to her relationally rich adventures in Wonderland, I too have become “curiouser and curiouser” as I have grown in my multi-storied life and in my professional practice as a therapist, social worker, and social work instructor (Carroll, 2006, p. 8). I have vivid memories of childhood awe being methodically silenced and my curiosity suppressed. The old adage “curiosity killed the cat” resonates in my mind. What ever happened to that cat? I am curious.

Considering my childhood curiosity I ask myself: was my inquisitiveness as a young child potentially dangerous? Or, was my un-knowing dangerously inquisitorial? Was my curiosity a denounced “vice to which young women were especially prone” as Alice experienced on her “epistemological odyssey” through her adventures in Wonderland; a place where she experienced continual condemnation for her curiosity (Dillon, Warner & Malbert, 2013, pp. 26- 27)? I have discovered over time that the absence of curiosity cultivates narrowness, boredom, and an insincere sense of knowing. A



(3)

complacent monological,⁴ individualist approach lacks the ability to create dialogue, ideas, meaning, and possibilities (Bakhtin, 1984; McNamee, 2013; Shotter, 2011; Shotter, 2012). This is not a curious place to be. How does one enrich the act of un-knowing to embrace curiosity? Were my childhood queries as an interested young girl misunderstood and misplaced given the historical, cultural, and gender constructs in the 1960's? Or was my relentless curiosity a need to feed my desire for knowledge, instinctively fueled by the concept of my inspiration to create relational richness (Berlyne, 1950; Berlyne, 1954)?

Curiosity keeps us walking to the next corner, over the next hill, around the next bend, just to see what is there to appreciate and enjoy (J. Birkbeck, personal communication, February 2014). Curiosity formulates excitement and exhilaration. Silva (2014) parallels curiosity to “cognitive ecstasy... an exhilarating neurostorm” that awakes us all (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOVmVMJEhg8>). Curiosity kindles questions. Our curious questions evoke dialogues that engender new ideas and collective action. My curiosity is intra-active,⁵ intra-acted through addressivity in conversations with others whom I encounter in my life experience and in my practice (Shotter, 2011). To expand on the notions of intra-active and intra-acted opposed to interactions and interacted, Barad (2003) explains the relational significance:

The notion of *intra-action* (in contrast to the usual ‘interactions’, which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful. (p. 815)

As noted in Sampson (2008), “conversations involve addressivity: they are addressed by a particular person to another particular person in a specific situation” (p. 97). Addressivity is intra-acting with another person or other people in such a way that the other’s presence is considered in the shaping of one’s actions (S. McNamee, personal communication, August 2014). Our conversations are “*something we do* ... in order to accomplish social actions” (Edwards, 1991, p. 517). Conversations “implicate addressivity – they are addressed by someone to (an)other(s) and they are what humans do i.e., conversation is action (rather than about action)” (Hosking, 2011, p. 56). Addressivity is an integral part of our relational dialogues. Experientially, the act of addressivity in conversations with

⁴ Bakhtin (1984) defines monological as a way of relating to those around us. He further states: “Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness ... Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality.” (pp. 292–293)

⁵ Intra will be used when appropriate to contrast inter from this point on.

others can lead to a co-created language of ideas, change, action, and at times identity reconstruction, whether this is private change within the self or communal change.

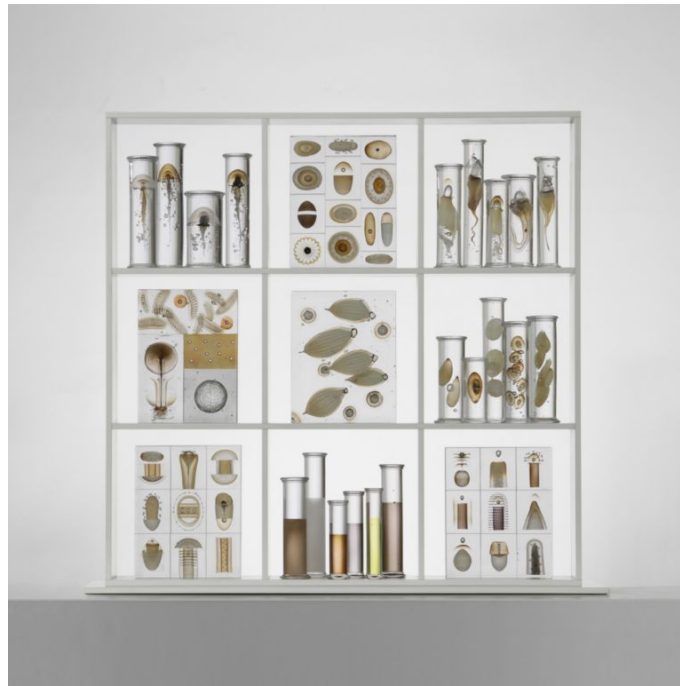
I have grown to know as de Botton and Armstrong (2013) surmise, “Curiosity takes ignorance seriously, and is confident enough to admit when it does not know. It is aware of not knowing, and it sets out to do something about it” (p. 112). As a therapist, my not knowing makes curiosity a courageous and beautiful dance partner for both verbal and visual narratives performed in therapeutic discourse, in therapeutic space. Curiosity is humble yet resilient. Curiosity embodies collaborative, appreciative dialogue and inquiry that informs addressivity and generates possibilities in my life and in my practice (McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Sampson, 2008). Foucault (1996) connects curiosity with power:

Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatized in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science. Curiosity, futility. The word, however pleases me. To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes “concern”; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist: a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential.

I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means for it; the desire is there; the things to be known are infinite; the people who can employ themselves at this task exist. Why do we suffer? From too little: from channels that are too narrow, skimpy, quasi-monopolistic, insufficient. There is no point in adopting a protectionist attitude, to prevent “bad” information from invading and suffocating the “good.” Rather, we must multiply the paths and the possibilities of coming and goings. (p. 305)

The process of inquiry and questions inescapably leads to active change. Curiosity must also be relationally interactive, as suggested by the intersectionality of Foucault’s concepts of power and control that connect resources and credibility to curiosity’s courage and strength. This constitutes a menace to dominant bodies, like Christianity, government bodies or Alice’s adventures, because curiosity has the ability to voice inquiry and engage in resourceful and daring dialogues. Inquiry in any form leads to action and active resistance as Foucault indicates, and this at times creates threat to controlling bodies. As an outsider, the other in a minority group, Foucault’s curious relational concepts provoked change and possibilities in the world for many people. The idea of curiosity and “breaking up our familiarities” was obviously exciting to Foucault and is inspiring for me (Foucault 1996, p. 305). His “dream of a new age of curiosity” and his ideas that we “multiply the paths and the possibilities” heightens my hope and creates an adventure in curiosity, in not knowing, and in

newness of my use of appreciative inquiry (Foucault 1996, p. 305; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). In my new age of curiosity I was inspired and excited about this path that began as ideas, questions, and yet to be formed co-constructed meanings. Curiosity nurtures questions and inquiry that induce critical thought and dialogical relations, co-creating ideas, action, change, and possibilities for us all who live outside the boundaries of the ascribed normal, suggesting that, despite difference we can co-construct our world together.



(4)

In Dam's (2011) panel above, *Cabinet of Curiosities*, he awakens my curiosity with his intriguingly constructed glass creations, his "social poetics" that dissect and deconstruct our socially constructed realities of science in order for me, the viewer, to relationally discover and appreciate what is inside (McNamee, 2000). Dam's (2011) art depicts fictional and non-scientifically accurate creations that are representational of organic shapes and forms, textures of nature, and underwater life forms in the real world we claim to know. One's eyes are drawn to these glass cylinders and containers of colour, light, and organic shapes while one's mind is blinded into believing a taken-for-granted reality. Or, is this piece of art about engaging one's eyes and stimulating one's imagination and curiosity? Paradoxically, if this is the artist's or viewer's intention, then this piece of art is not about the preconceived analytical notions of specimens, shapes or forms of nature and life; it is about seeing and processing emergent possibilities of poetic visual shapes and forms that create new and entirely different meaning. Dam (2011) creates space for me to be curious and relationally engage, explore and challenge my concepts of reality, and to see what is really not real and what is really not logical (McNamee, 2000). Strandbygaard Bitner (2011) shares:

This installation is both absurd and deeply fascinating: a fictitious measuring instrument measures the pressure in a fictitious object – and still we attempt to determine the identity of the object we see through the glass, what the instrument is measuring, and how. The cylinder draws attention to the never-ending need for humans to categorize the world, and at the same time, it states the impossibility of this project, as what is measurable is only a tiny part of the truth about the world, the complexity of which we will never fully grasp. (p. 1)

In my therapeutic space, I have learned that curiosity fosters a relational sense-ability and human intra-action which co-creates respectful counter stories of reflection, reflexivity, remembering, reclamation, transformation, ideas, actions, and possibilities despite human diversity (Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1970; Madigan, 2011; McNamee, 2013; White, 2007). This creates a strong sense of curiosity, awareness, new understanding, new ideas, new knowledge, and new action that builds a re-search community. The qualitative re-search used in this dissertation relies on curious questions, unique conversations with co-inquirers, thought-provoking stories and art that re-story and re-create new possibilities and opportunities for life and practice.

As the reader may see, the spirit of this work is curiosity. The inspiration un-knowingly began many years ago, re-membered by my childhood creative and relational curiosity, the imperative to ask questions, create stories, and make art. Narrative and art practices have informed my therapeutic work with people for many years. The focus of my dissertation is collaborative curiosity with the use of appreciative, narrative and arts-based inquiry⁶ and pure love of verbal and visual narratives that have inspired and nurtured reflection and remembering for those with whom I walk.

Our appreciative relational engagement of multi-verbal and visual narratives will pace the tempo of our dialogical dance as a means for us, the co-inquirers, to collaboratively explore the importance of how the entities of strengths, resistance, and hope relationally interact and inform our multi-storied lives to co-construct transformative⁷ possibilities. My therapeutic orientation imagined more meaningful connections with people. I was curious if, in the context of my practice, I invited a person's strengths, resistance, and hope into

⁶ Appreciative inquiry is a relational approach to re-search and therapy as conversation while narrative-based and arts-based inquiry is a means of understanding re-search that invites me to connect to my story telling/artist identity and encourages verbal and visual conversational engagement with the co-inquirers. Chapter Four offers in-depth discussions of appreciative, narrative-based, and arts-based inquiry.

⁷ Transformative is a means of transformation – change. White (2011) suggests that transformative possibilities create life-shaping effects such as new knowledge, new identity conclusions, and new future possibilities through which people become other than who they were at the outset. He explains that transformative possibilities can be thought of as “transporting” (p. 6).

our conversation, might we relationally co-construct new and meaningful possibilities for transformation in her life.

My re-search began with three questions: If these three entities of strengths, resistance, and hope inform one another and are intertwined, then what shall we call the transformative dynamic they make? How does this unnamed dynamic inform and re-story the assumptions of dominant therapeutic practices for myself and other practitioners? Is there a transformative dynamic that creates possibilities? Here began our conversations of curiosity; our verbal and visual narratives, con-jointly co-creating our meanings of strengths, resistance, hope, and transformation as women in discursive therapeutic space.

Awakening the Relational Dialogical Dance



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Just as the body is formed initially in the mother's womb (body), a person's consciousness awakens wrapped in another's consciousness. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.138)

Virtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationship. From this standpoint there is no isolated self or fully private experience. Rather we exist in a world of co-constitution. We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship; even in our most private moments we are not alone. (Gergen, 2009b, xv)

How do our verbal and visual narratives begin? How do we invite this relational dialogical dance? Do our stories, art, and intra-actions construct our worlds together? It is my experience that locating two or more people together creates a relational process, through our relational connections we create stories, both verbally and visually and, resultantly co-construct and co-perform diversity of meaning, thereby co-creating space for possibilities (McNamee, 2013). A dialogue is a very *special* kind of conversation, a relational activity between two or more persons; this collaborative dance begins with mutual not knowing and waltzes with loveliness to improve understanding of the stories of others and ourselves in new ways despite difference (Anderson, 2003; Hosking, 2011; S. McNamee, Personal communication, January 20, 2014). Hosking (2011) elaborates:

Dialogue as a special kind of conversation goes on in slow, open and curious ways of relating characterized by: (a) a very special sort of listening, questioning, and being present; (b) willingness to suspend one's assumptions and certainties; and (c) reflexive attention to the ongoing process and one's own part in it. (p. 61)

Stewart and Zediker (2000) share, through the work of Bohm (1996), that the word dialogue is born from the "Greek term *dio-logos*, or 'meaning-through,' it labels a process of collaborative meaning-making in verbal-non-verbal talk" (pp. 227-228). This suggests there is a relational dialogical paradigm with human beings, conversations, and meaning making. Sampson (2008) says:

We learn that social reality itself is constituted on the basis of dialogical processes. The conversations people carry on together do not simply express the underlying fabric of their social world, but are the very processes by which that fabric is created and sustained or transformed. (p. 99)

Dialogical practice deconstructs the insular and the separateness. Dialogues reflect relationality and emphasize that the dialogical process of practice opens up space for self and others to co-emerge and co-create possibilities (Hosking, 2011; McNamee, 2013; Sampson, 2008). Anderson (2003) reveals:

For me, dialogue refers to a form of conversation: talking or conversing with one's self or another toward a search for meaning and understanding. In and through this dialogic search meanings and understandings are

continually interpreted, reinterpreted, clarified, and revised. Newness in meaning and understanding emerges, and thus, possibilities are generated for thought, feeling, emotion, action, and so forth. In other words, transformation is inherent in dialogue. True dialogue cannot be other than generative. (p. 2)

As long as I can remember, I have held an affinitive and curious appreciation for verbal and visual narratives and meaning making – the discourse of verbal and visual language, the endless hearing and telling of stories and the seeing and making of art are celebrated enlightening passions both in my personal and professional locations. Sampson (2008) discusses that our conversations “encompass verbal, nonverbal, symbolic and written material” (p. 97). As a little I girl, I have fond memories and wonderment of relationally situating my self with others and hearing, telling, co-constructing, co-creating, and co-performing meaning both verbally and visually. Anderson (2013) suggests that collaborative dialogue is a “stance in which ‘with’ is a basic characteristic: talking with, thinking with, acting with and responding with. This stance, or the features of dialogue, can be expressed in many ways” (p. 2). I have since discovered that the language of story telling and art making are a healing and life enhancing kaleidoscope of dialogical transformation and action, creating rich expressive, collaborative, and relational meaning in my practice with others as a therapist, social worker, and social work instructor. My re-search will better inform my understanding of relational meaning making and the possibilities for transformation in these three professional spheres of my life.

This concept of story telling and art making as healing may be inauspiciously viewed as a less than scientifically valid method from a modernist discourse (McNiff, 2004, p. 3). In point of fact, I have colleagues who propose that when research does not follow a scientific method it is invalid and worth less. They further suggest the nature of scientific truth is objective and data driven. Gergen (2015) refers to this traditional researcher’s gaze as a “gaze that simultaneously constrains the imagination and numbs the sensitivity to consequences... And thus the gaze solidifies its objects” (pp. 292-293). Re-search as creative construction is future forming, reminding us to replace “the persistent rush to establish ‘what is’ and ask ourselves ‘what could be’” (Gergen, 2015. p. 294)? A relational constructionist approach curiously and appreciatively challenges and co-constructs an alternative response that embodies the understanding that both verbal and visual narratives co-create and re-create voice, meaning, action, generate possibilities and are, grounded in our relationships (Gergen, 2009a, Gergen & Gergen, 2004, McNamee, 2009; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; McNamee, 2013; White 2007). When we engage in relational or collaborative dialogue in the discourse of stories and in the fascination of art as a way of being human with others on the journey, we celebrate one another while also proclaiming new knowledge and co-authoring, co-creating, and co-constructing meaning and possibilities together (Anderson, 2013; Bakhtin, 1986; Sampson, 2008).

It has become apparent to me that I have un-knowingly performed this relational dance of engagement for many years; this unwitting yet intrinsic con-

joint performance co-creates a curious analysis of language, meaning, and transformation with those I walk beside in my practice. Gergen (2011) refers to this as “relational performance that is the actions with or for others” (p. 73). He thinks of this as a dance with the coordinated movements of both partners with “no solo movements” (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 41). This dance, the way we dialogically perform together and how we make meaning together in the discursive and safe space of therapeutic practice, is what I know now as the theoretical approach of relational constructionism and relational re-search⁸ (McNamee, 2000; McNamee, 2009; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; McNamee 2013). McNamee (2013) advocates that:

To engage in dialogue is not to impose our professional knowledge on others. Dialogue requires that we extend our curiosity about the profuse and diverse realities that emerge when people come together and coordinate their activities. We must extend that curiosity to those with whom we work, opening possibilities to explore alternative understandings of a person’s life situation. (p.5)

For many years, I have been privileged to co-perform and dialogically dance with un-certainty in both stories and art with multiple conversational partners, co-creating endless curiosity, jointly examining the language of thought, sharing in appreciative relational inquiry, working together in new meaning making, and in generative con-joint action and possibility (Anderson, 2003; Anderson, 2013, McNamee, 2000; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). These many dialogic dances invite co-created, rich understanding and meaning for both my dance partner/s and myself as we explore and re-story our strengths, our resistance, and our hope so we might better appreciate and share this interwoven, transformative dynamic in therapeutic space.

The Purpose of This Journey

Over the past five years I developed a keen adoration for shoes and boots. Modernist teachings and reality informs me that shoes and boots are simply shoes and boots that are worn on our feet. However, if I choose to be intentionally curious and deconstruct this perceived idea, to question my constructed reality that shoes and boots are to be worn on our feet, I begin to wonder if such shoes and boots can be more than I believed. My “generative curiosity” explores and creates un-certainty about my own



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⁸ Relational constructionism and relational re-search are foundational to Chapter Two.

long held, taken-for-granted truths and “certainties” about shoes and boots, thereby opening space for a “different story” and new meaning for me (McNamee, 2009, p.63). I reflect on Dorothy’s silver shoes in Lyman Frank Baum’s (1900) novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* or Judy Garland’s ruby slippers in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, the first movie I ever saw and a childhood favorite. Did Dorothy’s shoes make a significant difference in her inquisitive and relational inquiry, taking her somewhere over the rainbow, creating possibilities for her to get where she needed to be? It appears that the adventurous footsteps made in her ruby slippers created an imaginative process while she followed that yellow brick road. Her journey invited meaningful relationships and engagements that unfolded transformation, possibilities, and hope for her and all she encountered. As the ruby slippers metaphorically walked Dorothy to where she needed to be, my eclectic shoes and boots take me to meaningful places of relational engagement, and allow me to listen, hear, and see when walking with others on a myriad of diverse paths. I hope my shoes and boots continue to carry me through an imaginative process on a curious, un-knowing, and respectful path that does not step on the shoes of those I walk beside.

In journeying down this path, I invite the reader to co-navigate with me the multiple ways of knowing that emerge through a dialogical process to co-create critical awareness of the three entities and the un-named transformative dynamic in therapeutic space. To highlight the important steps on this journey, we will travel through social construction and de-methodology in Chapter Two, a comprehensive literature review in Chapter Three, then traverse appreciative inquiry, narrative-based, and arts-based theoretical and practical applications to re-search and the co-constructed research design in Chapter Four. These four chapters set the stage to walk through the co-inquirers’ stories and art in Chapter Five. Chapter Six brings all co-inquirers along on our metaphorical journey, to critically analyze the meaning we made together about the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the fluid transformative dynamic process. And we listen in as conversations are shared in Chapter Seven about the implications for re-search and future therapeutic practice.

Just as the ruby slippers took Dorothy back to Kansas, so has my academic journey co-created and co-performed a meaningful and inquisitive pathway home, to a place of curious addressivity in relational practice. My learning has ebbed from a modernist framework, flowed into a post-modernist paradigm, and is now curiously pursuing a social constructionist path with a rainbow of possibilities. Post-modernism and social constructionist paradigms intensified my understanding in my therapeutic practice through Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990) with the use of Art Therapy (Case & Dalley, 1992) or art as a therapeutic modality. My focus on these two modalities of verbal and visual story telling is linked to childhood remembering and continues to capture my un-knowing on my academic and professional journey, creating an imaginative process of “dialogical possibility” (McNamee, 2009, p. 12). As a narrative practitioner, I am focused on relational co-creation through narrative therapy and art therapy, and social construction facilitates a means for me to be curious, open, and make new meaning through relationships

My heightened awareness and application of social construction gives me insight into Gergen's (2009) assertion that "what we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part" (p. 2). This rich and inspiring relational dance of engagement and appreciative inquiry draws me to deconstruct and re-story my knowing of what I was conditioned to believe through the construction of social work education about the individual yet possibly intertwined entities called strengths (Saleebey, 2002), resistance (Wade, 1997), and hope (Weingarten, 2000). In the discourse of therapeutic space, as I endeavor to better understand how these three concepts interact and interconnect to re-story and co-create new ideas, meaning, transformation, and possibilities. I find I understand more about strengths than about resistance, and have ignored hope until recently inspired by social construction and appreciative inquiry.

For many years, the multiple verbal and visual stories I was invited to co-create and co-perform with others have generated a deeper relational understanding and a stronger curiosity that these three unique concepts or perspectives may not be distinctive, but rather relational in our dialogical and transformative process and practice. A brave little girl once shared both verbally and visually with her words and her images how she always closed her eyes when being sexually abused. In our dialogical dance of relational engagement she shared both verbally and visually, "because he told to me to look him in his eyes." In that moment she re-storied her strength of bravery, closing her eyes to take back her power and control while simultaneously co-creating hope for her life, not seeing his dark, black eyes while he was violently hurting her.

This courageously strong, boldly resistant, and inspirationally hopeful little warrior's verbal and visual narratives exemplify the meaning of the relationality of these three entities. The position of relational inquiry enlightens how these three non-discrete entities inform one another as a transformative dynamic and ground this manuscript in curiosity and appreciative inquiry relative to social constructionism and dialogical therapeutic practice. The re-search endeavors to privilege the co-inquirer's voices in a way that invites therapists to utilize ideas of strengths, resistance, hope, and transformation in future therapeutic conversations.

In mystory I see myself as a little girl, courageously overcoming multiple fears of darkness, drowning, death, and the behemoth, prehistoric creatures that eat children.

Once Upon a Time... A Long, Long Time Ago... Mystory

The narrative may incorporate articulate language, spoken or written; pictures, still or moving; gestures and the ordered arrangement of all the ingredients: it is present in myth, legend, fable, short story, epic, history, tragedy, comedy, pantomime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comic strips, journalism, conversation. The narratives of the world are without numbers.... In addition, under this almost infinite number of forms, the narrative

is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind; there does not exist, and never has existed, a people without narratives.
(Barthes, 1966, p.14)

I offer mystory, my verbal and visual narrative as a co-inquirer's voice in this re-search. Butler-Kisber (2010) describes the significance of reflexivity for the re-researcher, as it is essential that I the author/inquirer must:

Examine carefully what she brings to and contributes to the process... narrative inquirers do not shy away from tension that occur in their work. Instead they always honor the personal and local and participate in the continuous stream of experience... for co-constructing understanding.
(p. 66)

Leaning-in, being-with, relationally living alongside the other co-inquirers and equally being-in the re-search challenges me (Anderson, 1977; Clandinin, 2013; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Reynolds, 2013). Maggisano (2008) shares "What narrative had taught me was that if I, as a (practitioner, educator and researcher), could not come to terms with my own story, how could I come to terms with others' stories?" (p. 6). Submitting mystory forced me to look risk in the eye, to crumble certainty and invent un-certainty, and to fully engage in a relational dialogical journey along side the other eight women in this re-search project. If I was asking them to share their verbal and visual narratives then I should share my own.



(7)

Once upon a time... I always remember, as I meticulously clear the weeds and other debris by the dock and on the beach. I am in continual awe as I reflect on the cool, lyrical blue that surrounds me. My children, both grown now, still

spend as much time at the lake as they did when they were my little water babies. I still perform this daily ritual: the removal of all the childhood ooggies, slimy weeds, gross decomposing leaves, sticks, a rare leach or two, and smelly dead fish. I do this so that my adult children can swim free, as they always have. Lake monsters that once haunted this very water have been banished for many years now. My daughters frolic and float fearless and free in the tranquil peace and ferocious power of the waves.

They live way down there, in murky lairs about a hundred or sometimes a million feet down. You can't see what their lairs look like, because it is too pitch black down there – and people can't see that far anyways. I don't think the new kid renting Lalonde's cottage really understands how deep my lake is – or does he even know that I am an expert on lakes? He's younger than me; that's why he doesn't understand – plus he's never been to my lake before. With my bare toes resolutely grounded, deep-rooted in my sandy safe beach, I point out what lurks beneath, on the muddy bottomless lake, long rotting, slimy dull brown. They rule my lake. They eat children, too.

My mother shrieks wildly from the screen window of my cottage above, "Don't go near the water until your father comes down!" My father is sleeping; he sleeps forever at my lake. My mother hates my lake – she hates all lakes. I think she hates everything. What she doesn't know is that I wouldn't dream of going near the cold, black, bottomless water. I saw one you know. Yesterday, right over there, near the prickly bushes, by the jagged rocks, just to that side of the dock, the side where my dad keeps the big metal container of salt to sprinkle on those huge disgusting leeches that sometimes stick to my arms and legs. I hate leeches. They suck your blood.

The old wrinkly gray haired man who runs the store calls them behemoths, prehistoric sea creatures. I know that means they're real live monsters. I just finished learning about dinosaurs in grade one and I learned about other really bad creatures that were prehistoric too. My teacher said I was the smartest in my class. They call the creatures 'very ancient' – this just means they are really old.

The old man at the store told my dad, "They eat small animals and children." "They do not!" said the little kid with big bulging fish eyes. "They do too," I said in my most bossy way: I was an expert on these lake monsters who lurk deep, down at the bottom of my lake.

A couple of days later, I went to the old store with the wooden Indian chief on the porch. He is magnificent, with his exotic headdress full of feathers painted hundreds of colours. I sit cross-legged and gaze at the Indian chief. At my lake, all the kids play cowboys and Indians; no one every wants to be the Indian except me. I love being the Indian. I get to run barefoot. Indians don't wear real clothes like other kids. So, I sometimes just wear my purple bathing suit bottoms. I paint my body, too. Well, I don't really paint my body; I use my mom's lipstick and make bright red and pink designs on my face, stomach, arms, and legs. I do different designs depending on whether I am a princess or a warrior. I'm not old enough to be a chief yet. The cowboys on TV always kill the Indians; these cowboys never get me. I am such a fast runner.

To be fast and free is amazing, to be faster than most is even more amazing. To swim powerfully and to be one with the water is pure enlightenment. To adorn one's body with permanent paint must be of strong personal significance. For many years I have considered a tattoo, the artwork an ancient pictograph or anthropomorphic image of a water person.

I was sucking my rainbow-flavored jawbreaker when suddenly in the dead quiet I heard an earsplitting bang. The thunderous sound echoed and danced over and over again. I nearly jumped out of my skin and spat my jawbreaker on the filthy, dirty porch floor. I didn't spit it out on purpose. I wasn't scared or anything; it just happened. I ran off the porch to the bushes beside the store and squatted out of sight, leaving my poor half-finished jawbreaker rolling in the dirt.

I could barely see the old man, but I could hear every word he said. He was talking to my dad. The sound of the shotgun must have awakened my dad. As I told you before, all my dad does is sleep at my lake. "I just shot another beast," the man barked. "This ferocious brute is big enough to swallow a child whole and eat all the bloody fish in the lake," he yelled. I knew that these monsters love to kill children; kids are their favorite food.

This one was enormous. I could see only parts of it because the man from the store and my dad were in the way. It was about forty feet long and maybe thirty feet wide, with tons of flippers about twenty feet long. There was blood gushing everywhere, covering my dad's white sneakers and the old man's rubber boots.

The one I saw yesterday was much uglier and meaner. Now that I really think about it, it was way bigger too. It weighed about two thousand pounds. It was part prehistoric dragon and part ancient lizard. Its head was humongous, with razor sharp brownish yellowish stained teeth and tiny squinting greeny yellowish nasty eyes. It didn't have eyelids – most monsters don't. Its snout-like nose was dripping warm, slimy, stinky goo. Its face was scary looking with boney knobs and wrinkly, not wrinkly like the skin on my great grandma's face, but hard wrinkly. Its jaws were like the old, rusted bear trap my grandpa hung above the fireplace in my cottage – strong, ready to crush a kid. I avoid the black, bottomless water of my lake, as one never knows what the murmur of the waves might mean.

I listened in awe to my father's intellectual banter and attempt to explain the creatures that lurked in my lake. His words, as usual, were flowing swiftly and eloquently, making no sense to me at all. I remember I sat cross-legged on the cottage porch and nodded knowingly to every lengthy, inexplicable word he uttered. His articulate and detailed description of the mammoth beast was indeed scholarly. Without explaining a single word he rattled on, fact after fact. "they have leathery hard sheaths, encasing strong, bony vertebrate and internal organs. They are omnivorous and extremely ravenous. These creatures are top predators in many aquatic systems. The females of the species lay up to eighty-three eggs." I could barely count to eighty-three let alone keep up with his sea of words. He concluded his dissertation with the only two details that I really and truly understood: "They like to float lazily in shallow water and bask, and they

never stop growing!" I still feel the cold, harsh terror instilled by his last four words.

My dad arrived at the dock, his arms overflowing; my little sister sprawled in the middle of a heap of brightly striped towels and smelly orange life vests. I hate those life vests – they stretch your neck and strangle you. He put the load down and shouted, "Everyone in the water!" My mouth went instantaneously dry like the desert; a huge lump grew in the back of my throat, and what little hair I had on my skinny body stood upright, dead straight. I froze. He picked me up, slowly walked to the end of the dock and threw me to the beasts that lurk in the briny, bottomless deep.

Water symbolizes the strength of weakness and the power of adaptation and persistence in its capacity to flow and fill the given space. It represents unity and fluidity of life as opposed to the separateness and rigidity of death. Water has many powers. It can be still and turbulent, warm or cold. It is wet and forever moving; in its continual motion it reflects the world in diverse ways. Water has the ability to heal and restore life, to purify, and to devastate. Water is a common substance that is most uncommon; it is mysteriously unique, a simple transparent fluid that is more complex than many of us care to acknowledge or respect.

I sunk like a great big rock, faster and faster, thousands, maybe millions of feet down, panicking every deep, dark, black inch of the way. My eyes wide open, searching for monsters, water filling my throat, choking me. My fear of being eaten alive by these lake creatures or dragged to their muddy lairs was much worse than the nightmares I had of those awful, hideous monkeys and that wicked witch in The Wizard of Oz. They eat children. I was now kicking, kicking like a maniac, entangled in the slimy, slippery weeds that shield the monster lairs. "They eat children, they eat children, they eat children," relentlessly shrieked thought my head. Kicking, kicking, kicking away from their deep dark lairs. My lungs ready to explode, choking, sputtering, faster, faster.

Water flows through me as I flow through it; it is a necessity, an essential element of my soul and my entire being. This treasured liquid is vital to my absolute existence; it is a calming and powerful stimulus for my passions, strengths, desires, and dreams. It has created both joy and sadness in my life. My respect and adoration for this colourless, odorless, and tasteless fluid that flows through me and surrounds me is constant. As I grew older I dreamed I was a fish – not a mermaid – a fish with a long, opalescent, translucent tail. Fluttering, floating, without air, aimless, no needs. Oh to dance underwater...

They were just below me, floating slowly, waiting, ready to lock their steel jaws about my flailing, quivering body. Snap. They want to eat me. My head spinning, frantically twisting so fast with such pure throbbing terror, I hurt. Then out of nowhere I am struck with the realization that I am swimming, not drowning; not dying, but swimming. Suddenly I was as fast and furious as a shark or a barracuda. Swimming upward to the safety of my shore, where only moments before I was a barefoot, scantily clad Indian, I was now swifter, faster, and mightier than all who sought me. I could swim, fast and unharmed, I was liberated from my lake demons, monsters that haunted and terrorized my thoughts for those few memorable summer days. In the black abyss of the monsters water I

was now free. The behemoth, prehistoric creatures still rule and lurk in the pitch-black deep of my lake: and it is said by some that they still eat children.

Suspended I still dance under water, for I am a water person. I have always been a water person. Primitive and simple, resistant, surrounded by beautiful fish, behemoth prehistoric creatures – snapping turtles that bite off tiny toes – slimy weeds, mermaids, stories, and art. I swim daily in the bottomless cobalt blue lake, still fast, still deep, still like a shooting star falling from far above, still free to dream. My thirst for water is infinite, pure, and simple. I am a person of the water.

Reading Mystory...

Coming to terms with mystory from a personal perspective I also consider what it means to me as a professional. From my re-search, my therapeutic practice orientation, and my meetings with colleagues and students, I am continually aware of how each person has multiple stories. In both my personal and professional experiences, stories generate conversations and the opportunity to co-create meaning with others. Curiously deconstructing and reconstructing our stories together may lead to “a difference that makes a difference” (Bateson, 1972, p. 381) in our lives. When we attempt to make a difference, we may re-author a problem-saturated story to a preferred story; this is the transformative change that my relational re-search seeks to illuminate through our co-inquiry of strengths, resistance, and hope. Mystory makes a difference in my preferred adult story with the conceptualization of fluidity. Like water, life may offer a generative flow of possibilities for transformation.

We are multistoried beings. Mystory illustrates this from both a childhood memory and an adult perspective; it echoes the ideas of strengths, resistance, hope, and the possibility of fluid transformation. Through my re-search, beginning with mystory and the stories of others, I learn about and appreciate the importance of being-with others in the process of relational dialogical engagement with the three entities. Together we may co-create new opportunities for transformation in discursive therapeutic space.

As This Chapter Ends ...

The narrative of curiosity weaves through this chapter. The three entities of strengths, resistance, and hope are introduced along with curiosity about the unnamed transformative dynamic in discursive therapeutic space. I speak briefly to the central ideas of verbal and visual narratives, relational discourse, dialogical practice, transformation, social construction, and appreciative inquiry utilized in this re-search. Stories infuse this chapter with the likes of Alice’s curiosity, Dorothy’s journey to Oz, and my snapping turtle. These childhood stories emphasize the importance of our connections to verbal and visual narratives throughout our lives. Stories and art inspire the relational dialogical dance that can create conversational possibilities using a social constructionist lens.

The next chapter provides a discussion and literature review that draws from social construction, relational concepts, and the *nouveau* notion of de-

methodology. These are approaches that further develop my framework for this re-search, a means to inform the reader of the epistemology, ontology, and methodology relative to this relational inquiry.

Chapter Two: Social Construction and De-methodology

As This Chapter Begins ...

Building on the spirit of curiosity and the metaphor of the dialogical dance, I further develop a framework for inquiry based on relational constructionist approaches. This chapter provides an introduction to social construction, and the concept of de-methodology created for this re-search. I journey from my past learning and knowing of the self as separate, individual or “I” to a relational orientation of “we” because a constructionist views meaning as an offshoot of relations. Therapy and re-search as social construction is a way of being with others, it can strengthen our relations with others, thicken our understanding of the effect of the language practices we use, and build conversational possibilities to construct a better world. The appreciation for and use of the relational dialogical process in therapy and re-search is connected to relational practice. A historical and reflective critique of individualist thinking about knowledge and other traditional theoretical discourses is offered to contrast constructionist epistemology, ontology, and de-methodology as a relational discourse with multiple assumptions of the world. The notions of knowing, certainty, and taken-for-granted viewpoints are briefly introduced and critiqued. I embrace my desire to un-learn traditional methodological, ontological, and epistemological approaches, and their ethical assumptions, in order to relearn and to be comfortable with un-knowing and un-certainty throughout this re-search journey. Relationality – relational ethics, relational response-ability, and relational respect – are explored in the context of social construction as inquiry and therapy.

De-methodology created an alternative methodological landscape for the co-construction of this relational inquiry. As a result, we were able throughout this re-search project to un-map emergent ideas about the relational interconnection of strengths, resistance, and hope, and how these entities inform possibilities for personal transformation in therapy. The use of a de-methodological method created a movement away from conventional research and accentuated a constructionist view of relational inquiry as social transformation through dialogical engagement. The de-methodological approach illustrates the process to dialogically engage in relational inquiry. We were able to explore more generative ways of creating practice possibilities in therapeutic space. The notion of this de-methodological movement flows throughout the entire manuscript as a means to explore the implications and practical applications of working within a relational orientation. It demonstrates how social construction invites a useful alternative, a being-with others in poetic art of therapy.

An Inquisitive Journey: Social Construction



(8)

I'm not different crazy my reality is just a little different from yours - Alice in Wonderland. (Sign at Gotham West Market, New York City, 2014)

That rapturing accepted standards – of permitted knowledge, tasteful spectacle, known experiences – motivates the curious mind and the artist – quester. The thirst for information, the desire to penetrate cordoned-off areas of study, the insistence on personal witness throughout early modern culture signals ambition of enlightened minds to escape public categories or established truths. Curiosity is the ambition to go beyond. (Benedict, 2002, p. 254)

Far from despair, the idea that each of us recreates reality with each encounter fills me with wondrous hope, empowerment and community connection....if we accept that when we enter into dialogue we both change; if it is true that we co-create reality, which in turn creates us – then we are called to a new community. If I can make culture I must act responsibly. (O'Hara, 1995, p.155)

What does it mean to talk about therapy as social construction? (McNamee, 2004, p. 254)

Curiously and Relationally Co-performing Therapy as Social Construction

My embodiment of a social constructionist framework is metaphorically and curiously summed up by the cool, grinning Cheshire Cat and his relational interactions and inquisitive conversations with Alice. As an outsider witness and authentic listener he appears and disappears throughout Alice's journey in Wonderland, continually pointing out that his reality and understanding of the world is just a little different from her reality. The notion of the difference that makes a difference invites multiplicity and dialogue, as the Cheshire Cat's uncertainty and un-knowing generates curious questions for Alice, bridging incommensurate discourses of madness and diverse realities (Bateson, 1972; Gergen, 2009b; McNamee, 2004; McNamee 2009). Together the Cheshire Cat and Alice bring their respective preconceived notions and cultural understandings to their dialogue, shaping a deeper connection, being-with each other in their adventures in Wonderland. McNamee (1989) shares:

A stance of curiosity encourages an observer to be less willing to accept information as an immutable exemplar of a person's belief system and instead encourages an observer to ask questions.... Curiosity underscores an emphasis on questions as opposed to answers, reminding us to question our own premises as researchers. (p. 98)

The Cheshire Cat's different way of being reminds me to curiously and relationally engage in un-certainty with those I walk beside in con-joint therapeutic space. "Viewing therapy as social construction opens the therapeutic conversations to a broader range of issues" (McNamee, 2009, pp. 59-60).

Gergen (1985b) suggests social construction is "... principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (p. 267). Social construction views meaning making as socially embedded and embraces the role that language plays in our relational construction of meaning and possibilities. Gergen (2009b) further suggests that through the looking glass of social constructionism human beings are relational beings and therefore meaning making is a relational and dialogical process. Social construction as therapy questions what we can create and accomplish together through the dance of relational dialogues (McNamee, 2009; Gergen 2009b; Gergen & Gergen, 2004). This is the co-performance of relational engagement, attuned together as partners in conversation to co-create meaning, transformation, and possibilities. Gergen (2009a) suggests that participation in transformative dialogues "would specifically bring the participants into new forms of coordination. The new forms would draw from tradition, but would also enable participants to generate more mutually congenial realities. They would be constructing worlds together, as opposed to separately" (p. 118). Therapy and re-search as social construction co-creates space for relationally sensitive conversations to explore resources with un-knowing and un-certainty to intersect in multiple relationships and to live in multiple worlds. McNamee (2009) proposes:

When we are relationally engaged, we enter into conversation with no clear or prior notion of who we should be (expert, authority, or equal conversation partner) nor of who the client *should* be (needy, incapable of helping him/herself, friend). (p. 60)

This is the ethical practice of being relationally responsible (McNamee, 2009; McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

Getting on the Path of Social Construction

As a small child I always felt like a circle in a box, curiously different forms in time and space. There are such dissimilarities between modernist and constructionist relational frameworks of practice and re-search. Shifts and growth were continued in both practice and research as postmodern philosophies cast doubt on the validity of a universal, objective, certainty of scientific truth in many areas of thinking in contemporary life, including architecture (Venturi, 1966), art (Best & Kellner, 1997; Phaidon, 1994; Phaidon, 1996; Trétiack, 1997), literature (Coste, 1989; Okri, 1998), philosophy (Derrida, 1973; Foucault, 1965), and psychotherapy (Foucault, 1965; Spence, 1982). Best and Kellner (1997) identify how, “Postmodernists abandon naive realism and representational epistemology, as well as unmediated objectivity and truth, in favor of perspectivism, anti-foundationalism, hermeneutics, intertextuality, simulation, and relativism” (p. 257). McNamee (2009) suggests that postmodern awareness is “a world that embraces uncertainty as opposed to certainty, continual change as opposed to stability, and local/historical/cultural contingencies rather than universal laws” (p. 57). As a result of a gathering storm of discontent - the differences between the box and the circle - a search for a different way of practicing grew. Postmodern ideas and therapies increasingly led to a deeper awareness of relationally responsible interactions as opposed to a modernist individual internalization and objective observation in therapeutic discourse (Anderson, 1997; McNamee & Gergen, 1992; White & Epston, 1990). McNamee and Gergen (1992) profess, “the integrative vehicle is social constructionism” (p. 3) in both therapeutic and re-search conversations. According to McNamee (2010) the historical stories and themes of social construction are found in literature including:

Feminist and other radical critiques of science, communication studies, social psychology, family therapy, critical social anthropology (Gergen, 1994; Danziger, 1997; McNamee & Gergen, 1992) and some areas of “postmodernism” and “post structuralism” (Latour, 1987; Foucault, 1980). The common thread among these themes is a concern with processes of communication as opposed to concern with discovery phenomenon in the “real world.” The assumption is that in our daily interactions with others, we construct the relational realities within which we live. (p. 11)

Constructionist epistemology sustains “what we know (the domain of epistemology) is neither objective or subjective” as the emergence of meaning is co-created in “relational interchange” and then “knowledge itself must be relational” (McNamee, 2010, p. 14). Constructionist ontology tells us “there is no presumption that the world exists apart from our relationship with it. This does not mean that constructionists reject the notion of a material world” (McNamee, 2010,

p. 14). A constructionist lens considers that many assumptions of our world are shaped and sustained through discourse. Social construction offers us an option of looking at the world differently and an opportunity to shift our practice and re-search ways (Gergen, 1985; Gergen, 2009a, Gergen, 2009b; Hosking, 2011; McNamee, 1989; McNamee, 2004; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). This is an invitation to participate in the collaborative relationship of diverse reality and intersectionality of meaning among people. McNamee (1989) suggests constructionism “is a way of thinking... a way of continuing the conversation” (p. 93). A social constructionist epistemology is “a shift to studies of interactional process” (McNamee, 1989, p. 94), a relational way of being – relational discourse. This is a co-construction of con-joint action – “what people do together and what their doing makes” (McNamee, 2010, p. 11). Practice is then a process of searching, then re-searching again, if inquiry is to make a difference.

A Comfortable Place to Wonder

Un-knowingly, in my life I have lived, practiced, and re-searched from a social constructionist lens for an unidentifiable period of time, engaging in “constructive qualities of everyday activities” (McNamee, 1989, p. 93). A deeper understanding of social construction has enlightened and shaped my theoretical way of knowing and being – and the writing of this dissertation. This is a composition of compassion, a comforting sense of where I belong in the world, a reflexive analysis on how to be relationally engaged and relationally responsible in transformative dialogue in therapeutic space. Social construction empowers openness to others’ experiences, construction of new meaning, and potential possibilities; no longer stuck with an idea of what is. This fosters conversations, enthralls inquiry, creates attunement, and opens dialogues while it simultaneously resists judgment in order to better interpret and construct new meaning in the world, co-creating a healthier future. Reynolds (2013) suggests this is a way of “leaning-in” towards another and offers an invitation to collective relational accountability and responsibility when walking together (p. 53). Reynolds (2013) refers to leaning-in in her practice of being an imperfect ally. Being an imperfect ally can be uncomfortable and does not require perfection, as it is “not a static identity” (Reynolds, 2013, p. 59). Being an ally is an approach, a performance of movement (Butler, 1990). Reynolds (2013) advocates that ally work is a project of imperfection. We all have the potential of becoming allies (Bishop, 2002). In re-search and therapeutic space an appreciation of leaning-in also reflects the intimate conversational dance of how our recursive relational connections, relative to our shared verbal and visual narratives, shape meaning, change, and possibilities. A constructionist stance in therapeutic space and re-search is a collaborative and constant flow of generative transformation. How to look with different eyes? How to listen with different ears? Am I comfortable with my uncertainty? How does new meaning making shape possibilities and ongoing transformation? Why this discourse and not that discourse (McNamee, 2000)? What is my therapeutic orientation (McNamee, 2009; McNamee & Gergen, 1992)? How do I relationally form knowledge and meaning in practice, re-search, and life? Am I open to multiple views, interpretations or ideas? Am I resisting

righteousness? How do I know when my clinical practice or re-search is responsible and ethical (McNamee, 2009)? How might we do this better?

McNamee (2004) shares:

If we can engage with our critics on this topic in a manner that invites further coordination and conversations, we engage an aesthetic consistency between our theory and our practice. The aesthetic consistency is engendered when we, as constructionists, attempt to coordinate our activities with our critics rather than debate them. It is this unity of consistency of theory and practice that gives way to the identification of constructionism as a practical theory and thus affords an aesthetic quality to our work. And, in this practice there is an aesthetic harmony due to our resisting opportunities to tell others how it is or should be and rather, to engage others in attempts to coordinate our multiple views. (pp. 257-258)

Burr (1995) lists four components of the social constructionist position. Firstly, there is a “critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge” (Burr, 1995, p. 3). Throughout our appreciative inquiry we critically question and collaboratively challenge our assumptions of conventional discourses, methods, descriptors, classifications, and justifications of objectified knowledge and language. Our shared experiences through relational dialogue are anticipated to create conversations of emergent ideas and alternative possibilities. Secondly, Burr (1995) speaks to “historical and cultural specificity” (p. 4). We exemplify this in our sharing of historical and cultural narrative experiences. Our diversity engenders dialogical and relational engagement that co-created constant movement. We embrace our shared meaning making as continually unstable, flowing and changing in the context of our curious inquiry. Thirdly, “knowledge is sustained by social process” (Burr, 1995, p. 4). Our intent is that we commence this re-search together, we co-construct this re-search together, we ask curious questions together, and we complete this re-search together. In the spirit of curiosity and relational construction our shared intra-actions, leaning-in, being-with, and being-in conversations and witness writing, we hope to transform the fabric of this appreciative inquiry (Anderson, 1977; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Reynolds, 2013; Shotter, 1999). And fourthly, “knowledge and social action go together” (Burr, 1995, p. 4). Our knowledge constructed in our social processes will become action. Shifts in meaning invites harmonious shifts in action and resultantly effects emergent possibilities in the world (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1994; Gergen, 2009a). We expect the meaning making we conjointly construct in our relationally dialogical processes will co-create action and possibilities for my future practice. The knowledge we make together will further our re-search and shape future practice. Social construction positions me to wonder, to be open to the continued co-construction with others, the world, and myself, both respectfully and ethically. I continually reflect on un-learning and relearning the new language of a constructionist.

Language Practices

Language is the central focus of the constructionist in the therapeutic encounter, as problems are defined within language (Goolishian & Anderson, 1987; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; McNamee, 1989; McNamee, 2004).

McNamee (2006) says:

Thus, in therapy, as in organizations, placing our emphasis on what people are doing when they interact, rather than on the qualities, traits or motivations of separate individuals, yields a very different way of understanding human interaction. The interesting thing about centering our attention on language is that first, we cannot escape language. We live in language. Yet language is malleable – we can select different ways of talking and acting thereby inviting different sorts of responses from others. (p. 4)

“It is with language that we create the world in which we live” (McNamee, 2004, p. 255). Our language of dialogical engagement has the potential to co-create transformation and possibilities as conversational partners in therapeutic space that deconstructs the therapist or the inquirer as the expert (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). This invites collaborative and relational language practices (Anderson & Gehart, 2007; Hosking, 2011; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Dialogical practices or special conversations are ongoing language-based relational processes in therapy and inquiry (Gergen et al. 2001; Hermans et al., 1992, Hosking, 2011; Hosking & Morley, 1991; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Sampson, 2008). I am reminded of my discussions with Sheila McNamee (2014) to be mindful that our dialogues in therapeutic space are special kinds of conversations. If language is relational then meaning is relationally contextual as Bateson (1979) articulates in our patterns of being, “context is linked to another undefined notion called ‘meaning.’ Without context, words and actions have no meaning at all” (p. 15). Language practice is the attention of social constructionist interests. The language of practice as defined by McNamee (2009) is “all activity including relations with one’s environment and interactions that are ‘beyond words’” (p. 61). Language of practice is a process of attunement, responsiveness, and leaning-in with the person or persons in conversational space. McNamee (2009) describes this as a “liberating stance because when we become curious, we open ourselves up to the consideration of alternatives” (p. 63).

My Un-learning Shift

My undergraduate learning and understanding for many years was located in the box – a dominant Western cultural worldview with its modernist, positivist, objective truths, medical model/science-based, expert/professional centered practice, culturally mainstream therapeutic modalities. The outcome of my journey with postmodernism led to the social constructionist road, un-learning the knowing of my modernist, individualist, expertise driven, positivist research-based reality that taught me to define objective truth or supposed true meaning. Postmodernism opened the door to social construction, imparted new meaning to

embody relational discourse, relational response-ability, relational experiences and adventures together, inclusive of rich curiosity, multiple views, and co-created multiple possibilities in practice, re-search, and life. Gergen and Gergen (2004) co-construct that, "The foundation idea of social construction seems simple enough, but it is also profound. Everything we consider real is socially constructed. Or, more dramatically, *Nothing* is real unless people agree that it is" (p. 10). This is a dramatic shift from modernist knowing of the world. Berger and Luckmann (1966) pen, "while it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself" (p. 67). Gergen (1985) concurs, "The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people," and further suggests, "the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship" (p. 267).

Curiosity and Relationality

My childhood circle and box metaphor now portrays in therapeutic discourse two diametrically dissimilar shapes interacting and colliding in the same space, portraying and contrasting thought, language, respective knowledge, and meaning making. Do both approaches embrace curiosity and encourage questions? Curious questions inspire inquisitive thoughts that lead to courageous conversations and new ideas. Although I profess to be circular as opposed to linear, there is a place for the box with its linear knowing and meaning, while we mindfully practice softening the corners of the box. McNamee (2000) discusses:

The notion of relational engagement places emphasis on the particular modes of interpretation and action by which participants create their worlds. Research, then, departs dramatically from the tradition where we believe we are able to discover some essential aspects concerning our objects of study. (pp. 146-147)

Being curious, reflective, mindful, and open to all knowledge and diversity creates multiple perspectives and possibilities that will grow my re-search, practice, and life to improve my engagement in dialogical transformation and new collaborative meaning making. As a circular being, focused on relational co-creation practices con-jointly through narrative-based and art-based methodologies, social construction facilitates a means for me to be curious, open, and make new meaning dialogically and relationally. The circle engenders more generative knowledge for me than the box, as it keeps me positioned, person-centered, relationally engaged, and continually in motion (Gergen, 2009a; Gergen, 2009b; Shotter, 2011). I reflect on what we create together and who we become in that process. A constructionist approach is collaboratively informed by relational perspectives of continual transformation that create a channel for me to challenge, interact, and engage within in the box while remaining in the circle.

How do we affect one another in the meaning we make together? How do we safely explore each other's theories and stories and achieve together? How do we co-construct transformative and preferred narratives and move towards aspirations and possibilities not otherwise pondered? McNamee (2007) teaches:

Meaning emerges in the joint activities of persons in relation. To talk of meaning as relational requires that we replace our emphasis on individuals and their internal motivations, intentions, and perceptions with an emphasis on the coordinated activities of people engaging with one another. (p. 318)

Social construction beseeches curiosity, looking through another lens to relationally find a richer and more empowering way of knowing and being. Bateson (1979) writes, “*Learning the contexts of life* is a matter that has to be discussed, not internally, but as a matter of the external relationship between two creatures” (p. 132). Bateson (1979) explains further, “It is correct (and a great improvement) to begin to think of the two parties to the interaction as two eyes, each giving a monocular view of what goes on and, together, giving a binocular view in depth. This double view is the relationship” (p. 133). A constructionist practice articulates an ethical stance that “reality, truth, and values are neither mine nor yours but they are ours” (McNamee, 2004, p. 264). Answers and meaning making are co-explored, co-created, co-performed, and co-constructed relationally.

Relational Constructionism

Relational constructionism is an orientation of relational process. McNamee and Hosking (2012) share that a relational constructionist lens guides all aspects of inquiry – “the questions we ask, how we try to answer them, what we count as fact, what we recognize as rigor, the language tools we employ” (p.45). This speaks to the ongoing process of *how* we construct and co-create practice and inquiry (Hosking, 2011, McNamee & Hosking, 2012). “Relational constructionism takes the view that relational process ‘go on’ in language-based interactions” (Hosking, 2011, p. 53). This includes the “textuality” (Hosking, 2011, p. 53) of all forms of relating – verbal, non-verbal, symbolic, performed, written – that construct and reconstruct our world together with self and others. Multiplicity is relationally embraced rather than assumed to be singular or universal. Hosking (2011) argues:

Unlike work grounded in other social science perspectives, the relational constructionist perspective offers practices (a) that open up *multiple self-other relations* – to a dialogic rather than mono-logic view of person (b) that *open up possibilities* such as new ways of being in relations (e.g. in therapy or stuck in conflicts) or new possible futures (e.g. Future Searches or Imaginization⁹ projects) rather than trying to make positive (factual)

⁹ Imaginization definition: *business approach encouraging creativity and innovation*. An approach to creativity concerned with improving our ability to see and understand situations in new ways, with finding new ways of organizing, with creating shared understanding and personal empowerment, and with developing a capability for continuing self-organization (QFINANCE, 2015).

statements about how things are (c) that open up to *ongoing, emergent and multiple local realities* – rather than assuming stable, separate entities and try to ‘fix’ these (assumed to be stable and separate) things. (p. 57)

Therapy as social and relational construction is a shift from dominant discourse that queries deficit-based, judgmental, pathologizing language and taken-for-granted notions of truth, knowing, and expertise to curious conversations and the multiplicity of voice. From a social constructionist lens the therapist is positioned in a curious stance of un-knowing and un-certainty and not the taken-for-granted standpoint of expert. Un-certainty invites inquiry, questions, and conversations to co-create a richer understanding of alternative or preferred narratives and future potential. A relational constructionist practice embraces un-certainty and un-knowing; un-certainty is not to be feared. Therapy as construction is a stance, a relational way of being in conversation with others, a relational discourse of intra-actionally curious inquiry that co-creates possibilities (Gergen, 1999; McNamee, 1989; McNamee, 2009; Shotter 2011).

Relational Ethics

Relationally responsible practice is an ethical means of exploring “*what people (therapist and client) do together and what their doing makes*” – this is the relational dance of therapy or inquiry as social construction (McNamee, 2009, p. 62). Just as McNamee (2009) states, Clandinin (2013) supports the relational and interactional process of “who we are, and who are we becoming” (p. 21). Relational ethics are grounded in the shared dance of compassion and relational response-ability, and are committed to relational dialogue to lean-in further and be with others in the world – this is constructionist sensibility (Clandinin, 2013; Gergen, 2009b; McNamee, 2009; McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Reynolds, 2013). To reference Okri’s (1998) words, “we live by stories” (p. 46) and when we are relationally engaged with peoples’ stories, “we become sensitive to their stories, as well as our own, in ways that allow us to be responsive and therefore, relationally responsible” (McNamee, 2009, p. 64). Therapy is relational inquiry. Ethical practice is relational response-ability. Therapy and inquiry construct transformative dialogue (Gergen et al., 2001). By relationally attending to our con-joint verbal and visual narrative intra-actions, we shape deeper understanding about transformation and preferred presence of ethically being-in and being-with in the world (Clandinin, 2013; Gergen et al., 2001; Gergen, 2009b; Gergen & Gergen, 2004; McNamee, 2004; McNamee, 2009).

Relational Engagement

A social constructionist approach in my practice creates a means for me to be more open to other possibilities rather than being trapped with a single idea of ‘what is.’ Therapy as social construction makes me curious. Social construction views the multiple paradoxes of life through a different lens. This liberating, rich, and empowering approach assists me in curiously navigating my path of inquiry and learning in comfortable shoes of un-knowing and un-certainty. This heightened awareness creates exploration of many perspectives and possibilities

in my life. The journey that Alice and the Cheshire Cat take together parallels therapy as social construction. As an outsider witness, the Cheshire Cat gradually appears and disappears, morphing and changing throughout Alice's adventures in Wonderland. His disembodied smile remains as he metaphorically leans-in and relationally engages with Alice's sense of inquiry. "Well I've often seen a cat without a grin," thought Alice "but never a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life" (Carroll, 2006, p. 51). The non-verbal aspects of the Cheshire Cat remind me of the importance of leaning-in and being-with while curiously co-constructing our shared experiences in therapeutic space. When we are dialogically relational, we lean-in and open ourselves up to sharing and being-in experiences together. We co-create meaning from the stories, art, and experiences with and of others in the world. Much like the Cheshire Cat and Alice's relational discourse while seeking alternative views, social construction as therapy opens up relational inquiry through curious conversation and relational interaction – a collaborative journey that co-creates meaning, transformation, and possibilities of our being-with and being-in the world.

The Relational De-methodological Story

The act of writing assumes an attitude of persuasiveness. Literacy persuasion, or rhetoric, like much of visual persuasion, is artistic. As writers and painters we try to persuade our readers and viewers to see the world through our eyes. (Diaz, 2002, p. 153)

I never made a painting as a work of art, it's all research.
(Pablo Picasso)

I am purposely using the term "inquiry" because once we step aside from the taken-for-granted assumptions of traditional social science, we recognize (simultaneously) all forms of inquiry as research and all research as implicated in the "results" that emerge. Another way of saying this is to acknowledge all research as a form of social transformation. But equally important is the recognition that, as we engage in any form of curious... (McNamee, 2012, pp. 151-152)

In a fractured age, when cynicism is good, here is a possibly heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted –knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning, or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives. (Okri, 1997, p. 46)

Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me, and I will understand. (Confucius, BC 450)

Navigating Different Research Worlds

Cautious to avoid subjectivity, my learning and knowing in the field of social work practice (specifically in research, therapy, and supervision in the fields of mental health, addictions, and trauma work) was based on the application of theory and evidence-based research in practice. The measurability and reliability of one's techniques were fundamental to gauging the outcome in both research and practice. My understanding of traditional research, as McNamee (2014b) suggests, was "couched within the discourse of science" (p. 107).

Social work education, and resultant practice as I knew it, represented both positivist and interpretive paradigms in their traditional methodological, ontological, epistemological, and ethical assumptions. In my early learning I thought that I was more closely aligned with an interpretive paradigm however, the unquestioned reality of a positivist approach informed my research, practice, and instruction from the start (Bogo et al., 2004; D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Parsons, 2005; Parsons & Durst, 1992; Payne, 2005; Vayda & Bogo, 1991). Parsons and Durst (1992) suggest, "Two of the major paradigms of social and psychological theories that have relevance to social work education and practice are positivism (also termed functionalism or operationalism) and interactionism (also known as symbolic interactionism or interpretivism)" (pp. 147-148). Positivism is based upon objectivity – it emphasizes observation, data collection, predictable knowledge, content, measurable outcomes – and addresses practice, competency, and evaluation standards. The positivist paradigm designates the social worker/therapist/researcher as expert (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Kaiser, 1997; Munson, 2002; Parsons, 2005; Parsons & Durst, 1992; Payne, 2005). This defines the distinct power imbalance between social worker/therapist/researcher and client/subject. Conversely, an interpretive approach is based upon flexibility, contextual knowledge, process, and subjectivity, and underscores the subjective experiences of people. The interpretive paradigm is grounded in participation, communication, and situated meaning. This eliminates the requirement that the social worker/therapist/researcher play the role of the expert, minimizes the professional's power differential and empowers the client/participant (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Kaiser, 1997; Munson, 2002; Parsons, 2005; Parsons & Durst, 1992; Payne, 2005; Raboin, Uhlig, & McNamee, 2012). My research and practice paradigms slowly but surely emerged to a qualitative, interpretive form of situating meaning and expanding insight through participation and appreciation for multiple realities (Raboin, Uhlig, and McNamee, 2012). Modernist knowing, quantitative and qualitative research paradigms, and traditional psychodynamic practice approaches added value to my professional development and informed my practice for many years on my journey of learning and knowing.

While this knowing unquestionably influenced my learning, past research and practice, much has transpired in the interim. Un-learning learning and un-knowing knowing generated emergent ways of relationally being-in and being-with re-search and practice and constructed a new adventure in relational inquiry. I did not believe then what I believe now – therapy as re-search and re-search as

therapy – intertwined and interconnected as relational practice. Relational constructionism offers me a vision of the world as merely another version of reality, one narrative of understanding my relationally being-in the world. As our relational inquiry proposes, this vision differs from the individualist-based approaches situated in both positivist and interpretive methodologies – it creates a view of “we” opposed to “I.” Undoubtedly, traditional research and practice make significant contributions to social scientific inquiry, but they, too, only represent one view, one form of research or practice (S. McNamee, personal communication, November 11, 2015). This is not to say that one way of research or practice is more relevant than another, but that there are many ways to explore the making of meaning and emergent ideas. Relational constructionism views research or inquiry as a “form of life” practiced within different “language games” (McNamee, 2014b; Wittgenstein, 1953). Un-learning and un-knowing curiously proposes there are many “language games” with which to engage.

Raboin, Uhlig, and McNamee (2012) suggest examining what we call “research worlds” (p.1). A research world involves “the complex interdependencies that support and give scholarly rigor to particular approaches to research” (p. 1). They explain further that research worlds are constituted by:

Any distinct way of understanding and conducting research, including its unique purposes, practices, and conventions of rigor—together with the beliefs, assumptions and standards of the professions and communities of scholarship within which it is situated . . . A research world is a comprehensive context that guides, supports, funds, conducts and evaluates research in certain ways. A research world holds and maintains a particular approach to research based on core assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), ways of knowing (epistemology), and ways of conducting research based on these understandings (methodology).

What is acceptable in each world is constructed and held in place by many stakeholders. (p. 1)

My journey clearly supports Raboin, Uhlig, and McNamee (as reported in McNamee, 2014a) in their notion of three different research worlds: “the diagnostic (quantitative), the interpretive (qualitative) and the relational (process oriented)” (p. 76). Table 1. Understanding Consistency and Inconsistency Across Research Worlds (McNamee, 2014a, p. 76), illustrates the three different research worlds I experience. Considering these three research worlds, it is clear that our inquiry focus is “let’s change it together” (McNamee, 2014a, p. 76), co-creating, co-re-searching, and co-generating new meaning from our de-methodological lens.

Table 1. Understanding Consistency and Inconsistency Across Research Worlds (McNamee, 2014a, p. 76)		
SCIENTIFIC METHOD Traditional Quantitative Diagnostic Evidence Based Practice	LET'S UNDERSTAND Traditional Qualitative Interpretive	LET'S CHANGE IT TOGETHER Relational Constructionist
Prove	Understand	Change
Observe	Describe/Interpret	Co-Create
Researcher/Subject	Research/Participants	Co-Researchers
True or False	Situated Meanings	Generate New Meaning
Discoverable Truth and Cause/Effect Mechanisms	Contextualized Knowledge and Multiple Realities	Generate New Realities
Statistically Valid	Authentic to Participants	Locally Useful/Generative
Generalizable & Repeatable	Possibly Transferable	Local and Historical, Co-Evolving
Discover Truth	Expand Insight	Generating Possibilities

De-methodology: An Alternative, Unfamiliar, Curious, and Transformative Adventure

This transformative adventure begins with the assumption that as we re-search we create change. A rich understanding of social construction gives flight to this alternative de-methodological journey of transformation. Improved understanding of the research worlds offers critical analysis to be comfortably curious about the unfamiliar idea of de-methodology. I use the term 'de-methodology' to emphasize a movement away from traditional research, where research is about discovery. The use of de-methodology in this re-search does not follow the tradition where research is presumed to uncover what already exists in the world. Our transformative understanding of the re-search process is argued as a de-methodological approach throughout the manuscript. "As we examine the world, we change it. In so doing, we change our understanding of what we know (ontology), how we know it (epistemology), and how we might (re)produce it (methodology)" (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 99). This relational de-methodological story is about what I did, who came along on the journey with me, how we did it, where we journeyed, and why we took this adventure together.

Rubin and Babbie (1989) describe the methodology section of a paper as a quantity that "delineates in precise terms the design of the study, including the logical arrangements, sampling and data collection procedures, and the measurement and approach used" (p.94). This represents the scientific methods of finding out. Methodology as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2015) is as follows:

- 1: a body of methods, rules, and postulates employed by a discipline: a particular procedure or set of procedures;
- 2: the analysis of the principles or procedures of inquiry in a particular field. (para. 2)

As co-inquirers adopting a social constructionist ideology, de-methodology was our co-constructed embodiment of methods and our co-created means of analyzing relational inquiry through our collaborative verbal and visual narratives. Our de-methodological approach speaks the narrative language of social constructionism. It is a means to inventively un-map our ideas about the relational interconnections of strengths, resistance, and hope, and how these concepts inform possibilities for change in therapeutic space.

Curious conversations full of curious questions emerged, un-mapping previously unquestioned presumptions of research. Is there a 'correct' method and a 'correct' form of analysis that, if properly utilized would yield an answer to a research question? A relational constructionist approach of de-methodology is our means of deconstruction, our way to intentionally un-map old ways of knowing and old ways of being-with the notion that research is an objective method of discovery. This de-methodology is a collaborative, engaged embodiment of conversations without traditional methods, rules or protocols, fluid and continually moving and transforming – embracing curious and relational inquiry. Our de-methodological journey began as an idea and flourished with emergent opportunities through relationally being-with the co-inquirers in dialogical space. De-methodology awakens the stories and art of our relational and conversational experiences, rich in inquiry and application to future practice in the poetic art of therapy. Curiosity and the courageous resistance to not be dependent on any previously known or particular methodology, except for the one we relationally co-created in the moment, moved us on our uncharted de-methodological journey.

Deconstructing methodology to reconstruct relational engagement as de-methodology for this dissertation was an alternative, unfamiliar, curious, and transformative adventure that both witnessed and embodied inquiry through our verbal and visual narratives. This *nouveau* de-methodological landscape invited curiosity and un-knowing to accompany me and the eight co-inquirers who traveled alongside. This was a holistic escapade of relationally and imaginatively looking in all directions – inward and outward, backward and forward to past, present, and future. This journey was a practice of collaboratively crafting new meaning; what McNamee (2000) positions as social poetics. She illuminates, "To talk of the poetic is to give wing to imaginative. It is to 'express oneself' in words that are 'thoughtful.' It is to script a sense of 'beauty.' Also related to the poetic is the freedom from the constraints of traditional forms of practice" (McNamee, 2000, p. 146). Sanders (2014) relates this to his practice of the "performance of narrative poetics in seeking and co-creating new possibilities of resolution and hope" (p. 53). As our multi-storied process unfolded, our relationally performed conversations un-mapped traditional practices of research and de-centered expertise and knowing in our inquiry. This invited an enchanted, artful, and poetic

practice of respectful and thoughtful dialogical engagement in mutually ethical and responsible relational discursive re-search.

As This Chapter Ends ...

Curiosity reminds me to question my position throughout this chapter (McNamee, 1989). Social construction, as relational discourse, relational engagement, relational ethics, and relational response-ability offered a way for me to curiously look at re-search and therapy (Gergen, 1985b). In this chapter, the reader accompanies me on the relational de-methodological journey. Social constructionism invites a means to deconstruct traditional methodology, to reconstruct unfamiliar methods of inquiry, and to co-construct our *nouveau* process of de-methodology. Relational constructionism provides an option to look at my world differently and shift my understanding of re-search and, suitably, the emergent idea of de-methodology for this inquiry.

The history of different research worlds is explored. Critically analyzing my past assumptions of methodology constructed and inspired an idea to create a movement away from traditional research. Inquiry as relational construction is a “form of life” practiced within different “language games” (McNamee, 2014b; Wittgenstein, 1953). A relational constructionist stance in re-search and therapy is collaborative, as the language of dialogical engagement has potential for conversational partners to generate transformative possibilities. As McNamee (2004) and the Cheshire Cat continually remind me, I engage my critics in a manner that invites further conversations.

The following chapter looks at diverse literature related to the central concepts of stories, art, Narrative Therapy, Art Therapy, and the three entities, strengths, resistance, and hope in this re-search.

Chapter Three: The Multiple Layers of Knowing and Un-knowing



(9)

As This Chapter Begins ...

This extensive literature review is conducted to introduce, support, and critique the central concepts and theoretical applications related to the research project. It ensures a thorough understanding of new ideas discussed throughout the re-search, considers previous findings, identifies gaps in knowledge, and suggests areas for further study. Literature reviewed maintains the distinct significance of this re-search as it queries the connection of the three entities, strengths, resistance, and hope to any transformative process from a relational orientation through verbal and visual narratives. In this chapter the central concepts and theoretical applications are:

- Stories
- Art
- Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy
- The Three Entities: Strengths, Resistance, and Hope

The literature celebrates the importance of stories and art in our lives, and how they co-create meaning through multi-hued dialogues - we hear, see, intra-act and experience through stories and art in relational engagement. In our form of re-search, stories and art shape our experiences of being-with others and ourselves and explore how we make sense of our world together, generating new meaning. The voice of art challenges our notions of authority, language, and socially constructed norms, as in the image of *Cici n'est pas une pipe* (Magritte, 1929).

Our discussion shifts to the literature on Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy, its story and its co-relation to social constructionist ideas. An appreciative critique of the theoretical concepts and application of Narrative Therapy (Epston, 1989, 1999, 2009; White, 1989/1997, 2005, 2007, 2011; White & Epston, 1990, 1992) and Art Therapy (Betensky, 1973, 1995; Kramer, 1958, 1971; Malchiodi, 2006, 2012; Naumburg, 1950, 1966) is explored in detail. This literature review clearly links both Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy as forms of practice that represent important and creative contributions to the theorizing of therapeutic practice as relational. The literature further supports my suggestion that both Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy are relationally relevant to constructionist philosophy.

This chapter ends with an exhaustive literature review of the three entities: Strengths (Saleebey, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2002), Resistance (Wade 1997, 2000, 2007), and Hope (Weingarten, 2000, 2003, 2010). Human experiences and stories from my practice are woven throughout this section within the context of literature reviewing the three entities. This literature review furthers our arguments as we seek to answer the research questions formulated in Chapter One. No empirical evidence is found to link the three entities and any dynamic of transformation that they might produce. The relational idea of these intertwined entities challenges current academic literature and therapeutic practice, as the literature presents these concepts as discrete, missing the opportunity to entwine them to co-create a transformative dynamic.

Storying Beings

This sheet of paper alone says nothing. But fold it, manipulate it.
Now it's a different story....Now you're telling a story.
(Kazuo Kobayashi)

When we reject the single story, when we realize that there
is never a single story of any place we regain a type of paradise.
(Adichie, 2009)

For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the
stars makes me dream. (Vincent van Gogh, 1853-1890)

You cannot step into the same river twice. (Welter and Peller,
1994, p. 15)

The artist constructs a new symbol with his brush. This symbol is
not a recognizable form of anything that is already finished, already
made, or already existent in the world – it is a symbol of a new
world, which is being built upon and which exists by the way of the
people. (El Lissitzky, 1890-1941)

Our stories cry out to be spoken, seen, and shared; they are opportunities to be relational and co-create. We are storying beings. Stories generate resonance and transport us (Carey & Russell, 2003; White, 2002; White, 2005; Zak, 2013) connecting us to the past, grounding us in the present, and moving us to possibilities in our future. “A story is a little knot or complex of that species of connectedness that we call relevance” (Bateson, 1979, p. 13), a story may epitomize a “difference that makes a difference” (Bateson, 1972, p. 381). Our stories co-create relational emergence. Stories absorb us to a world of emergent ideas and transformative territory of new opportunities (Silva, 2013). Our stories through words, metaphors, signs, symbols, images, icons, and colours create and co-create verbal and visual dialogical meaning for ourselves, others, families, groups, communities, societies, and cultures, relationally positioning and informing us of multiple voices, multiple images, and multiple worlds, building connections between each other, and encouraging and enhancing possibilities in all our lives (Adichie, 2009; Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 2009a, 2009b; Gergen & Gergen, 2004; Hosking, 2011; McNamee, 1996, 2009, 2008, 2013; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; McNiff, 2004; Saleebey, 1994, 1996; Sampson, 2008; Wadeson, 2000; White, 2007).

Where do our stories begin? We are not born with stories, or are we? Okri (1997) wrote, “We live by stories” (p. 46). Stories are endless. They enrich life. Our stories are constructed and performed through the meaning we make with others in our lives. MacIntyre (1981) explained:

It is because we live out narrative in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narrative that the form of narrative is

appropriate for understanding actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told. (p. 197)

Our stories or relational narratives both verbally and visually are rich with “thick textured descriptors” that make interactive space to construct curious inquiry (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 47). Human beings are storied thinkers whose stories are “little knots of relevance” (Bateson, 1997, p. 13) that shape behaviour and action. Bateson (1972, 1997) believed our meaning is made through a relational dialogical process or communicative system that was created and re-created by stories, signals, interactions, and difference. This is about the interactional process of what we dialogically do together, sharing and being curious about our little knots of relativeness woven in our stories co-constructs our relational dialogical process. Our stories, signals, interactions, and difference begin in the reciprocal process of conversationally greeting one another in therapeutic space, then relative knots of our stories move forward in conversation to the next relative knot in the shared story. The fabric of our woven knots invites collaborative conversation and relational meaning making in therapeutic space. The act of sharing, hearing, seeing, and co-performing stories together co-creates endless possibilities. Therefore, as Bateson (1997) maintains, if the *mind is social* then communicative and recursive relationships are essential features of how we con-jointly think and co-create meaning in and of our world.

Storying: Our Verbal and Visual Narratives

Relational and constructionist perspectives view narratives and stories as co-constructed, a means “embedded in multiple inter-textual relations” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 50). Our relational dialogical narratives dispel stereotypes, transcend cultural ghettos and human difference, and co-create opportunity to punch holes in the windows of our respective realities to give us a deeper and more meaningful glimpse of one another, as knowledge should take us beyond ourselves (Shafak, 2010). Our stories are shared and witnessed (Carey & Russell, 2003; Saleebey, 1994, 1996; White, 2002, 2005), making our narratives a relational practice of inquiry. Narratives are metaphoric means of shaping our understanding and constructing our embodied experiences with others in the world (Bruner, 1991; Greenhalgh, 2001; Mattingly, 1998). Conant (2010) shares the poetic words of Muriel Rukeyser “The world is not made of atoms, but of stories” (p. 11).

In her story, as Alice endeavors to make sense of herself and her experiences with others in the new world of Wonderland, her sense of knowing and fixed perspectives are altered and she curiously asks, “Who in the world am I? Ah, *that’s* the great puzzle!” (Carroll, 2006, p. 10). Her bewilderment shifts as she engages in curious questions, relational dialogues, and being-with others on her adventurous journey. This is about being-with, captivating us in relational practices and realities of living inquiry (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008). Andersen (1997) wrote:

A person takes part in the world as a being. Not the noun Being, but the verb Being: Being-in-the-world, which is: Being-in-(bodily) movements, being-in-language, being-in-conversations, being-in-relationships (being-

with-others), being-in-culture, being-in-time (being-in-history), being-in-natures, etc. This change is to be differently in either: movements or language or conversations or relationships. (p. 126)

Ellsworth (2005) maintains “embodiment puts us into a moving relation with forces, processes, and connections to others in ways that are unforeseen” (p. 212). The stories we have about who we are shape how we experience our lives; we sort and file our stories to make things link together, to make sense of things and being together with others in our world (McNamee, 1996). Our visual and verbal narratives are relationally being-with others in our ongoing relational process. Anderson (1997) defines narrative as:

A form of discourse, the discursive way in which we organize, account for, give meaning to, and understand, that is, give structure and coherence to, the circumstances and events in our lives, to the fragments of our experiences, and to our self identities, for and with ourselves and others. Narrative is a dynamic process that constitutes both the way that we organize the events and experiences of our lives to make sense of them and the way we participate in creating the things we make sense of, including ourselves. (p. 212)

There is always a story out there waiting to be told. Stories are travels through metaphoric landscapes that engage others with incredible journeys. Clandinin (2013) believes our lives meet in storied ways, “addressing the conceptual underpinnings of the *relationally living alongside*” another in our narrative landscapes (p. 23). Our stories explore, hear, and see otherness with the hope to reveal other worldviews and cosmovisions¹⁰. At the same time, we must be mindful and ethical that we do not represent the other, dismiss, take or own another person’s verbal or visual narrative. Discourse can be described as what gets to be said or produced, who gets to say or illustrate it, and who has the verbal or visual story rights to what is going on. Our power, our knowledge relationships in all realms of being must be appreciated, transparent, and shared in order to be relationally respectful of whom the story or art belongs to, who is telling the story or making the art, and who is witnessing the story or art (Carey & Russell, 2003; Hartman, 2000; Kirst, 2011; White & Epston, 1999). This is

¹⁰ “An important belief of Aboriginal traditional ways is the recognition and understanding of a distinct Aboriginal cosmovision” (A. Tamburro, personal communication, September, 2008). The word “worldview” is a socially constructed Western term and, therefore, cosmovision is more culturally respectful in relation to Aboriginal practices. An Aboriginal woman, Andrea Tamburro introduced me to this term; I have learned that cosmovision reminds us that it is not just our vision of the earth, but our whole vision and belief system about the beings, multiple elements of nature, and spirituality in the universe too. “It includes the old stories of our creation and helps gain perspective of our place in the universe” (A. Tamburro, personal communication, September, 2008). Aboriginal cosmovision is an important and meaningful understanding in my practice as it portrays human relations and the interconnectedness of holistic being, spirituality, Mother Earth, all of nature, and cultural knowledge and traditions in the journey to attain harmony and balance in one’s life circle (A. Tamburro, personal communication, September, 2008).

relational accountability and relational responsibility (McNamee, 2004; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Our stories are living things (Kirst, 2011). The relationally responsible witness recognizes that power and knowledge are one, they are not appropriated or owned; power and knowledge are shared and resultantly, meaning and action are made together (Foucault, 1980).

Shared stories shape deeper awareness of our every day experiences. As a therapist, each day I experience resonance and I am transported by the verbal and visual narratives of those I encounter; their stories are sacred and intimately shared in safe, therapeutic space. From a constructionist lens my dialogical practice space of rich story telling and art making co-creates inquiry and “co-constructions where the inquirer is part of, rather than apart from, the narrative” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 50). As the co-inquirer engaged in relational dialogue I am naïve, not-knowing, and un-certain; this invites genuine curiosity for generative conversations and in turn permits thought-provoking relational performance to co-create new possibilities, “generative alternatives” for action – this is re-search (McNamee, 2012, p. 151). “Thinking relationally, then, is part of thinking narratively and of thinking narratively as a narrative inquirer” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23). Relational dialogue arouses curiosity and inquiry, this is re-search “in an inclusive sense,” referring to “all the different ways we create knowledge – some occur on a more formal and systematic basis, yet others are used daily” such as in shared therapeutic space (Fook, 2004, p. 17).

When you ask someone a question, they tell a story. Our stories evoke memories and our dreams of the future. The authors of these stories share many lived things: they share secrets, some admit fears, some reveal vulnerability, some radiate strength, some reflect beauty, and some express sadness and pain. Some stories are detailed and some are vague. This endless sharing of human experience and particular happenings, the knowing and reality that transpires within their lived performances, and their explanation and construction of being in the world connects me to their stories (Bruner, 1991). This demands strong relational response-ability. Anderson (1997) eloquently speaks of her relational responsibilities and un-certainty when engaged in relational dialogue in therapeutic space:

I do not think myself as a master consultant or therapist who participates from a meta-position, has privileged knowledge, or has better ideas. I see myself as a guest who drops in on an ongoing conversation. I emphasize that I want only to join the conversation, not interrupt it or change its course. (p. 167)

Anderson (2012) expands further on conversational un-certainty, “Uncertainty is inherent in this kind of spontaneous, unplanned situation. A therapist’s ability to trust uncertainty is important and involves taking a risk and being open to the unforeseen” (p. 19).

The Intra-active Landscape of Sharing Stories

Anderson (2012) also refers to the unconditional notion of hospitality and suggests that therapist or inquirer assumes a dual role of hospitable host and guest. She emphasizes respect and responsibility in relational engagement and shares that “hospitality involves subtleties and nuances of greetings and meetings that shape the tone and quality of the relationship and conversation, and consequently their potential” (Anderson, 2012, p. 15). Over the past ten years, I have been a respectful guest (Anderson, personal communication, October, 2013) who has had the honour to walk, work, hear, tell, and write stories, see and make art, celebrate, sing, dance, cry, and heal within seven Aboriginal communities on the Secwepemc Territory in the ecologically diverse South Central region of British Columbia, Canada. The wisdom the Elders share has taught me much about the inestimable value of oral tradition – story telling. Through storytelling and sharing, at healing or talking circles, around someone’s kitchen table, sitting on the beach, hiking up the mountain or drinking tea together, many traditional Aboriginal values, beliefs and traditions are constantly being revived and regenerated. It is through the telling, retelling, and sharing of stories that Aboriginal people make sense of their world (Anderson, 1996). Storytelling feeds oral tradition, creating identity, community, culture, and meaning that survives across time and space, co-constructing generations of hope, resistance, and re-existence (Conant, 2010; Ouellette, 2002). Anderson (1997) believes our narratives navigate “what we do and what we do together...a reflexive two-way discursive process” (pp. 213-214). The making and telling of stories teach us to do more than react to and survive in this world; they illuminate ways to heal families, communities, and ourselves. Stories tell us how to be in the here and now. Conant (2010) speaks to this as poetic resistance – “*poesis* – creation or creating – is the first in the war of oblivion” (p. 37). “Poetic resistance – the resistance of language against the oblivion of silence – has been a part of indigenous survival for the last five hundred years – the fiery blooming of flowers from the hardened soil” (Conant, 2010, p. 37). Stories bear witness to cultural and historical survival. Stories transcend borders (Shafak, 2010). Stories have been used to “malign,” but stories can also be used to “empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people but stories can also repair that broken dignity” (Adichie, 2009). Stories, the common human intra-actions, create the landscape for re-search using narrative within qualitative inquiry, and shape multiple theoretical approaches.

Traditional Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing have been subjugated by dominant culture since the people on the tall ships arrived on Turtle Island and Aboriginal voices were silenced. Storytelling by the Secwepemc Elders has co-created new meaning for me. One does not need to scurry for a source of reference in order to validate the reliability of the knowledge and meaning making of the stories told, as new and old knowledge and meaning are continually passed on through stories and art in our everyday lives. This traditional evidence is empowered by Aboriginal knowledge, experiences, and truths of the Ancestors. “Narratives are a version of reality whose acceptability is

governed by convention and ‘narrative necessity’ rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness” (Bruner, 1991, p. 4). A farsighted Elder once shared with me:

We didn’t need to write anything down it was all up here and we felt it in our hearts. It is connected yesterday and today. Don’t need no book to tell me how I lived I know how it was and it doesn’t matter what those books say...Just go ask your family they tell you about past and it has more truth than books. (Un-named Elder, personal communication, September 2012)

This teaching is diametrically different to ways of academic knowing; it fits well with my un-learning and un-knowing of modernism and my new knowing of post modernism and social construction. Initially this was unsettling as it jarred my complacency and my theoretical and professional expertise about the world and my practice. Elders’ stories have contributed greatly to the deconstruction of my knowing and un-knowing. I now query the epistemological assumptions that underlie and shape our thoughts, that tell us that the world operates upon a consensus basis, and so all we need to do is understand the single story of the world as it is, rather than hear multiple stories that change our knowing. These assumptions give rise to concepts that only support the status quo or one solitary, boring way of knowing. Our stories flow; they are the rivers of our experiences that are constantly and curiously moving. Our stories can create space for all.

Curiously Being-with Verbal and Visual Narratives

The artist’s stories, the poet’s stories, the dancer’s stories are as powerful and meaningful as the nuclear physicist’s or the biologist’s stories. The sounds and images of verbal and visual narratives are meant to be heard and seen – the creation of generative curiosity and the beginning of un-knowing and knowing. Curiously being-with, relationally living alongside, hearing multiple views, seeing different ways of knowing and diverse construction of meaning creates a means to deconstruct, understand, and expand our sincere, respectful, and relational dialogues with one another about new realities and truths, with the hope of reconstructing and co-creating new possibilities (Anderson, 1997, 2003, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Ellsworth, 2005; McNamee, 1996, 2000, 2008; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Sampson, 2008). Meaning is a “joint accomplishment. Our actions are never independent, but acquire their very intelligibility as actions by virtue of others with whom we are (or have been) engaged” (McNamee, 1996, p. 8). This is both relevant and significant as collaborative narrative reflection may unfold the possibility of deeper richness and meaning in my practice, for myself and others, as Hartman (2000) writes:

It is really not so complicated; we must ask people then listen. And as we listen, we must attend to difference, to particularity, the contradictory, the paradoxical. As we do this, we will attend to that which may be quantifiably insignificant but whose presence may question a more conventional interpretation and expand understanding. Epidemiological studies are useful and important, but direct practice must be built on local knowledge, on the particular, on attention to difference and, most vital, on multiple voices. (p. 22)

The multiple voices that echo through my memories as a child, both verbally and visually, recall my lived story and re-storying of learning how to swim, and fluidly link my narrative of respect, love, meaning, and being-with water as an adult woman. The paradox of water throughout my narrative reflected a multitude of selves, meaning making and change as it is forever moving, and in its continual motion it reflects the world to me in diverse ways. My juxtaposed verbal and visual narrative reflects both my un-knowing and knowing, my past, present, and future, my truth, my curiosity, and my ability to create, tell, hear, see, and understand my multiple stories in order to collage a sense of meaning that embodies my experiences and realities in life and in the world (Bruner, 1986, 1990, 199, 1996; Gergen, 2009a, 2011; Hedtke and Winslade, 2004; McNamee, 2008; Wittenstein, 1953). These embodied stories shape my experience in all realms of my life as I walk in the world. Anderson (2013) suggests we must responsively listen, talk, hear, and think when inviting collaborative relationships and participating in a dialogical conversation. Our relationships are gifts of attunement and tension, diverse realities, past realities, and new realities, curiosity, humble not knowing-ness, shared appreciation, new forms of coordination together, shared space, shared inquiry, generative dialogue, and hopeful transformation. This creates much inquisitiveness, enchantment, and wonderment for me about the possibilities of rich verbal and visual narratives, a means to shift our awareness of our use of language (good/bad, right/wrong, win/lose, superior/inferior). We may also shift our “taken for granted way of talking and acting” to increase our ability to listen and hear, be present together in the moment, speak from mindful and curious inquiry, and embrace the multiple views of others in a respectful dialogical space (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 54).

Shared stories are relational – for every problem-saturated story there is a past exception story and a future preferred story that can be co-authored or co-created. Conflict and solutions are relational. If our relational engagement together creates the possibility for both conflict and solutions through con-joint construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction then we must begin by challenging and deconstructing our previously constructed conceptions of the self/individual. Values, beliefs, ideas, lived experiences, knowing, and culture come into question through our courage to engage relationally to reconstruct multiple possibilities together. How do we prepare to openly position ourselves in the alternative discourses that we produce together? How do we embrace our vulnerability as strength? As resistance? As hope? Can we become fluid like water embracing the strength of weakness and the power of adaptation and persistence?

Celebrating Our Multi-hued Dialogues

Stories and art are con-jointly performed, multi-hued relational dialogues that co-create a means for how we make sense of our experiences of being with others and ourselves in the world. Storytelling and art making embrace and align with a relational constructionist perspective of how we make sense of our world together. Dialogues engage respectful participation and embrace curiosity despite difference (Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1970; McNamee, 2013). Dialogical

conversations are invitations to collaborate and support the fluidity, flexibility, and openness of multilogic and multivocality in the co-creation of meaning making. “*The most important thing about people is not what is contained within them, but what transpires between them*” (Sampson, 2008, p.20). Based on Sampson’s (2008) work, Hosking (2011) writes, “‘dialogical’ approaches emphasize multiple self-other relations and their mutual creation and co-emergence in ongoing processes” (p. 49). A narrative is anti-individualist because our stories are relational and shared, their “meaning is neither mine nor yours, but emerges out of our relational engagement” (S. McNamee, Personal communication, October 25, 2013). This is not the “language of individualism” and the “limitations of individualist discourse” but the language of relational discourse, “the interactive moment” that co-constructs meaning and generative alternatives, as “meaning is always transformed in relationships” (McNamee, 1996, pp. 2-4). This resonates for me in every therapy session. The dialogical dance with those I perform with is a consciously committed shift from the need to change the other as taught from a modernist view in my undergraduate degree, to my desire for fluidity, flexibility, openness, and respectfully walking beside, being-with together in hopes of seeking alternative ways of relating and co-creating preferred stories, new meaning, and possibilities. “Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living. They are what make our condition *human*” (Kearney, 2002, p. 3). Adichie (2009) echoes that stories are as necessary as love, proposing our stories create intimate connections and beautiful relationships. Hardy (1977) says that, “we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (p. 31). This again suggests that our stories play parallel roles in our sleeping and waking lives, our multiple selves, making meaning and sense of our world for the whole person, just as my story of learning to swim illuminates. Our verbal and visual narrative co-creations speak to us all, mirroring and reflecting memories and images, moments, sensory perceptions and sensations, ideas, understanding, meaning, action, change, and possibilities (Anderson, 2003, 2013; McNamee, 2000, 2013; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Morgan, 2000).

You don’t know what you are going to learn until you start a conversation. Our conversations generate multiplicity; Hosking (2011) shares, “by being constituted in conversations *each person is multiplicity* and multiplicity is the norm” (p. 56). Dialogue, as Gergen (2009a) suggests is “not an individual but a relational achievement” (p.112). Meaning making is a joint creation, living in multiple worlds as “multiple beings” (Gergen, 2009a, p. 113) with multiple stories rich in complexity of human existence, experience, history, value, beliefs, and cultures. Dialogue¹¹ enables multiple “community-based voices and can help multiple communities (‘forms of life’) to participate such that other realities can be ‘allowed to lie’ rather than being questioned, grasped, judged and re-constructed

¹¹ Hosking (2011) shares, “Social science approaches that explicitly center ‘dialogue’ include the Public Conversation Project (Chasin et al., 1996), work using language of ‘transformative dialogues’ (Gergen et al., 2001), ‘dialogue conferences’ (Toulmin and Gustavsen, 1996) and the MIT Dialogue Project (e.g. Isaacs 1993, 1996)” (p. 61).

by a particular, knowing and structuring agent” (Hosking, 2011, pp. 60-61). Sampson (2008) finds that our dialogues celebrate the other, whereas our monologues are self-celebratory. McNamee (2008) suggests “we carry the residuals of many others with us: we contain multitudes” (p. 8). My life is multi-storied both verbally and visually; therefore, I live my life through my many stories and my respective preferred stories (Adichie, 2009; Gergen, 2009a; McNamee 2013; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; White, 2007, 2011; White & Epston, 1990). Our many stories matter. The story of me is multi-hued just as the story of you is multi-hued; this underscores the importance of empowering many voices, many images, and the resultant many possibilities. Our stories are enmeshed with other stories. Whereas the single story - just as the monologue - creates stereotypes, Adichie (2009) believes the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but they are incomplete, making one story the only story. The problem with a single story is that it strips people of dignity, it makes recognition of equal humanity difficult, and it accentuates our differences rather than our similarities (Adichie, 2009).

Multiple Voices of Stories and Art: Hearing, Seeing, Intra-acting, and Experiencing

As two leggeds, the “act of living requires that we are engaged in the mediation between the dominant stories and the alternative stories of our lives” (Morgan, 2000, p. 9). My verbal and visual narratives told and re-told are based on overlapping, exciting and mundane fragments of my whole life experience. These are many interwoven chapters, strands, layers, colours, and realities of thousands of spoken and heard stories as well as made and viewed art that links past and present meaning shared in dialogical space with others I encounter in my world. Kearney (2002) proposes “a tale is spun from bits and pieces of experience, linking past happenings with present ones and casting both into a dream of possibilities” (p. 5). As far back as I can remember I see stories in my head and see them before my eyes. I see an object or an image that speaks to me and this enables my intra-activity – meaning is made by the intra-action with the object or image as meaning making is relational (Shotter, 2011).

How often do we just let our eyes fall on the images that surround us? Do we curiously notice the images we see? Are we relational with the entities, objects, images that surround us? Do we appreciate the wealth of possibilities that these images co-create for us all? I see the world around me; when shared with someone else this satisfies meaning. Simply put in everyday life, “seeing is essentially a means of practical orientation, of determining with one’s eyes that a certain thing is present at a certain place and that it is doing a certain thing” (Arnheim, 1974, p. 42). Our vision is active and curious, creating and interpreting our experiences with others and things in our exploration of the construction of experience, knowledge, and meaning. Freedman (2003) views:

The images we have encountered in the past become attached to associations related to the context in which we saw them, including the context of thoughts about or conceptual space between previous

experiences. In a sense, the attached meanings are part of what is known about the images until we restructure or construct new knowledge through more experience. This process, then enables us to commingle images make associations between them, recycle and change them, as we restructure knowledge and create new images. (p. 121)

Relationally Engaging with Art

Our relationships to visual narrative and human expression extend as far back as prehistory, when people created images in caves to document and express their worlds. Art is an enduring concept of human expression, granting voice and meaning making. Voice is a remarkable instrument of human expression manifested through many means: word, song, visual art, and movement, shaped into images and forms to reflect attitudes, beliefs, values, and assumptions. All artists are storytellers. The multifaceted dimension of voice dispels myths and creates shared awareness and meaning, awareness creates action, and action creates possibilities. Relationally raising awareness touches all the human senses and emotions, and allows a genuine understanding of the human experience. Expression reflects human experience. Relational awareness creates change in human attitudes and perceptions, and, therefore, relationally generates transformation.

Artists preserve multiple experiences. Gombrich (1995) believes, "We do not know how art began any more than we know how language started" (p. 39). Yet art and language are essential to our earliest communication. The making of art reflects voice; the symbolic narrative is relational to the creator/s and the viewer/s as is clearly evident in the pieces of art throughout this project. Art as a visual narrative voices and illuminates relational sharing. Art is a visual representation that makes the invisible visible. Art making is life enhancing. Marcel Proust (VSA Arts, 2003) acknowledged, "Only through art can we emerge from ourselves and know what another person sees" (p. 1). The voice of art describes our understanding of the world, another means to describe and explain our experiences within the world around us. Leavy (2009) shares through her teaching that she has become aware of "the profound possibilities of the arts to jar people into seeing things differently, to transcend differences, and to foster connections" (p. viii). Art impacts us all. Images give us freedom of thought. Allen (1995) finds that "images take me apart; images put me back together again, new, enlarged, with breathing room" (p. ix). Gombrich (1995) suggested "to look at a picture with fresh eyes and to venture on a voyage of discovery into it is a far more difficult but also a much more rewarding task. There is no telling what one might bring home from this journey" (p.37). This journey opens our eyes, sharpens our sense of awareness, and increases our understanding of the shades of difference. "To see is a process of observing and recognizing the world around us. To look is to actively make meaning of the world. Through looking we negotiate social relationships and meaning" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 10). McNamee (1996) envisions "meaning is social" (p. 4). Bochner and Ellis (2003) indicate as observers:

Most of us are trained to look at art and ask, what do I see? But as a form of language, art can become reflexive, turn on itself, invite us to question our own premises, to ask, how do I see? What can I know? How do I know what I know? Then, art becomes a process and form of inquiry. Art can be representational, but it also can be evocative, embodied, sensual, and emotional; art can be viewed as an object or a product, but it also is an idea, a process, a way of knowing, a manner of speaking, an encounter with Others. (p. 508)

Our visual narrative lifts our spirits, engages our intellects and imaginations, and gently (and not so gently) nudges us outside the constraints of our daily routines (Baily, 2007). When we encounter an image, “we expect a certain kind of experience but are surprised when we do not recognize what we are seeing”, we may want to pause and linger with or in it if “we really want to make out what we are up against in our struggles for meaning and understanding” (Saarnivaara, 2003, p. 582). Relational constructionism “assumes that many simultaneous interacts (con-texts) continuously contribute to ongoing (re)constructions of reality (Hosking, 2011, p. 53). Our preconceived ideas can, therefore, be distorted and queried in visual imagery. Magritte’s (1929) painting called, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* illustrates this well. Do we believe in the veracity of the image or the veracity of the text? Is this a pipe? Does this challenge our notions of authority, of language, and of socially constructed norms and representations of a pipe (Harris & Zucker, 2014)? Is this denial of authority of language and representation of a



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pipe (Harris & Zucker, 2014)? Hosking (2011) illustrates multiple and changing relational processes and the performances of how:

Relational processes simultaneously implicate multiple interrelated texts which could include relating the visual symbol (which many would say was a picture of a pipe) with the written text below it (which says Ceci n’est pas

une pipe – ‘this is not a pipe’), the written text with the French language, the written text with the Dutch language (!), narratives of earlier viewings, of what others have said about the painting, of what counts as a painting, of what is appropriately called a pipe and so on. The question ‘what is it?’ could invite many equally correct answers depending on the particular inter-relating of multiple texts: ‘it’s a pipe’, ‘it’s a painting of a pipe’, ‘it’s a paradox’, ‘it is a work of art’ and so on. The ‘correct’ answer is not dictated by the contours of real world objects. (p. 53)

Ceci n’est pas une pipe (Magritte, 1929) demonstrates the value of attending closely to our experience of looking relationally at what is before us. Art welcomes images and brings both verbal and visual stories to our lives (Allen, 1995). Art represents a deeper understanding of diversity in the world. Art creates our sense of knowing or un-knowing. Art can be rebellious; it can be a way of resisting boundaries, discarding old ideas, and co-creating new ways of being-with and experiencing possibilities in the world.

The practice of looking at art facilitates a means of engagement for us to respond intensively to beauty and terror, to induce feelings of wonder and bewilderment, to empower transformative experiences that assist in the betterment of living and knowing. Questions of right and wrong can be curiously inquired through art, sometimes different than words. Does art portray perfection in our imperfect world, or does art portray imperfection in a supposed perfect world? On the title page, the dancers in the Matisse (1910) painting “are not in denial of the troubles of this planet, but from the standpoint of our imperfect and conflicted – but ordinary – relationship with reality, we can look to their attitude for encouragement” (de Botton & Armstrong, 2013, p. 16). Objects of art made by humans for humans with humans are flowing and intra-active; meaning is made by the human intra-action with the respective visual creation. Meaning making is inspired relationally – *this is relational discourse*.

Roskill (1991) shares excerpts of one of Van Gogh’s letters written to his brother in June 1889, “ This morning I saw the country from my window a long time before sunrise, with nothing but the morning star, which looked very big” (Roskill, 1991, p. 318). At that moment emerged a symbolic landscape of whirling movement, colour, light, and vibrant energy while contrasting peace and calm as seen through Van Gogh’s eyes on a starry night. Did Van Gogh’s multiple selves become this starry night as he aligned himself with a vernacular mode of expression, his story of a starry night, his creative and curious inquiry (Garrett-Petts & Lawrence, 2000)? Knowingly or un-knowingly he challenged existing traditions and interpretations of a starry night in his generative discourse (Gergen, 2009a, 2009b). My eyes and mind are illuminated by the light and colour, absorbing, continually moving in a rhythmic, relational dance with the painting; inspired imaginative meaning transposed from Van Gogh’s spirit, memories, experiences, and the possibilities in his life - 1889 to the future. Through his vibrant verbal narrative I am transported by promising ideas in this painting’s transcendence and humility. de Botton & Armstrong (2013) illustrate that art is an



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extension of our experience:

Art is immensely sophisticated accumulation of the experiences of others, presented to us in well-shaped and well-organized forms. It can provide us with some of the most eloquent instances of the voices of other cultures, so that an engagement with artworks stretches our notions of ourselves and our world. At first, much of art seems merely 'other', but we discover that it can contain ideas and attitudes that we can make our own in ways that enrich us. (p. 65)

How can anyone say art doesn't inspire, co-create meaning, and move us to be different people? Art has the potential to change our world.

Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy

The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds. (His Holiness the Dalai Lama)

One of the aspects associated with this work that is of central importance to us is the spirit of adventure. We aim to preserve this spirit, and know that if we accomplish this our work will continue to evolve in ways that are enriching to our lives, and to the lives of those persons who seek our help. (White & Epston, 1992, p. 9)

Art Therapy enables me to access images that no amount of talking can bring me to. It helps me gain a far greater and deeper understanding of myself and is a way of expressing cut off and

painful feelings that until now have had no voice. It illuminates some of the dark shadows of my mind and soul and helps me find within them powerful symbols of nurturance and protection. It gives voice to those parts of me that are beyond the reach of words. (Barber, 2014)

Art Therapy gives me a different perspective of myself. My doubts and worries become so much less important. New possibilities show themselves to me. I learn to accept myself as I am, to live in the moment, not in the past or in the future. To blossom within and to use this new found energy in a loving way in the outer world. (Barber, 2014)

A multiplicity of theoretical paradigms and interventions are continually emerging to collectively engage the therapist and person in an effective approach for societal and/or individual, family, and community change and, ultimately, human growth. Even though there are no named constructionist therapies, social constructionist thinking views therapeutic process as conversations or dialogues (Anderson, 1997; McNamee, 2004). Therapy as social construction focuses on “*how* a therapist might bring particular forms of practice or conceptual bases into the conversations” (McNamee, 2004, p.254). I consider my interwoven focus and application of Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy in therapeutic practice and process as constructionist philosophy (McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Rubin, 2010; White & Epston, 1990). Both modalities are based on verbal and visual narratives, oral, written, symbols or images of curious engagement and co-creation of preferred stories of transformation and future possibilities. Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy are being-with another person in therapeutic discourse to co-create and co-construct generative verbal and visual dialogical engagement. Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy are acts of appreciation.

The Story of Narrative Therapy

After several years of exploring Narrative Therapy in the context of therapeutic practice, I remained diligent to be curious about finding a precise definition. Should I be curious about finding a precise definition? I wonder. Having said this, I now think that being precise is not the essential meaning or “T” truth (Caputo, 2013) behind a narrative approach. As a narrative therapist reality or “T” Truth is not exact, orderly or precise at all. Reality cannot be fully understood as each of the people we walk beside has their own storied and lived experiences in the world. No one storied life that enters our discursive therapeutic space is the same. Our shared narratives co-create who we are in the world. White and Epston (1990) explain, “Persons give meaning to their lives and relationships by storying their experiences and that, in interacting with others in the performance of these stories, they are active in the shaping of their lives and relationships” (p. 13). How we co-create who we are in the world together is what matters.

Framed from a wide range of postmodernist philosophical notions, Narrative Therapy is a reflective, relation-centered, creative approach that

involves the telling of and retelling, deconstructing and reconstructing of a person's story in conversational partnership (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Freedman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; White, 1989/1997, 2005, 2007, 2011; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996). Theoretically postmodernism serves as a conspicuous counterpoint to traditional foundations of philosophy, research, and practice. Postmodern thought questioned and blurred boundaries of traditionally accepted concepts of objectivity, knowledge, and the essential capital "T" truth claims. Postmodernism ideology dispelled the need for the therapist to cure the client's problem. Monk (1997) shares that a narrative approach in therapeutic practice "wants to deconstruct the problem that is presented," externalizing the problem from the person (p. 8). Therefore problems, truths, and realities are multiple, subjective, and socially constructed imparting the importance of our need to deconstruct taken-for-granted ideas, models, and theories.

The therapeutic process of inquiry differs from modernist intervention of expert, scientific knowing to a relational shift involving respectful, attentive listening. It focuses on asking questions in order to gain deeper understanding of the *meaning* of a person's rich story as opposed to thin descriptors of a person's story. Narrative questions continually ask the person to re-evaluate their position with the problem and ask how this relates to their preferences for living, as our stories sometimes move in restrained ways due to dominant discourse. What is the context in which a person lives? What is the person's relationship to the problem? How do we construct a new relational language? The person no longer *has* depression, but rather the person has a *relationship* to depression (D. Nylund, personal communication, May 2013). Narrative questions are asked in such a way that people story make, create and recreate vocabularies of experience that reside far beyond the stale, restrained, and limited versions of their problem saturated story. Dialogical engagement penetrates restraints and creates courses of action and possibilities. Curious conversation flows to tributaries outside of the problem.

Dialogical Conversations: Expert or Equal

Anderson (1997) states, "The modernist discourse promotes the *dualistic and hierarchical notion of a client as the subject of inquiry and observation* and places a therapist in a superior expert position.... the subject of inquiry (the client) is considered defective, flawed, and dysfunctional" (p. 32). The first contact with the person in a narrative practice positions the person as the expert of her/his life and differentiates the problem from the person, locating the problem relative to a larger intersectional social context that challenges and oppresses her/his life. Freedman and Combs (1996) state four concepts integral to Narrative practice:

- Realities are socially constructed.
- Realities are constructed through language.
- Realities are organized and maintained through narrative.
- There are no essential truths. (p. 22)

A Narrative Therapy discourse deconstructs the therapist's role as expert, and reconstructs the realization of the person's role as expert of her own story and life, co-creating a joint endeavor (Anderson, 1997). As a therapist, the position of un-knowing and un-certainty demands humility, gives breath to personal agency, offers strength to differentiate the problem from the person, and locates the problem relative to a larger intersectional social context that challenges and oppresses the person's life. This is an open invitation to collaboratively share stories creatively and comfortably; it redefines the role of the therapist as, "that of a conversational artist - an architect of the dialogical process - whose expertise is in the arena of creating a space for and facilitating a dialogical conversation" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 27). Narrative therapy is a poetic partnership.

Narrative Therapy engages the participants in the co-creation of suspension of knowledge and power, a way of being-with. Safe therapeutic space co-constructs the recognition that our relational social contract is a means to speak the unspoken, shaping both participants to dialogically engage in the fluid movement of compassion and trustworthiness. Therapeutic conversations do not explore or expose deficits, nor do they diagnose, but rather they engage in a dialogical dance of telling and re-telling of one's story. Opening space and being-with a person creates a powerful experience when re-telling one's story. Being genuinely listened to is empowering. Problems overwhelm us; they demand our attention and negate exceptions to our stories. Problems recruit people. Problems invite multiple stressors such as worry, fear, anxiety, despair, and hopelessness into our lives. Problems evoke self-surveillance, fueling our monologues as they perform to an audience of normality or dominant discourse (Epston & White, 1990; Foucault, 1965, 1980, 1996). A Narrative Therapy process separates the problem from the person and views the problem as separate, different, and external to the person. Curious questions solicit mutual engagement, creating a means to co-construct scenic landscapes of action, landscapes of consciousness, and landscapes of identity (White, 2007, 2011). Curious inquiry composes questions that offer a backdrop of choices to either support a person's problems or her potential to construct alternative stories that empower the experience of personal agency (Epston, 1989). Inquiring questions provide a means to explore, reclaim, and thicken a story, to offer alternatives and possibilities while also emphasizing strengths and successes. This collaborative partnership in curious conversation externalizes thin problem-saturated stories, empowers and creates a landscape for loitering with unique outcomes and exceptions, and scaffolds potentials for preferred stories, co-creating new ways of being in the world (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Freedman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; White, 1989/1997, 2005, 2007, 2011; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996).

The Story of Art Therapy

Evidence of art as a means of human expression, iconic documentation, and healing extends from prehistory to Navajo sand paintings, from African sculpture to Tibetan Buddhist mandalas. Many examples can be found of the use

of art in therapeutic ritual throughout time. Clearly, the idea of using art for healing is not a new concept but is a relatively new approach of therapeutic modality that stems from both modernist and postmodernist ideologies. The definition of Art Therapy is still widely debated. The healing modality of art is widespread both for the outsider witness or viewer and the art maker. Art Therapy continues to be a live work in progress. In my practice, I have noted a relational correlation between art and the complexities of voice. Art creates voice and meaning. It is an effective mode of communication; art making in therapeutic space is relational discourse (Malchiodi, 2012). de Botton and Armstrong (2013) believe:

Art can help us identify what is central to ourselves, but hard to put in words. Much that is human is not readily available in language. We can hold up art objects and say, confusedly but importantly, 'This is me.' (p. 65)

Art making of any form empowers communication of the unspoken or the forgotten through image, symbols, photography, film, sculpture, dance, music, words, poetry, and multiple other mediums - an aligned connection with social constructionist thinking of therapy as a process of conversation. The healing power of art is indisputable.

A visual narrative co-creates expression to share images and words that may be difficult to speak. Art is visual story that stimulates curious questions. Art speaks to us all. Art is relational. Art making is life enhancing. Art changes the world. Art in any form expresses strong verbal and visual messages that are vessels to create wonder, change, and make peaceful protest to critique society, inspire society, and raise awareness for the future of humanity. Visual territory rouses the opening of our minds, our hearts, and our visions to engage our perceptions of change and possibilities in the world. It has been thought by some that art may be used as movement to define our species (Dissanayake, 1992).

Art addresses our biggest challenges, it "invariably involves shifting human behavior and culture and this is where art can play a more pivotal role. It can help inspire new thinking, open dialogue, mitigate conflict, build local economies, accelerate learning and even play a therapeutic role" (Jones, 2014, para. 9). Art making is a relational dance, a visual narrative between artist, medium, and viewer/s that generates social change, transforms cultural ideas, and frames human benefits and opportunities. de Botton and Armstrong (2013) refer to art as a tool, they suggest like other tools "art has the power to extend our capacities beyond those that nature originally endowed us with" (p.5). They further propose that art "is a therapeutic medium that can help guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves" (de Botton and Armstrong, 2013, p. 5). Art making is an agency of change in both therapeutic space and everyday life as it energizes thought, expression, and transformative dialogue. Allen (1995) shares "making images is a way of breaking boundaries, loosening outworn ideas, and making way for the new" (pp. ix-x). This suggests a visual constructionist narrative of transformation in the creation of one's preferred story of being-with and being in the world. We can usually make room for more of the art that surrounds us. Malchiodi (2012) writes:

Art Therapy is based on the idea that the creative process of art making facilitates reparation and recovery and is a form of nonverbal communication of thoughts and feelings.... It is used to encourage personal growth and had been employed in a wide variety of settings... It is an approach that can help individuals of all ages create meaning and achieve insight, find relief from overwhelming emotions or trauma, resolve conflicts and problems, enrich daily life, and achieve an increased sense of well-being. (p. 1)

The History of Art Therapy

Art Therapy, a fusion of art and psychology, was influenced by social and intellectual trends of the 20th century expounded by a collection of diverse individuals (Jung & Asawa, 1994; Betensky, 1973, 1995; Kramer, 1958, 1971; Naumburg, 1966; McNiff, 1981; Ulman & Dachinger, 1975). Ironically, the systemic box-like institution of hospital discourse has used Art Therapy longer than other systems. Art Therapy was originally used to work with institutionalized children, state hospital psychiatric patients, and psychiatric inmates; the creativity of the circle interconnecting with the box. It is believed that in 1942 Adrian Hill devised the term Art Therapy, a form of psychodynamic therapy that utilized art practices and interventions of talk therapy (Hogan, 2001; Naumburg, 1950; Malchiodi, 2012). Art Therapy may be traced to the analytical psychology of Freud and Jung; both believed “through creation of images, the unconscious manifests itself and the act of creation intrinsically provides release” (Berdard Bidwell, 2001, p. 33). Margaret Naumburg (1950) is accredited with being the “mother of art therapy” (Junge & Asawa, 1994, p. 22); contemporary applications of Art Therapy can be attributed to the art psychotherapy approach of Naumburg and the Art Therapy approach of Kramer (Kramer, 1958, 1971; Naumburg, 1950, 1966). While both were founded in psychoanalytical techniques, their respective approaches still offer the basis for Art Therapy currently used in clinical practice today. According to Vondracek and Corneal (1995), while basing her approach on Freudian psychodynamics and incorporating Jung’s concepts about the universality of symbols, Naumburg believed that the “only appropriate interpretation of an individual’s art was the individual’s own” (p. 297). She treated the “material produced in the patient’s art as a psychoanalyst would treat dream material. Art Therapy, then, is an insight-orientated approach in which insight is generated through dialogue between patient and therapist concerning the patient’s art” (Vondracek & Corneal, 1995, p. 297). However, a constructionist lens would relationally utilize art and narrative to craft new ideas and create possibilities. Case and Dalley (1990) suggest that, “pictures can also operate on a metaphorical level, when this occurs we have a clear relationship between two modes of expression, the iconic and the linguistic” (p. 8). Transitional objects such as art or iconic expression stimulate a means of collective linguistic discussion through transitional space, an exploration of relational meaning for both the therapist and the person/s in therapeutic space and in relationship to the world around them. Currently the exploration of Art Therapy is evident in multiple discourses where there is a concern with human meaning making, growth, and

transformation (Allen, 1995; Cameron & Bryan, 1992; Moon, 2002). Alter-Muri (1998) professes that art therapists “embracing a postmodernist approach become co-creators with their clients in a life of meaningfulness rather than continuing to act as mere interpreters of signs and symbols of pathology” (p. 250).

A Collaboration: Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy

Both Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy as unique or collaborative approaches to practice deconstruct pathological theories and respect the person as the expert with the therapist in a role of curious un-certainty in dialogical engagement (Malchiodi, 2012). Together these therapeutic approaches of story telling and art making complement one another in co-creating alternative outcomes. It is documented that “two languages, one verbal and one visual, stimulate processes that help the client find solutions to problems. By combining art activities and narrative approaches, therapeutic change is expedited through both specific interventions and creative expression” (Riley & Malchiodi, 2012, p. 103). Riley and Malchiodi (2012) illustrate that the concept of verbally and visually externalizing problems is shared in story telling and therapeutic letters through Narrative Therapy and art making through Art Therapy:

For example, a drawing, painting, or collage of the presenting problem is a natural way of separating the person from the problem because through art the problem becomes visible. It allows the person to literally “see” the problem and to think about it as something outside him or herself... It also can evoke a physical sense of how the problem feels and provides the opportunity to make meaning and to rework images into new stories. (pp. 109-110)

Together Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy promote multiple images, multiple perspectives, and multiple stories that evolve to be creatively and collaboratively witnessed. Intertwined, these two modalities deconstruct fixed beliefs and problem-saturated stories and construct stories and images of new beginnings - preferred verbal and visual narratives.

The Three Entities

Some of us think holding on makes us strong; but sometimes it is letting go. (Hermann Hesse, 1877-1962)

Satyagraha is literally holding on to Truth and it means, therefore, Truth-force. Truth is soul or spirit. It is, therefore, known as soul-force. It excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and, therefore, not competent to punish. The word was coined in South Africa to distinguish the not-violent resistance of the Indians of South Africa from the contemporary ‘passive resistance’ of the suffragettes and others. It is not conceived as a weapon of the weak. (Mahatma Gandhi, 2001,p. 2)

Imagine all the people living life in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one. (John Lennon, 1971)

The verbal and visual narratives I am privileged to relationally dance with in therapeutic space make me query the three entities of strengths (Saleebey, 1992), resistance (Wade, 1997), and hope (Weingarten, 2000). These three entities feed my re-search and help me practice curiosity; I marvel how or if these three entities interact and inform our multiple visual and verbal narratives in collaboratively co-creating transformative possibilities in our lives. Do these three entities inform one another? Are they intertwined in our preferred stories? Do these three entities construct an un-named dynamic, if so, how does this re-story practice and re-search?

Once upon a time... when asked what strengths were, my response was based on a patriarchal construction of a muscular, forceful, powerful man, able to lift heavy objects with ease and leap tall buildings with a single bound. Women were not strong, forceful or powerful, nor were children. I actively resist this childhood memory, this social construction of masculine traditional verbal and visual narrative of strengths. My grade school teachers referred to me as a resistant girl, their repertoire expanding with the use of descriptors such as obstinate, unwilling, defiant, difficult, rebellious, noncompliant, and unruly. Girls were not resistant; they were submissive. Needless to say I spent much time during my early years in the corner or the principal's office. Punitive, power over crescendos and relation-less measures created no meaning making or ability to embrace my curious counterwill. Little girls were to be seen and not heard. As an adult woman I embrace those same acts of resistance as when I was a young girl. I was not sure of what hope meant way back then, as I had only heard the word in the context of "I hope you'll behave." As my verbal and visual narrative illustrates, I hoped I would not to be eaten or drowned by snapping turtles, in the same way as I hoped the wicked witch would not get Dorothy and she would soon return to Kansas and, of course, that the Queen of Hearts would not lop off Alice's or anyone else's head. I am curious about the concept of hope. I had no real knowing of the significance that strengths, resistance, and hope offered to my life and my relational meaning making with those I encountered on my path of being-with. Now, I embrace these three entities every day in practice. This inquiry embodies these three special and meaningful entities in relational dialogue in the co-creation of possibilities and transformation.

Strengths

Merriam-Webster (2014b) defines strength as follows: "the quality or state of being physically strong; the ability to resist being moved or broken by force; and the quality that allows someone to deal with problems in a determined and effective way" (para. 1). As a social worker and therapist, the strengths perspective is engrained in my knowing, language, practice, and re-search and invites me to be appreciative, collaborative, and relational. We two leggeds are

not constructed to intuitively acknowledge our strengths – unless of course we are in positions of power. We hide our strengths; at times we are blind to our strengths.

A Story of Strengths

In a session many years ago I worked with a person in their 30's who had been consumed for 17 years by heroin, violence, jail, and trauma. When seen on the street or in a public environment, this man's physical persona was very intimidating; he would be the first to tell you his presence scared people. He opened his story with a question for me: "What the fuck would you know about a person like me?" My response was "other than your name I know nothing of your story or why you are coming to see someone like me at this point in your life." He looked perplexed. My stance of un-knowing lacked judgment and invited him to share his story of his knowing and his experience. About 40 minutes into our first session I had created a detailed composition in my head of his colourful and vast strengths, despite his story of many years of misery. I was curious if his narrative of pain, violence, trauma, shame, blame, and chaos had masked or eclipsed his story rich with a multitude of strengths. Hidden inside his problem-saturated story was a story of multiple strengths. Had his experiences created a means for him to construct and express a language of strengths or a language of deficits? It was at this point that I posed the question: "Can you tell me of your strengths?" Immediately this burly, tattooed, daunting six foot four inch man began to cry; through a flood of tears he sobbed uncontrollably. We sat together in silence with his tears for quite some time. Anderson (1997) explains:

We generate knowledge with each other through language. Language – spoken and unspoken words, sounds, utterances, gestures, signs, and other forms of speech and action used to communicate – is the primary vehicle through which, in which, we construct our worlds, give order and meaning to our lives, and relate to each other. (p. 201)

It was evident to me that his story and his tears profoundly illustrated his strengths. Whether knowingly or un-knowingly his tears expressed a language of strengths exposing and sharing his ability to be vulnerable with me. His language of vulnerability was his language of strengths – not weakness. When he was able to respond he said, "No one has ever asked me that question before." At this time, he was unable to articulate any strengths as he truly believed he had none – his perception of his life experience was not strengths-based. We reflected in silence again. I asked his permission to share what strengths I had thought he posed and he began to weep again, unable to stop the flow of tears. This man's unnamed, hidden strengths constructed a language of meaning making which he had not articulated before, as "people make meaning out of experience through discourse with others" (Van wormer & Davis, 2008, p. 99). Through our relational dialogue his once blinded – now seen – strengths created a new way for him to view his past and present experience. The telling and re-telling of this man's story co-created a means to restory strengths, shifting his embedded socially and institutionally constructed perspectives of himself. For five years we walked relationally in therapeutic space. As co-inquirers we co-created meaning and co-

constructed his preferred story of transformation and future possibilities. Van wormer & Davis (2008) propose that:

Strengths-based practitioners believe that no matter how dismal the circumstances, people have possibilities, resiliencies, and capacities for change and even transformation. They look for and try to nurture the “gleam” that is often hidden by misery, protective strategies, and the failure to achieve goals set by others. (p. 86)

A Strengths Perspective

Through the use of strengths-based language, questions, and human intra-actions focused on possibilities and hope, our strengths are easily and meaningfully rediscovered and/or discovered. Do we create a world of problems or do we create a world of possibilities? Saleebey (2002) suggests that strengths perspective is:

A versatile practice approach, relying heavily on the ingenuity and creativity, the courage and common sense, of both clients and their social workers. It is a collaborative process depending on clients and workers to be purposeful agents and not mere functionaries. It is an approach honoring the innate wisdom of the human spirit, the inherent capacity for transformation of even the most humbled and abused. When you adopt the strengths approach to practice you can expect exciting changes in the character of your work and in the tenor of your relationships with clients. (p. 1)

Strengths perspective is not considered a theory as it lacks “explanatory power” (Van wormer & Davis, 2008, p. 17). Rather, it is a multi-dimensional, collective approach that brings people together and refocuses problems as challenges, deficits and limitations as strengths and resources, and redirects the past to the future (Rapp, 1998; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Saleebey, 1992, 1996, 2002; Sullivan & Rapp, 1994). Van wormer and Davis (2008) believe a strengths perspective is a “way of perceiving people in their struggles to rise above difficult circumstances” (p. 17). Our strengths illuminate our capacities, resources, gifts, hopes, visions, and values despite circumstances, adversity, oppression or trauma. Honouring strengths reifies what a person knows and empowers revision of the person’s lived experiences and verbal and visual narratives (Saleebey, 1996). A strengths perspective appreciates creativity and inspires us to move to preferred verbal and visual narratives. We all have strengths – every person, family, group, and community. As relational human beings we are membered and co-create meaning through dialogue, giving voice to all that is there to be seen and told. We all witness the strengths of another person.

Saleebey (2002) suggests that strengths perspective is a “versatile practice approach, relying heavily on ingenuity and creativity, the courage and common sense of both clients and their social workers” (p.1). Our relational connections and visual and verbal narratives enable expression and perception of strengths and realities – empowered voice. Our life journey may encounter struggles and adversity, our known and unknown strengths may be sources of challenge and opportunities to create and empower transformation. A strengths

perspective is an approach that encompasses certain principles for relational practice: the need for a person to position herself/himself to deconstruct and externalize identification and reconstruct self or relational control of what challenges them, the need for personal choice or control, a person's need for hope, a person's need for purpose, a person's need for a sense of achievement, and the presence of one key or supportive person in one's life (Rapp, 1998). As spirited beings we are resourceful and our resources are unlimited despite the depths of our despair at times. We are socially and professionally constructed to pathologise, to ask, "What's wrong?" as opposed to a strengths-based and empowerment-based question of "What's well?" Western dominant cultural rhetoric debases, belittles, and discounts stories; this cynicism reminds us of the harm and stigma that a constructed single story creates. When we seek out peoples' strengths we are told multiple and meaningful stories that dispel problem deficit language and assessments (Cowger, 1994; Saleebey, 2002; McNamee & Hosking, 2012), giving richness to our relational engagement with *people* rather than clients, patients, cases or files. Strengths perspective is the process of enriching the spirit of life and fulfilling holistic potential by not focusing on what is wrong, but rather on what is well – rejecting hierarchal structures of power and control and shedding the shackles of misgivings (Saleebey, 1992, 1996, 2002). Strengths dispel deficits as constructed and assumed by Western culture.

Saleebey, (2002) suggests that practicing from a strengths orientation means:

Everything you do as a social worker will be predicated, in some way, on helping to discover and embellish, explore and exploit clients' strengths and resources in the service of assisting them to achieve their goals, realize their dreams, and shed the irons of their own inhibitions and misgivings, and society's domination. (p. 1)

Problems and deficits rob us of our ability to speak in a language of strengths. Problems recruit people.

Strengths and Empowerment

Strengths perspective works collaboratively with an empowerment theoretical perspective. Mullay (2007) suggests, "empowerment is not a technique but a goal and a process" (p. 302). Rondeau (2000) defines empowerment as:

A process that enables the transformation from a state of passivity to one of activity and control over one's life...[I]t essentially means a process of change where people stop being passive and become active, that is, they take charge and become active players in their own lives. By becoming active, they attempt to take back, control of themselves and their environments. (p. 218)

Enabling is not empowering another person. Payne (2005) poses that "Empowerment is not limited, as enablement is, to allowing or assisting people to take actions, but is aimed at relinquishing and transferring them the power to control their lives permanently" (p. 302). Empowering the narrative of another gives strength to voice, control, and change. In a therapeutic dialogue it is empowering when a person discovers that something they were convinced was a

weakness in their life actually turns out to be a source of strength. Empowerment co-creates power in transformative dialogue.

Cowger (1994) believes that a “clinical practice based on empowerment assumes that client power is achieved when clients make choices that give them more control over their presenting problem situations and in turn their own lives” (p. 263). Narrative and Art Therapy echo the strengths of past exceptions and richly feed the preferred story. The more we are relational and co-create meaning the more we are empowered, the stronger we become. Hick (2002) reiterates empowerment as, “the sense that people can create and take action on their own behalf to meet their physical, spiritual and psychological needs” (p. 276). When we are empowered we have a heightened awareness of tension and conflict that oppresses and limits; when we are empowered we are able to navigate freedom from what restrains us (Saleebey, 1996). Mullan (2007) suggests that the correlation between strengths and empowerment is that:

People are not objects to be exploited, to be controlled, or to be oppressed. People are the subjects, human beings with inherent dignity and worth that should not be conditional on race, gender, class, or any other inherent characteristics. All people should have reasonable opportunities and choices over their life situation and their social environments. (p. 302)

Together, perspectives of strengths and empowerment are processes for deconstructing oppression. Our stories have the prospective to draw on our existing inherent strengths to re-author alternative stories, to build stronger potential, create transformation, and inspire future possibilities for all people and communities. Our stories of strengths author potential and enhance well-being. Despite the focus on strengths perspective in social work practice, there continues to be a gap in the literature regarding the concept of strengths and our understanding of this concept in the context of dialogical conversations, therapeutic space, and therapeutic practice.

Resistance

The Learning and Un-learning of Resistance

What is this misunderstood and misrepresented concept called resistance? I am curious. Merriam-Webster (2014a) defines resistance as follows:

- 1 (a): an act or instance of resisting: OPPOSITION (b): a means of resisting;
- 2: the power or capacity to resist: as (a): the inherent ability of an organism to resist harmful influences (as disease, toxic agents, or infection) (b): the capacity of a species or strain of microorganism to survive exposure to a toxic agent (as a drug) formerly effective against it;
- 3: an opposing or retarding force;
- 4 (a): the opposition offered by a body or substance to the passage through it of a steady electric current (b): a source of resistance;

- 5: a psychological defense mechanism wherein a patient rejects, denies, or otherwise opposes the therapeutic efforts of a psychotherapist; and
6: *often capitalized*: an underground organization of a conquered or nearly conquered country engaging in sabotage and secret operations against occupation forces and collaborators. (para. 2)

In my undergraduate social work degree I was taught much about the resistant client, an oppositional, manipulative, non-compliant person who resists the help and efforts of the helper. Interesting that a BSW program that boasted an anti-oppressive and strengths-based framework to practice used deficit based language to label and disempower people in their classrooms. My journey of unknowing this learning is liberating.

A Resistance Story

A beautiful woman shared her story with me about being identified in the hospital as 'cancer.' Admitted to the hospital, lying in her hospital bed in the hall outside the MRI clinic, she heard a loud voice yell, "Where is the cancer patient?" Another nurse responded "Over there." She was incensed by both nurses' disrespectful use of language of effect and their resultant irresponsible linguistic representation of her. For the past year, and despite her suffering, her courageous acts of resistance to cancer and death were strong. She was perplexed as to why the professionals would identify her as 'cancer' when neither she nor her loved ones identified her in that way. In the hall that day, her resistance grew stronger to cancer and to the professional discourse of cancer as she refused to let cancer steal her name. She responded, "My name is not cancer, my name is Eileen." This courageous act of resistance co-created deeper meaning of our shared understanding of the language of response as opposed to the misrepresentation and untruths that the language of effects construct. "Fuck cancer." Eileen's story makes it evident that the how, what, and who we identify, classify or name reflects socially constructed norms of dominant discourses and discursive practices of insensitive judgment, labeling, and categorizing (Foucault, 1965; Gergen, 2009a; Madigan, 1996, 2007). Coates and Wade (2004) present an example of a young child:

Taking hours to walk two blocks home becomes understandable as a form of resistance only when we put the behaviour in context and discover that his father would rape him after school, before his mother got home from work. The disparity between events as they actually occurred and accounts of those events remains concealed until the events are examined in context. (p. 5)

Our judgment, socially and professionally constructed truths, and expectations craft a taken-for-granted inclination of deficiency or defiance that mask the courageous act of resistance that this child has creatively and brilliantly developed as a survival strategy. Without the child's story, risks of misrepresentation and untruths are constructed.

The Story of Resistance

Historically the understanding of resistance in therapeutic discourse and space was the client's unwillingness to participate in the therapeutic process and was referred to as 'client resistance' (Gold, 2008; Seibel & Dowd, 2001). This reflects the historical power imbalance of the relational inequality of the person as the recipient of therapy, subject of the powerful gaze, and the therapist as the expert of the therapeutic process, a complacent monological, individualist approach to practice. Such historical practice normalizes judgment, fuels power relations, disengages curiosity and inquiry, and ignores relational interaction (Foucault, 1965; Foucault, 1996). Socially constructed objectified norms, standards and truths about human behaviour have historically directed therapeutic practice, whether purposely or unintentionally, to a position of judgment, classification, and acceptability of a person's life (Foucault, 1980).

Resistance, as constructed in Freudian analysis and still continued in psychodynamic practice is expressed as emotional sensitivity or lack of emotional regulation, lack of psychological defense mechanisms, and inability to cope with unconscious conflicts related to historically painful events from which the client seeks safety and wellbeing from the expert knowing of the therapist (Cowen & Presbury, 2000; Freud, 1957; Gold, 2008). This suggests a medical model emulating an individualist practice framework. The expectations and modalities of psychotherapy are multiple and diverse, yet "One insidious expectation is the idea of a deficiency or weakness within the person" (McNamee, 2009, p. 57). A deficiency based is "frequently a main vehicle for disempowerment" (McNamee, 2009, p. 58); this perpetuates the disregard for human dignity and enforces power relationships in therapeutic space (McNamee, 2009; Foucault, 1965, 1996). Such disregard lacks a "relationally responsible therapeutic context" and refutes relational dialogue with those we walk beside (McNamee, 2009, p. 59).

It would make sense that if a therapist were confrontational, directive, authoritative, and disrespectful that the person in therapeutic space would be resistant or present with strong counterwill as a reaction to this perceived control and/or the multiple forms of coercion reflecting the conventional dichotomy of power and resistance and power relationships (Foucault, 1965, 1996; Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Control affords the therapist a place of power as the knowing or un-knowing oppressor in therapeutic space. No one likes to be pushed around or told what to do. Alternatively if the therapist were respectful, reflective, supportive, and relational then the person's resistance would be reduced, reflecting person-centered practice that hopes to co-construct generative transformation congruent with relational discourse. This illustrates Gergen's (2011) relational and dialogical performance, a dance with "no solo movements" (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 41). If the lyrics of resistance create the music to which we dance, then resistance invites a sense of co-performance. When I first met a young Aboriginal woman in our local emergency room, she was unimpressed by my presence. She welcomed me with an unabashed "Fuck you, I don't want to work with you...fuck off..." and proceeded to vocally share many pieces of her trauma and problem saturated story for some time. I listened. Was my visual yet non-verbal presence

and social interaction relationally engaging? Was her resistance connoting non-compliance, drug-seeking behaviours or was her resistance informed decision-making, knowing exactly what she wanted or needed, simple survival in the moment? If I had perceived her act of resistance as non-compliance and had responded from a place of non-compliance, would we have danced? Not walking away from the “fuck you... fuck off” and being present responded to her resistance as a generative process, a means for relational engagement as she continued to share chapters of her story. There were no solo movements in our initial meeting in the emergency room that evening, we shared collaborative movement. Our conversational dance emerged and flowed and co-created alternative stories that supported her intuitive and informed resistance.

Historically, the term ‘resistance’ in the context of the therapeutic relationship has been used to describe the behaviour of the person attending therapy, suggesting resistance as deficit-based – problematic behaviour of the person. This historical analysis of resistance conceals the powerful dynamic of therapist as the expert of knowing and permits the use of deficit-based and disempowering language to assign (unintentionally or intentionally) judgment and blame on the person in therapy. This is paradoxically confusing from a place of relational, responsible, and respectful practice. If resistance truly exists in a relationship or system, then in the context of a therapeutic relationship it is “an interpersonal interaction”, a dialogical dance between the therapist and the person attending therapy (Miller & Rollnick, 2002, p. 98; Gergen 2011; Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Resistance, whether present in a relationship or system, suggests the need for movement in another direction or form of being. That evening in the emergency room the therapeutic discourse could have followed two diametrically different paths. One route might have been from a knowing expert stance of judgment, which is a non-relational stance that disempowers and oppresses. This lacks responsive interpersonal interaction. An alternative road of curious inquiry and therapy as social construction was being-with, co-performing a relational dance in discursive therapeutic space, embracing resistance despite difference with the hope to co-create possibilities.

Continually Curious About Resistance

My un-knowing and new learning of resistance co-constructed with others in therapeutic space makes me continually curious. My post secondary education taught me little about resistance other than in the unbalanced context of the person practitioner relationship and disempowerment as aforementioned. Are we taught to value resistance? Through relational dialogue, verbal and visual narratives in my daily practice I have witnessed resistance and much meaning has been shared and imparted about the creativity, the strength, and the power of resistance. Is resistance the refusal to accept what an individual, a community or a society deems to be the correct way to do something, or to feel about, or to cope with a specific situation? Could resistance be defined as fighting back for oneself or someone else against someone or something that is holding a person back or devaluing a person in any or all holistic realms of functioning? Is resistance a refusal to permit an individual, group, or specific situation or injustice

to dictate what you do or someone else does in the moment or the future? Is resistance a means to both brazenly and inaudibly respond to and conceivably attempt to address oppression and the multiple forms of abuse of power in the moment, to create a sense of safety, dignity, and desire for justice? Is resistance the strength to survive?

The act of resistance assists in the deconstruction of internalized socially constructed messages of structures, relational domination, power, violence, surveillance, and oppression (Fook, 2004). It intrinsically encourages people to respond and defy language, labels, myths, stigmas, stereotypes, harm, regulations, and untruths that have been imposed on a person or persons, in order to reconstruct and transmute a preferred and safe way of being in the world (Fook, 2004). Where there is power there is resistance. Conant (2010) suggests that one way resistance works is as:

a cycle of pushing and pulling, of opposing forces struggling for survival, struggling to engage creatively in their environment, to adapt. Resistance is always aware of the variety of external threats it faces, and adapts to the struggles as it happens. (p. 35)

Wade (1997) reminds me that resistance is:

Any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression, or the conditions that make such acts possible... any attempt to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality, on behalf of one's self or others, including any effort to redress the harm caused by violence or other forms of oppression. (p. 25)

Resistance is an existing response-based means to an improved understanding of our differentiation and deconstruction of the imbalance of power, abuse of power, and oppression that we as human beings experience. When deepening our awareness of that resistance, it is important to acknowledge "how oppression works on the individual and how the individual responds" (Wade, 2007, p. 64). The word response is a derivative root of the word responsibility. *Responsibility* "signals the importance of making spaces for telling and listening to stories as well as the responsibilities of sustaining each other" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 28).

The Complexities of Resistance

Resistance, like power, is complex (Afupe, 2011; Reynolds, 2010). Oppression and resistance inhabit diametrically opposite ends of the spectrum. Afupe (2011) states that "dominant discourses always coexist with alternative discourses that challenge them... power and resistance can be viewed as two sides of the same coin" (p. 36). Resistance is creative (Afupe, 2011; Blackstock, 2008; Reynolds, 2010; Wade 1997) and, therefore resistance creatively facilitates a means for me to respond to oppression and all forms of abuse of power – overt, covert, lateral, vertical, deliberate – to courageously contest what, who, and where my experiences of oppression takes me. I choose to be creatively resistant, as reflective resistance can create power for myself and for others. I acknowledge

the intricacy of power, and therefore, I know that resistance can be constructive and also destructive depending upon my reflection or reaction (Afupe, 2011, Wade, 1997). If I embrace difference, I create meaning and possibilities. If I turn a blind eye, I contribute to more oppression and create suffering. As allies of resistance “we must resist what is unjust to realize what is just” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 22). I choose resistance to create possibilities as opposed to “causing further limitations and constraints on people’s ability to live well with each other” (Afupe, 2011, p. 37).

Resistance is response-based; it is spontaneous and acts in the moment (Wade, 1996, 1997, 2007). Research (Coates & Wade, 2007; Epston, 1989; Goffman, 1961; Kelly, 1988; Todd, Wade, & Renoux, 2004; Wade 1996, 1997, 2000) suggests that “resistance is ubiquitous: whenever individuals are badly treated, they resist” (Coates and Wade, 2004, p. 6). Consequently, consciously or unconsciously we are all able to perform acts of resistance. We all have the capacity to do the opposite of what is expected of us. However, “social myths and conventional treatment models” tend to “blame victims and mitigate the responsibility of the offender” (Todd, Wade, & Renoux, 2004, p. 151). Social norms continually dictate, “Victims are typically represented as socially conditioned and passive recipients of abuse” and oppression even though “violent behaviour is deliberate” with most perpetrators or tormentors strategically suppressing their ‘victims’ resistance” (Todd, Wade, & Renoux, 2004, pp. 145-146). This creates a language of effects as opposed to a language of responses (Todd, Wade, & Renoux, 2004; Wade, 1997, 2000). “Resistance is a response to violence” or oppression and “cannot be encoded in a language of effects” (Todd, Wade, & Renoux, 2004, p. 151). Our understanding or misunderstanding and use of responsible or irresponsible language, social discourse, and linguistic representation of a person or peoples’ actions encompass how we contextually interpret resistance and exercise knowledge and power personally, professionally or socially (Coates & Wade, 2004, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Richardson, 2010; Todd, Wade, & Renoux, 2004).

The Spirit of Resistance

Resistance may be loud or quiet. Resistance can be noticed or not seen or heard at all. Acts of resistance may be very grand – war, protests, civil disobedience, speaking out, violent resistance or passive resistance – or very small – closing one’s eyes, pretending not to see or hear or understand, walking slowly, breaking rules or chewing gum (Goffman, 1961). Grand acts of resistance are obviously more socially noted whereas small, covert acts of resistance usually go unnoticed and are not understood (Reynolds, 2010). Small acts of resistance are not trivial. Goffman (1961) refers to the multiple small acts of resistance as “small acts of living” in the courageous response to resist abuse in one’s life (p. 181). Gandhi (2001) coined the term Satyagraha - non-violent resistance. Its root meaning is “holding on to truth, hence Truth force,” also referred to as “Love-force or Soul-force” (Gandhi, 2001 pp. 3-6). Gandhi (2001)

clearly advocated that there was no universal truth, “as for what appears to be truth to the one may appear to be error to the other” (p. 6). Dominant systemic structures and socially constructed norms tend to conceal courageous acts of resistance by blaming, pathologizing, victimizing and re-victimizing people (Coates & Wade, 1997, 2004, 2007; Kelly, 1988; Reynolds, 2010; Richardson, 2010; Todd, Wade, & Renoux, 2004).

Witnessing Resistance

Resistance knowingly or un-knowingly creates discovery and therefore meaning. As a Narrative therapist, the verbal and visual narratives I am privileged to witness, participate in, and co-perform show me that the many hidden acts of resistance are both important and most noteworthy. Reynolds (2010) shares, “I hold close to this teaching. It informs me to bear witness to the resistance that was hidden out of necessity” (p. 51). “To witness well, we must resist indifference” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 11).

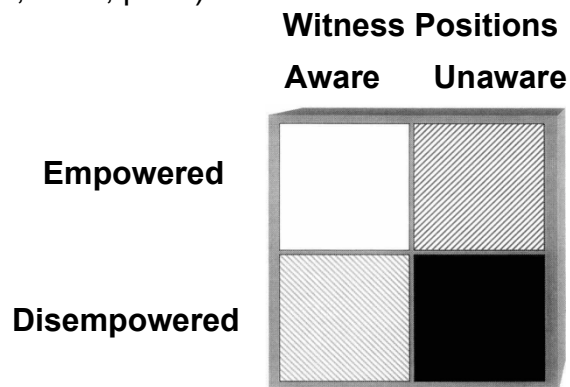


Figure 2: Typology of Witnessing (Weingarten, 2000, 2003).

In her witnessing framework (Figure 2.), Typology of Witnessing, Weingarten (2000, 2003) incorporates trauma theory and bystander theory to illustrate a typology of witnessing through a two-by-two grid, a geometric box that describes four positions of witnessing violence and violation: aware, unaware, empowered, and disempowered. These witness positions are constructed around “whether or not the witness is aware and empowered or unaware and disempowered in relation to what is witnessed” (Kotzé, Hulme, Geldenhuys, & Weingarten, 2013, p. 358). This practice of bearing witness creates mindful opportunities to be aware and empowered (Weingarten, 2003). Our co- performance of compassionately witnessing, being-with self and others constitutes the aware and empowered position and co-constructs respectful and desirable dialogues (Kotzé, Hulme, Geldenhuys, & Weingarten, 2013; Weingarten, 2003).

When a therapist is authentic in her position of not knowing, a relational dialogue ensues enlightening the strength of resistance to deconstruct, reconstruct, and co-create a preferred story of being in the world (White & Epston, 1990; Winslade, Crockett & Monk, 1997; Winslade & Monk, 1999). The performance of witnessing and being-with a person’s act of resistance no matter how small validates dignity and voice despite oppression, abuse of power,

violence, and socially constructed judgments and untruths in order to co-construct generative dialogue and co-create preferred meaning and possibilities. How we witness resistance is essential, as “voice depends on witnessing” (Weingarten, 2000, p. 392). The acknowledgement of dignity and voice is a respectful act of support when being-with another person. Conversations that honour and regard resistance are dialogically relational; these responsive conversations co-create possibilities (Richardson, 2006, 2010; Wade 1997). These conversations deconstruct dominant discursive language that conceals and suppresses the voice of resistance and validates courage. Reynolds (2010) approach to witnessing resistance is informed as follows:

1. Wherever there is oppression there is resistance.
2. Resistance ought not to be judged by its ability to spot oppression, rather;
3. Resistance is important for its ability to maintain a person’s relationship with humanity, especially in situations outside of human understanding. (p. 52)

Weingarten (2000) corroborates that “Witnessing takes place in and out of spoken and written language. Witnessing fractures language in ways that mirror the fracturing of language experienced by those whose experience is witnessed” (p. 393). Embracing and honouring resistance co-constructs relational and transformative conversations - compassionate witnessing. Honouring narratives of resistance co-creates respect, dignity, creativity, liberation, and possibilities.

To be intentionally and generatively curious calls into question my constructed academic learning or truth about resistance, provokes un-certainty and un-learning of the taken-for-granted certainties of resistance, and opens space for a new story of resistance. Currently, as with our understanding of the concept of strengths in therapeutic discursive space, there is a lack of literature specific to the poetics of resistance (Conant, 2010; Sanders, 2007, 2014). While resistance is gaining more attention in the area of response-based practice, the gap in the literature must be noted.

Hope

Curiosity leads me down the pathway called hope, an inspirational path that enlightens and sparks meaning, creates the desire for change, and apprises the aspiration for possibilities in our lives. When I think of the archetypes of hope I think of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and John Lennon – these amazing human beings have moved me in some way towards how I view and perform hope. Their visions and actions as useful languaging of hope have moved many people, inspiring compassion, peace, and social transformation. Since each of their births, my two beautiful daughters and granddaughter daily enthuse hope for me about the future. I see the simple image of family photographs as visual narratives of hope as opposed to the common socially constructed images of rainbows or butterflies. As an attuned witness or co-performer of many verbal and visual narratives in therapeutic space, it is undeniable that the journey of hope is very important in our lives as we create and co-create possibilities. Why do we not speak of this thing called hope?

Hope is central to our survival, an empowering way of thinking, promoting holistic re-discovery and growth. Hope is continually present in the verbal and visual narratives that I hear and see both in a professional and personal context. Hope is even more visible in our stories of challenge and difficult times (Parse, 1999). Through many years of practice I have been curious about both the importance and illusiveness of hope (Weingarten, 2000). If hope is present it may be celebrated and contrastingly if hope is absent it may cast a sense of doom both in our verbal and visual narratives. How do we as therapists improve our attunement of the notion called hope in the context of relational dialogue and relational practice? How do we relationally enhance hope? Is hope a practice?

The Story of Hope

The story of *Pandora's Box* suggests that hope is “alone inside one object” and parallels Western individualist discourse of hope as “a feeling that is the property or quality of one individual” (Weingarten, 2000, p. 401). In Solt and Wolpor's (1988) film, *Imagine: John Lennon*, Lennon said, “Hope is something you build in yourself.” A Minquass proverb teaches, “The soul would have no rainbows if the eyes had no tears” (Lewis & Ippen, 2004, p. 11). In the movie, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) it was implied that family and home was the last refuge of human hope. The song *Over the Rainbow* gives voice to Dorothy's lost sense of hope or hopelessness in finding her way home and her renewed sense of hope in finding the Emerald City:

Somewhere, over the rainbow,
Way up high,
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby.
Somewhere over the rainbow,
Skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to
Dream really do come true.
Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far
Behind me,
Where troubles melt like lemon drops,
Away above the chimney tops,
That's where you'll find me.
Somewhere, over the rainbow,
Bluebirds fly,
Birds fly over the rainbow,
Why, then – oh why can't I
If happy little bluebirds fly
Beyond the rainbow,
Why, oh why, can't I?

Emily Dickinson (1891) wrote:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without words –
And never stops – at all –
And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –
I’ve heard it in the chilliest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of me.

Paul Freire (1996) eloquently states:

But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone or a purely scientific approach is a frivolous illusion. To attempt to do without hope, which is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle is tantamount to denying that struggler as one of its mainstays. Hope as an ontological need demands an anchoring in practice. Without minimum hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. (pp. 8-9)

I am curious if hope is omnipresent within us all. Is hope a feeling or is hope an action? Does a feeling of hope inspire action? Do we do this thing called hope in isolation or do we co-construct hope together? Is hope an antidote to hopelessness, despair, and suffering? Does hope silence voice or induce voice? Is dialogical relational practice in therapeutic space a transference that fuels hope between the therapist and the person? How do I as a therapist incorporate the notion of hope in dialogical engagement? How do I model hope? Are our conversational crescendos and decrescendos in resonance when we speak of hope? If I portray hope in a conversation, does the person I am dialoguing with absorb hope? Does hope create connections? Together do we receive, resonate with, and amplify a hopeful state of being? Does our inquiry feed conversational reflection and thoughtful response and enhance the fluidity of hope in therapeutic discourse? Does the co-construction of possibilities empower hope? Is hope a theoretical construct?

Multiple Discourses of Hope: Barren Shelves?

In the first part of the 20th century, hope was viewed as the “provenance of theology and philosophy, more a moral than a psychological construct” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 6). In the 50’s the discourses of medicine and psychology acknowledged minimal interest, inquiry or appreciation of the notion of hope (Allen, 2011). Menninger (1959/1987) writes an exception to the medical discourse’s lack of interest in hope:

Our shelves hold many books now on the place of faith in science and psychiatry, and on the vicissitudes of man’s efforts to love and be loved.

But when it comes to hope, our shelves are bare. The journals are silent. The Encyclopedic Britannica devotes many columns to the topic of love, and many more to faith. But hope, poor little hope! She is not even listed. (pp. 447-448)

Often the concept of hope is related to health, recovery from illness, transformation, achievement of optimum physical and emotional health outcomes, and even death (Allen, 2011; Gottschalk, 1985; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Pilkington, 1999).

Research stories suggest the diversity of the fundamental construct of hope. Weingarten (2010) states, "Hope may be the most laden term of all time. Everyone wants it; few know how to articulate what it is" (p. 5). To definitively identify what hope means poses challenging for me both personally and professionally (Perry, Taylor & Shaw, 2007; Saelør, Ness, Holgersen & Davidson, 2014). The meaning of hope may be dependent on "dominant cultural discourses and unique personal experiences" (Weingarten, 2010, p. 5). Central to Foucault's (1972) work is the idea of discourse; some discourses are more dominant than others, challenging and assuming greater power and authority, ascribing Truth. As we are surrounded by the language, beliefs, rules, accepted and/or expected norms, and taken-for-granted notions of dominant discourse – academically, theoretically, culturally, politically, institutionally, socially, professionally, technologically or through social media or the news – we may become saturated in normative and expected understanding with little consideration of alternative ideas. Discourses visibly or invisibly construct the fabric of one's reality. Certain discourses maintain certain worldviews. Lessa (2006) explains:

Discourse is a...systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak. Foucault traces the role of discourses in wider social processes of legitimating and power, emphasizing the construction of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. (p. 286)

Unique personal experience may or may not differ from the acceptance of dominant cultural norms. When we are curious and question dominant discourse in any realm we open opportunities to embrace the Other and hear and engage with alternative perspectives and ways of knowing.

Research suggests, hope contributes to human motivation and will power in seeking a process of thinking about goals, the relevant action plan and/or pathway to achieve one's goals to challenge difficulties in life, suggesting that we, as humans, are fundamentally goal oriented (Snyder, 1995; Stotland, 1969). Hope has also been described as a condition that personally and collectively affects change and fosters agency (Fromm, 1968; Freire, 1992; Snyder, 1995). In Western discourse it is suggested that hope is associated with personal agency, this implies a sense of independence and freedom – hope is a resource that assists with improving one's stress responses and coping abilities in life (McGee, 1984). In all human beings hope is highlighted when challenging difficult experiences, creating newfound meaning despite moments of adversity (Parse, 1999). Hope keeps us from drowning or failing in the midst of adversity and

meaningfully gets us through the obstacles and challenges in life. In contrast, when human beings suffer they “observe that they are bereft of hope. They diagnose a deficiency: they are empty of hope” (Weingarten, 2000, p. 401).

Paradoxical Elements of Hope

Perlesz (1999) conveys to the therapeutic community the coexistence of hope and despair and how they must be relationally understood. Jenmorri (2006) warns, “hope, faith in possibility, and despair are visceral concepts that can be difficult to articulate in words, terms which seem intimately linked to one another” (p.43). Mattingly (2010) conceptualizes hope as complex and uncertain. She says, “hope emerges as a paradoxical temporal practice and strenuous moral project... thus cultivating a hopeful stance is paradoxical; it involves an ongoing conversation with embittered despair (Mattingly, 2010, p.3). Given these beliefs, it is understandable that there is a strong contradictory yet interconnected relationship between hope and hopelessness, hope and despair, and hope and suffering that create meaning in life. Some suggest that these antonyms are opposite ends of the continuum (McGee, 1984). Hope is only “clearly known in the light of the ever-present possibility” of hopelessness, as hopelessness “only has meaning in the light of hope” (Parse, 1999, p. 3). Likewise, hope is defined through the presence or absence of despair, as despair is defined through the presence or absence of hope, such is the same for hope and suffering. These paradoxically lived experiences represent the rhythm of human life (Parse, 1999). Madigan (2007) suggests that “Therapeutic understanding, response, and action is shaped by and shaping these discursive parameters, offering discursive ‘life’ to both hopeful and despairing ideas (sometimes simultaneously) concerning the possibility of change” (p.175). Sanders (2014) writes:

Within therapeutic conversation, holding “hope and despair” simultaneously requires considerable diligence and a commitment to acceptance. To do so requires a belief that suffering others possess the resolve, resources, know-how and wisdom to address their struggles and dissolve the dilemmas afflicting them. (p. 76)

Jenmorri (2006) conveys, “hope and faith in possibility clearly provide immense support for negotiating life challenges” (p. 43). Hope is a “humanly live phenomenon inherent to becoming” and being-in life in the world (Parse, 1999, p. 2).

The Community of Hope

My hope is that we stand together in community against hopelessness, despair, suffering, and connect through human connections, resourcefulness, creativity, resistance, and strengths. Not to have hope in human beings is to underestimate the power of human connection, resilience, and ingenuity.

Weingarten (2000) believes:

Hope is something we do with others. Hope is too important – its effects on body and soul too significant - to be left to individuals alone. Hope must be

the responsibility of the community. Where this is so, and when this is so, there will be a sense of wonder, which has been called the abyss where radical amazement occurs. There is an abyss. Often. We can look across or we can look in. We can find ourselves in it or know other who are.

When we enter the abyss, when we see it, then radical amazement is ours. Ours. Together. With hope. (p. 402)

In Weingarten's work the emphasis on community and gathering strength from others is most significant to creating hope together. Hope can be gained from others and can be cultivated and can grow within a community. It can also die and wither away when left to just one individual. We can so easily talk ourselves out of being positive, making change, or taking a risk because hope can so easily be overshadowed by other thoughts and emotions. Hope stays alive when we are reminded that it exists and this reminder often comes from those around us who have a different perspective in the world. Kotzé, Hulme, Geldenhuys, and Weingarten (2013) suggest that our understanding of hope has shifted from "hope as a feeling to hope as a practice that people can do together" (p. 355). Doing hope is therefore very relational. Varty (2013) in his Ted Talk, shared that Nelson Mandela's great hearted generous spirit is the embodiment of a South African concept called *Ubuntu* – "I am because of you" or "I am because we are." When describing *Ubuntu* Desmond Tutu said, "A person is human precisely in being enveloped in a community of other human beings, in being caught up in the bundle of life" (Battle, 1997, p. 1). This expression of connection and community personifies hope as a relational concept – I hope because we hope, paralleling Buber's (1970) I –Thou relationship (Weingarten, 2010). Buber (1970) theorizes, "*I-Thou* establishes the world of relations" (p.21), this requires a sense of reciprocity, of "mutual action" that "embraces both the *I* and the *Thou*" (p. 116) as we find meaning together in our relational being-with another in the world. This suggests the relation of subject-to-subject in a genuine relational dialogical process (Buber, 1970). Still, Weingarten (2010) cautions, in the reciprocity of mutual actions, "one cannot romanticize relationships" – we cannot suppose that all relationships will "give rise to or support" hope (p. 8).

Reasonable Hope

Can we say the voice of hope is relevant to all those who witness it? Weingarten, (2000) believes "we are all witnesses" (p. 392). If we practice witnessing such as in Weingarten's (2000, 2003) witnessing framework and White's (2007) outsider witnessing practices we may be able to attune to the telling and retelling of a person's story through watchfully scaffolded interactive dialogue. When we are able to lean-in and we are attuned to being-with hope and doing hope in therapeutic space, we then co-create awareness, empowerment, action, and transformation.

A therapist who is an aware and empowered witness is essential to co-creating hope (Weingarten, 2000, 2010; White, 2007). Saelør et al. (2007) imply that "professionals should look for ways of inspiring hope through collaborative relationships" (p. 65). Weingarten (2010) offers another view, the construct of

“reasonable hope,” she describes this as a “variant” of hope (p. 6). Weingarten (2010) shares the five characteristics of reasonable hope:

- Reasonable hope is relational;
- Reasonable hope is a practice;
- Reasonable hope maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable;
- Reasonable hope seeks goals and pathways to them; and
- Reasonable hope accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair. (pp. 8-10)

Reasonable hope suggests an allied construct, a doing of hope together. When we are aware and empowered, we are more prone to co-create actions that manifest reasonable hope. Reasonable hope is a practice that “is undertaken in the context of a relationship, always maintaining that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable” (Kotzé, Hulme, Geldenhuys, & Weingarten, 2013, p. 358). Saelør et al. (2007) propose, “people seeking help and support often depend on others such as family, friends or professionals to be carriers of hope” (p. 65). I have been told over and over by many people in therapeutic space that I carry hope for them. Am I a carrier of hope or do we as humans relationally carry and do hope together?

Contrastingly, hopelessness “thrives when the future is perceived as unknown, certain and bleak” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 14). When we reconstruct hope as a verb and not a noun, we change our thoughts of hope as a feeling to our understanding of hope as action in the context of practice. Weingarten (2010) suggests:

Hope as a verb, as a practice, leads to different activities than hope as a noun. Reasonable hope as a practice, doing reasonable hope, is orientated to the here and now, toward actions that will bring people together to work toward a preferred future. (p. 8)

Hope as a verb “automatically conjures the subject, a person who hopes” whereas hope as a noun “is a quantifiable thing that resides in a person” (Weingarten, 2010, p.8). “Reasonable hope seeks goals and pathways and is able to accommodate doubt, contradictions, and despair” (Kotzé, Hulme, Geldenhuys, & Weingarten, 2013, p. 358). Reasonable hope provides “a way of thinking about hope for the therapist and client alike that makes it more accessible even in the grimmest circumstances” (Weingarten, 2010, p. 8).

Hope bestows many advantages in various ways; however, therapeutic space creates vulnerability for both the therapist and person especially when verbal and visual narratives of trauma are shared (Kotzé, Hulme, Geldenhuys, & Weingarten, 2013; Weingarten, 2000, 2010). Hope in our stories and art “keeps pleasant and cheering things in view,” as our stories and art of hope know “we despair too easily” (de Botton & Armstrong, 2013, p. 65). The relational interactions with another person’s hope creates and influences transference of hope or vicarious hope for the therapist at times. Hope takes on courageous journeys. Hope confronts the coexistence of hopelessness, despair, and suffering in our relational dialogues and interactions of deconstruction and reconstruction to inspire meaning and generate transformation. Hope as a practice creates

space for us to do the practice of hope together to co-create future landscapes of possibilities in our lives.

My adventure in academia included no content specific to the magnitude of hope. I expected to find more literature on hope, but as in the search for identified literature specific to strengths and resistance, there was a marked gap regarding hope specific to therapeutic discourse. Literature relative to hope comes from multiple discourses – medicine, psychology, psychiatry, theology, social work, philosophy, and more. The literature consistently varied in discussion and definition of the entities. Our re-search is *not* to define the three entities of strengths, resistance, and hope as individual notions, but to explore their *relational interconnectedness* and their influence on any related transformative dynamic. No authors suggested these entities were relationally connected. Some literature suggested that as separate entities they might contribute to transformation or growth, but did not discuss interconnectedness or transformative change.

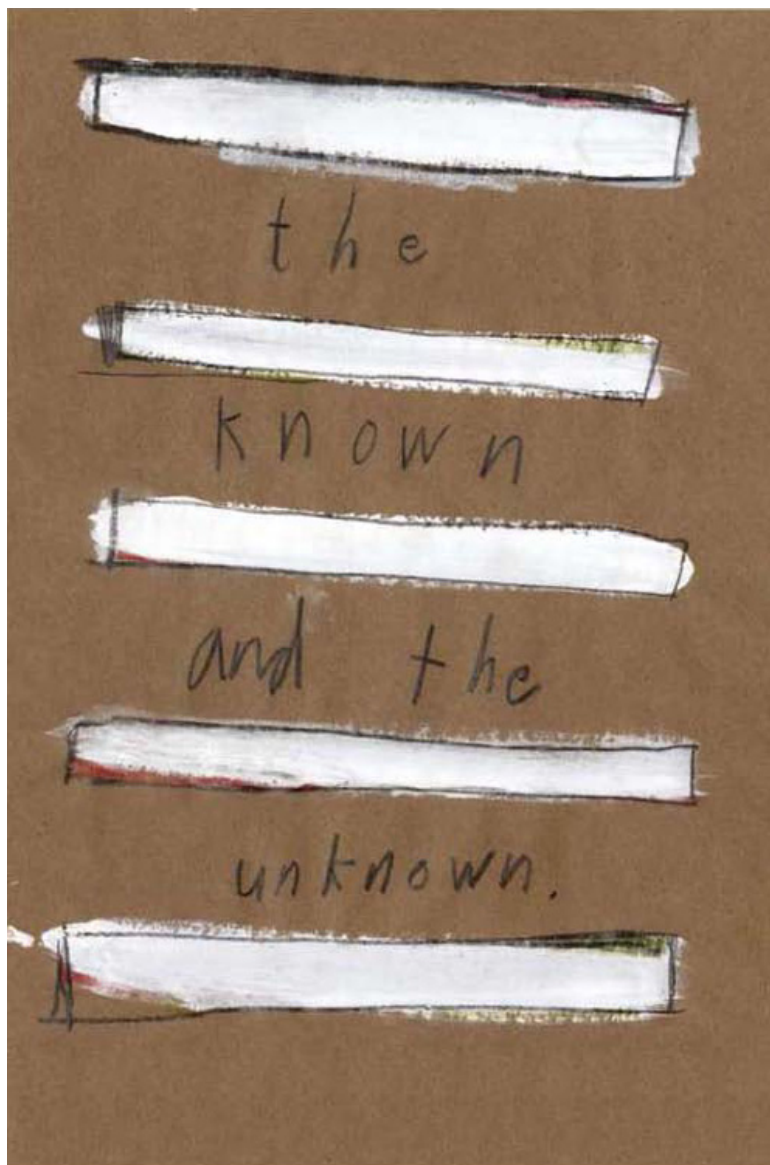
As This Chapter Ends ...

An extensive literature review informed the reader on the central concepts related to this re-search: stories, art, Narrative Therapy, Art Therapy, and the three entities, strengths, resistance, and hope.

The next chapter looks at un-mapping my knowing and embracing new found un-knowing.

Chapter Four: Un-mapping the Intersection of Knowing and Un-knowing

For most of my adult life, I traveled a safe path. I remember in vivid detail the moment I began the journey: August 1983, the hot, muggy summer of Synchronicity and “Modern Love.” A few months out of college, I stood on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Bleeker Street in New York City wearing pastel-blue balloon trousers, a hot pink V-neck T-shirt, and bright white Capezio Oxfords. I lingered at the intersections, peering deep into my future, contemplating the choice between the secure and the uncertain, between the creative and the logical, the known and the unknown. (Debbie Millman, 2009)



(12)

As This Chapter Begins ...

We focus on un-mapping the intersection of knowing and un-knowing, a challenging endeavor in deconstructing old ways of doing research. This chapter distinguishes between the researcher and the researched, dispels the conventional concept of subject – the researched, and constructs a new way of conducting relational inquiry with co-inquirers. We share a deeper understanding about the idea that knowledge and inquiry are everyday practices and our everyday-ness is meaningful. Our experiential and relational de-methodological process blends action research and qualitative research through appreciative (McNamee, 2006; McNamee and Hosking, 2012), narrative-based (Clandinin, 2013), and arts-based (Leavy, 2009) inquiry honouring the storyteller and artist within each co-inquirer.

The premises of un-knowing and un-certainty guide the relational constructionist movement with the voices of nine co-inquirers¹² verbal and visual narratives. To us, inquiry is a relationally responsible and ethical conversation and thus we explore appreciative inquiry as a form of dialogue. Furthering a social constructionist framework, our curious conversations generate a dialogical process that co-constructs multiple ideas, new and appreciative ways of experiencing possibilities for being together in re-search and therapeutic space.

I present the criteria, process, and rationale for the small group selection. Then I share in rich detail the context and content of *how* we did this collaborative re-search journey. Rich stories of strengths, resistance, hope, and transformative experiences emerge and beautiful art is shared to visually illustrate the artistic process of the three entities and the un-named transformative dynamic. The construction of questions, the conversational interview process, the summarizing process, the co-authoring and re-telling process, and the mattering process are explained in detail.

Narrative-based, Arts-based, and Appreciative Inquiry

In my red Fluevogs, my de-methodological journey of imaginative re-search and relational therapeutic practice began at the intersection of knowing and un-knowing on my path. I intentionally chose the route of un-knowing – an un-certain, vulnerable, and humble pathway to the possibilities of this re-search – a relational, co-created, and transformative path of looking with caring and attending eyes at the world around me. A direction grounded in reflexivity, a “stance of curiosity and interested inquiry” (McNamee, 2000, p. 154). While I was taught it is essential to comprehend the methods of inquiry, from a constructionist stance there is no adherence to “an objectified set of procedures and rules” (McNamee, 2010, p. 14). I am not ignoring or discarding modernist discourse, positivist and post-positivist paradigms or other ways of knowing; I am simply exploring a new and different intersection on a path of co-creating new ways of

¹² With much appreciation I introduce the nine co-inquirers who co-created the visual and verbal narratives, the emergent ideas, meaning, and possibilities for this re-search: Amy, Jane, Eileen, Jade, Liz, Susan, Leona, and Shar. I am the ninth co-inquirer.

experiencing, knowing, and co-constructing possibilities through narrative-based, arts-based, and appreciative inquiry in discursive therapeutic practice. Our re-search and resultant relational engagement created tension, dilemmas, passion, laughter, tears, and awareness of my desire to un-learn previously learned understandings of the chasm of 'research' methodology inclusive of epistemology, ontology, theoretical perspectives, and practice. This experiential and relational path of de-methodology informed a new way of being-in re-search and in discursive therapeutic space, valuing voice through stories and art. Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy relationally guided my practice for many years just as our verbal and visual narratives guided this relational re-search de-methodology. Hosking (2012) reminds me that:

This does not mean that we reject (post-positivist) 'scientific' research; rather, as we will see, we reposition it as a "form of life" practiced in its Own "language game" (Wittgenstein, 1953), where other 'forms' and "games" are also possible and have their own legitimacy. (p. xiii)

Pelias (2004) eloquently writes, "I speak the heart's discourse because the heart is never far from what matters. Without the heart pumping its words, we are nothing but an outdated dictionary, untouched" (p. 7). This dissertation flows from nine unbounded and compassionate hearts – our hearts of conversation and co-inquiry.

Our relational de-methodological story was an epiphanic experience with multiple perspectives unfolding. Saarnivaara (2003) sees epiphanic experiences as dialogical performances. We, the co-inquirers, spent time both misjudging and embracing the re-search of our stories and art that intertwine the concepts of strengths, resistance and hope. My misconception was based on old learning or knowing of the language of objectification, rigorous scientific or systemic inquiry throughout the safe and known territory of positivist and post-positivist research. Challenging and un-learning my ingrained way of thinking, being-with, experiencing, and knowing embraced appreciative inquiry to include the multiple stories of others both verbally and visually in a relational practice context to co-create generative dialogues and possibilities. This con-joint re-search journey induced new learning, attuned and appreciative ways of seeing and thinking I had not seen or thought before – a profound disruption of my monologue of past knowing. For co-inquirers, maps and directions were common to our knowing and experiences of research as a scientific process. It was un-nerving at times to participate in our de-methodological process of un-mapping as it took us on many unexpected turns, detours, and routes. As our confidence and exploration in relational curiosity grew, we amiably discarded past monological or individualist approaches and co-created a process of addressivity that dialogically embraced and enriched our re-search (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). Together we arrived at a destination of collaborative meaning making to enhance future therapeutic practice. The intent of this re-search is to be generative.

Nine Beautiful Women: Dialogically Dancing Together

Deconstructing the singular perspective and individualist discourse of past modernist research-knowing of methodology embraces relationally inclusive co-

learning and co-construction of language and other ways of being and experiencing the world around us. McNamee (2000) speaks to the social poetics of research as the practice of relational engagement and “unsettling the notion of poetics from it’s individualist tradition” (p. 146). Sculpting ethical and respectful means of relationally living alongside, leaning-in, and being-with others co-creates unknown and curious territory in appreciative therapeutic space (Andersen, 1997; Clandinin, 2013; Reynolds, 2013). The de-methodological story of this re-search was co-created by nine beautiful and compassionate women. We openly and relationally shared diverse and multiple stories and art. We told, retold, lived, and relived our verbal and visual narratives through many spirited conversations; these were ongoing performances of our shared experiences (Clandinin 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Frank, 2010; Leavy 2009; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; White & Epston, 1990). We are co-inquirers who shared creativity, shared knowledge, shared meaning, shared power, shared transformative action, and collaboratively created possibilities (Fox, 1989; Hair & O’Donoghue, 2010; Kaiser, 1997; Mullaly, 2002; Munson, 2002; Payne, 2005). We did not collect data; we relationally co-constructed conversations. Our words, our art, our experiences, and our conversations co-created this dissertation document. The resultant movements in our generative dialogical dance co-created future considerations for practice.

This journey began when I mused about the idea of embarking on a PhD and shared this idea with a few colleagues. In 2012, after training with some students in the Taos Institute’s PhD program I was encouraged to apply; acceptance into the program was the beginning of a great adventure. New learning in relational constructionism created intertwined connections between therapy and re-search – therapy a process of transformation and re-search a therapeutic experience, both relational forms of dialogical engagement (McNamee, 1988, 2000). McNamee & Tomm (1994) suggest, “useful or generative research and useful or generative therapy are more similar to each other... than they are different (p. 18) – conversational dance partners. As a therapist who practices both from a Narrative and an Art Therapy approach, relational connections were fundamental, however, I had not knowingly linked therapy and re-search. My experiences being-in conversations in therapeutic space were based on trust, ethical engagement, and mutual respect, a dialogical dance of collaborative meaning making. If I was ethically respectful and responsible in practice then it only made sense that I must hold the same expectations while being-in conversations with co-inquirers.

If therapy and re-search are processes of construction, then there could not be a researcher studying subjects in this inquiry; we were all co-inquirers collaboratively performing together. The distinction between researcher and researched was established early on in our work together (Bruner 1986). If we were allies in a relational constructionist archetype then there was no primary researcher with eight subjects; this was indeed co-research (Epston, 1999). We had a collective focus to proceed in un-knowing and un-certainty. The concept of subject was dispelled, a new way of being-with and being-in re-search emerged. We were nine co-inquirers – dialogical dance partners. Commitment to our

conversations in safe and transparent discursive space invited willing, collaborative, and explorative dialogues. This new way of being-with others in re-search created emergent ways of reflexively engaging in relational and dialogical space. Once we de-centered expertise and co-constructed discursive space for sharing knowledge as co-inquirers, we became excited and energized – this was our de-methodological process of re-search. We valued the multiplicity of our voices and experiences in our co-creation of ethical meaning making and future possibilities for practice.

Inspiring dialogical dancers to join this adventure of co-performance was a lengthy process. Most people I dialogued with did not understand my quest to better understand the interconnectedness of strengths, resistance, and hope and any resultant transformative dynamic in order to improve my therapeutic orientation in discursive therapeutic space. This was discouraging at first. In other dialogues, some professional colleagues I worked with did not view participants of inquiry as experts in research or therapy. McNamee (1994) states that “subjects” of research are chosen for their expertise and knowing specific to the research topic (p. 73). Given my experiences in practice it was obvious that people were knowledgeable experts in therapy, inquiry, and everyday life. Over time, the prevailing monological dilemma of past assumptions and power relations was silenced. Previously produced methodological constraints outside of our relational inquiry created our pursuit for de-methodology, a discursive process unfolded that held space for the multiplicity of voices through the verbal and visual narratives of the co-inquirers. Our voices began and remained positioned together in the re-search.

Co-inquirers were thoughtfully selected for this journey based on our meaningful relationships in diverse contexts, on their honesty, their integrity, and their interest in the re-search puzzle – naming a transformative dynamic that may relationally flow from the intersectionalities of strengths, resistance, and hope in therapeutic space. I discussed criteria for group selection and group size with my PhD faculty advisor on several occasions (S. McNamee, personal communication, July 2013; August 2013; October 2013). After much deconstructing of past assumptions that research necessitated large numbers of participants – and aligned with my emergent de-methodology – I decided that a small group size would generate support and safety in discursive space and empower relational discourse. I believed a small group would engender in depth and intimate conversations in order to draw substantial detailed and rich ideas, meaning, and text. As a therapist working in multiple professional settings – a social worker, a university instructor, a professional colleague, a friend, a parent, and an artist – I recognized that I was able to draw co-inquirers from multiple settings and various social locations. This challenged previous research methodology and traditional forms of research practice (McNamee, 2000). I chose co-inquirers, not subjects. There was no random selection process. No co-inquirer benefited financially or otherwise, except for any new understandings she experienced or contributed as new meaning for my therapeutic orientation. Other criteria for co-inquirer selection was that co-inquirers were all women, all over the age of eighteen, and all representing different ages that I experienced being-with

in diverse relationships in dissimilar realms. This created a reliable community for our co-constructed re-search as social construction views inquiry as a relational process. McNamee and Hosking (2012) suggest, "Because research is a process of inquiry, a constructionist sensibility implies that we are all engaged in research" (p. xiii). The diversity of the group of co-inquirers aged twenty to seventy-two years offered multiplicity of voices and visual perspectives in naming the focus of and the limits to our inquiry.

A letter explaining my initial ideas for the re-search, the use of audio recordings for transcription purposes, the limits to my use of the audio recordings, the sharing of written transcripts and art with all co-inquirers, and a consent form to participate in the re-search and authorize audio recordings was emailed to all co-inquirers. I explained to the co-inquirers that my therapeutic orientation imagined more meaningful therapeutic connections with people. I was curious if, in the context of therapy, I invited a person's strengths, resistance, and hope into our therapeutic conversations, might we relationally co-construct new and meaningful possibilities for transformation in her life. I questioned if I would find any unique nuance or relational meaning from the co-inquirers' verbal and visual experiences. I wondered how this appreciative inquiry might co-create significance for me in the poetic art of therapy. After conversations in person or by telephone, eight women graciously volunteered to act as co-inquirers in the re-search puzzle of the intersectionality of strengths, resistance, and hope in discursive therapeutic space.¹³ In addition to the co-inquirers' interest in stories, art, and the re-search puzzle, all but one had attended therapy at some point in their respective lives, so there was an experiential expertise of discursive therapeutic space (McNamee, 1994). This invited a conversational partnership to explore and develop areas of discussion.

From a Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy practice orientation, three months before the initial conversational interview process¹⁴ took place, co-inquirers were invited to think of the three entities of strengths, resistance, and hope and a moment or story in their lives that might be emblematic of the interconnection of the three entities. Co-inquires were also asked to consider if their verbal narrative involved a transformative moment that related to the three entities. I requested they make three pieces of art that embodied the three entities and one piece of art that symbolized the transformative dynamic. They were asked to mull this over in their own time, at their own speed, and come up with a verbal and visual narrative that encompassed all three entities and a transformative dynamic. I could not expect to engage in generative dialogue by asking the 'right' questions; preparation was required for these special conversations. Out of my practice of Art Therapy I had originally planned that we would all make art, however the co-inquirers quickly dispelled traditional research assumptions that I could direct this inquiry process, as art making created some

¹³ The topic of anonymity was discussed with all co-inquirers, each co-inquirer chose how they would be named in this written document; this process was continually revisited as co-inquirers took ownership of their verbal and visual narratives.

¹⁴ From this point on, the conversational interview process will be referred to as conversations not interviews.

intimidation for most co-inquirers. We collaboratively decided that we would *choose* rather than *make* art. Multiple conversations took place and it was collectively agreed that we would each choose four pieces of art. The visual narratives proved more challenging than I expected and it soon became each co-inquirer's choice as to how many pieces of art they would share and what art would represent their visual narratives. The process of un-mapping our forward movement continued throughout the re-search; it became common practice to collaboratively consult, converse, co-construct, and re-construct. Un-mapping invited curiosity and new ideas.

From a Narrative Therapy approach, I then composed curious questions and shared them with the co-inquirers prior to our conversations. A relational process began as co-inquirers deconstructed and then re-constructed my questions about strengths, resistance, hope, and the un-named transformative dynamic, building richer understanding and context into to our conversational inquiry. These questions were co-created; co-inquirers shared a sense of collaboration in their co-construction. After hearing and seeing the verbal and visual narratives the final questions for our initial conversations were utilized to invite curious co-inquiry and inform future practice:

1. What does each of these three entities mean to you?
2. Have you interacted with a piece of art that represents each of these entities? Can you share your meaning of this interaction?
3. Do you see these three entities as interconnected to each other in your life?
4. If you believe these three entities are interconnected, please explain how you see them interconnect to one another?
5. How do you see these three entities interconnected as they relate to a transformative dynamic? Have you ever experienced a transformative moment as a result of this dynamic, verbally or visually? Can you share this moment or story?
6. If you were to give a name to this transformative dynamic that is created by the intersection of strengths, resistance, and hope, what would that be?
7. Have you ever interacted with a piece of art that created meaning for you about these three intertwined entities and a resulting transformative dynamic? Can you share your meaning of this interaction?

All the aforementioned questions were posed in my initial conversations with the co-inquirers.

In July 2014, the first re-search dialogical dance of conversation took place in Montreal, Quebec. After too many technological glitches, this conversation was eventually audio recorded and my technical know-how advanced. Seven other conversations evolved between August 2014 and December 2014, some were in person and some were by telephone, all were audio recorded. While we started with the same collaboratively constructed questions, new and unique questions evolved specific to each unique conversation. One of our co-inquirers volunteered to transcribe the audio recordings. This was a laborious and time-consuming contribution; I am forever grateful to Susan for transcribing the audio recordings into working documents. It was agreed by all co-inquirers that once the audio

recordings were transcribed, all transcripts would be shared with all eight co-inquirers to read and engage in further discussions. Transcripts varied in length, as conversations varied in time and no set rules or protocols for conversation limitations were prescribed. The average initial conversation time was approximately three hours. The concept of togetherness emerged, as we walked together un-mapping hundreds of pages of transcripts and marveled at each other's verbal and visual narratives. Co-inquirers commented on the new-ness of this relational re-search process and how they valued equitable inclusion.

All co-inquirers shared that our relational connections through our stories and art invited reflections and feedback. This guided the re-search and the writing throughout my dissertation. Most co-inquirers shared that if they had not had a relational connection with me prior to our beginning this inquiry their stories would not have been as deep and rich. They described the process of trust and mutual respect as being integral to our conversational richness. During each conversation every co-inquirer stopped at one or more points to tell me they had not shared a certain piece of information before their interview. Why did everyone share these intimate details with me in our dialogues? Do the blurred boundaries of re-search and therapy open up opportunities for honest and open conversation and meaning making? Does data as conversation make relational connections and sharing easier to deconstruct expected norms and co-create possibilities? Does collective participation in re-search co-construct dialogical process? A dialogical process such as our relational de-methodology invited us "to ignore/blur boundaries between different approaches in order to create a process" that relationally emerged between co-inquirers, inviting conversations that were "meaningful to participants" (Tilsen, 2013, p. 61). Our production of emergent ideas, meaning making, and shared knowledge was unique to our re-search process and co-constructed possibilities for future therapeutic practice.

With eyes wide open, our collective curiosity flowed from our shared experiences specific to our stories and art, through multiple relational dialogues that co-created a deeper understanding of the three entities and what they made (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Co-inquirers shared their strong beliefs about the importance of relationally being-in curious conversations that collaboratively supported a process of consultation, meaning making, and influence in our inquiry. Ontologically, we believed in our collaborative re-search journey and expected that we would all contribute accurate and meaningful stories, both verbal and visual, of our experiences. Together we strived for ontological emergence. In multiple conversations we co-inquirers shared our own verbal and visual narratives, our stories and preferred pieces of art that reflected our experiences of strengths, resistance, hope, and transformation.

As our ideas emerged, our inquisitiveness and generative meaning making grew; we collaboratively invited intense crescendos of curious conversations about the possibility of naming the transformative dynamic that flowed from these three interconnected entities in therapeutic space. Continually engaged in relational dialogue we reviewed all the inquiry artifacts gathered. We collectively reviewed the re-search puzzle. We reviewed transcripts of our stories from audio taped conversations, we explored visual images of art that we collected and

contributed to our inquiry, and we dialogically engaged in multiple conversations about what we knew, how we came to know it, and how we might co-create knowing and knowledge to honour relational practice in therapeutic space. Our shared stories and art were not a declaration of “this is how it is” but rather a means of inviting us all “to consider what it (or they) could become” in the context of our inquiry (Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p. 507). Resultantly, stories and art “as inquiry became a transgressive activity” (Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p. 507), a resistance of traditional research. Our relational dialogues engendered a “conversational arena” where we collaboratively became curious about the “coherence and rationale of alternative views” (McNamee, 2000, p. 155). Our conversations of deconstruction and reconstruction of our knowing and our unknowing invited “communal interchange” (Gergen & Gergen, 2003, p. 2) of rich descriptions and deeper relational understanding and meaning of this phenomenon in relation to what we co-created and what might become of our co-construction in our thoughtful re-search discourse. McNamee (2000) elaborates, “What is valued, what is ethical, what is pathologized emerge out of communal interchange” (p. 148). Knowledge and meaning are made together, not found in isolation; our con-joint relational engagement co-creates meaning and transformative dialogue (McNamee, 1996).

Relational constructionist discourse offers a unique understanding of relational reflexivity and relational ethics, specific inquiry and practice that embraces our de-methodological story. Because this dissertation is true to my heart and to the hearts of the co-inquirers the de-methodological story is a journey of integrity, imagination, un-certainty, and possibilities – breaking new ground together while making space to open up alternative perspectives and constructions. We are all dialogical partners on our journey of curious co-inquiry, as inquiry is a collaborative effort of shared space (Clandinin, 2013; Frank, 2005, 2010; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). We are storied beings and so we ontologically exist narratively and hence relationally on this inquisitive journey. Adams (2008) identifies, “if we learn how to think, feel, and interact with society via narratives, we also learn ethical ways of being with others” (p. 175). This re-search story embraces and respects co-inquirers in our relational dance of dialogue – all co-inquirers are experts of their stories, art, experiences, knowing, and contributions (Clandinin, 2013; Foucault, 1980; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; White and Epston, 1990). As dialogical partners our dance is ethically choreographed as a performance of relational engagement, relational response-ability, relational ethics, and relational reflexivity; these create cognizant awareness and attunement to our accountability to power relations (Clandinin, 2013; Gergen, 2009b; McNamee, 2000, 2009; McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Our co-constructed conversational space is about respectful and free expression as we share and co-perform deeper understanding and meaning making together to ethically co-create relational and emergent practice possibilities. There is a keen sense of curiosity, generosity, accountability, and connection in our collaborative conversations as we celebrate the presence of our multiple voices – our multiple visual and verbal narratives, told and retold, seen and re-seen. We value our openness to more stories and more art. Frank (2005) explains, “each voice is

formed in an ongoing process of anticipation and response to *other voices*. Each voice always *contains* the voices of others” (p.966). McNamee (2000) believes, “Research that invites the multiplicity of voices...goes a long way in achieving” social poetics (p. 152).

McNamee and Hosking (2012) use the term “quality” to reflect relational ethics and cite the works of Levinas (1985) and Buber (1971) in their relational understanding of human inter-actions (p.97). Both the works of Levinas (1985) and Buber (1970) “recognize the significance of self and other in making meaningful worlds (i.e., ethical worlds)” ...however, “for both, the locus of all meaning is still within the phenomenal world of an acting subject” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 98). A relational constructionist discourse juxtaposes and encourages us as inquirers or practitioners to witness quality constructed as a relational process (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). In terms of our practice of relational ethics or quality in the process of inquiry these three interconnected ideas are proposed by McNamee and Hosking (2012):

1. Reflexive practices, which include examining our own ways of entering into the process of inquiry;
2. Dialogue and ecological ways of being in relation; and
3. What might be called the ethical and aesthetic aspects of construction. (p. 98)

Appreciative Inquiry as Conversational Dialogue

Appreciative inquiry, a relational approach to re-search as conversation, social construction, and relational approaches of narrative-based and arts-based inquiry in therapeutic space shaped my curiosity about the intersectionality of our verbal and visual narratives of strengths, resistance, and hope in therapeutic space. Appreciative inquiry is the practice of “conjoining realities” developed by David Cooperrider (Gergen et al., 2001, p. 706). Gergen et al. (2001) share “The emphasis on appreciation sprang from the conception of ‘the appreciative eye’ in art, where it is said that within every piece of art one may locate beauty” (p. 706). If beauty is found do we envision a new future (Gergen et al., 2001)?

Relative to the term appreciative inquiry, McNamee and Hosking (2012) echo the words of Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) that appreciative inquiry “refers to both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization, or society as a whole” (p. 66). McNamee (2006) says:

Appreciative Inquiry, as one elaboration of this constructionist stance, highlights the power of shifting our talk from a focus on problems and their solutions to valuing what works well, what we enjoy, and what gives life. Of course, the latter focus, in addition to creating a very different relational/organizational context within which to operate, invites us into dreaming and imagining our future. Contrarily, if we see problems as needing resolution before we can move forward, we find ourselves trapped in contexts and relationships where imagination can be stifled. In the face of “real problems,” most traditionalists ask what the point is of dreaming and imagining a better future. (pp. 4-5)

As a social construction stance is open-minded, appreciative inquiry opens up dialogues of possibilities opposed to closing possibilities down (Hosking & McNamee, 2007). As in a relational constructionist practice, appreciative inquiry views narratives as valuable resources because our stories generate emergent and alternative ways of knowing (Gergen et al., 2001). Opening up possibilities invites diverse construction of knowledge, new ways of being together in the world, and transformation (Hosking & McNamee, 2007). Appreciative inquiry centers on “transformation within self-other differentiation rather than intervention through distancing, scientific objectivity” (Hosking & McNamee, 2007, p. 14). McNamee and Hosking (2012) emphasize “working with appreciative inquiry within a relational constructionist discourse suggests that appreciative inquiry is seen as a ‘here and now’ process for constructing realities and relations (the path is the product)” (p. 66). Appreciative inquiry makes space for multiple stories, “including and enabling multiple local realities in different but equal relation” (Hosking & McNamee, 2007, p. 14). Through stories and art, as a therapist and inquirer, I open up safe, curious, and harmonious space to think and be relational with another person or persons and we collaboratively participate in shared inquiry while co-creating new and emergent generative understanding and meaning. This positions us as inquirers encouraging resourceful practices of attentive and collaborative presence in the richness of our relational dialogues (McNamee, 2006; McNamee and Hosking, 2012). Our different ways of being-with collaboratively unfold and emerge as possibilities to expose the richness of our humanness and meaning of the world together. An appreciative inquiry approach interacts with constructionist ideology; whether in therapeutic space or in the context of re-search our collaborative curiosity portrays enduring conversations, verbal and visual narratives of our experiences (McNamee, 2000). This is conversation as re-search and re-search as conversation. McNamee (2000) suggests:

Yet research is itself another form of conversation. And it is in conversation – in relationally engaged activity – that our worlds are circumscribed. The world can only be “imagined” in language; that is, in what we do together. To cast research as a poetic activity is to call attention to research as conversation – one that is situated and relational and can therefore expand the array of possibilities – of images – for further forms of social life. (pp. 155-156)

This is an inclusive and relational thinking process, a co-operative construction of understanding with others (McNamee, 1989). Meaning making is a shared and respectful practice in any discursive space, creating multiple opportunities to gather new knowledge. Thinking relationally is then a “part of thinking narratively and of thinking narratively as a narrative inquirer” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23). McNamee (2008) shares, “In dialogue, we are steeped in uncertainty, incompleteness, and multiplicity.... Dialogue is the process of holding firmly to one’s position while maintaining a curiosity and respect for another’s very different position. This is what Bakhtin refers to as responsibility” (p. 9). Anderson (2008) describes:

Dialogue is not a one-sided, unilateral, practice driven process, nor is the practitioner passive and receptive. The practitioner is actively involved in a complex interactive process of continuous response with the client.... As conversational partners we continually coordinate our actions with each other as we respond with each other. And, we are continuously influenced by the other. (p. 19)

Appreciative inquiry heightened our relational dialogical awareness and opened enthusiastic space for spirited and curious dialogue about the three entities and the possibilities of a transformative dynamic. Co-inquirers all commented on my ability to listen and to ask curious questions throughout our re-search journey. This speaks to respect, responsiveness, response-ability to the co-inquirers, the re-search project, and the role of the therapist in discursive therapeutic space. Anderson (2013) shares about the learning and understanding that our collaborative dialogues make:

This requires the responsiveness in which the listener (who is also a speaker) is fully attentive and present for the other person and their utterances whether expressed orally or otherwise. This also requires being aware of, showing acknowledgment of and taking seriously what the other person said and the importance of it. In other words, a listener-speaker not only listens attentively but is also a speaker-listener who responds so as to make sure that they have heard the other person as best they can. Such responsive understanding as Bakhtin (1986) refers to it tends to help clarify and “check in” understandings and misunderstandings which in turn is part of the meaning-creating process. (p. 1)

We all became listener-speakers and speaker-listeners – our curious co-inquiry was a mutual meaning making process. Bakhtin (1986) utters:

Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere. The very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects. Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another... Every utterance must be regarded as primarily a *response* to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word ‘response’ here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account... Therefore, each kind of utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication. (p. 91)

We decided that what we uttered was a response to previous utterances (Bakhtin, 1986), and so on and so on – the utterances of our collective yet different voices co-created meaning for our relational inquiry (Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1970; McNamee, 2013). Open sharing and listening was respectful and empowering. Our conversational utterances embodied our verbal and visual narratives and the meaningfulness we relationally co-performed together – more inspirational new knowing for future therapeutic practice.

If our dialogical dance of conversation performs co-creative generative meaning, is this daily practice re-search? Are our conversations true scientific

meaning making, as prescribed by the quantitative paradigm of positivist epistemology and ontology? Is the term 'research' misconstrued as something only scientists do in a construct of modernist, positivist research paradigms? Do the deductive methods of scientific research state the existence of independent reality and define knowable truth (Leavy, 2009)? Can science be as objective as it is assumed to be? Is objectivity a myth? The quantitative paradigm of positivist and post-positivist epistemology and ontology claim empirical means that cross many disciplinary fields, espousing scientific research as objective and knowable knowledge and/or truth – suggesting predictability, measurability, generalizability, controllability, and dispassionate construction of theory (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Leavy, 2009; Palys, 2003; Rubin & Babbie, 1997; Salahu-Din, 2003; Saarnivaara, 2003; Sclater, 2003). Saarnivaara (2003) believes "The world can not be ingested (mastered); the desired goals of scientific control is impossible" (p. 587).

McNamee and Hosking (2012) see that:

This (modernist) discourse separates self (in here) from other (out there) – other people, the government, the environment, and so on. It further positions self as the knower of these self-existing entities and as one who can e-value-ate realities and relations as good or bad, right or wrong. Constructions of this sort invite attention to finding out about (i.e., diagnosing, assessing) and intervening to 'fix' things that are bad or wrong. (p. 65)

We resisted this research paradigm, as it defied our un-knowing and "everyday-ness" (McNamee and Hosking, 2012, pp. 5) in practice and on this re-search journey.

Our Everyday-ness: Inquiry Through Our Verbal and Visual Narratives

Our rich verbal and visual narratives nurtured relational inquiry. Inquiry speaks to the "everyday-ness" (McNamee and Hosking, 2012, pp. 5) of my dialogical practice, practice-based evidence of conversation and inquiry. Inquiry is opposed to the purpose of "data collection" (McNamee and Hosking, 2012, p. 6) as it deconstructs old ways of knowing and constructs co-collaboration.

McNamee and Hosking (2012) share:

We have shifted to more of an everyday term "inquiry." The term "inquiry" can seem more a part of the daily practices of those who do not think of themselves as scientists and it gives space to activities that some views of science would not count as scientific. For us, and for those with whom we work, the term "inquiry" seems to imply an orientation toward exploration and opening up to the senses along with a curiosity and openness to what might be. The term "science," in contrast, is often understood to imply the use of a reliable methods or techniques for objectively discovering how things are. (p. 4)

This speaks to the limitlessness of this inquiry, a "shift of stance," and contributes to greater meaning making of reflective and improved practice of collaboration and co-construction of generative transformation, inviting "openness to

possibilities” (McNamee and Hosking, 2012, p. 7). It defines a non-hierarchical relationship to inquiry, a co-collaboration, a collective way of not knowing, and it challenges my modernist ways of being and knowing, as knowledge and power are shared in this inquiry. Shotter (1999) shares:

In almost all of our everyday activities, we are interlinked in with the others and othernesses in our surroundings in a whole web of living, spontaneously responsive relationships. And while we can be unresponsive or insensitive to some of the events occurring around us, we cannot be unresponsive to them all. (p. 1)

Inquiry is therefore a dialogical dance of the language of verbal and visual narrative; relational processes that are relationally responsive (McNamee and Hosking, 2012). As our being-with unfolded, the action of doing this re-search together grew and we became more relationally connected and responsive to our shared stories and art and our resultant collaborative meaning making. The multiplicity of voice in our conversational arena nurtured deeper understanding of the re-search puzzle (McNamee, 2000; McNamee, 2008).

Qualitative research recognizes diverse methods and methodological practices informed from many epistemological and theoretical groundings of human experience, inductive approaches to knowledge building (Leavy, 2009). “Relational constructionism assumes and gives ontology to relational processes as they (re)construct local realities” (McNamee and Hosking, 2012, p. 36). The relational focus of the qualitative paradigm produces rich descriptors of the co-inquirers’ stories and experiences in order to generate new meaning (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Geertz, 1973; Leavy, 2009; Norris, 2000). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) describe narrative inquiry as a pervasive practice because:

Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the many ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities. (p. 35)

Narrative-based and arts-based inquiry is means of understanding this re-search; a means for me to connect to my storyteller/artist identity and promote dialogical engagement with people I walk beside. The theoretical and epistemological perspectives of narrative-based and arts-based inquiry conceive the holistic concept of living inquiry to “carve” embodied understanding, new knowledge, and “intersect out in the open” to merge “knowing, doing, and making” (Leavy, 2009, pp. 1-3). If we embody narrative and art as re-search and practice, then “we are obliged to think new thoughts about the nature of subjectivity – it becomes less product and more process – an “always-becoming” in the potential space that our own and others’ stories provide” (Sclater, 2003, p. 623). Stories, art, and experience are creatively linked; a poetic performance of co-relation as Freeman (1998) eloquently alludes to, that illuminates the “untold potentials of meaning, fleeting and evanescent...it is about finding language that is adequate to experience” (p. 465). This provides a means for me to relationally live alongside the co-inquirers of this re-search while also aligning to the relational discourse of

my daily practice that co-creatively engenders shared resonance in stories and art (Clandinin, 2007, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Leavy, 2009).

The de-methodological story speaks from the heart, a relational con-joint performance of the telling and retelling of nine compassionate co-inquirers verbal and visual narratives of being-with in the world – a transformative process for us all. This journey of curiosity, imagination, creativity, un-certainty, and un-knowing was guided by relational ethics, relational response-ability, relational responsiveness, and relational reflexivity, a means to “deepen the sense of what it means to live in relation in an ethical way” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483) on this quest of appreciative inquiry. Rich stories of strengths, resistance, hope, and transformative experiences emerged, beautiful art was shared to visually illustrate the three concepts and the un-named dynamic. Together, our conversations challenged our notions of traditional research, authority, language, and socially constructed norms of practice and being-in re-search and therapy. Our de-methodological journey and invitation to multiplicity of voice un-mapped and demonstrated the value of attending closely to our experiences of looking relationally at what was before us in our inquiry. Our resistance to boundaries and abandonment of old ideas embraced curious conversations and new ways of being-with and experiencing possibilities together in both re-search and therapy.

Meaning That Matters: Our Stories and Art

Follow your bliss and the universe will open doors for you
where there were only walls. (Joseph Campbell)

The spirit of this work is curiosity. With curiosity as our guide our collaborative de-methodological process flourished. We made meaning together as we co-created new possibilities within a social constructionist framework. The re-search developed through our ongoing involvement together – dialogically shared events, striking moments and living moments that mattered to us (Shotter, 1999). Our dialogical engagement through stories and/or art are important to future therapeutic practice because stories and/or art create a means of expression and construct relational connections and possibilities for transformation. In our appreciative inquiry many striking moments were shared. For example, I often reframed deficit-based pieces of the co-inquirers’ stories to courageous acts of resistance or strengths that carry one through moments of despair. These striking moments moved co-inquirers’ perspectives to creatively reconstruct new meaning. Such striking moments or living events are significant as Shotter (1999) proposes:

They can – and often do – make a kind of difference in our lives that matter to us. Their effect is perceptual, they can ‘move’ us, ontologically. They can occasion more than just a change in perspective... something creative occurs. In perceptually relating ourselves to our surroundings in utterly new ways, we open up to ourselves new lines of action which a moment before, were inconceivable to us. (pp. 5-6)

This ontological emergence of social construction appreciatively honoured the courageous conversations of nine co-inquirers; the heart of their verbal and visual narratives relationally co-constructed new ideas of how we make meaning that matters. The heart:

Suggests that we keep going, day after day, regardless of what we face. To keep pumping is an insistence on life, a refusal to give in, to succumb. It is a persistent desire to make sense of it all, to tell some story that will allow us a moment's rest. It is a claim to our right to take some small measure of space, to locate ourselves in relationship to others who are and are not like us. It is to say, "I exist." Knowing that the heart is still at work is our evidence. (Pelias, 2004, p. 162)

As Bateson (1972) suggests "differences that make a difference" were essential to our inquiry (p.453). Diversity in our co-inquirer group co-created dialogical conversations that were not static. Our differences in our realms of being and knowing urged us to embrace emergent and respectful understanding of others. (Shotter and Katz, 1999). Social construction views our ways of being and knowing in the world as relationally and dialogically performed together. Shotter and Katz (1999) state:

The new ideas, or thoughts, or images that we think of as coming to guide our ways of acting in the world do not just spring into our heads 'out of the blue'; they originate in differences (in relations) which have a sensed connection: whose origins are to be found in our spontaneous, unnoticed, responsive or dialogic bodily reactions and relations to our surroundings. (p. 87)

Being-in the discourse of we means being-with and doing inquiry *together*. We deconstructed, reconstructed, and co-created shared stories and art through relational constructionist discourse. McNamee and Hosking (2012) prefer the term relational constructionism as it "directs attention to relational processes as opposed to pre-existing (individual and social) structures and their influences on how we construe the world" (p. xiv). Hosking (2011) shows that relational constructionism "is a social science perspective with *its own* assumptions about ontology, epistemology and methodology, its own interests and its own possibilities; its potential value lies in this context" (p. 61). Gergen (2009b) also attributes relational processes to social constructionism.

Our ideas stretched our minds and imaginations; we dissolved boundaries and transformed our being together (Silva, 2014). We reached a unique understanding of relational constructionism (Gergen, 2009b; Hosking, 2011; McNamee, 2000, 2009; McNamee & Gergen, 1999). The making of this re-search in shared curious space fostered rich relational dialogue, nurtured new ideas, meaning, possibilities, and action for therapeutic practice (McNamee, 2000; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Shotter, 2011, 2012). Leaning-in and being-with in relational conversation opened the narratives to explore truths not spoken before, co-creating a collaborative presence of vulnerability, attunement, and trust (Andersen, 1997; La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Reynolds, 2013). We shared multiplicity of voice as our storytelling and art linked us together, orchestrated by this dissertation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Shotter, 1999; Wittgenstein, 1953).

This re-search rendered me vulnerable, created a heightened sense of relational response-ability, and transformed my practice. Boundaries dissolved in an intimate collaboration with the co-inquirers, at times inspiring and at other times overwhelming. Vulnerability emerged as a challenge to my academic assumptions of certainty and knowing and co-constructed renewed curiosity. Despite the loud cries of certainty, objective knowledge, and expertise, curiosity critiqued the lingering bounded individualistic, scientific, rational, objective, causal relationships between variables, testing, control, predictability, and general rule following (Hosking, 2011, McNamee & Hosking, 2012). As I deconstructed myriad pages of stories and art my certainty and knowing, like Lorenz's (1972) butterfly, flapped its wings into more un-certainty and more un-knowing. My thoughts were chaotic at first, however over time – like the butterfly emerging from her cocoon – my vulnerability transformed into a calm and curious un-certainty and un-knowing, an appreciation of imperfection, unpredictability, and a nimbus of uncontrollability unfolded.

Relationally being-with and leaning-in together created a connection that demanded ethical response-ability and ethical accountability; these ethical imperatives informed our re-search (Andersen, 1997; McNamee, 2000, 2009; McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Reynolds, 2013). The creation of this appreciative conversational space centered on attuned presence, relational respect, honesty, and trust that nurtured growth, relational connections and intra-actions. Our relational doing together made meaning for the re-search we collaboratively created (Clandinin, 2013). Hosking (2011) poses, "*Doing research with others means creating opportunities for dialogues...* Conducting inquiries 'with' others means working in and through dialogues and so opening up the possibility of becoming more multi-logical" (p. 58); and the use of multi-logical approaches are relational, "participatory, collaborative, appreciative, and dialogical" (p. 59).

Down the Rabbit Hole: Deconstructing the Conversations

Like Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole, my quest for a process to organize and deconstruct nearly 1000 pages of conversational transcripts led me to pursue multitudinous pathways. And like Dorothy, I realized I was not in Kansas anymore – pages, words, themes, ideas, confusion, chaos, colours, images, art... oh my! At that moment, there was not a pair of shoes that could walk me through this unexpected and unexplored terrain. My feet stood still, uncertain and un-knowing.

Procrastination ruled. It took a long time to print the transcripts. Once completed, it was visually astonishing to see a pile of paper almost one foot high. Fear touched me, my curiosity froze, the rabbit hole loomed deeper and darker than I thought when reading Alice as a child. An adventure at the local office supply store shaped a new awareness regarding the spectrum of highlighter hues – so many choices, buying them all seemed a logical thing to do. A palate of forty-eight coloured markers complimented the highlighters. Various coloured and sized paper clips and sticky notes, along with pens and pencils were acquired for the dissemination mission.

Oversized bags packed, laptops in tow, and I was off to work collaboratively with Jane in person and other co-inquirers by telephone or email, to co-perform a deeper understanding of our gathered re-search. Jane accompanied me to Vancouver, BC and became our editor as we deconstructed and reconstructed the text – attentive and inspired as we explored the transcripts. Although enthused, we stood still and stressed in our de-methodological process that first day. An anxious telephone conversation took place between Sheila McNamee and me – we dialogically engaged and co-created a calm before the storm. How do we begin putting this all together... (S. McNamee, personal communication, April 2, 2015)? My questions to Sheila invited rich conversation and co-created a means to deconstruct and reconstruct our re-search journey. Lengthy dialogue ensued between myself and Jane, and then among the other co-inquirers, concerning how we would co-produce this new practice of re-search. In Narrative Therapy, questions and more questions were the primary tool we employed; we asked questions and discussion ensued for hours. Our comfort in asking questions heightened our skill of curiosity and inquiry. This was a work of passion. Again and again, we collaboratively dismissed our knowing of traditional forms of research to remain genuine to the discourse of relational constructionism and our de-methodology. Our dialogical dancing moved our conversations in uncertain directions towards new understanding, indeed a collaborative moment of curiosity.

The process of deciding how to present these verbal and visual narratives involved five days of passionate dialogical conversations with co-inquirers from a hotel in Vancouver. It was predetermined after our initial conversations that once the transcripts were complete we would all read each others' and further dialogue would take place about the three concepts and the un-named transformative dynamic. It was also agreed that I would write a summary of each transcript that would then be shared with the respective co-inquirer. Finally, co-inquirers were invited to re-write, amend, and edit the summaries of their verbal and visual narratives. With permission these summaries were then to be re-edited by me and then re-edited by Jane. After these edits they would be provided to the respective co-inquirers for their approval to include in the working document.

'Overwhelmed' captures my feeling of humility at the magnitude of this rich journey. Metaphorically this was like giving birth, the journey similar to the human gestation period. Following nine months of conversations the re-search was poised to unfold. This moment of reflection opened up a genuine moment of curiosity. I was not quite sure how, but I was ready to begin with un-certainty and un-knowing, ready to open up the stories and art to discover our relational connections through verbal and visual narratives.

Yet another destination point in uncharted territory, true moments of curiosity grew in the continual re-reading and listening to the co-inquirers' transcribed and recorded conversations. Un-knowingly this process was initiated at the end of the first recorded conversation in early July 2014 and intuitively flowed for many months thereafter, as I listened to and re-read each transcript many times. This was time well spent, as it created heightened relational meaning and attunement for me before I journeyed to Vancouver. The

remarkable coherence and cohesiveness in the voices of these diverse women was uncanny. Un-knowingly we had co-constructed a special relational and responsive connection. Unintentionally we were actively con-jointly composing a collaborative elaboration of our shared moments in relation to our re-search (Shotter and Katz, 1999). The rhythm of our verbal and visual narratives was fluidly emerging and new understanding was unfolding.

Two sets of transcripts from eight individual co-inquirers soon overtook the spacious work place, a messy bombardment of rich narrative and visual imagery. As a starting point, the three notions of strengths, resistance, and hope were assigned highlighter and marker colours: purple for strengths, orange for resistance, and green for hope. Pink denoted art, blue represented the dynamic, red symbolized transformation, and the colour yellow highlighted other concepts that jumped off the transcribed pages. Our transcripts composed a different visual narrative, a striking moment in our colourful and collective seeing and meaning making. Our transcribed conversations created “a new way of relating ourselves to each other” and to improving future practice (Shotter, 1999, p. 2). Reading and re-reading began and like a pointillist painting dashes of colours stained the pages to create a visual composition and relationally responsive understanding emerged (Shotter and Katz, 1999). Arrested by this poetic image we co-created in relational dialogical space, we resonated to the multiplicity of the other’s verbal and visual narratives and new possibilities stained the pages (Bachelard, 1991; Shotter and Katz, 1999). Dialogue arose, conversation became curious, notes, doodles, and drawings flowed. The sound of fingers on keyboards echoed as a river of ideas was relationally mused. Dialogue explored unknown territory both verbally and visually. This was not data; this was a conversational collision connected in understanding and meaning making. The multivocality of our stories and art were relationally performing together. Shotter and Katz (1999) reflect:

In our speaking of words, we embody a way of proceeding, of ‘going on’, of orchestrating the flow of our energies, a rhythm of acting, shaping, stopping, reflecting, switching positions, revising, looking back, looking forward and sideways, and son on – we embody ways or styles of responsively relating to our circumstances, shifting between different activities at different moments. (p. 85)

As we diagramed and dialogued the terrain words, colours, and connections transformed into a confluence of con-joint relational thoughts, queries and dialogical meaning. The generosity of co-inquirer’s time, dedication, knowledge, and sharing in this re-search was overwhelming. When available co-inquirers dialogued by telephone, text message, and email or in person, they shared their words, visual images, thoughts, experiences, knowledge, and curiosity. An interchange of conversations and emergent ideas flowed. The curiosity and responsiveness of the co-inquirers shaped the unfolding of our inquiry process. This de-construction created a means to condense each co-inquirer’s verbal and visual narrative. Deconstructing and reconstructing these intimate and personal stories, with a focus on the significance of their art, became a poignant endeavor with each co-inquirer’s verbal and visual narrative. A

dialogical and co-authorship process was invited and inherently developed between each co-inquirer and myself. Shotter (1999) speaks to this writing style as “witness writing” that portrays dialogically shared “striking events or living moments” that touch us because of our involvement with others (p. 4). This is about relational involvement and relational response-ability to neither deviate from, nor add to, these verbal and visual narratives was ever-present, consistent with a constructionist orientation. How do we do justice to each verbal and visual narrative without adding to or deleting from each woman's story? This was a collaborative process. All co-inquirers agreed to re-read and re-write their stories; this process remained genuine to the co-inquirers’ voices throughout our re-search journey. Invitation and inclusion of a collaborative authorship process co-created accountability to relationally responsible re-search.

Originally, when I sent co-inquirers their transcripts I asked them to highlight their feelings and ideas about the concepts of strengths, resistance, and hope, and any shared transformative moments related to the un-named dynamic. In Vancouver, building on these criteria, Jane and I highlighted words, ideas, and themes that spoke to the co-inquirers’ stories and art. This in turn created a composition of multiple colours, words, and curious questions. Words transformed into art and meaning. Through relationally respectful, responsible, and accountable practice we condensed her lengthy transcript into an authentic vignette. Thus flowed a reciprocal co-authorship process of writing and re-writing with each co-inquirer and myself. Jane’s sharp editing skills, her interest in the re-search, and her new knowing of un-knowing became very important, as she challenged the veracity of this dialogical relational writing process from a narrative and social constructionist lens (Shotter, 1999). Once encapsulated, each conversational vignette naturally guided forward movement through the other co-inquirers’ stories. This thoughtful practice of dialogical and relational co-authorship was repeated with all co-inquirers, a fluid process energized and invigorated our spontaneous dialogical engagement, enhanced our work with new meaning, and raised curious questions about our re-search inquiry. Our stories linked us together and transformed our way of being-with and knowing, as we co-composed and re-composed our re-search in imaginative and exciting ways. Dialogically being-with and witness writing co-constructed curiosity and relational responsiveness relative to our re-search. There was a sense of collective tenure in our inquiry; our data was collaboratively co-created. Our dialogical engagement opposed an individual or monological stance and it was evident that this was collaborative re-search in contrast to traditional research ways of knowing.

Once all the stories were encapsulated I returned each narrative to the respective storyteller, along with her original transcript and art, to review and reconstruct. It was important to our re-search that each final narrative be an authentic reflection of the teller. Each co-inquirer owned their personal final narrative. As authors and experts of their respective visual and verbal narratives, all co-inquirer’s endorsed the authenticity of all written work included in this dissertation. Some co-inquirers refined their stories, some added to their stories, and some chose different pieces of art. Co-inquirers shared a gratified awareness

about their collective sharing and co-authorship in our re-search. Social construction and narrative and art-based methods intertwined with appreciative inquiry to co-create re-search. We had wandered far off the road of traditional research convention. We stayed firm in our shift from traditional research methods and made space and invited the free flow of conversational dialogue, enriching our inquiry with thick textured descriptors. Relational responsiveness requires “a great deal of talk, conversation, and dialogue”; this is about “letting go of control” (McNamee and Hosking, 2012, p. 47). Opening and giving space for curious inquiry invites multiplicity to generate transformative realities and relational connections with others. In our re-search our relational connections as co-inquirers co-constructed new ways of collectively making meaning and future practice possibilities (McNamee and Hosking, 2012). This speaks to our continual deconstruction of traditional research methodology from researcher and subject to our re-construction of how our re-search would be relational with multiplicity of voice and knowledge. McNamee and Hosking (2012) ask:

So what sort of world do we invite each other into when we act as if it is possible to represent the one way things really are? And, in contrast, what sort of world do we invite each other into when we assume realities are community-based local, historical, and cultural co-constructions? Both sorts of inquiry construct local-communal realities – but very different ones. One where there are experts and non-experts versus one where there are multiple and perhaps conflicting realms of expertise. (p. 35)

It became clear that we were orientating ourselves in relational discourse and appreciative inquiry and not reproducing a dominant modernist discourse. Our re-search was about how we were doing re-search differently.

And finally, after much dialogical engagement, there were fewer than fifty pages of conversational narratives. Our dialogical dance moved us to the next question – how the stories would flow together in the telling of the verbal and visual narratives. The process of deciding how to present these narratives initiated a dialogical discussion with diverse points of view initially between Jane and myself and then with other co-inquirers. Shall co-inquirers’ stories and art be ordered by a linear construction, by original interview, by chronological age, by length of narrative – numerically, thematically, alphabetically? Was this the road of traditional research calling us back? Like an abstract painting, we randomly arranged the stories and art on multiple working surfaces in our hotel room. We un-knowingly created a visual representation, a composition that encouraged new ways of conceptualizing the beautiful stories and art. We intentionally attempted to not use a coherent ordering system throughout our re-search, in doing so we co-created a random order. This was a random process that constructed a different way of seeing and invited us to look from many perspectives, to not rush into old research traps.

There was no way to predetermine the order in which the stories would appear in this manuscript. I decided that the arrangement of the following vignettes was dialogically co-performed and relied on my familiarity with each woman’s story. Co-inquirers were asked their opinions of the arrangements of the vignettes; Jane, Amy, and Eileen commented that they each liked the

arrangement. No one else commented on how the vignettes were arranged. No further dialogue transpired about the arrangement of the vignettes. These rich stories naturally linked together to co-construct awareness of the vast narrative and visual landscape of our un-certainty and un-knowing. They relationally lived alongside (Clandinin, 2013) each other, rousing curiosity to collaborate and co-create bountiful ideas, meaning, and possibilities for future practice. These richly textured narratives relationally connected, shaped, and co-constructed a fluidity of embodied experience and movement – being together in curious, appreciative, and celebratory space.

As This Chapter Ends ...

Consciously deconstructing and critiquing old ways of knowing and confidently affirming comfort in un-knowing and un-certainty in doing relational re-search invited a deeper understanding and application of our de-methodological approach. This chapter articulated our relational constructionist framework and examined our use of one action research approach, appreciative inquiry, and two qualitative research approaches, narrative-based and arts-based inquiry. Appreciative inquiry as conversation was embodied in this chapter. Those *who* co-conducted the re-search were named. A rich narrative of *how* we did this relational re-search journey – the very thorough process – was encapsulated in this chapter.

The following chapter shares all eight co-inquirers'¹⁵ verbal and visual narratives about their experiences with and thoughts of the three entities, strengths, resistance, and hope and their experiential construction of transformation.

¹⁵ Eight co-inquirers' verbal and visual narratives are shared in the next chapter, mystory appears in Chapter One.

Chapter Five: Strengths, Resistance, and Hope?

I feel like hope sometimes might belong at the beginning of that list, cause I feel like a lot of people gain strength and resistance... or resist sorts of things that come across their paths. But, I think it all... it comes down because of hope. Like hope is kinda the thing that happens before you have the guts to do something. (Amy, 2014)

From hope flowed the strength to act and the courage to resist. (Eileen & Kathie, 2015)

Hope fuels resistance and resistance is a response to strengths. (Jane & Kathie, 2015)

As This Chapter Begins ...

Eight vignettes – all previously unspoken verbal and visual narratives by the thoughtful co-inquirers comprise this chapter. Each co-authored¹⁶ vignette starts with a brief introduction of the co-inquirer, followed by Herstory – an account of our original conversation based on audio and transcribed recordings. Each vignette concludes with Our Thoughts, a collaborative analysis of the research journey, shared experiences, story telling, and art. These co-created our relational inquiry that explored the three entities of strengths, resistance, and hope and the un-named transformative dynamic.

Amy's story voices her struggle against normalized dominant and political culture. Her visual narrative of Suzie Hotrod embodies strengths, resistance, hope, and transformation. Jane's verbal and visual narratives speak of her vibrant life, her love of family, her vast academic achievements, the agony of depression, and her current path to retirement. Eileen's story and art are about the courage to hold on to hope, strengths, and resistance despite a story of trauma and overcoming medical odds. Jade, the youngest co-inquirer, shares her verbal and visual narrative of trauma, pain, joy, and forward movement in her life. Liz speaks to hope as the matrix on which strengths and resistance thrive as she shares her story of moving to a new country to live out her dreams. Susan's trauma narrative reveals her inspirational and courageous acts of resistance, strengths, hope, and transformation from an early age. Leona's childhood story of isolation and disconnect highlights the presence of the three entities and possibilities for change. And Shar's verbal and visual narrative reflects human relations as she connects the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance as the catalyst for transformative fluid movement to create growth and well being in her and her family's life.

¹⁶ Vignettes were collaboratively summarized, deconstructed, reconstructed, and co-authored by my self and the respective co-inquirer.

All co-inquirers' verbal and visual narratives reiterated a confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and transformation. They shared a deeper awareness and a new meaning relative to a richer appreciation of their lived experiences in this relational inquiry process. No co-inquirers were able to name the un-named dynamic that flowed from our conversations of hope, strengths, and resistance.

The Stories and Art

Amy

Relationally being-with Amy began 33 years ago at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal after 24 hours of labor. Originally I had other names picked out for my first baby, however when I had my first glimpse of this beautiful little baby girl I knew those names were ill-suited. She was an Amy! From this day forth, Amy taught me many things about life. From the very first moment she taught me that we were relational beings. Our relational connection was unlike any other – this continues today.

For the past 33 years I have experienced the metamorphosis of Amy's transformative journey through life from a beautiful tiny little baby to the beautiful brilliant woman she is today. Her journey has not always been seamless. In our conversations she shared much about her awkwardness in life, the uncomfortableness of growing up and becoming the whole person she is today. Amy's verbal and visual narratives rival strengths, resistance, hope, and transformation. I am privileged to be an insider and outsider witness to her life story. Relationally, we conquered first steps, skinned knees, kindergarten, riding a two wheeler, tampons, zits, first love and heart break, wins and losses, academia, life transitions, cross country moves, career choices, the recent purchase of her first home, and the role of new auntie-hood. We grew up together.

Herstory

Amy is a young, beautiful, educated woman. Her story is one of struggle against dominant and political culture. As a lesbian, her life style opens her to continuous queries about her difference. "Coming out is like a going through a second adolescence, whether at 20 or at 40." She spoke about the time it takes to navigate different spaces – not only internally but externally – given social norms. She identified resistance as, "It is hard to develop meaningful relationships that are not just about sexuality; it's kind of difficult and problematic when you are not heterosexual." She reflected the difficulty that something so private defines who she is ... "Like, straight people don't have to come out." Amy talked about having to resist the 'normal' – the normalized dominant culture on a day-to-day basis. "I make a strong effort to never be quiet about that stuff and so that gives me strength to continue to do this even when people are not accepting it. You need to be strong enough to overcome your own resistance to the resistance of others."

Resistance and strength are relational. Amy described how resistance built strength, challenged her to take risks and gave her courage to do things that she might never have done. She changed her academic and professional direction from a high profile passion in media communication to creating delicious patisseries and pursuing a passion for cuisine. “You know, like you can’t have resistance without strength. You can’t be resistant without being strong. Resistance is almost like strength, like as a verb – resistance is strength in action.” She identified how much resistance and strength it takes to be honest with people who might judge or shun her. She interplayed hope with confidence, as hope is the motivator that constructs confidence in her life. She identified the effort it took to get where she is and said her effort was driven by hope. In our conversation I wondered if hope was like her container that embodied her resistance and strengths. Her reply was “Yeah.... sure. Well it prompted those things. Almost like a goal.”

When asked to identify the interconnectedness of these three concepts, Amy said, “You can’t have one without the other.” She further elaborated that hope, resistance, and strength are connected to change in her life... “I can see... I know... I just feel I am a different person. I’ve grown a lot because of the work I’ve done on myself. Because of the experiences I’ve had in my life.” She used the game of roller derby to illustrate this dynamic as her transformative moment:

I feel that this sport and my experiences there are the visual example of the person I’ve become. It’s an important community for me... um... one that is very accepting of everybody. One that has taken up a lot of space in my life. It has physically transformed my body and given me confidence. It was how I met my girlfriend. It’s like... it’s just an important part of my life and part of the person I am now. And I think when you see me play, I feel like it’s a perfect example of the person I am proud to be now.

In our conversation Amy described t-shirts that say “Roller Derby Saved My Soul” and stated that roller derby figuratively saved her from “really difficult moments in life” and turned her into “a stronger person physically, mentally, and emotionally.” Amy found it challenging to name the transformative dynamic – at the end of our first conversation she suggested laughingly “Roller Derby Saved My Soul”

The photograph (Hapak, 2011) (13) of Suzy Hotrod¹⁷ represents the transformative roller derby saved my soul movement that Amy spoke of so vividly! Suzy’s strengths, resistance, physical power, and courage are so beautifully captured here as she stripped down to show her relational connection with this sport and community. The presence of this photograph in an ESPN collection of athletic bodies also exemplifies her transformation as well as a life lived outside

¹⁷ As a non-athlete, Suzy began skating in 2004 with New York’s Gotham Girls Roller Derby League (GGRD). She quickly became one of the strongest roller derby players in the world. Having won five Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) Championships as a GGRD All Star, she went on to lead Team USA to win gold medals in two Roller Derby World Cups. She is the only roller derby athlete to this date to cross into mainstream sports culture as a representative in ESPN’s 2011 “Bodies We Want” with the her photograph above by Peter Hapak.



of the conventions of dominant culture. She courageously represents a sport that most people haven't even heard about. The image of Suzy in a collection of photographs alongside Olympians and professional athletes is remarkable and unprecedented. This is a physical representation of the transformation that visually reveals the relational flow of hope into confidence, resistance, and strengths.

Our Thoughts...

When reading all the other stories Amy felt that her story comparatively did not live up to the other stories. She minimized her story as "navel gazing" and the other co-inquirers stories as more important. Her perception was intriguing for myself and the other co-inquirers, as two women using pseudonym identities decided to reclaim their names based on their inspiration of Amy's story of hope, strengths, and resistance. We collaboratively learned that hearing and seeing other peoples stories co-create relational meaning despite difference and due to their difference. Reading, hearing, and seeing stories that were so different from her own cultivated a huge sense of respect for the other co-inquirers. While Amy had not met most of the co-inquirers when we began our re-search adventure she noted that shared experiences, storytelling and art co-constructed a deep sense of relationality for her.

Amy noticed that the art especially shared a similar theme of being a strong, courageous woman. Was this observation because we were all women? We cannot ignore that our gender positions, our social experiences as gender, are constructed in the world. Amy noted that all our selected pieces of art proposed two themes, nature and being a woman. The pieces of nature represented transformation and the pieces representing femaleness visually depicted hope, strengths, and resistance while also inspiring courage. Our stories and art, although diverse, cultivated a strong sense of relationality with us all, despite our different paths and experiences. We collaboratively arrived at the same place – this co-created enthusiastic and intriguing relational meaning making in this re-search. Together we co-discovered new terrain.

Amy shared that being a co-inquirer in this project has been truly inspiring: It has been so fascinating to see the process that we have all gone through in telling our stories. The action of creating meaning out of our experiences is something that one doesn't get a chance to do enough. We are so socially constructed to make relational discourse difficult and awkward at times.

She shared she found it hard to be questioned about her own life and her experiences so thoroughly, especially *after* reading the stories of the other co-

inquirers. Amy referred to her own experiences and her verbal and visual narrative as minimal in comparison and it forced her to not only think about her story in a critical way, but to be somewhat gentle with herself. She explained that she is one to initially be hard on herself in life, always wanting to improve or learn from every experience, so she couldn't help but compare her story to the other, more significant, stories of the other co-inquirers. Amy shared:

This is a personality trait that guides the way I live, as an athlete, a professional, a partner, and an individual, but in this circumstance, that knee-jerk reaction to be self-critical wasn't right in some way. Instead, after discussing it more with Kathie, I reflected in a way that was much more kind to my story. Rather than comparing my story to the others, I began to see strengths in the other stories that paralleled my own strengths. Having someone else discuss your experiences with you in a way that is trying to find meaning is a very empowering thing... and it really turned my self-analysis away from the "critical" and towards a kind sense of reflection.

One part of her story that was illuminated by the other participants was the concept of daily resistance. Her story was not reflected by a single moment in her life, but rather the way that she lives and loves. This requires a sense of daily resistance, as she still lives in the borders of what is "normal" to some people.

Amy elaborated:

I didn't have to overcome a big moment or event, but rather I overcome small little things that challenge who I am on a daily basis. While this is something that differentiates me from the other co-inquirers, I could also connect with their stories because they were a part of the same project as I was. Our being here together bridged the gap between our differences.

Jane

I began my Bachelor of Social Work studies as a part time student, taking classes at night and in the summer. In one of those courses, Social Work, Law, and Social Policy, I met Jane. Course scheduling in the School of Social Work did not permit me to take any further courses with Jane; therefore our relationship did not extend beyond that of student/instructor.

When we talked about writing this introduction, Jane insisted that her memory of our initial meeting was more accurate than mine, but later agreed the Law course was our first encounter. Jane recalled the day she arrived at the high school art class I was teaching. She was the practicum field liaison for social work and I was the practicum supervisor for one social work student. Jane's midterm evaluation turned into a joyful exposure to the Aboriginal students' artwork and discourse – their verbal and visual narratives. The class was creatively collaborating on an exhibit for the local art gallery, *The Voices of First Nations Youth As Reflected In Art*. Jane recalled this day vividly and laughed as she noted that the mid term evaluation "went by the boards." As we continued to collaborate on this introduction Jane told me:

That day I thought I had made a friend, but I didn't follow up on it, I hoped you would come to me. That was my innate shyness, my feeling that you would not really want to know me as a friend.

Kathie: Are you surprised that that surprises me?

Jane: No, how would you ever know me if I didn't let you in?

Kathie: Do you know how honoured I am that you opened that door and let me in?

Typically, Jane laughed, yet again undermining her inherent strengths.

Relationally being-with truly co-created connectedness and relationship for us both. Our meaningful friendship flourished, setting the stage for our co-collaboration as I completed my BSW, my MSW, and now this PhD dissertation. Jane is my mentor.

Herstory

Jane began our conversation by saying "it's been a long life and I could share a lot of stories." Jane has times of great contentment as she regards her current reality - a story of hope and strength as she embraces retirement. Her life stories were multi-layered; she identified herself as a friend, colleague, mother, university professor, social worker, lone parent, world traveller, knowledge seeker, life-long learner – a woman with a full public life whose private life was sometimes a struggle against the dark reality of depression. In the darkest of these times it was first her son Dan who pulled her back from that brink; years later it was her daughter, Pam. Family is the essential strength in Jane's life. In other dark times Jane would call forth memories of happier times, and remind herself these would come again. This created hope, resistance and strength that would carry her though to wellness. At times in the telling she puzzled on the three concepts, first attributing her confluence of ideas to resistance, seeing resistance "as the leader" but as her verbal narrative evolved she spoke of how her internal and external resistance flowed into and buttressed her strength, creating an indivisibility of resistance and strength. Her relational discourse juxtaposed between knowing and un-knowing, certainly and un-certainty.

She began by recalling the 18 months between her retirement and the day of our conversation; days of hope and even fulfillment. She talked about her memorable retirement party, then the few months of growing used to retirement before embarking on four months of travel. The first of those two months she spent in India - where she attended Buddhist meditation retreats and talks by the Dalai Lama, and the next two in Mexico – where she studied Spanish, explored Morelia, and travelled with new friends to nearby towns on most weekends. She returned to Canada, ready to move from Kamloops and begin a two year stay in Williams Lake, where an American Buddhist nun and renowned teacher was in the second year of her three year contract with the Gendun Drubpa Buddhist Centre. It was a time of hope and another adventure.

Jane described the agonizing days that followed her move, days of peering out her living room windows at seven foot snow banks in mid-March! And days of wandering listlessly through an unfamiliar home filled with boxes, but without

friends to help unpack. And days filled with fear, resistance and foreboding. “It was a new adventure, you know, but it was also ‘my god, what have I done?’”

And then, a surge of hope fueled her strength to overcome fear. On a Saturday morning in her new home, seeking solace from partially unpacked boxes, she decided to do a ‘phone-around’ to her four children. As usual she began with her oldest son, but it was his Saturday morning to work, responding to computer crises. Hearing his distracted voice, Jane apologized for disturbing him, promised to call later, and promptly burst into tears. His caring response was immediate, as was his decision to fly out on the Easter weekend to help her hang her art. Jane remembered in our initial conversation that I reframed her fear as a courageous act of resistance, picking up the phone. Hope embraced resistance and fueled strengths - the boxes seemed to melt away. Jane added, “So I didn’t have a lot of time for resistance. Something less than a week, but it was profound. I was scared. I thought I’d made a hugely wrong decision. I didn’t know how I was going to cope, and the walls were painted gray!” Yes, there were certainly times of resistance and fear that surrounded the move, but it was a move based on hope that her retirement would continue to offer new meaning and contentment. Jane concluded, “I see that as strengths, you know, at the age of 68 to make that quite amazing decision to carve out another piece of life. And the art transformed the ‘gray’ walls into silver.”

Later, in reflective moments, Jane visualized a dynamic of strengths as a river, resistance as a roiling waterfall, and hope as everything in that environment - the trees, rocks, birds, even the little animals in the forest. She said “That’s hope. It’s life. The dynamic is life.” In curious conversation I wondered are all three connected and her response was “Totally. I would put hope first.” She identified hope as a motivator. As hope was everything around her, it was central and primary to her being and her survival:

“It’s all about hope, you know, because without that hope, especially when times are bad, it’s because of hope that we can draw on strengths we don’t even think that we have, because things are bad. But, if we have hope, we can draw on strengths to meet or resist, to push back.”



To describe a transformative moment Jane talked about her own belief, that everything is created by the mind: good times, bad times, *faux pas* and felt successes. “I chose to live joyfully, but when I am despondent, I remind myself that I was joyful before and I will be joyful again ... nothing lasts ... I’m happy now and I’ll be sad again, but the transformative moment is recognizing the impermanence of it all, and holding on to hope”

One of Jane’s favorite paintings is *The Dance Class* by Degas (1873-76) (14). This painting captures the hope of the young ballerinas, the strengths of the ballet maestro –

and a pirouette of resistance from the ballerina whose back is to the viewer. Looking carefully we see her green bow is tattered, and she has brought her dog to class. This ballerina's courageous acts of resistance are fueled by the hope that her performance will still meet the approval of the maestro despite her difference. Un-knowingly she brings strengths to this *tableau*. Jane relates this un-knowing to times of un-certainty in her life, times of lesser confidence and wishes for approval that overshadowed her strengths, resistance and even hope.

Our Thoughts...

Jane reflected, "To be a part of this journey was a privilege and a work of the heart - energizing, thought-provoking, happy, sad, and always humbling." In our initial conversation Jane's words and ideas tumbled forth, covering years of her life through moments in time. I laughingly told her that her transcript was *ginormous*; she referenced Leonard Cohen (1971), "I treated you to a flake of my life." We laughed a lot, and sometimes we cried. This speaks to our deep rich relational connection. For Jane, it abundantly addresses the concepts of trust, letting go of fear, and discovering the connections of hope, strengths, and resistance in her own life.

She initially expressed reluctance to comment on the other co-inquirers' stories and art, particularly after reading Liz's deep and meaningful discourse. But it was easy for her to begin with Amy. For Jane, Amy's story resonates with incredible power, passion, connection, meaning, and fulfillment. She makes Jane glad to be a part of our potent and diverse humanity. Amy is a *mensh*.

Eileen's humour and courage in the face of pain and adversity made Jane cry. A medical social worker in her early years, Jane understands well the trauma associated with every hospital visit, from Eileen's newborn daughter to her current being-with cancer. Eileen well understands the concept of hope from a wish or a dream to the practical and tangible day-to-day realities. Hope changes as our reality changes.

Jade's story opened with a description of unconscionable disempowerment imposed on her by the social work profession. Oppression angers Jane, and Jade's story explicated years of colonized practice perpetuated on Aboriginal people. Reading how bureaucratic incompetency was overturned, Jane cheered – for Jade and even more for her daughter.

It remains Jane's contention that her four pregnancies happened merely by passing her children's father in a hallway. It was humbling to read Liz's story, to learn about the long and arduous path that led to the birth of her beautiful twins. How did she summon strengths, resistance, and hope? Given her hopes, desires, and goals it is clear that Liz found "the grit, the strength, personal fortitude, and just plain doggedness to figure out the right path." Helen Reddy's (1972) *I Am Woman* comes to Jane's mind!

Susan's story, like Jade's, raises so many questions about the trauma and fear visited on children by the child protection system and other systems of oppression and exploitation. It fills Jane with bliss to read that today Susan advocates for homeless youth and other disenfranchised young people. This

woman brings her fine mind and vast experience to her work in an area that would trigger most people. Jane applauds her.

Leona's story raises more similarities about the pain and pressure experienced by young children in our rich and prosperous country called Canada. Imagine having the brilliance and bravery to call the Ministry at the age of nine! Like Susan, Leona has turned early life experiences into courageous practice where she helps young children find their strengths, resistance, and hope.

Shar's approach to adversity informs Jane's relational practice. More often than not there is a time to speak softly, to process, and to come back yet again. This concept of resistance, what Shar called "a conscious choice" is not Jane's usual mode of being in the world - Jane acknowledged there is always more to learn.

Every story in this collaborative inquiry gave rise to similar and different ideas that enhanced and grew this re-search project. Nine women brought nine stories and nine pieces of art to re-search table. Different stories brought all of us to similar conclusions when we considered the interconnectedness of hope, strengths, and resistance. There is no way that Kathie could have predicted this confluence of ideas would flow and emerge from narratives shared by these diverse woman. Co-constructed confluence is what made the re-search inquiry so stimulating and captivating for Jane.

Eileen

I met Eileen in my private practice about two and a half years ago. Eileen hesitantly came to see me about the stress in her life. Recently she shared that our first session was about assessing trust. Could she trust me? Could she safely share her story with me without judgment? Eileen did not want a "controlling" therapist. Her story was hers to own; she wanted be in charge of what she shared, when she shared it, and how she shared it. Her right to self-determination, autonomy, and choice were very important. After Eileen thoroughly assessed me in that first session, she disclosed her violent trauma-saturated story. It was the first time she had shared her story with anyone. Thus began a long journey of courageous conversations and therapeutic letter writing that deepened and cultivated a trusting mutual relationship in a safe therapeutic space. Our dialogical verbal, written, and visual connections co-created hope, strengths, resistance, and transformation despite her ongoing adversity. Eileen was diagnosed with cancer six months after our initial session. Now, two years later, Eileen is in palliative care.

Herstory

Eileen's story resonates with the three concepts of hope, resistance, and strengths. Asked from her hospital bed how she wanted her story introduced she responded, "with a glass of wine and a toast to a bumpy road behind and ahead of us!" As we started our conversation Eileen reminded me that her story about her daughter was a hard story and not a done story, but a story that gives her hope in the moment, and she believes it can also give hope to others who may

find themselves in similar situations. It gives her hope in her own personal journey that, “some of the stuff I’m facing now, battling this cancer – because sometimes it’s not always easy to find hope at the end of a day of chemo or appointments.” This is Eileen’s current reality: she hears from medical personnel that there is a 20% chance she will be alive at this time next year, that she should go to her lawyer to put her affairs in order and to the funeral home to make arrangements. She experiences these words as harsh messages that illustrate a lack of relational practice as well as a lack of understanding of the therapeutic discourse of hope, resistance, and strengths.

Eileen reflected how – years ago when her second baby was born – when she wasn’t sure if there was any hope and she didn’t think she had any strengths, she found it in her newborn daughter. When her daughter was born Eileen experienced a mother’s worst nightmare, the knowing that something was wrong, yet the un-knowing of what could happen. When she first saw her baby it seemed she was not breathing. Consumed with fear and not knowing if her daughter was even alive, Eileen resisted the bed rest order, marshaled her strengths and walked to the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit. Hope thrust resistance and strengths together, walking through these intertwined concepts got her to that nursery. She believes that “resistance and strengths can go back and forth. Sometimes we have to muster strengths and in using those strengths, we’re resisting, and when we’re using resisting that is a sign of strengths.” Whirling in terror, Eileen resonated in resistance and strengths and found hope.

Hope came through her knowing, her learning, and gathering the information she needed to say, “I felt like finally my baby was not going to die!” She shared:

If we didn’t have hope that something would be achieved, changed or learned at the end of a process or situation, it would be hard to have strengths or find resistance to get to that different place. I really think hope is, it’s what drives the other two, honestly. Having said that I think there is also hope at the end of that process or situation because it’s what we are working so hard to get to! Whether the situation or process changes, ends, or continues the journey with us, maybe just in a different direction with different players, we have to be pushing through for something... I believe that something is hope. In the beginning hope may be a more of a wish or a dream and at the end it’s more practical, tangible, and easy to definitively see.

Eileen held out for hope; that was her goal. She thinks it is about pushing through, for finding that resistance to say no or to do something different or to try something else or to find that strength to take one more step “to go to, you know, in my case, one more doctor’s appointment, or one more surgery for my daughter.” Hope is taking one more step.

Connecting the three concepts of hope, resistance, and strengths in her story Eileen names the dynamic as “it’s just living, to me it’s just living, it’s the ebb and flow of life.” She believes that the dynamic is transformative, and as her story so eloquently illustrates, transformation is continual movement. “We’re still doing it, we’re still living that moment 17 years later with different twists and turns, with

a few completed tasks, with a few more players, and with many adventures ahead. We're still transforming this moment."



Eileen's piece of art is called *The Happy Heart Tree* by Mary Dawn Armstrong (n.d.) (15). She shared this piece of art symbolizes her visual narrative of the dynamic of the intertwined concepts of hope, strengths, and resistance. Tree trunks grow big and solid with deep roots into the earth giving the tree strength to withstand any and all elements that it will face during its life. The branches grow out of the trunk like defying arms reaching, growing, and waiting to explore and challenge what the world will show it. The beauty that grows off the branches and fills the space around the branches is hope!

Our Thoughts...

Eileen described our therapeutic journey together as "emotionally exhausting." We both believe that as a result of this arduous roller coaster ride, we have jointly co-constructed a preferred belief and a preferred story despite all the "HARD" times. Neither of us could fathom the unrelenting compounded trauma of her narrative, the heaviness and hopelessness that at times seemed never-ending. Through our conversations, therapeutic letter writing, and shared doodling Eileen was able to find strengths and conceive resistance in herself – a profound act of courage. Her newfound insight of the interconnectedness of hope, strengths, and resistance grew stronger and bigger than her trauma-saturated story.

On many occasions Eileen shared that I held hope and helped her carry her immense pain and her uncertainty of her future. Even now I curiously wonder how I held hope for her? I *witnessed* hope, and we collaboratively transferred and co-created hope in our discursive therapeutic space. Conversely, Eileen gave me hope. Given her story of her daughter's birth with a rare syndrome and ongoing medical and health challenges, it was obvious that Eileen carried hope all along. Despite dark adversity, she continues to envision possibilities.

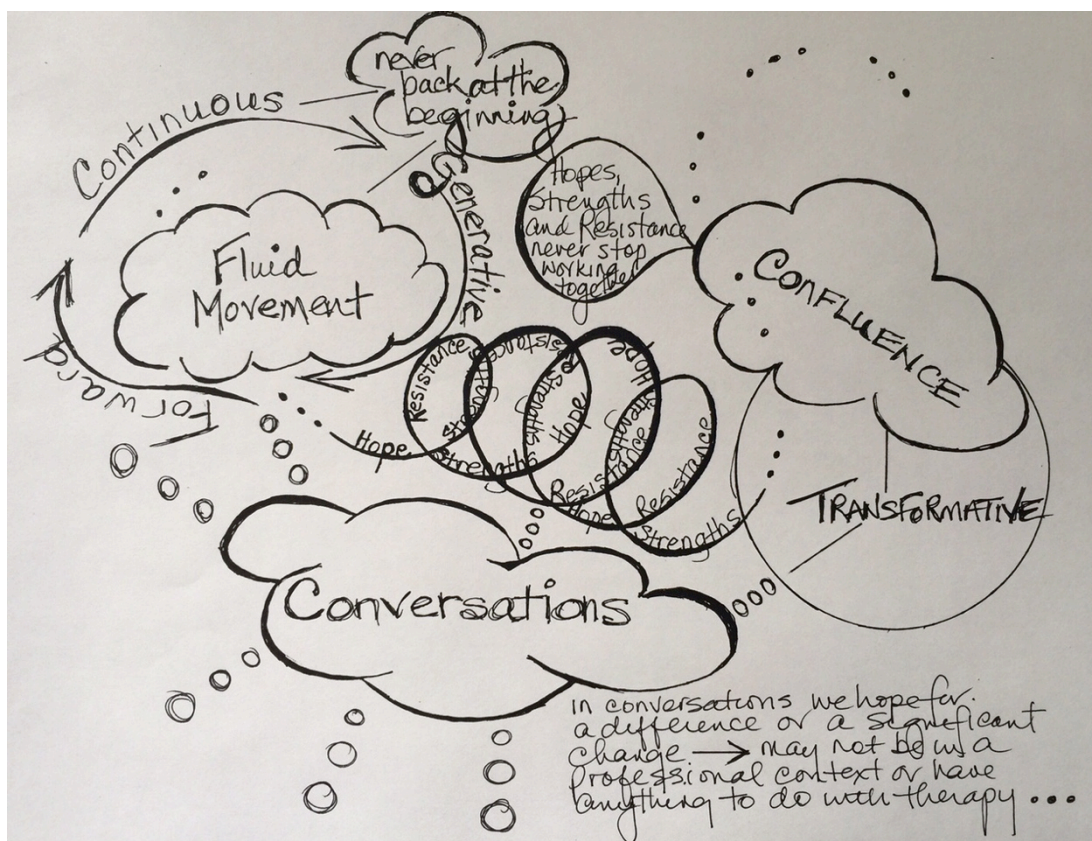


Figure 3. Eileen's Illustration, (Eileen and McKinnon, 2016).

Eileen's story taught us about the interconnected relations of hope, strengths, and resistance. Her story illuminates how these three concepts "work hand in hand." We worked together to link and co-construct forward movement in her life as a young mother, a survivor of violence, and a woman currently facing terminal illness. In courageous conversations, we learned that these three concepts facilitated many preferred stories of transformation in her life. Eileen pictures overlapping circles of hope, strengths, and resistance as fluid movement within her, a processional dynamic of continual transformation, forward motion that does not go backwards. At the time, Eileen clearly articulated this dynamic "thing" as movement and process. Eileen shared how our re-search journey shifted her perspective of her daughter's story and her current story. "All of the shitty parts of my story were now visible in a different light." This light brightened hope, strengths, and resistance in a new dimension for Eileen. She re-discovered and re-claimed a new means to journey forward – she described this as a fluid movement. Our con-joint meaning making co-created new knowing of the confluence of the interconnected concepts and the resultant transformative process. We wondered and pondered the implications for future practice. Hope, strengths, resistance and this un-named transformative dynamic co-constructed a means for Eileen to keep going... "FUCK CANCER!"

Jade

Just over four years ago I was called to the local hospital emergency room to do a suicide risk assessment on an Aboriginal girl who was in her late teens. I introduced myself and it was clear she did not want to engage as she initiated our conversation with “I don’t fuckin want to talk to you...” Her boyfriend sheepishly stood at her side as she voiced that she was not suicidal and she wanted someone from a mainstream agency to see her, not a person from an Aboriginal agency. She had “no gas in the tank,” she was “running on fumes!” Her anger escalated as she disclosed that she was at ER as she needed some prescription anxiety meds to calm down and no one was providing her with medication. She explained that her stress and anxiety was caused because her mother had “kidnapped” her baby and further shared her story. Jade granted me permission to make some phone calls to inquire as to the legal custodial documentation specific to her daughter. Three phone calls later I was informed that there were no legal orders specific to custody agreements or child protection concerns. She appeared perplexed when I told her this, and within 48 hours this matter was cleared up. Together we opened the door of trust; this was where our relational connection began. Jade’s life experience did not permit much trust with professionals, as she was betrayed and “burnt” countless times by the system and those who worked within it. Her openness to trust me at this moment in her life was a courageous act of resistance. Did she know the incredible strengths she possessed?

The last 11 months of confusion and unfair treatment from disrespectful social workers had generated loss of hope. Jade was hurt by power differentials and injustice that the system imposed on her. She had “lost” her “mind over something that should never have happened and could have been completely avoided.” Within days, the bureaucratic and practice incompetency was corrected – hope lightened hopelessness. Jade reclaimed custody of her beautiful daughter immediately, even though there were no court or other documents. Two days after that we had our first therapy session and we have walked together in therapeutic space ever since. Jade’s life experiences are founded in strengths, resistance and hope. When I spoke about this as an inspirational and courageous story, this surprised Jade and created new relational dialogue between us. I am grateful for all this incredible young woman continues to teach me.

Herstory

Jade, the youngest co-inquirer, tells a story about pain and joy. It encompasses ten years of sexual assault, physical violence, drug abuse, and a street-entrenched life. Pregnant at fifteen, Jade found the strengths to resist demands that she have an abortion and to resist drug use during her pregnancy. Her story is woven with fear and trauma, challenge and courage, a rich tapestry of overcoming adversity to be a mother for her child.

The birth of her baby was a “life-changing chapter, kind of like a loop that I went through all of three - strengths, resistance, and hope. Doing it all over, doing

it all through twelve hours of labour, but it had all those looped and looped.” She talked about having strengths to resist the negative in her own life, and show her baby that she too can have strengths, resist the negative, and have hope. “You have to be strong - not only for yourself but for others.” Her baby girl gave her hope, the strengths to know there would be something better, and positive resistance to know deep down that change was possible.

Jade voiced her hope to create a:

Better world than being high all the time, and targeted, and looked at. I had hope that there would be better and it would be brighter and have different light. Even though I was still waiting for the next pill or who was going to buy the beer that night. There was still hope.

She repeated throughout our conversations her continual hope to have the strengths to keep resisting the negative; “I hope to just take it one day at a time – this is all you can do.” Jade used the illuminated metaphor of hope as the light or sunshine behind the clouds.

Jade talked about the connection between the concepts of hope, resistance, and strengths, describing them as being like three friends, holding hands, skipping down the road, and present in each and every one of her experiences. She explained that these three entities “have to work together; you can’t have one without the other.” Exploring the possibility of a dynamic in our conversation, Jade initially shared her thought that it might be “faith.” She further offered another powerful visual explanation for the dynamic – a transformative stairway or mountain up through the clouds, encompassing hope, resistance, and strengths. “And when you finally get there, you’ve made it!” Jade described her path as an upward direction to transformative possibilities.

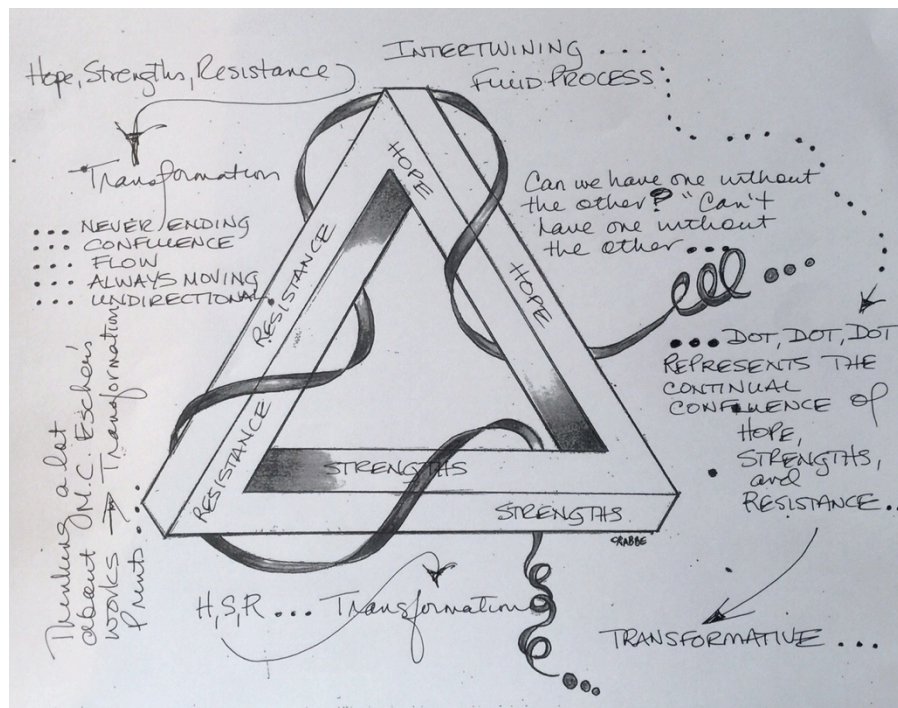


Figure 4. Jade's Illustration, (McKinnon and Jade, 2016).

Jade proudly voiced that it took her a while to brainstorm in order to articulate her feelings and thoughts about her selected piece of art. She constructed a curious exercise on paper – she wrote the word ‘strengths’ next to the word ‘resistance’, and in between and just below both she wrote the word ‘hope.’ She then drew a line connecting the three words and made a triangular symbol. Jade noticed that her eyes bounced continuously from one word to another, the three words pulsating together as they were all unconditionally connected.

When Jade asked me to view her piece of art for the first time she asked me to listen to the American songwriter Lana Del Rey’s (2012) song *Gods and Monsters*. This visual and auditory experience heightened a deeper sensory appreciation of her life imitating this piece of art:

In the land of Gods and monsters,
I was an Angel.
Living in the garden of evil,
Screwed up, scared, doing anything that I needed.
Shining like a fiery beacon...
No one's gonna take my soul away
I'm living like Jim Morrison
Headed towards a fucked up holiday
Motel sprees and I'm singing
'Fuck yeah give it to me this heaven, what I truly want'
It's innocence lost
Innocence lost... (Elizabeth Grant and Time Larcombe, n.d.)



Jade selected John William Waterhouse’s (1896) painting *Hylas and The Nymphs* (16). Jade emphasized the importance of her visual narrative. The process of sharing art with other people invited ease for Jade to express herself. “My story could not stand alone without my art, it would only be half a story.” She chose this

painting because she sees herself as the main figure in the painting despite that this figure is a male. The nymphs represent negative aspects in her life. Jade described how elements in this piece of art depicted “her choices followed by her consequences.” The man bending over the water is *Hope*. Listening to Del Rey’s song while viewing Waterhouse’s painting the “bad elements and temptations” in Jade’s life echoed a chorus of hope, strengths, and resistance.

She claims that her character and the male's character in the painting represent mutually relational strengths. He looks at the water nymphs through the eyes of his soul projecting his strengths, as he resists the irresistible, the forceful pull, and the temptations that life offers. She looks at the previous chapters of her visual and verbal narrative through the eyes of her soul projecting her strengths, as she resists the irresistible, the forceful pull, and the temptations that life offers. His decision to resist is posed. Her decision to resist is graceful. His resistance is an automatic reaction. Her resistance is instinctive. Her/his strengths to resist come from her/his hope. He believes hope is his savior. She is curious if hope is *her savior*. The man in this painting hopes for hope. Jade is HOPE.

Our Thoughts...

Jade's enthusiasm and energy inspired us as co-inquirers, she stressed the relational process of this project was important to her growth. She defined her relational process and learning specific to this project as a new set of stairs that she walked with the other co-inquirers in an upward and forward direction. Jade described her relational dialogues as "mind opening." She shared many times that she never would have intertwined the three concepts, as she had never considered that these three concepts stand together. Jade shared vast learning, she believed our dialogical engagement solidified "that making bad choices does not make you a bad person." This exemplifies that honest meaning making is a relational process; she stressed that this "was done through the sharing of our verbal and visual narratives. I don't think that one person could have come up with all these ideas for co-creating new understanding and meaning like we all did together." Jade stressed in all our conversations the significance of our con-joint performance, our multivocality, our curiosity in being-with each other and collaboratively doing the re-search despite difference (Bakhtin, 1981; Buber, 1970; McNamee, 2013). Her deep sense of being-with others continually reiterated the importance of our relational dialogical process and our respect and integrity for the re-search. We co-constructed this project together and all that emerged transpired together (Sampson, 2008).

Jade's verbal and visual narrative weaves her multifaceted intertwined realities of hope, strengths, and resistance as relational and experiential, present to her being. She conceptualized and emulated these entities as collaborative partners working together, further explaining that they were not separable entities in her life experiences. Jade had many thoughts about our un-named transformative dynamic – emergent thoughts of faith, spirituality, heaven, clouds, stairways, mountains, and water, to name a few. When she could not verbally language some of her thoughts she shared them with visual images of movement and fluidity. Jade did not name the dynamic.

Liz

Liz remembers a very young woman, her new neighbour, walking to the back door of her new house. She was half hidden by the gigantic portfolio she

carried and Liz saw her through the trees and shrubs and over the ancient stone wall which separated their back-to-back properties. Kathie had moved in!

We became connected when Kathie's daughter Amy was a baby and a very close relationship grew over the years. Soon large stones were removed from that historic wall to make easier access for the kids and grown-ups too. We found many interests in common including the local outdoor pool, where we both volunteered and where we and our children spent our summers. In 1984, we once spent two weeks glued to a huge projection TV which we had been able to borrow in order to watch the Summer Olympics. We swapped children often to allow parents some "away time" and Liz shared:

My twins were always sure of a welcome at Kathie's and loved the art classes she eventually ran. Kathie also had a strong influence on my childrens' swimming and diving exploits! It was a heavy blow when we learned that they were to move to BC, a still memorable farewell party saw them off and soon after we were able to visit and spend New Year's at a ski resort. We had several visits after that. We were even on site to help prepare Amy's apartment when she moved to Montreal for University. And I was able to be at two of Amy's graduations...High School in Kamloops and Concordia University in Montreal!

We remain close and have shared many milestones in our lives. We recently welcomed to the world Kathie's first granddaughter, Sadie. By my reckoning that is a span of 36 years! Reading your story Kathie, and its concluding line, "I am a person of the water!" I think it is no wonder we connected. "I too have always considered myself a water soul! Born near and brought up on the beach... always seeking it... always craving its nearness."

Herstory

To prepare for our conversation Liz reflectively journalled her initial thoughts:

Thinking about the themes of this work - strengths, resistance, and hope - it occurs to me that hope must be at the forefront. It is the matrix on which strengths and resistance thrive. I think it is difficult to summon strengths, let alone resistance, to steer a path through life without that thing called 'hope'. Thinking about strengths I imagine emotional strength, that which bolsters strength of character, grit, persistence, backbone, fortitude to press on, to overcome the odds or the external resistance put in our way. Emotional strength can lead to unusual physical strength, as in the case where someone may perform over and above her norm in an emergency situation. Or the resistance from inside, swimming against the tide, not taking 'no' for an answer, resisting forces which would turn one away from one's goals.

In 1964, at the age of twenty-three, Liz and her husband "packed two suitcases and set off from England for a life in Canada." Liz carried with her two dreams: to find a fulfilling job and to raise a family. Employed as a physiotherapist

in one of Montreal's hospitals she realized there was no prenatal education in the West Island of Montreal. Over time she built a multidisciplinary program for mothers-to-be, taught based on the Lamaze method, and brought in nurses, dieticians, nursery nurses and others to provide orientation and support – in French and English. "One might say I was steeped in the Obstetrics Department."

Her second dream to start a family was a very long rollercoaster of hope, resistance, and strengths. Time passed, every month more painful than the last, feeling perfectly healthy and wondering why she could not conceive. She described how every month without success "was another blow, a dent in the strengths" that kept her hope alive. Liz, dashed and infuriated by the indifference shown by her obstetrician, resisted his apathy and embarked on the daily temperature charting required to reveal any underlying issues, an occupation of watching and wondering. She was compliant and continually hoped that the results of her diligent recording, and the inevitable scrutiny of her private life, would "shed some light." The obstetrician after one glance pronounced the charts "fine, nothing amiss here!" He agreed to one test and when that revealed nothing asked Liz and her husband why they didn't just adopt. Liz, again feeling flattened and betrayed by a colleague she trusted, resisted again and requested a referral to a recently opened Infertility Clinic.

Here... vindication! The problem was evident in the charting. Another long journey was to start but with the support and positive, optimistic attitude of her team. She felt empowered now and had renewed hope. Liz eventually became pregnant - but miscarried in her first trimester. Despite her emptiness, her loss, and her perception of failure, she saw the need for other bereft mothers to talk about their deep sorrow and acknowledge their losses – so she started a program for mothers grieving after miscarriage.

The long treatment program continued and more than two years later it was decided to try the "big guns." There would be only three chances. They met another young couple and camaraderie developed during the daily visits for tests and treatment as they needed their all important, exclusive and expensive injections on the same day. "Sharing the process helped us deal with the situation." The first round ended in failure. "Time to pick ourselves up, stick out our chins and start again." Days after the second round she knew she was pregnant! An ultrasound at seven weeks showed she was expecting twins. "Hope realized! Twelve years to the month after we were married, and seven long years of hope and struggle, our son and daughter were safely delivered!"

The concepts of hope, resistance, and strengths are "interwoven" in her life journey, and expressed as "fluidity" moving through her life. She describes the three concepts as a continuum. Metaphorically she creates the visual of the branches of a tree, the three concepts stemming from all directions. She says:

You are given this hope, these desires, these goals. You need to find the grit, the strength, the personal fortitude, and just plain doggedness to figure out the right path. Strengths come from that and resistance too, whether it has to be overcome or has to be internal – it's all interwoven. She identified this dynamic as "finding your mettle, finding your way, reaching for empowerment – you could even call it courage." For Liz, who needed hope,

strengths, and resistance to carry her through several phases of her life, one transformative moment came through her struggle to graduate as a physiotherapist. Her training epitomized hope, strengths, and resistance – often fading. The exhilaration of feeling skilled and being able to provide life-changing effects for peoples' lives was an enormous "wow I did it" sensation. The strongest, most intense, "we really did it" moment came when she held her new born twins. That moment certainly transformed their lives.



The sculpture (17) below shouted hope, resistance and strength for Liz. A seed lodged in a rock without any visible means of survival other than the hope it would grow; resistance to the elements and strengths to grow into a full size tree despite all odds. Lodged against a hard rock, mocked by green grass and bushes, beset by the winds of time, conquering the elements this tree stands as tribute to survival.

Our Thoughts...

Liz had much to share about the verbal and visual narratives of the co-inquirers. She noted that while each person's story was enfolded in a challenge, every one was a life drama, and the sum of the resistance, strengths, and hope they were required to summon,

amounted to raw courage. Liz shared that her challenge required "only long-range doggedness and persistence."

Liz expressed a strong interest in the art choices. She reflected that the art became more special in relation her to knowing each person's particular experience. Liz thoughtfully embraced all verbal and visual narratives as follows:

Amy: Her choice shows the joy and strength to be seen and known exactly as she is and therefore to soar. Personal note: this story as you can imagine had particular importance for me and I'm very grateful that this dear little girl, now a strong beautiful young woman found the way to overcome. I did not doubt she would. Amy stated "Roller Derby saved my soul" in that vein it occurred to me that "the Welsh terrier in me saved mine by giving me children!" Her choice of art – so perceptive – perfect.

Jane: The book *The Painted Girls*, by Cathy Marie Buchanan described in detail the lives of Degas' child models: their struggles to be accepted, the hope which drove them to get out of poverty, and to dance even when many of them had to sacrifice their innocence.

Eileen: A tree, a symbol of strengths for several of us, surrounded and entwined with hearts, the symbol of our emotions and aspirations. This is a wonderful choice to represent the myriad and ongoing obstacles which have characterized her life and which have not quenched her spirit.

Jade: A very interesting choice of art which I looked at several times in order to understand Jade's narrative as it relates to the art. I was impressed with the deep translation of the roles of the characters. To me it would have represented someone in deep water, therefore in trouble, being offered hope of rescue from the deep. Simplistic!

Susan: The water falling, separated pools, strong trees symbolizing moving on to a healthy future – I can see why she chose this piece.

Leona: Another amazing, perfect choice to illustrate the challenges of herstory. Wow!

Shar: Strong flowing water, rapids causing eddies to hold you back and waves to resist progress, all part of the flow of life and the power to ride through it with comfort.

Our verbal and visual narratives illustrated that the journey through life flows along or bumps along or presents huge hills to climb or huge chasms to trip and fall into. We all shared that when challenged we can, with the help of hope, summon resistance and strengths or courage to achieve a way around or through the obstacles we face, and sometimes harness those strengths to continue fighting all life long if necessary.

Liz noticed several similarities in the choice of art. Trees in three pieces of art symbolized strengths. Water was repeatedly used as a symbol in many visual narratives. Eileen's verbal narrative evinced strong strengths that were echoed in her art. Shar's art portrayed water moving over rapids as a symbol of the movement of life as a journey. A repeated theme was seen in our efforts to succeed despite obstacles in society. Our narratives all defined a challenge outlining a life-changing situation, whether this situation was a long-ranging obstacle or a life threatening set of circumstances. It occurred to Liz that everyone had found the hope to change the situation, and the resistance and subsequent strengths to fulfill that hope. She believed all three were inherent in us all, all interwoven knowingly or un-knowingly. Eileen's story touched Liz. Eileen mentioned that Kathie gave her hope but Liz guessed that Eileen had known or held hope within herself for many years. Liz believed Eileen and Kathie's relational connection and dialogical process co-created a means to collaboratively find and hold hope together. Relational dialogue co-constructed the extra hope Eileen needed as the seed to resistance and strengths when the heavy blow of her cancer diagnosis knocked her sideways.

Apparent in all our verbal and visual narratives is that we identified hope as the seed, the motivator, the light towards which we are drawn. We also learned resistance from outside or from inner forces offered strengths to move on. The visualization of these entities drew them together as an interconnected confluence, flowing together to influence a movement of change and growth.

Susan

I met Susan a few years ago while teaching a fourth year social work class. On the first night I noticed a beautiful young woman sitting alone in the back row. She presented as covertly attentive and she did not make eye contact with me for the entire three hours. She doodled, fidgeted, played with her hair, and did whatever she could to remain composed. I sensed her enduring unease. I hoped that I was not unintentionally staring in her direction while teaching. My curiosity was naturally heightened. I did not anticipate she would return to the second class. I expected that she would drop the course. Wonderfully, she remained in the class for the entire term.

Susan later shared with me how she came into that first class, took one look at me and almost fainted. She said she remained frozen all evening, as she thought I was a child protection worker from her past. In self-preservation mode she was convinced she would have to quit the course. Susan left that first class determined to learn more about me from a close colleague, who told her I had never done child protection work. Fortuitously, she decided to remain in the course.

Susan an incredible student achieved the highest marks in the class. Once it ended, Susan volunteered to work on my team at the agency where I work. For months we engaged in lengthy dialogical conversations about youth homelessness and children in care – her abiding passion. Our relational conversations created new meaning for us both and incredible possibilities for Susan, as today her dream to generate change and provide housing for homeless youth and children in care has come to fruition. She heads a new national initiative for youth homelessness. Hers is a strong voice of experience and she has much to share. Susan is a respected colleague and cherished friend who continues to inspire me.

Herstory

Susan's story tells of courageous acts of resistance, strengths, and hope. At age five, her family experienced violence and addiction, and she was forced into foster care for the first time. She became a permanent ward of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (provincial child welfare/protection) at the age of thirteen. She recalls twenty-nine different moves in foster care before the age of sixteen. Describing a work experience program at the SPCA she likened the discarded animals to her time in foster care. Her foster siblings vandalized a group home window with the words "SPCA for Kids." This was an act of resistance to a system that did not meet the needs of youth.

Susan experienced multiple layers of trauma and exploitation: emotional, physical, sexual, and relational exploitation by drugs, death, family, friends, strangers, helping professionals, child protection, justice, education, and medical systems. From the time she turned thirteen Susan was at different times street entrenched and vulnerable. Resistance became her survival. She knows "resistance is a survival strategy to keep safe, have a voice and a choice and

power in your weakest moments.” Her conversation was rich in resistance, experiences at multiple foster placements, group homes, basement suites, motel rooms, treatment centers, and city cells - some environments kind and other environments hostile and abusive. Resistance to leaving one good foster home at thirteen led to her first encounter with the justice system and consequently, her first criminal charge of uttering threats by venting to a social worker. By sixteen she was either homeless or living in unacceptable places. Curiously I asked, “So how did you resist all this trauma?”

Throughout her time in foster care or on the streets, Susan found opportunities to protect, care for, and lend her strengths to other kids. She and her inseparable best friend relationally co-created resistance and strengths. Resistance fueled her strengths and led her to excel in her university program. Her inherent strengths reflect in the work she does today, advocating for homeless youth. She is passionate about social justice and the rights of youth – hers is a strong voice. Out of her resistance came the strengths to help herself and others. She rails against the social construction of the “criminalization of care” through child welfare practice that refuses to acknowledge strengths in resistance.

Hope comes late to Susan’s story; at one point she laughed, “I can’t wait to get to the hope.” She recalled one foster family who came into her life at a time when she felt broken. This couple made a commitment to keep her safe and to love her unconditionally. “It was the first time any one fought for me.” This home was “so full of love – love and healing.” For Susan, this healing moment was “kind of like putting my feet in the water a little bit.” Later in our conversation Susan equated homelessness and hope, recalling her favorite quote, “When my house burned down, I gained an unobstructed view of the moonlit sky.”

Connecting these elements, the order that makes the most sense to Susan is resistance, strengths, and hope:

Resistance is a beautiful healing thing, resisting something means you’re not depressed. Strengths have to be relational because I didn’t know my own strengths until someone brought that out. I think sometimes you have resistance and someone pulls your strengths out of that resistance.

Resistance is a different form of hope. Hope is able to make change for the next generation – that gives meaning and purpose to my story.

Speaking to the dynamic Susan said it’s hard to put it in a linear fashion, “it’s more like a water wheel.” A water wheel that “creates electricity, that creates change, and then benefits others.” There are “all the different pools of water” relationally creating change for someone else. Curiously I wonder if Susan’s multiple storied experiences, her knowing and un-knowing, set her on a path to relationally be-with, lean-in, and co-create possibilities with others. For Susan there is not one transformative moment, it is the time she spends with herself and others engaging in transformative change. Immersed in the work she does is motivational and a catalyst for the co-creation of change.



This beautiful painting (18) was a present, given to Susan by a treasured friend. This painting represents a dynamic of movement for Susan. The resistance is found within all the various water pools and barriers that separate them. This represents resistance as a response to the multi-layers of trauma. The steadfast rocks within the water embody strengths as they ground the beautiful trees

striving to survive. Finally, in the horizon, hope is found within the rushing waterfall. The fluidity of this unnamed dynamic generates possibilities, streaming with light and colour, symbolizing Susan's future growth and holistic wellbeing.

Our Thoughts...

In Susan's verbal and visual narratives our learning was that the entities of hope, strengths, and resistance co-created a relational flow. Susan conceptualized the unnamed dynamic as fluid, her sense of fluidity was similar yet different from the other co-inquirer's stories. Despite difference, she articulated a relational flow to all stories and art. Her profound water metaphor both verbally and visually corroborated this.

This was the first time Susan shared her entire story. With a deeper understanding of vulnerability as a strength, Susan shared there was "a powerful sense of healing in sharing your story and art." Susan brought many large pieces of art to my home for us to view and dialogue about collaboratively. Embracing large sizes and awkward haulage, we viewed her visual narratives while we relationally engaged in meaningful conversation. Susan brought a large scrapbook she created containing words, photographs, and artwork – titled: *When my house burnt down I gained an unobstructed view of the moonlit sky*. Her creation was an unobstructed view of her life story from the time she aged out of foster care to the present. The authorship of this book defined Susan's reclamation of herself, emulating hope, strengths, resistance, transformation and growth.

Professionally, our conversations gave words and new meaning to her practice framework; new ideas emerged in her relational work with youth and young adults. Today when Susan engages with youth or young adults she utilizes the person's hope to co-create and inspire a catalyst for change. She recognizes that resistance was a valid response to trauma, a fight, a sense of survival as opposed to being bad, not only in her own story but in the stories of people with whom she works. Strengths are a valued concept for Susan. New meaning was co-created for us both specific to the potent interconnection of the three concepts.

Susan believed the three concepts feed or fuel each other and spark movement as a catalyst for change.

Leona

I met Leona in 2009. She was a new employee at the agency where I worked. It was not until the beginning of 2012 that we really got to know each other when she and her Early Years Team joined our Wellness Team. As an Early Years Intervention Specialist, she had an innate passion for the holistic wellness of children and their families. Her relational practice exemplifies the kindred connection of dialogical conversations. She practices being-with, continually co-creating support, new awareness, and transformative possibilities. Working together for three years Leona and I became good friends. I admire her voice, her honesty, her transparency, and her strong self-awareness. She appreciates her desire to grow; she acquires new meaning and new knowledge through her relational connections around the world. Leona loves to relationally explore and adventure, she is ceaselessly curious. Leona's story reminds me of the tornado in Kansas, that gusted Dorothy on her journey to Oz. The compass of Leona's turbulent childhood guided her to generate and configure all the intricacies of the incredible woman she is today.

Herstory

Leona's story is a strengths-based story. She ties strengths to human spirit and temperament. She described her intuition about dysfunction as a little girl with "a sort of gnawing that wouldn't go away." She further shared she was "born" with inherent strengths. She frames her strengths as resisting external pressures as a child, and coming to hope as an adult. Shame and blame in childhood are recounted as external resistance, and internal resistance as strengths.

At the age of nine, Leona recognized that her father's behaviour induced by alcohol was not right, and decided to call the Ministry of Children and Family Development (provincial child welfare/protection) for help. She remembered experiencing a lot of guilt generated by her older brothers. She was shamed, blamed, and ignored thereafter. "Through all that, in my heart, I knew that I had done the right thing." Resistance compelled her to go against her family's beliefs and strengths convinced her that she had "enough gut intuition at a young age" to do what she felt was "the right thing to do." She further considered resistance as an "energy pull" – helping us to resist events or acts that misalign our lives. Resistance is then for her an act of misalignment, a natural means to resist energy or events – a chameleon of sorts – resistance camouflaged in different colours. "Resistance can be verbal, non-verbal, and it can be silent – it comes out in different forms." And her hope came from knowing her story, "the truth was out there. I really felt like my voice was heard by someone." Leona framed hope as inspirational energy, a "feeling of peace – it's like having faith."

As an adult, Leona works with children. She remembered herself as a brave child; her knowing and courage enhances her practice. Leona reflected that it is interesting how her path brought her to this professional position and shared,

“I didn’t seek that out.” She thinks about what it took to go against her own family; she remembered her feelings of fear. Leona’s incredible story emulated hope, resistance, and strengths. My curiosity took over. I wondered if that little girl was still there, doing the same thing for other little people? Leona wondered if resistance exists without self-knowing. And pondered how curiosity is useful when we talk about transformation.

Describing the connection of the three concepts, Leona offered, “hope creates energy, energy helps us with action, resistance repels negative energy, and our strengths are actually our momentum.” She saw the dynamic as, “a perfect storm for transformation.” She visualized this dynamic as “drifting in rough waters, having multiple currents or elements coming at you and at that time you can’t see the outcomes.” In that moment when the “perfect storm comes, we may not always foresee the outcome but we end up where we need to be.” This is fluid, she identified a metaphoric wave, “forever moving – there is some discomfort but you are moving through the waves.”



Leona picked this piece of art (19) because it visually illustrated her life in childhood – a heroic little girl standing alone. She appears not to belong anywhere or to anyone. A young girl relationally disconnected from her parents, family, and friends – devoid of all human connection. Globally isolated, standing in solitude on a cylindrical brick pylon in the middle of rough waters, juxtapositioning a sense of invincibility and vulnerability. This unique brick structure supports her to see clearly that she has the courageous capacity to stand alone in the storm. Alone and

calm, this little girl weathers the chaos of the storm – her serene awareness creates hope. With her umbrella held firmly, her hope offers power to weather, the metaphorical storm of her life. This visual narrative represents her courage to stand alone, defying her lack of belonging. Weathering her storm alone is an interconnected act of resistance and strengths. Resistance and strengths raise hope and co-create a nurtured state of awareness while surrounded by the storm. Strangely, her grounded sureness creates possibilities in navigating the storm to create a preferred story. Her verbal and visual narrative gives Leona comfort to transform relationally and validates her preferred intuitive story of being-with in life.

Our Thoughts...

Throughout our conversations Leona reflected on her early childhood and the “gnawing feeling that something was wrong” with her entire family. Relational confusion created curiosity about her sense of belonging: did she really belong with the people who identified themselves as her family? The interconnectedness of hope, strengths, and resistance resonated and, un-knowingly, eased her discomfort at this time. The three concepts also provided a means to expel fear of difference in her quest for belonging and acceptance. Leona now acknowledges that hope, strengths, and resistance provided a process for transformation; this was evident not only in her story and art but the stories and art of the other co-inquirers. As hope, strengths, and resistance pooled together they created the calm before her “perfect storm for transformation.” Leona’s piece of art visually depicts her courageous childhood realities weathering her storm in the sea of life.

Leona’s story and art stress her process of transformation as fluid movement that created safety and a means to flourish in acceptance and belonging. Possibilities and opportunities fostered connections for this young girl and enabled courage and curiosity. She explained our re-search reminded her of many childhood memories and experiences:

I was experiencing safety for the first time. It was the feelings of safety and connection that allowed me the strength to feel courageous enough to share my worries of my family with others. I remember feeling a great sense of anxiety as the risk of feeling heard and validated weighed heavily on my heart. I was fortunate that I was heard and validated. I remember feeling surprised that people were concerned about my story and that they really wanted to help me. To this day, I can feel the warmth of relief run through my body. I believe this to be the feeling of hope that warmed me as I felt a renewed sense of energy and motivation to make changes. As a nine-year-old girl, I was experiencing a sense of unconditional caring for the first time. I am grateful that I experienced this as that moment changed my heart forever. I often wonder what would have happened to my heart if I did not sense this powerful feeling of hope. I also remember feeling angry that I had been ‘ripped off’ in the loving family department of my life. I wondered why I was living with these people as they all seemed to just accept the dysfunction and craziness and yet I could not. My resistance to this charade grew stronger and stronger. Although I still felt uneasy at home, I was different now. I had hope with a strong sense of resistance. These feelings mixed together created courage in me that I never thought existed. I felt this energy come over me that could not be ignored. That is when I decided to call Ministry of Children and Family Development for help.

Leona’s childhood experiences did not have a fairy tale ending. In fact she was treated far worse than when she was silent. As an adult woman she speaks to the power of one’s voice and one’s story. Despite her awful experiences and her childhood knowing of intense alienation from her entire family, she feels strongly that her strengths to resist personified her truth and enabled her to grow

relationally. Hope, strengths, and resistance pooled with her courage, to transform her into the person she is today. Leona has a strong sense of self, acceptance, and love that she honours and shares with her own family. Her metaphoric perfect storm transformed a courageous little girl into a confident woman, despite unsafe and unpredictable relationships.

Shar

Shar and I met in 2005 when she inquired if I would co-facilitate her Masters degree internship. As an Aboriginal woman she had much to teach me about the need to decolonize the agency where I worked. I had no idea then what I would learn and how I would change my views of the world. Through relational dialogue, story telling, and her kind-hearted spirit Shar gifted me with stories and the voices of her grandmothers, her aunties, her mother, and her sisters. These relational stories of personal experience taught me about the women in her family – their strengths, courageous acts of resistance, and undying hope for their families and their communities despite colonization, oppression, and adversity – and their power to generate change and nurture the future. In the Canadian context, colonization has been defined as:

the process of taking control over and assimilating Aboriginal people through formal government policies. From an Aboriginal perspective, it refers to the theft of ancestral homelands and resources, as well as attempts to destroy Indigenous languages and cultures. (Chansonneuve, 2005, p. 19)

Colonization left a legacy of despair and destitution for Aboriginal peoples on their land.

Shar's rich stories created meaning about Aboriginal traditions, culture, spirituality, and the relational Aboriginal way of being-with and being-in the world. Her stories emphasized the high value Aboriginal peoples place on oral history and the belief that just because it is written down does not mean it is the "truth." The telling of stories and extended conversations nourish her family and her people's oral tradition, co-creating their culture and identity to survive across time and space. She shares this is how Aboriginal people make sense of their world. Shar conveyed through her stories the importance of unconditional love and caring in our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual intra-connected activities and the effort involved in looking after, responding to, and supporting others.

Herstory

Shar's story is grounded in the spirit of relationships, which bring out strengths, resistance, and hope. Her values around partnership, relationship, family, and community factor into her understanding of the three entities. She speaks to her personal story of hope and resistance in her last two relationships. Historically, Shar's understanding of resistance comes from experiences of family violence, aggressive behaviour, fear, and survival.

In our conversation Shar shared that her acts of resistance are expressed through her quiet voice, finding opportune moments to speak, and projecting

calm. “Resistance for myself means I don’t need to acknowledge it right away. I can take time out, process it, and come back and talk about it when everyone is open to discussion... Resistance is a conscious choice.” When this choice arises, Shar asks herself, “Is this in the best interest of my relationships?” Her metaphor for resistance is finding one’s voice; “voice is like the wind, you don’t have to be strong for people to notice – you can be gentle and still be heard.” Strengths are inner strengths, the essence of being able to support one’s family and face the world. Learning to live with each other in acceptance is strength, and strengths are the ability to be vulnerable and weak. And Shar defines hope as the ability to keep growing and changing in one’s relationships. Hope is being able to see the best in people and build relationships throughout life’s journey – it is also about allowing people to create their own journey.

These three entities connect like a catalyst, each of them acting as a spark for the other. The three work together. This interconnection continues whether one starts with a seed of hope or a seed of resistance. Shar identified this transformative dynamic saying, “I think water is a good analogy, because water creates resistance, it is strong, and it creates hope. It can flow smoothly or fiercely.”



Water (20)
“is fluid, in constant motion.” Shar believes we share this this dynamic, it enlightens us and strengthens the connection with everything around us, “nature, animals, people, and life itself.” Times of transformation emerged in Shar’s

story when she was able to speak up, to create strong boundaries, and to ask for what she wanted.

Shar shared her visual and verbal narrative:

I chose water, as it is continual in movement and is continually stimulated by new water flow, affected by seasons as it changes and adapts. I relate it to myself as being strong when I need to meet life’s challenges. When I need to recharge, calmer energy soothes and grounds me. I believe like the seasons we are influenced by how we view and interpret the world. In winter we tend to be more reflective and internal like the hibernating bear, and when spring arrives we are like the new streams filled with rain – we are alive and take risks like the strong force of the river. Like water, we are

clear and transparent and have the potential to be strong or calm depending upon where we are in our cycle of life.

Our Thoughts...

Shar's story illuminates the importance of relationship in co-constructing harmony and balance in her life and in the lives of others for whom she cares. Relationships and relationally being-with are cultural imperatives in her life. Reflecting on her story, Shar and I explored her quiet way of being-in the world, and agreed that her life experiences gave her the strengths to resist on her own terms. "Voice is like the wind, you don't have to be strong for people to notice – you can be gentle and still be heard." Thematically, similar interconnected concepts of strengths and resistance echoed in other stories. Our verbal and visual narratives express how we find our way in the world.

Shar appreciated the opportunity to be a co-inquirer in this re-search and shared and learned through relational discourse. Many points of connection were verbalized and visualized between Aboriginal relational worldview and relational constructionist perspective. In this, the seventh generation, Aboriginal peoples are deconstructing and de-mythologizing the destructive and residual effects of colonization. This process of decolonization is seen by Shar as hope, "the ability to keep growing and changing... to be able to see the best in people and build relationships through life's journey."

In her water metaphor, Shar connects the three entities of hope, strengths, and resistance, describing them as a catalyst for transformation. The waves in her art tumble fiercely across the surface of the water - at the bottom the river is still. For Shar, water is a meaningful analogy because it creates resistance, it has strengths, and it nourishes hope. Culturally, it is the cycle of life.

As This Chapter Ends ...

The co-inquirers' verbal and visual narratives were introduced, shared, and respectfully analyzed in this chapter.

In the following chapter, I speak in greater detail to the findings for re-search and practice that led us to change the dissertation title to *Intertwining Hope, Strengths, and Resistance as Transformative: Women's Verbal and Visual Narratives*.

Chapter Six: All Together Now

Let us envision, then, a process of relational flow in which there is both continuous movement toward constraint, on the one hand, and openness to the evolution of meaning on the other. (Gergen, 2009b, p. 46)

If relational realities arise out of relational engagement (conversations, performances, dialogues), then we must pause and reflect, we must ask in what other ways we might talk about or perform this topic, this issue, this problem. We do not have to inquire as to what the world is, or should be, just one way. Rather, our inquiries could open up new possible ways of being human. (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 43)

What a pleasure it was to meet with most of the co-inquirers in dialogical space, and to experience our absolutely amazing synergy as we shared our thoughts and our feelings about this re-search journey. (Jane, 2015)

Wow! Wow! Wow! We should be proud of our work and all the people we brought together because of it – so cool! (Amy, 2015)

I was shy to begin. As we talked I became so excited about our work together that I shared more than I ever expected. This was magical! (Jade, 2015)

As This Chapter Begins ...

Rooted in relational constructionist inquiry, we were engrossed in one another's stories and selected art as we read each transcript and continually engaged in conversation. Our relational dialogical process co-created a means for our respective and collective analysis of the re-search we had made together. Our collaborative analysis reconstructed our thoughts, our ideas, and deepened our understanding of the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the fluid transformative movement they inspired in our respective lives and in the re-search we co-created. We redefined the title of this manuscript from *Verbal and Visual Narratives: Conversations that Co-create Meaning of Strengths, Resistance, and Hope with Women in Discursive Therapeutic Spaces. What is this intertwined, transformative dynamic?* to *Intertwining Hope, Strengths, and Resistance as Transformative: Women's Verbal and Visual Narratives*.

We established the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and a fluid transformative process through our stories and art. After much thought and many conversations we did not attempt to reify or classify an un-named dynamic

as a thing – or not a thing. Reification or classification was incongruent with our constructionist de-methodological stance. We concluded that our moments of transformation relative to the three interconnected entities was fluid movement – a process of transformation.

Being-with, Making and Doing Re-search Together

In December 2015, after 18 months of telephone dialogues, text messages, emails, and in-person conversations, seven co-inquirers and myself (the eighth co-inquirer) gathered in my living room. Only Susan was absent. We drank tea, ate cookies, and re-introduced ourselves to one another – this time in person, not on paper. This was the first time our community of co-inquirers met face-to-face, six in person and two on cell phones as Liz called in from Ontario and Amy from Quebec. Our dialogical dance resumed. We began by deconstructing what we made together. Traditional research might coin this as a focus group, however I like to think about it as magical conversations in dialogical space. These magical conversations were followed by even more dialogical engagement as we continued to refine our re-search. Co-inquirers were inspired by the process of our original conversations and how my curious questions helped them to identify the entities of hope, strengths, and resistance in their own lives. They laughed together at how I continually asked them to name a dynamic “thing.” My original re-search questions about the linear process of strengths, resistance, and hope – and the search for the illusive dynamic – changed over the months as we met together in dialogical conversations, reading, commenting on, and re-editing our own stories. Initially, the co-inquirers unknowingly allied with a social constructionist stance. Later, they all agreed that they had stayed committed to the heart of this re-search because we engaged in relational constructionism throughout the entire adventure. We saw that our focus on conversations, intra-action, and shared experiential moments with each other in re-search and therapy was a process of social construction (S. McNamee, personal communication, December 20, 2015). Our dialogical engagement fostered conversations that co-constructed multiplicity of voice in our process of relational inquiry.

De-constructing and Re-constructing the Re-search: The Story of Hope, Strengths, and Resistance

Our re-search inquiry focused on the intertwined meanings of strengths, resistance, and hope, in discursive therapeutic space. We sought to identify a transformative dynamic relational to these three entities. Through appreciative, narrative-based, and arts-based inquiry nine women dialogically and relationally engaged and intra-acted with one another’s stories and art about the three entities and the quest to name the transformative dynamic. Their rich verbal and visual narratives deconstructed any potential thoughts or tentative ideas I might have held about what we might find and co-created meaning beyond my original re-search expectations.

Firmly embedded in a social constructionist approach and in keeping with un-mapping our de-methodological process I remained strong in my stance of un-knowing and un-certainty (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Gergen, 2009a). I continually applied a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge and curiously questioned set categories or methods of conventional assumptions upon which traditional research was built (Burr, 1995). Gergen (1985b) states social construction is “principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (p. 267). A social constructionist approach influences one’s way of being in the world, therefore, social construction informs my way of being, and my way of being informs my re-search and my therapeutic orientation. Our re-search suggests we are relationally rooted in understanding through collaboration in co-inquiry – a “we” lens – our counter response to individualism. Knowledge is sustained by social processes; we co-create knowledge dialogically between people and through our intra-actions with others (Burr, 1995). This dissertation emulates such intra-actions as nine co-inquirers share co-construction and co-ownership of the meaning making of this re-search and the implications for practice.

Each verbal and visual narrative challenged my long held assumptions, my past learning, my “bounded being” (Gergen, 2009), my limitations of language, and my practice beliefs and knowledge that *strengths*, *resistance*, and *hope* were sequential, and would behave in their stated order within a static beginning and end. Sequence and objective definability and knowledge obstinately danced in my head (Hosking, 2011; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Do we presume that there is always fixed procedural notion of beginning, middle, and end (McNamee & Hosking, 2012)? Do we presume there is a single truth or universal logic (Gergen et al., 2001; Gergen, 2009a)? Did pre-conditioned private meaning presume “the outcome of some form of ‘inner utterance’” (Gergen, 2014, p. 52)? Was this an attempt to “get it right”, an outcome of analysis (Gergen, 2014, p. 52)? How to counter this individualist approach to inquiry? The practice of ‘getting it right’ seemed essential. Maybe there was no such thing as getting it right or ‘now I’ve got it!’ When centered in appreciative inquiry “appreciation means not imposing good/bad or right/wrong evaluations” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 75). McNamee and Hosking (2012) propose that the practice of appreciative inquiry supports “a tone of curiosity and openness to possibility, rather than judgment and fixing what was, is, or should be” (p. 75). Like Dorothy and her friends journeying to Oz, we curiously, relationally, and dialogically danced together down our Yellow Brick Road heading in a new and exciting direction of wondrous inquiry.

Contrary to my original thoughts none of the co-inquirer’s shared a pre-determined order or clear fixed direction of the three entities, but instead illuminated the social poetics and continual flow of the metaphoric water themes throughout their conversations. If there was no predetermined order of strengths, resistance, and hope, as I had originally theorized, then I was forced to let go of my original assumptions and take direction from the co-inquirers. This created new ways to think and to dialogue about the three entities. To call this an

'unexpected surprise' would be to understate the obvious. Initially, I stood vulnerable and alone, a bounded being with ingrained taken-for-granted notions while the co-inquirers con-jointly re-constructed and re-defined the relational flow of being-with the concepts as *hope*, *strengths*, and *resistance*¹⁸. This created a sense of ambivalent tension and excitement for me as my presumed knowing, certainty, lived, and routine professional experiences were brilliantly challenged. "By unsettling the notion of poetics from its individualist tradition, we open exploration for the relational ways in which the imaginative, the unsettling, the novelty are crafted in what people do together" (McNamee, 2000, p. 146). Clearly we were relationally crafting, exploring, and inspiring imaginative and novel ways of being-in the world. McNamee (2000) explains further about the discursive transitional process of social poetics:

Yet all of these associations with poetry or the poetic are couched in the image of inner reflections of the artist. It is the poet who plays with language, with interpretation, with imagery. It is in juxtaposition to this portrait of the poet, the poem, the poetic that I embrace the move toward a *social* poetic. Here we move rapidly from the interior of the poet or the particular poetic moment to the relational nexus from which all meaning emerges. No longer are we strapped with a view of the lonely poet or that difficult to capture moment we call poetic. Rather, we recognize that the "genius" of the poet and the ineffability of the poetic moment reside in the discursive resources that have been generated within relationships. Our resources emerge from our communities, from our negotiated ways of coordinating our actions within local moments. (p. 146)

Intense enthusiasm and participation of the co-inquirers liberated multiple self-other relations, new ways of relationally being together, emergent social poetics, appreciative inquiry, and shared possibilities emulating a relational constructionist perspective (Gergen, 2009b; Gergen, 2014; Hosking, 2011; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Appreciative inquiry opens up possibilities (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Our re-search challenged dominant rationality and fixed realities as we were doing this together; we collaboratively created space to co-emerge. This exemplifies the willingness of the re-searcher – and the therapist – to be curious, to collaborate, and to be prepared to engage in transformative movement through a freeing and relational process. Bohm (2004) refers to this as flow.

The original transcripts were rich with moving and compelling coherence to the relevance of our wish to be-with and harness hope, strengths, and resistance. The co-inquirers spoke of these three entities as *confluence*; a performance in their respective lives "constituted by an array of mutual defining entities" (Gergen, 2009 p. 54). Our curious and appreciative verbal and visual narratives co-constructed invigorating new views of being-with in relational inquiry while emergent ideas flowed from the onset of our collaborative re-search. Aligned with a relational construction lens, Butler-Kisber (2010) shares our "world is constructed in and through our discourse and actions" (p. 78). All co-inquirers

¹⁸ In collaborative agreement, from here on in we will refer to the three entities as hope, strengths, and resistance – reflective of our new meaning making together, unbound by the preconceived linear order.

found that our dialogical and appreciative inquiry embodied action, as our curious conversations were neither dull nor static. McNamee and Hosking (2012) allude to Bohm's (2004) idea of the practice of dialogue as "an exploratory and emergent or unfolding process" (p. 70). Hosking (2011) emphasizes Sampson's understanding that dialogical approaches embrace "multiple self-other relations" that give way to "mutual creation and co-emergence in ongoing processes" (p. 49). Questioning and analyzing by the co-inquirers defied separation of the entities and co-created a fresh understanding of the confluence and transformative process, igniting new learning, generating emergent ideas, and new possibilities for my practice. These three entities were not separate or independent in therapeutic space; they were intertwined – co-performed in constant movement and motion in our relational dialogical engagement and our con-joint meaning making (Gergen, 2009b; Shotter, 2011; Shotter, 2012). The concept of confluence revealed a relational flow and boundless con-joint action to co-create meaning and possibilities for re-search and practice (Gergen, 2009b).

The fluidity of this confluence led to shifts in relationally responsible conversations, empowering voice, and countering trauma, as when Susan embraced her strengths, a turbulent waterfall, while reliving her trauma narrative in our original conversation. Our intra-actions, being-in relational dialogues, invited multiplicity of voices and visions to co-create meaningful meaning – a process of fluid movement (McNamee, 2000; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Shotter, 2011, 2012). Epston in his introduction for White (2011) shared "Poetics as well as narrative renders language a medium for experiencing experience" (p. xxvi). In our re-search we deconstructed our experiences through the language of the three entities. Our dialogical journey had shifted from an individualist reality to a co-created reality. Shotter (2011) visualizes this as:

A shift from living in a world of already made things to a world of 'things-in-their-making' from life as being only 'in' certain things (organisms) to things having their life only 'within their relations' to the flowing processes occurring around us. (p. 2)

Mystory shared much of my relational intra-connection with flowing processes, water's power of adaptation and persistence in its capacity to flow and fill the given space – fluid opposed to being separate or rigid. Wet and forever moving in its continual motion reflecting the world in diverse ways. Oh to dance underwater, to be as fluid in my therapeutic practice as I was a fish swimming to the surface.

Challenging the *What* While Flowing to the *How*: Is There a Transformative Dynamic – A Thing or Not a Thing?

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.
(Wittgenstein, 1953)

It is the free water flowing around the dynamic stabilities of interest to us that we cannot ignore. It is the local particularities in that free flow of water that have conditioned their emergence and which also sustain them in their existence, that we

continually overlook. In other words, we continuously overlook what we might call the *determining surroundings* of the events of interest to us. (Shotter, 2009)

Like eddies of dust raised by the wind as it passes, the living turn upon themselves, [like swirls and vortices in a stream – js] borne by the great blast of life. They are therefore relatively stable, and counterfeit immobility so well that we treat each of them as a *thing* rather than as a *progress*, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of a movement. (Bergson, 1911, pp. 134-135)

People disagreeing on all just about everything, yeah
Makes you stop and all wonder why
Why only yesterday I saw somebody on the street
Who just couldn't help but cry
Oh, this ol' river keeps on rollin', though
No matter what gets in the way and which way the wind does blow
And as long as it does I'll just sit here
And watch the river flow
People disagreeing everywhere you look
Makes you wanna stop and read a book
Why only yesterday I saw somebody on the street
That was really shook
But this ol' river keeps on rollin', though
No matter what gets in the way and which way the wind does blow
And as long as it does I'll just sit here
And watch the river flow (Dylan, 1971)

Naming this transformative dynamic proved challenging for all co-inquirers and created un-certainty for myself during our initial conversations. Varying questions threaded throughout the tapestry of those conversations: "Can you name the transformative dynamic? Is there a dynamic? What is the dynamic? I want to go back and ask you, can you name the dynamic?" Consistent responses were: "No, I can't name the transformative dynamic. I'm not sure there is a dynamic. That's a hard question. Can I think about that and get back to you?" This un-named dynamic, this un-nameable thing created awkward pauses in our conversations – a stalemate, an uncomfortable unpredictability in our re-search. Could the co-inquirers identify this entity? Could I?

Un-aware, my rigid quest for knowledge constructed a significant barrier – obstructing our learning and meaning making. As a captive of language, I was fixated on naming this thing, this "separate and bounded entity" (Gergen, 2009b, p. 30). From a scientific monolingual lens, Hosking (2011) proposes, "Language is assumed to represent, refer to, or 'mirror' a non-linguistic 'real' world of objects" (p. 49). This implies a certainty of language and things, an independent ontology with the ability to "know and be known" and the ability to "influence and be

influenced ‘from the outside’ implicates a very particular view of language” (Hosking, 2011, p. 49). Wittgenstein (1953) spoke to the limitations of language in our imposed world and how language imposes itself into our world; therefore our use of language identifies and creates the world we know. At times language may limit our thoughts and our interactions with the world. Were we limited by our own “vocabulary of description and explanation” (Gergen, 2014, p. 53)? Does limited vocabulary, thin descriptors, and expert explanations dilute inquiry and practice? Wittgenstein (2009) wrote:

When philosophers use a word – “knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “propositions/sentence”, “name” – and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language in which it is at home? (p. 53)

Secured by my conventional construction of language, reasoning and representation, our world of things, nouns, labels, accurate depictions of reality, and the taken-for-granted acceptance that this was a nameable dynamic falsely fabricated certainty for our re-search (Gergen, 2009b). Language games that represent various discourses of values, knowledge, and accepted truths rule our ways of speaking, seeing, and relating (Wittgenstein, 1953). McNamee (2006) reminds me that we two-leggeds live in language with no escape. She also provokes thought that our language creates the world we live within (McNamee, 2004). Shotter (2011) alludes to the clarity of the above-mentioned Bergson (2011) quote. He indicates “it is so easy for us to think of the world as being full of nameable ‘things’ which, once they have been named, stay as the things we take them to be while we are inquiring into their nature” (Shotter, 2011, pp. 4-5) – for, as Bergson (1911) says, they “counterfeit immobility so well” (pp. 134-135). How do we challenge descriptive and representational views of language? How do we promote a vocabulary of transformative dialogue both in inquiry and practice?

Dialogically spinning, my ideas of naming this dynamic became problematic; it was like fitting a square peg into a round hole. The co-inquirers’ curiosity turned to frustration as I attempted to fit them into the re-search paradigm, as opposed to permitting the re-search questions to guide our co-construction of meaning. Was the re-search telling me that there might be a danger in identifying this thing, this ‘big’ transformative dynamic? Did the co-inquirers really need to name it all? Did they need to reify this and make the dynamic an entity – a thing? By naming this dynamic were we creating limits in discursive therapeutic space?

Once again, we were caught up in a mono-logical thinking trap (Hosking, 2011; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Sampson, 2008). What is this thing? The singular self – I think so I know – trapped our curiosity (Sampson, 2008). We were all caught up in “I thoughts” about this thing. Was the need to name what the dynamic was as all consuming for the others as it was for me? The *what* was impeding our relational dialogical process – fatiguing addressivity. My relentless interrogative of “what is this thing”, this insatiable need to name this singular object as discourse in objective knowledge making dominated our ongoing process. My fixation with *what* as content constructed a blurred tunnel vision for

the multi-logical relational process. Had the empiricist *what* seized the performance of *how*?

With the de-construction of *what* as content new ideas co-emerged. I became more comfortable with challenging the need to objectify and reify what was the transformative dynamic. After exhilarating conversations, we agreed we could not name a transformative dynamic, as it was not a nameable entity – it was not a thing. The relational culture and meaning making of our re-search performance co-constructed our own re-search language game. McNamee and Gergen (1992) share that the meaning of a word is not through its capacity to picture reality, but through its use in dialogical engagement and intra-change within the “‘language games’ of the culture” (p. 177). *What* had been externalized. Our dialogical process began to pursue the ongoing performance of *how* in our re-search (Hosking, 2011; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Looking at how the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance created movement new understanding emerged in how we were making our re-search together – how we were alternately viewing the transformative dynamic as a process. This fueled our relational process. Hosking (2011) proposes:

Dialogical practices that are grounded in a relational view of processes (and so dialogical view of person) offer an alternative to dis-engaged, disheartened, dis-encharmed ways of being in relation. Dialogue can provide a way out of stuckness, a way out of some seemingly solid, stable and singular ‘I’ who builds individual knowledge about and seeks control over other. Dialoguing can help to bring forth and support appreciation (rather than judgment and critique), discussion of what can be done (rather than what cannot) and a sense of relational responsibility (rather than blaming individuals). Dialoging makes space for ongoing emergence, for improvisation. (p. 61)

The Erroneous Transformative Dynamic

All co-inquirers confirm that initially I was determined they would name the dynamic that I believed would create transformative possibilities as a result of the confluence of strengths, resistance, and hope. When we met all co-inquirers agreed with the statement:

In the beginning, I was convinced I must make the transformative dynamic a nameable thing. This naming was central to Kathie’s re-search question. Over the past 18 months and many, many conversations later, I now understand this dynamic is a process that we live, one that helps us grow and transform.

During my initial curious conversation with Jane, I asked:

Kathie: If you were to give a name to this transformative dynamic, that is created by the intersections of strengths, resistance, and hope... Let’s reword that, hope, strengths, and resistance... What would that be?

Jane: If I was to give a name to the dynamic that... if I was to give a name to this dynamic... that what?

Kathie: That, this is created by the intersection of hope, strengths, and resistance, what would that be?

Jane: (Pause) Hmmm.

Many co-inquirers were stymied by my repeated question, “Can you name this transformative dynamic?” – a perfect example of un-knowing and un-certainty. As the inquisitive inquiry expanded we finally resisted the imperative of dominant discourse that would have us name, label, sort and categorize the dynamic – it was not a thing, it was a process (Foucault, 1965). It was not static or rigid. It was fluid movement arising out of the confluence of hope, strengths and resistance. Like Alice, curiouiser and curiouiser, we took the tiny golden key, swept back the curtain covering the re-search questions we wanted to explore, and opened Wonderland, impossible to name or categorize (Carroll, 2006).

The Relational Flow of the Transformative Dynamic: Out of the Rabbit Hole

Our conversations storied a strong relational constructionist way of relationally being-with and intra-acting together. Our process co-created new possibilities for our relational inquiry through the sharing of emergent ideas. Dialogues transpired about the performance of this transformative dynamic as a conversational process in therapeutic space. Based on the fluid movement of the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance, this dynamic was a relational flow, a *process of transformation* rather than a concrete entity. We all agreed that this was not a thing and now entered into fascinating dialogues about the relational flow of the transformative dynamic. A process not a thing – relationally how, rather than what is or is likely to be. This process speaks to the fact that we do not have to reify, categorize, label or definitively name transformative movement.

The water metaphors in all our stories paralleled the fluid movement of the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the fluid process of the transformative dynamic. Our attention shifted to the fluidity, movement, malleability, and relational flow as a generative process, a fluid performance. Gergen (2009) shares “generative processes stimulate the expansion and flow of meaning” (p. 47). Could this discursive dynamic be a “flow of interchange” (Gergen, 2009, p. 47), a transformative dynamic flowing from the confluence of the three entities working together in discursive therapeutic space? Could this transformative flow act to co-construct creative possibilities? As we embraced new thinking regarding language and discourse, we knew our experience, process, and ideas were ours; therefore, we agreed there was no need to label, sort, or categorize anything, as our on-going dialogical understanding of our reality was fluid and in motion. Shotter (2011) voices our need to move away from the boundaries of being trapped in “hypothetical thought *about* an identifiable ‘thing’” (p. 32). Our curiosity was liberating as together we explored new terrain – a *process* instead of a thing (McNamee, 2009). Our relational dialogues shifted, our creative souls attuned, we adventured and moved together and intra-acted to learn more about this “ceaselessly unfolding, unbounded, fluid process” (Shotter, 2011). Appreciative inquiry makes discursive space for multiple stories, relational views and ideas, and opens up possibilities (Hosking & McNamee, 2007).

Together, we made space for curiosity, movement, and new possibilities for practice – no longer down the rabbit hole.

As This Chapter Ends ...

Our appreciation and practice of social construction discourse as relational being-with in both re-search and therapy is demonstrated by our collaborative meaning making as a result of this re-search. Our relational process of co-inquiry revealed new understandings of the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and the fluid movement of transformation as a lived process, not a dynamic 'thing.'

In the final chapter of this dissertation we look at further dialogues that illuminate the implications for re-search and therapeutic practice.

Chapter Seven: What Next? A Conversational Invitation



(21)

He who wonders discovers that this in itself is wonder.
(M.C. Escher, n.d.)

My story and the stories of other co-inquirers taught me that each person was enfolded in a challenge, every one had a life drama, and the sum of the hope, strengths, and resistance which they were required to summon amounted to raw courage.
(Liz, 2015)

As part of this journey we came together to learn from one another the strengths of our individual narratives, and their coherence as a whole. Everyone has a story; the telling, re-telling and perhaps changing to a preferred story implores another to curiously engage in the conversation. (Jane, 2015)

Constructionism, as an orientation to the world, invites us to view the process of therapy as a conversation or dialogue with no techniques, strategies or specific therapeutic modalities. (Kathie, 2015)

As This Chapter Begins ...

I share our reflections of the re-search through verbal and visual narratives about the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance, and the lived process of transformative movement – implications and possibilities for my future therapeutic practice and the practice of others in therapeutic space. I invite open and relational dialogue to further meaningful conversations about this re-search for practice. The collaborative relationality, co-construction, and co-creation of meaning in this appreciative inquiry indicate a social constructionist, relational orientation to both re-search and therapy. Through our shared verbal and visual narrative re-search journey we ponder the deeper meaning of power differentials, themes, rhizomatic thought, analysis, and the significance of curiosity in our voices of stories and art as they relate to the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and a lived transformative process in discursive therapeutic space.

The Current of Curiosity

The process – what comes next? – was one of distress and vulnerability for me. Procrastination gave me a false sense of accomplishment and comfort in the moment. Attempting to muse and to write the words in my head felt next to impossible. Facebook was good. Face Time, or as I like to call it ‘Sadie Time’ with my baby granddaughter, was even better. I wanted to be in Montreal snuggling and unconditionally being-with Sadie.

Answering work emails and texts was a given, hoping for more emails and texts encouraged me to idle. Making tea and even more tea for calm relaxation, pouring a vodka and soda to quench a different thirst. Channel surfing to find what I might watch worked to numb and distract. Phone calls, texts, and emails constructed conversational dialogues with the beautiful co-inquirers, co-constructed engagement about all and nothing, and co-created a means for me to ignore and escape the inevitable Chapter Seven. Jane, alternately demanding and loving, sat in my living room and attempted to gently nudge me out of the despair of my stuckness. She reassured me that I un-knowingly knew how to begin writing again. The rabbit hole called me; I knew instinctively we were ready to leave Oz.

Surrounded by piles of papers, notes, articles, and books, stacked on tables, chairs, bookshelves and on the floor, I could see no barren shelves, save for those whirling in my mind. I wished I had a dog that I might take for a very long run. I wanted to be an iridescent goldfish dancing in fresh glacier fed water. After months of dialogical conversations and invigorating inquiry I knew our dialogical dance together could continue forever while we generated and inspired continued curiosity. But it was time to put this baby to bed, said my new grandmother’s voice.

Letting Go of Expertise and Power

The metaphoric landscapes of our re-search journey tangled learning and un-learning, knowing and un-knowing, certainty and un-certainty about new possibilities for my therapeutic dialogical space. Prior to this wholehearted re-search adventure, un-comfortable as a fish out of water, I never would have shared or disclosed any sense of ease in un-knowing or un-certainty in therapy or research as I had once learned through static methods and techniques. Original learning dictated that in my privileged position as a therapist or a social worker I was imbued with knowing and certainty, an expert in therapeutic space with the monologic power to make change. Our social construction of professional privilege confers a position of power and control, a hierarchal imbalance of individualistic construction. How does this cultural construction of being a professional or being an expert affect re-search or practice? McNamee as interviewed by Guaness and Rasera (2006) shares:

I think that the cultural discourse of being a professional, being the expert, is so sedimented, so fixed, that we find people acting as they imagine they should act if they were a professional, and completely ignoring some of the most useful resources they might have – resources that allow them to be fully present in conversation with the client. (p. 6)

Our relational de-methodology deconstructed any past assumptions of expertise and reconstructed our conversational community of co-inquiry for therapy, a relationally reflective process for co-inquirers as experts of their lived experiences. Letting go of expertise was an important acknowledgment in our re-search for practice. Our re-search journey passionately illustrated what we did and made together, how we did it, who we became in this process, and how it created new ideas for practice (McNamee, 2010). Through our visual and verbal narratives we deconstructed and reconstructed strengths, resistance, and hope as the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the transformative movement it created. We began as individuals and we became confident co-inquirers relationally dialoguing with one another to co-create emergent ideas and meaning, new ways for me as a therapist to engage relationally and to co-create transformation in practice.

We called on Foucault's (1972, 1978, 1980, 2000) analytics of power, the role of power relationships, and his critique of monologic and hierarchal structures of power, to open the doors of our re-search and curiously explore our collaborative process. Dialogues ensued about this inquiry process that supported deeper understandings of the significance of relational construction in discursive therapeutic space. In their past interactions many co-inquirers experienced in different contexts the ways professional or dominant discourses had the capacity to objectify them as people, clients, patients, and subjects. We all agreed that this does not exemplify relational respectfulness or response-ability in re-search or practice. Many co-inquirers wondered: Do power imbalances get in the way of relational practice? Can professionals be a part of a collaborative process of making meaning, instead of dictating or describing meaning? I found it possible to engage the co-inquirers in a process of

collaborative meaning making because I listened to their stories and through curious questions dialogued with them about alternatives and possibilities. This relational inquiry supported the mutually generative narrative process of dialogue and addressivity (Bakhtin, 1986; Sampson, 2008).

We agreed that power was inescapable, as it is systemically and structurally embedded. However a sharper understanding emerged – power is produced dependent on who we are and how we define ourselves in the world. Do we analyze people in relation to our knowledge and our places of power? Do we subjugate individuals according to conventional norms? Foucault (1980) proposes, “The archeology of the human sciences has to be established through studying the mechanisms of power which have invested human bodies, acts and forms of behaviour” (p. 61). Jade spoke about how we learned to de-construct power and ways of being-with to co-create new meaning through our relationally respectful and responsible dialogues. I find this noteworthy learning for therapeutic practice. Our process reduced power imbalances and invited us to engage and to be with each other as a community of co-inquirers. This further suggests that efficacy of co-inquiry in therapy. Re-search and therapy as conversations defies most of my past learning as I was taught that I was the expert, I was the therapist and the patient or client was the other. This re-search changes relational positioning for both therapist and person and re-searcher and subject in therapeutic space and other professional environments (nursing, other medical professionals, education, leadership etc.). Remaining in a relation approach to practice is not easy as societal norms dictate individualism, expertise, and power differentials.

Ideas for therapeutic engagement emerged as our dialogical conversations ensued concerning how professional privilege, power and control overrule hope, strengths, and resistance. Eileen spoke to her experience:

I would encourage therapists and doctors to support their patients/clients to find hope even in the darkest situations. When I go to the oncologist's office, and when he says, “Your cancer is stage four and you won't live a year, there is NO HOPE.” There is NO seeking strengths to resist in his medically minded setting – no relational engagement or encouragement. The practical world of science, psychology, and medicine shapes linear thinkers, not relationally curious engagers. My doctor's monologue was about step one, step two, step three, and so forth. He was directive, not relational. There was no knowledge of, or interest in, the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and any possible transformative process for me. There was no appreciation of our being-in the world of cancer together. I was on my own.

In contrast, our relational “comings and goings” co-created possibilities as we imagined and walked together on multiple paths in our “new age of curiosity” – our hope and adventure in curiosity intensified (Foucault, 1996, p. 35). Curiosity shattered boundaries and took us to un-known places through our relational conversations; places we had not been before. Our social construction stance of co-creating re-search threw us out into the un-known, while the innovative art and

craft of conversations drew us closer in relational inquiry and intimate reflective possibilities for the practice of therapy.

Like my escape from the snapping turtle in the lake, dialogical and relational conversations multi-logically freed us from the constraints of certainty and knowing. Amy reminds us, “Choosing to stay stagnant, un-relational, uncurious, to play the status quo game, and to ignore our experiences and our lack of knowing how we fit together in our world, is a boring and easy route.” Without curiosity our re-search and our resultant meaning making for therapeutic practice would be impotent. After our lengthy adventure in relational inquiry, it was clear to us that curiosity did not kill our cats. The powerful current of curiosity carried us down a river of emergent ideas that glimmered with possibilities; our curious endeavor unfolding transformative potential for practice.

Unfolding Themes in Our Stories and Art: Why They Matter ...

In our stories, no life was without trauma.¹⁹ Shortly after beginning our conversations I noticed that trauma had the ability to silence co-inquirers’ past stories. This re-search offered voice to forgotten, unnoticed, or silenced stories. Questions and discussions about the identification of trauma in our narratives – countered by the three entities of hope, strengths, and resistance and a lived transformative process – resonated for some time. Each story opened new doors, as co-inquirers disclosed previously untold narratives. They expressed amazement at their candor as the narratives unfolded; I felt honoured.

While threads of trauma wove through each story, our telling and re-telling disempowered the voice of trauma. The resonance of re-telling our stories with all co-inquirers constructed meaningful engagement in our re-telling, as our stories were read, heard, and seen by all co-inquirers (Epson, 2004; White, 2011). Similar to the narrative practice of using outsider-witnesses, this embodied curious interest in each other’s experiences and created conversational reflection and offered deeper meaning and mutual understanding for us all (White, 2011). Most co-inquirers described a cathartic process of telling and re-telling their verbal and visual narratives, and being heard and re-heard. They understood this was a critical observation in our co-creation for alternative practice in discursive therapeutic space. No one tells her story just one time. Co-inquirers shared that our conversations about the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance opened up an innovative and safe context for them to speak about their experiences with trauma, and externalize the trauma in their respective narratives. They noted that they never considered the confluence and the movement of transformation as a lived process. Our new knowing gives voice to new implications for therapy. It was shared further that the dialogical curiosity and engagement about the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance in our conversations overshadowed the discourse of victimhood. Our relational

¹⁹ It is important that I share with the reader that no co-inquirer was asked to share a trauma story or to share any pieces of art related to trauma.

responsiveness dispelled the effects of the trauma and co-encountered how each co-inquirer overcame trauma.

Upon reflection, co-inquirers were surprised of their courageous acts of resistance specific to trauma. Our curiosity about the interconnections of hope, strengths, and resistance, and the opportunity to discern a transformative unnamed dynamic, refocused the voice of trauma in all our narratives to the preferred story of countering trauma. This part of our journey faced dialogical challenges and shifts in understanding, but it also brought us together to a discourse that shared new ideas and co-created meaning for future therapeutic practice.

Every life in our re-search community resonated with courage, knowingly or un-knowingly. Our verbal and visual narratives identified courage as a central theme that flowed with the entities of hope, strengths, and resistance. Often the sense of courage was not immediately recognized but through our dialogical process it emerged with unexpected clarity to feed new meaning and co-author alternative understanding about the confluence. Our dialogical process was that of curious and thoughtful asking of questions to invite continued conversation. Our conversations co-constructed value about the efficacy of our experiences – ones that we had not previously considered – that shaped new meaning and painted new pictures of our being-in the world. There was a strong co-relation between courage and resistance. Courageous acts of resistance appeared in relational engagement; at times this surprised some co-inquirers, as they had not formerly perceived resistance as a courageous act but rather a deficit-based one. For some co-inquirers overcoming the negative connotation of resistance was a challenging shift in knowing. The poetics of resistance crafted new language and awareness for therapeutic practice. All co-inquirers told me that their new appreciation of resistance co-created a transformative moment in their respective lives.

The abundance of strengths in one's life experience is not immediately evident or acknowledged. Co-inquires often underestimated their inherent strengths. Some co-inquirers initially felt challenged when asked to identify their strengths – their narratives expressed thin descriptors of strengths. Others expressed a sense of reticence when asked about their strengths. Do we bring our strengths into therapeutic discourse or do we only talk about the overwhelming aspects of our lives? Entrenched in a deficit-based world, co-inquirers found it easier to identify deficits in their stories as opposed to strengths. Some identified their lifestyles or relationships as bad rather than identifying a strong sense of survival despite violence and chaos. Some identified loss as an inability to be successful in life, while others shared drug use or mental health issues as a moral shortfall rather than a coping strategy or state of daily functioning in spite of adversity. In my practice I find most people have difficulty self-identifying their strengths, as was apparent in our relational discourse.

Originally, many co-inquirers were reluctant to name their strengths and were confused about the concept of resistance. It took my curious questions to bring forward deeper understanding and clarification of these two entities in our initial conversations. Meeting with people in my own therapeutic space I often

encounter this same reticence to identify personal strengths. It takes gentle and encouraging dialogue for most to explore their strengths, as in our re-search. Leona attributes her personal and professional locations today to her unknown strengths as a little girl. She shared, “I eventually came to realize my inherent strengths.” In the same vein the concept of resistance initially brought forth strong deficit-based thinking – resistance was viewed by all co-inquirers as a negative entity. For example, Jane expressed both surprise and “an incredible sense of empowerment” when I reframed her decision to pick up her telephone and ask for help as a courageous act of resistance, not a symbol of her weakness. For Susan, resistance became her survival. And Leona described resistance “as an act of misalignment, a natural means to resist energy or events – a chameleon of sorts.”

As Herstories disclose, this was not the case with hope. Co-inquirers were able to dialogically engage and explore their unique understanding of the notion of hope, providing me with a deeper appreciation and clarification of the heart of hope. Hope shone despite adversity in all of their lives. No one left out the significance of hope. It was one of the highlights in each verbal and visual narrative – an epiphany about the centrality of hope in inspiring both strengths and resistance. Even for a seasoned therapist like myself this was an epiphany; it transformed my relational practice with its focus on the immediacy of hope in dialogical engagement.

After my initial conversation with the third co-inquirer, I decided to rethink the original words in the title of this dissertation from ‘Strengths, Resistance, and Hope’ to *‘Hope, Strengths, and Resistance.’* I finalized this change based on the co-inquirers’ dialogues about the foremost importance of hope in their lives. My early conceptions embodied hope that the monstrous snapping turtle would not eat me, that Dorothy would escape the wicked witch on her way back to Kansas, and that Alice would keep her head despite the best efforts of the Queen of Hearts. Eileen shared, hope is “taking one more step.” In my original conversation with Amy we dialogued about hope being the container that embodied strengths and resistance in her life. A friend of Amy’s who was diagnosed with cancer taught Amy to visualize hope as a mama grizzly bear protecting her little grizzly cubs. Hope was protective.

This theme of hope inspired re-learning and re-knowing about the deep and rich importance of this entity over the course of our work together. Hope is so much more than a person’s hope that they might benefit from talking to a therapist; it weaves through the therapeutic process inspiring strengths and embracing resistance. Hope counters fear, despair, adversity, and hopelessness; it gives voice to strengths and resistance. Hope is relational with others; we do not do hope alone. It is a practice we do together, it is active and alive.

As resonated in the co-inquirers’ verbal and visual narratives hope has an entirely new meaning for me. Curiosity engaged hope to create new possibilities in my therapeutic practice. My previous linear thought process no longer held me captive. Able to lean-in, attuned to being-with hope, and doing hope in therapeutic space co-created awareness, empowerment, action, and transformation.

Other themes that consistently surfaced were those of water, fluidity, and movement. Every co-inquirer incorporated a water theme into her verbal narrative, and many in their art. For me, it was incredible to see these water metaphors emerge, none of the co-inquirers knew mystory and few of them knew of my affinity to water and movement. So to find these water images in every narrative was amazing and exciting. Dialogical conversations gave flow to water, fluidity, and movement, key interconnected re-search themes that integrated the resourcefulness of the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance with the ensuing fluid transformative process.

There were also thematic similarities and differences in our selections of art. Collaborative themes in the chosen art emerged, such as water and trees. All co-inquirers used water metaphors in their verbal narratives; four women chose art representing a water theme. Susan saw resistance in the water pools and the rocks that separated them. The rocks grounded in the water spoke to strengths, nurturing the beautiful trees striving to survive. For Susan hope is exemplified by the rushing waterfall, symbolizing her growth and well-being. Leona recalls her childhood, standing alone in solitude in the midst of rough waters, courageously bracing herself against the storm. She holds her umbrella firmly - hope in the metaphorical storm of life. Her stance is an interconnected act of resistance and strengths standing with hope in the eye of the storm. The positive and negative consequences of Jade's life are portrayed in her visual narrative. She projects her strengths onto the water, resisting the irresistible and the temptations that are placed before her in her life. And finally, her instinctive resistance and her strengths to resist arise out of her sense of hope. Of interest, while four co-inquirers used water as their visual narrative, all verbal narratives used fluidity as a metaphor for continued movement and transformative moments in our lives. Art is fluid, and this fluidity appeared in every co-inquirer's story.

Two co-inquirers included a tree in their visual narratives. When we met in person and by telephone, Liz shared her moment of instant revelation when she walked into a garden – and saw a tree. A tree growing out of a slab of concrete, strong, resistant, hopeful. Considering this image together, we decided that it was the one that best exemplified our own incredible strengths, willingness to resist, and ability to hope. In that moment, we celebrated the power of transformative change and growth in our everyday lives. Eileen's visual narrative, a crayon drawing of a multi-limbed tree, was created for her by a client of hers, now a renowned young artist. Deeply and strongly rooted in the earth this colourful tree stands tall against the elements; it endures and resists. Hope is the seed that nurtures this tree as it grows and transforms.

Amy defined her visual narrative as “more literal” than the other pieces of art in our re-search. She chose a photograph that embodied the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the transformative process. The photograph of Suzy Hotrod, flying through the air, her arms and legs strong and balanced, exemplifies for Amy her own transformation living alongside the conventions of dominant culture. Amy vividly exclaims, “Roller Derby Saved My Soul!” Naked, flying through the air, Suzy shows her strengths in difference, her resistance to difference, and her hope.

In my many years of practice in therapy, social work, and social work instruction I have no recollection of any dialogical engagement regarding the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the relational flow of the transformative process they co-create in therapeutic space. It was not until I began this re-search journey that relational conversations about these entities with Sheila McNamee and the co-inquirers opened up new possibilities for practice. No literature found suggested these entities were relationally connected. Some literature suggested that as separate entities they might contribute to transformation or growth (Rapp, 1998; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Saelør et al., 2014; Saleebey, 1992, 1996, 2002; Sullivan & Rapp, 1994; Wade, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2007; Weingarten, 2000, 2003, 2010), but did not discuss their interconnectedness as transformative potential. This gap in the literature, the absence of these entwined entities and the fluid process of transformation, supported my professional memories specific to this absent topic. As well, no co-inquirers had any previous knowledge of literature relating to our re-search questions. Our re-search did not seek to define the three entities of hope, strengths, and resistance as individual notions, but explored their relational interconnectedness and their influence on the transformative process they constructed. Our un-mapped conversational journey of lived experiences created excitement and a sense of adventure as we conceptualized, deconstructed and reconstructed the interconnectedness of hope, strengths, and resistance and the multitude of possibilities that this confluence offers to therapeutic space. During our conversations, it was acknowledged by the co-inquirers that they had neither considered nor voiced the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and a process of transformation in any therapeutic or other helping discourse prior to their involvement in this re-search project. Over the past 18 months every co-inquirer has commented that each time she stands in a place of fear, despair or other adversity, she now calls on the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance to create forward movement.

The Art We Shared

Our visual narratives, buttressed by our verbal narratives, provided rich images of the confluence and the fluid transformative process. Initially I asked co-inquirers to make art; this idea created a sense of intimidation. Jane said she felt “like the little girl with the tattered bow in dance class,” certain she could not do it right. Liz agonized, wondering if she could just make a quilt? Would that be art? It seemed that story telling was easier than art making. Was this a socially constructed myth? Curious conversations expanded on our insecurity about visual creativity and the meaning of art. Harsh judgments loomed over thoughts of art making. Were we socially constructed to comprehend voice as singularly verbal? Was this monologically reinforced? If we had no vocal cords would we still have voice? And if there were no words where would voice go? The idea of making art did not bode well; it was courageous that many co-inquirers brought forth their trepidation about making art. In a traditional research paradigm the method and process would be designed carefully given the research questions and theoretical framework, unwilling subjects who did not want to make art would

be instructed to please do the best they could relative to their involvement in making art for the research. Contrastingly with our relational de-methodological approach the co-inquirers were listened to as people, co-collaborators who had something to say about our process and had significant things to say about improving our process. Co-inquirers pushed back. After much discussion about art making it was collaboratively decided that we would select a piece or pieces of art. Once art making was deconstructed, we all felt more at ease. Being-with and being-in relational discursive practice made this very different than what it would have been in a traditional research context.

We were reminded that the multiplicity of art holistically informs us in many ways in our everyday life. Co-inquirers recounted as time passed the art became one of the most enjoyable parts of the re-search. Art affirmed and validated voice from a visual context, stated by co-inquirers, “just as powerful as verbalizing our stories.” The art we selected told visual stories that inspired multiple conversations about our life experiences. Our multiple conversations relative to our pieces of art co-constructed notable ideas for the applicable use of art in my future therapeutic practice. The art we explored held great significance for each co-inquirer. Some explained it created a deeper awareness of what challenged them verbally. Some co-inquirers also shared that the art facilitated ease in sharing what they had not thought of or had forgotten. Others shared the art intensified the significance of the confluence and their process of transformation. And many defined the inclusion of art as a therapeutic process.

When we met, Shar shared much about the visual narrative she contributed to our re-search:

In the beginning it was easy to pick out my visual narrative; it was deciphering what was underneath, exploring the deeper meaning of the art that brought my life challenges into sharper focus. I saw that the art represented how I grow and change. I see myself as a river, always in motion or flux and sometimes forced into change. Like the river, change comes sometimes as a strong force and at other times as a peaceful presence. I believe that our art is critically important to this re-search, a visual narrative that expresses our feelings and thoughts. How we see the art speaks to what we find important. We may pull out meanings we strongly connect to in that moment, however years later we might see our art with new eyes and find different representations of hope, strengths, and resistance. For me, the strengths of this re-search is that the art is fluid in its very meaning, it connects us all in a relational therapeutic way.

In our original conversation Jane said this about her choice of a visual narrative:

Resistance fuels (the ballerinas) strengths, embodies hope. I am sure it's hope for their mommies that they will be ballerinas. It is also hope for the little girls that, you know, that they're going to be as graceful and beautiful as those wonderful dancers they see at the ballet company. It's hard work. They do it and they practice. And they show up in their little tutus and their little pointy shoes and they practice hard. To me that's hope.

When the co-inquirer's met in my living room Jane remarked:

My life is so well reflected in my visual narrative, Degas's *The Dance Class*. The young dancer stands alone at the front of the painting – at the back of the studio. I see her as shy and perhaps frightened about moving into the larger space. Yet I see her strength as encapsulated in the fact that she 'showed up'... and the touch of resistance that further stems her strengths? She brought her dog to class, and the ties on her bow are imperfect.

Jane brings her hope to the forefront in both her first and her reflective visual narrative.

I am reminded of the relational power of art with two recent practice examples. I was called to the local hospital emergency ward to see an eleven-year-old female who refused to talk. I learned that she was diagnosed as selectively mute. I wondered about her silence, so I brought my art caddy with me to her ER bed. With the partition curtains drawn, her mother in a chair, and the male hospital social worker in another chair, I put paper and markers on her bedside table. I introduced myself and began to draw. Immediately this young girl picked up her markers and began drawing a picture of the four of us in her small cubicle. The three females were bright with multiple colours and the male social worker was rendered a flat tone of grey with a large black X through his figure. He attempted to verbally engage with her as she and I were making art. Her mother spoke for her to the hospital social worker. After about ten minutes I asked the little girl if she and I could be alone in the room. She drew YES in purple letters. Her mother and the social worker left the room. I drew her earrings and a heart shape. She smiled. We kept drawing. Much to my surprise after a short silence she said, "Thank you." We continued drawing and I asked curious questions about her art. I shared a story of the art I made. She seemed genuinely intrigued with me and I asked her if she would tell me about her first drawing. She proceeded to share "You're a girl and he's (the social worker) a boy and I like you." Our verbal and visual narrative dialogical process continued non-stop for the next forty-five minutes.

The second practice example involves a twelve-year-old Aboriginal girl who rarely left her remote Reserve. She was in the local emergency ward for a suicide risk assessment. Her fear of being in the institutional hospital system screamed despite her resounding silence. We moved to a family room and I began a conversation. She did not engage. Silence became our conversation. Eventually I brought out my paper and multicoloured markers and drew my suicide assessment questions. She looked bewildered that I did not speak, but drew. Courageously cautious she picked up some markers and began to visually and relationally engage as she drew the answers to my curious renderings of questions, inclusive of scaling questions. Art became our conversation. She spoke not one word for the entire four and a half hours that it took me to complete a comprehensive suicide risk assessment. Of note, whether this medical assessment process was done verbally or visually, the information gathered and the time frame would be the same. The child psychiatrist referred to this young girl's lack of verbal engagement as disobedience, further sharing that he had no time to draw with the child. He concurred that our visual narrative dialogical

process generated an accurate assessment of her low suicidal ideation. There was no need to admit her to the psychiatric ward.

Art connects people in spoken and unspoken words. Art inspires action. Art entices dialogues. Art promotes sharing of different perspectives and experiences. Art is relationally empowering. Art is transformative, “when individuals, despite societal divisions, connect and assert voice through art” (Van Eck, 2013, para. 1). The co-inquirer’s art inspired connection, action, dialogues and empowerment – un-mapping the art was a transformative experience for each one.

The Poetics of Un-knowing and Un-certainty: New Thoughts for Therapeutic Practice and Re-search

A collaborative [practitioner] takes a skeptical and tentative approach to knowledge, including its substance, its use, its certainty, its risks, and its implications... Maintaining a not-knowing position and living with the uncertainty that accompanies it is vital for the freedom of expression and for the natural unplanned paths of dialogue. (Anderson, 2007, pp. 48-50)

Un-knowing and un-certainty became accepted poetic actions in this re-search. McNamee (2008) shares that un-certainty may be an uncomfortable space, however un-knowing does not mean a vacuous state of being-in re-search or practice. It means having the courage to sit with un-certainty in therapy or in re-search. The use of McNamee’s (2008) dialogical metaphor for practice acknowledges, “We are steeped in uncertainty, incompleteness, and multiplicity. This may appear to be a very uncomfortable space to occupy. After all, we place high value on just the opposite: certainty, completeness, singularity...” (p. 9). We shared an alternative, unfamiliar, un-knowing, un-certain, curious, and courageous transformational adventure that witnessed and embodied inquiry through verbal and visual narrative, breaking multiple barriers of fixed limitations – the imperatives of modernist and positivist research paradigms. This heartfelt discourse of inquiry was never far from what mattered (Pelias, 2004).

McNamee (2000) speaks to social poetics, imaginative, thoughtful words, “scripts of beauty,” being free from “the constraints of traditional practice” (p. 146). Sanders (2014) identifies the poetics of resistance “seeking and co-creating new possibilities of resolution and hope” (p. 53). Our re-search speaks to the poetics of un-knowing and un-certainty, unpacking and deconstructing knowing and certainty through thoughtful dialogical conversations and relationally being-with as co-inquirers. Our courageous conversations unraveled what we thought we knew (Rosen, 2009). Our conversations became even more alive and creative. We dispelled the monolithic voice and individualist traditions of power, thinking, and knowing. Our verbal and visual narratives, like a chorus, resonated with the poetics of un-knowing and un-certainty, and lyrically embraced imaginative learning and a different way of being-in and being-with practice and inquiry. Our reflexive stance of un-knowing and un-certainty challenged past

conventional assumptions of knowing and certainty; this was an essential component of our inquiry (McNamee, 2012). McNamee (2012) elaborates:

The idea of uncertainty confronts the notion of Western rationality and logic that presumes a “good” person, a “smart” person is a “certain” person – one with certainty about the world. We mark the expert and the professional by the clarity of their certainty. Thus, it is a sign of incompetence for a professional or a scholar in our culture to say, “I’m not sure, what do you think?” This is unfortunate because being certain (right) inhibits any possibility of thinking together or of relationally crafting possibilities. (p. 154)

The poetics of un-knowing and un-certainty became creative acts of hope, strengths, and resistance, a means to collaboratively re-form our relational process in this non-linear re-search. Acceptance of the poetics of un-knowing and un-certainty in our appreciative inquiry gave breadth and courage to challenge the dominant discourse of past methods in practice, perplex arborescent thought²⁰ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), dispute fixed meaning and conventional theory, discard taken-for-granted ways of knowing in practice and research, and relationally create alternative stories and ways of recognizing novel knowing, dynamic meaning making and being-with others in practice and in the world. We were imaginative nomadic co-inquirers in our poetics of un-known and un-certain territory.

Sustained by a social constructionist framework, rhizomatic thought²¹ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) cast rough sailing for knowing and certainty, its empiricist evidence, and modernist influence. Rhizomatic thought flowed in various directions, intra-connecting and co-creating multiplicity of voice, movement, and process in our inquiry. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) inform that, “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances...” (p. 7). Rhizomatic thought entangled itself with our de-methodological stance in messy imperfection. Reynolds (2010) likens messiness and imperfection to the image of a rhizome. Throughout our re-search journey our relational conversations were at times quite messy, taking many detours to challenge dominant discourses and ways of being-with and being-in our re-search together. We explored entry points – strengths, resistance, and hope – and exit points – the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance – and un-mapped directions in our stories and art for our re-search, as we relationally connected the three entities and the transformative process, co-creating future possibilities and action in therapeutic space.

Walther and Carey (2010) explain, “In relation to therapeutic practice we can consider how lines of rhizomatic inquiry can initiate off-shoots of stories

²⁰ Arborescent thought is said to be: thought that is fixed, vertical, stable, binary thought rooted in a modernist paradigm. This metaphor is portrayed in Deleuze and Guattari’s, (1987) book, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

²¹ Rhizomatic thought is non-linear, non-hierarchical, horizontal, interconnected, and roams in many directions; its movement flows from a postmodernist paradigm. This metaphor is portrayed in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) book, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

which can then take root and develop as distinct but linked accounts of preferred story” (p. 6). Our relational inquiry and our dialogical process made space for curiosity that challenged us to re-think the traditional conceptualization of therapeutic conversations. Co-inquirers agreed that our recurrent sharing, the telling and retelling of our stories about the confluence was therapeutically beneficial, healing, life enhancing, and action inspiring. Immersed in our conversations, we gave shape to our stories and art, enriched inquiry, and nurtured future practice potential. Our verbal and visual narratives captured the language of storytelling and art, healing and life enhancing, a medley of dialogical transformation and action, creating rich expressive, collaborative, and relational meaning for future therapeutic practice. Considered from a social constructionist stance, the co-inquirers auspiciously viewed this concept of storytelling and art as healing. One co-inquirer told me:

This re-search was important to my own therapeutic process. While it was painful to recall certain instances in my story when I was unable to recognize hope, strengths or resistance, my newfound understandings led to amazing growth and opened up all sorts of possibilities. I am excited to see what comes next in my life.

Jane shared:

Perhaps the most significant piece for me was the belief expressed by each co-inquirer that our process was truly therapeutic. Our new knowing will remain in our hearts and minds, buffering us as we live in the moment, curious about what will come next.

All co-inquirer’s shared that this was much more than the re-search project they envisioned. In our place of curious addressivity, our dialogical conversations about our stories and art made meaningful connections for each of us within and between all nine co-inquirers (Bakhtin, 1986). It is the essence of fluidity in the spirit of therapeutic conversations, a rhythm of movement generated by hope, strengths, and resistance that creates the process for transformation.

We are storying beings. Stories are constructed and performed through the meaning we make with others in our lives (McNamee, 1996). The ongoing process and act of sharing, hearing, seeing, and co-performing stories together co-creates endless possibilities. McNamee (2004) asks, “What does it mean to talk about therapy as social construction” (p. 254)? In conversation Sheila McNamee (2015) explains:

There is an important difference between saying “social constructionist therapy” and “therapy as social construction.” In the former, we come to think of a particular “brand” or model of therapy; one that has evolved from the premises of social construction. However, for the constructionist, all values, beliefs, meanings are socially constructed. Thus, even social construction (as an orientation to the world) is a construction. Therefore, there is no model, technique, or brand of therapy that we could call “social constructionist.” When we talk about therapy as social construction we are calling attention to the ways in which we construct realities in our interactions with clients. The hope, of course, is to co-construct (with our clients) new ways of talking, acting, and thinking about the client’s situation.

But the therapist as well emerges with new understandings. One bold implication of this is that *any* therapeutic model, technique, or orientation can be useful. All are socially constructed ways of understanding ourselves, each other, and the world. (S. McNamee, personal communication, December 20, 2015)

Constructionism, as an orientation to the world, invites us to view the process of therapy as a conversation or dialogue with no techniques, strategies or specific therapeutic modalities. The dialogical conversations of nine different women co-performed the process of conversation in therapeutic space. How do we perform our verbal and visual narratives in therapeutic conversations? Co-inquirers answer, “Together, with uncertainty and diversity!” Our encounters invited conversations of the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the fluid process of transformation in discursive therapeutic space.

Eileen and Jade’s visual illustrations included in Chapter Five depict our collaborative rhizomatic thought in our understanding of the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the relational transformative process. The rhizome has no beginning and no end, but rather endlessly links and offshoots to other connections or directions (Deleuze and Guattari’s, 1987; Scott, 2013). Much like the rhizome, our relational journey of curiosity invited a multiplicity of voices, ideas, and possibilities for enriched ways of thinking and being together; this encouraged our re-search to grow and co-created opportunities for future therapeutic practice. Jade shared her understanding of rhizomatic thought and connected this understanding to her illustration of hope, strengths and resistance in Chapter Five as, “Dot, dot, dot... the three dots represent the never ending spiral of hope, strengths, and resistance and the transformative process that flows from them into our lives.” Her visual reference was important to our collaborative knowing. We all agreed that both Eileen’s and Jade’s drawings illustrated how our verbal and visual narratives and relational conversations over the past 18 months taught us that the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance do not stop, but continually begin again, over and over in our lives. Jade explains further:

This is a never-ending loop, just like our drawings. All our stories and art voiced an interconnection of hope, strengths, and resistance with no set entry or exit point. This journey taught us that we continually rely on hope, strengths, and resistance to make changes when our everyday life shakes us up. I am sharing this learning with others in my life. Dot, dot, dot...

The relational dance of social construction co-created forward movement on our curious nomadic re-search and therapeutic journey – what we were doing and making together. Relational discourse embodied curiosity and generated inquisitive intrigue in the deconstruction and co-creation of different ways of being-with the ideas of others. Co-inquirers shared the meaningfulness of our collaborative re-search process and described this as “relationally intimate, empowering, insightful, healing, reassuring, and magical, creating connections that were originally unforeseen.” We had the courage to be curious about our vulnerabilities. We grew safe together, empowering ourselves to collaboratively expose our un-certainties. This happened repeatedly in our sharing of the

intimate details of our lives on paper, in art, and in person, validating our relational meaning making process in our inquiry. Embracing our voices, art, ideas, and diverse ways of being-with one another in this relational inquiry co-constructed wholehearted coming together to validate our healing, learning, and action together. Jane reflects, “We validated the incredible strengths in one another’s stories, cheered the depth of our narratives, commended the courage we each showed to resist challenge and grow stronger, and acknowledged the hope that carries us forward.” All co-inquirers connected strongly through their diverse stories and art that exemplified hope, strengths, and resistance. We inspired one another as we talked about our discoveries and the process we co-created in our re-search together. We set out to co-create deeper awareness through our verbal and visual narratives of the concepts of hope, strengths, and resistance. Jade reflects:

The wisdom that truly enlightened me was that this journey helped us all to see how the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance come alive in our verbal and visual narratives. Enlightened about what I call ‘the intertwined triangular trio’ – hope, strengths, and resistance – we reflected on one another’s journey, how we integrated the trio, and celebrated the change in each of our lives. This inspired me. No matter what challenges I face, I believe that our collaborative learning and meaning making will stay with me, and this in itself instills hope for me to acknowledge my strengths and call on the courage to resist whatever challenges I may face.

Liz declares:

We learned that the journey through life flows along or bumps along and sometimes presents huge hills to climb or vast chasms to trip and fall into. Through our conversations about our stories and art we discovered that when challenged we can, with hope, summon strengths and resistance to achieve a way around or through obstacles and harness the strengths to keep on fighting. In relating to the re-search, everyone identified hope as the seed, a light towards which they were drawn. Everyone identified that resistance, whether internal or external, invited strengths to flourish.

Jane recalls:

When I began this journey, Kathie invited me to tell a story. With curious questions she illustrated my strengths in shyness, my courage to resist in times of depression, and my hope that is borne of remembering good times in tough times. Today, reflecting on the last 18 months, I can vision the many ways that I now integrate the concepts of hope, strengths, and resistance into my everyday life. The confluence of the three, and the therapeutic process that brings them to life, resonates for me today in the face of new challenges.

Our re-search journey disembarked at a place where we all marveled at the relational interconnectedness of hope, strengths, and resistance, and the fluid process of the transformative dynamic woven through our stories and art. Our relational meaning making co-constructed the confluence, and from this flowed the process of transformative movement. Our relational engagement with our stories and art co-created a deeper understanding of the significance of hope,

strengths, and resistance that we now apply in our everyday lives. It was clear to us that we broke new ground in my discursive therapeutic space. Our verbal and visual narratives made new meaning for us using the confluence of hope, strengths, and resistance and the fluid transformative process. Un-knowing and un-certainty guided the re-search and co-created new ways of being together, then considered how these new ways could be used by me and others in therapeutic space.

The Everyday Relational Richness of Inquiry and Practice

This process of doing our re-search – our collaborative ownership and co-authorship – redefined again our curious inquiry direction. As relational co-inquirers we were offered new ways of knowing together. This relationally rich process affirmed the idea of therapy as co-inquiry. Through our conversational verbal and visual narratives, our sharing of words and art created rich connections; co-inquirer's called this an "intimate" process. They further shared that if a therapist is a relational practitioner, then the dialogical engagement in therapy is also an intimate process, a social contract of sorts, an appreciative and intimate space to speak the unspoken, see the unseen, and make meaningful conversations. Our conversations and emergent meaning making in this inquiry are gifts to me that will enhance my future ways of practice.

Meeting together, co-inquirers recalled the thoughts embodied in one another's stories and art, and described a sense of already knowing one another through reading the stories and thinking about the art. They described this process as therapeutic, instilling the efficacy of the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and transformative movement. Each co-inquirer expressed her gratitude for the loving and generous reflective comments others had made about her story. Three co-inquirers confessed their belief that their stories were not as meaningful as the other co-inquirers. This brought forth a veritable torrent of dialogue. One co-inquirer said, "Amy, I can't imagine what it must be like to have to define yourself to the world every day." Another asked, "Dawn, how did you ever manage to do what you did, resisting medical authority and taking yourself out of that bed to go to your baby?" Others made similar comments. One asked, "Do we minimize the importance of our stories because we just *do* them?" This conversation further asked what decides meaning, to what do we ascribe meaning, and why do we sometimes minimize meaning in our stories? Perhaps we minimize because we do not believe we are important and/or we do not believe our stories count? The co-inquirers shared that at times they assumed the stories of others were worse or more important than their own; I experience this often with many people I see in my practice. We wondered if this was a socially constructed norm. The idea that we minimize our stories was met with much agreement by all co-inquirers based on their past experiences in therapeutic, medical, educational, social welfare, child welfare, and other life spaces.

Each co-inquirer shared her own feelings of validation through this re-search process of sharing, hearing, and seeing each other's stories and art and paralleled this as important for my future practice. Being-with and being-in each other's stories and art assisted most co-inquirers in identifying a better

understanding and heightened awareness of meaning within their own stories and art. One co-inquirer shared, “The strengths in the stories and art of others gave me a deeper understanding of my own strengths.” Another said, “Being listened to and curiously questioned validated and enhanced my curiosity about my own story.” We agreed that our collective validation co-created a joint sense of empowerment and “helped us to change our perspective,” as a fluid transformation. This collaborative volleying of validation co-created a rich understanding of the meaning and value in all our stories and art – a relational engagement essential to the poetic art of therapy.

Everyday Conversations Matter in Re-search and Practice

Gergen (2014) states, “Required is a dynamic process of interpretation, one that remains open, flexible, and empathic...ideally, the qualitative researcher moves then, from ‘methods of research’ to ‘practices of inquiry’” (p. 51). Our everyday conversations continually moved through our social construction stance of co-creating this re-search and making new meaning for my practice. Our relational lens conjointly reduced power differentials, challenged conventional knowing and certainty, and reconstructed our everyday narratives as significant aspects for the re-search and for my future practice. Do we ascribe meaning to the everyday conversations we share with one another? It became obvious to us as passionate and interested co-inquirers that when we dialogically engage in conversations we produce and construct new ideas and knowledge, our ‘everyday conversations’ are re-search. Based on our new ideas and knowing we apply to this as a meaningful idea for relational therapeutic practice. We co-created an experiential narrative finding – every conversation or therapeutic conversation is re-search (O. Ness, personal communication, April 30, 2015). Our inquiry has generated different kinds of re-search conversations that translate into different kinds of therapeutic conversations. If we view re-search as conversational and dialogically relational then we also view therapy as conversational and dialogically relational, thus creating appreciative space for collaborative meaning making. We agreed that we were affected by what was said, what we heard, what we saw, and what we experienced together. Eileen offers:

Our re-search has really changed Kathie’s practice. There is an underlying quality of the comfortable confluence entering into *all* our therapeutic conversations. This gives me comfort. Speaking about the confluence and transformative process in our conversations gives them life and power; I carry this with me into the world. These meaningful conversations co-create generate actions for change and growth in my life. My conversations and meaning making with others have changed; I am more confident in my ability to engage in relationally responsible conversations with others. My practice of relational engagement changed my conversations with my oncologist, who learned new ways of being-with me in conversation. Curious conversations like we experienced and practiced through this re-search make a profound difference in my being-in the world.

Eileen's use of relational discursive dialogical process supported advocacy that impacted social change between herself and her oncologist and other medical professionals. By deconstructing dominant discourse perceptions of hope, strengths, resistance, and change she offered a new way to see and talk, co-creating a different way of viewing and being-with her oncologist, other doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals. This changes perspectives and stabilizes a macro level of practice for multiple helping professionals. Conversations rooted in everyday realities inform practice in re-search, therapy, and teaching (McNamee, 2007). McNamee (2007) encourages us to deconstruct professional norms of expertise and moves us to think of re-search, therapy, and teaching as everyday conversations. She suggests that we bracket the metaphors of re-search, therapy and teaching as a means to form:

collaborative conversation... a relational approach... requires that we abandon the idea that knowledge or information can be conveyed from one mind to another and, instead, I will describe knowledge as constructed in our conjoint activities with others – in what people do together.

(McNamee, 2007, p. 314)

This infers that when re-search, therapy or teaching is practiced from a collaborative standpoint, intra-actional moments in conversation embody “visceral ways in which we move others, and are moved by them” (McNamee, 2007, p. 317). Conversations are relationally performed (McNamee, 2007). Our verbal and visual narratives are a valued resource in generating relationally responsive practice. Not only have we made new meaning through conversations specific to the importance of the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and the transformative process they relationally create for future practice, we have exemplified the utilization of social construction in our re-search as relational discourse that we performed together to effect transformation and possibilities. Our collaborative appreciative co-inquiry experience gave new meaning to the importance of relationality in both re-search and practice. Our relational dialogical dance mattered as our re-search highlighted the significance of conversations as relational meaning making.

The profound everydayness of our verbal and visual narratives and relational dialogical experiences throughout this inquiry challenged my former “T” Truths of knowing and certainty as a therapist, social worker, and educator. Our everydayness with our conversations invited many possibilities and new “t” truths (Caputo, 2013) regarding new ways of performing re-search and therapeutic practice. The miscalculated and trapped renderings of past knowing were brilliantly deconstructed by those everyday conversational experiences. Jane reminds us that:

Time was meaningless; we could talk for as long as we wanted. There were no restrictions placed on our conversational process. Our ability to ruminate through stories and art opened up conversational possibilities for new knowing and future practice. Our conversations went in many directions, unhampered by traditional rules of re-search. Kathie remained engaged as my stories tumbled one through another over my occasional question ‘can I tell you one more story?’

Conversations that question are slow, inviting, unhurried deliberations that story rich detail. Multiplicity of voice and full conversations emerge when we loiter with others in relational dialogues (D. Epston, personal communication, April 30, 2015). This was distinct in our re-search process, therefore also distinct in therapy. I am continually reminded in a conversation with Sheila McNamee when she shared with me, “we never know ahead of time where our conversations might go next” (S. McNamee, personal communication, October 2014). Our conversational unpredictability was empowering, exciting, open, and telling in the meaning we made both for future therapeutic practice and re-search.

Our dialogical dance choreographed movement beyond trained and traditional discourses. We disjoined from conventional theories and fixed meaning of therapy and research and reconstructed and connected in fascinated co-performed creative and curious space that re-examined my past notions of therapeutic practice and research. Through our verbal and visual narratives we heightened awareness and curious attentiveness to the multiple perspectives of relational engagement in both re-search and the relational dimensions of therapeutic practice. Stories, words, or images, whether in the context of re-search or therapy, relationally and conversationally matter. Our verbal and visual narratives defy conventional knowledge and roles of expertise in research, therapeutic techniques, skills or strategies. We were both buttressed and unbounded by our curious conversations, as curiosity was the one known prerequisite for our re-search; it continues to be a necessity in my practice. Our attunement to our verbal and visual narratives and our curious conversations about the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and the transformative fluid process nurtured relational dialogical engagement. McNamee and Hosking (2012) refer to this as inviting “openness to possibilities” (p. 7) in the context of inquiry and therapeutic practice. Without the dialogical dance of intimate conversations our re-search would be flat, unresponsive, and bounded, suspended in a stagnant dark void.

What We Voiced: Implications for Future Therapeutic Practice and Re-search

My love of stories and art have relationally constructed my being-with others for as long as I can remember. As a small child, stories and art permitted me to engage in “relational performance” (McNamee, 2007, p. 317), thoughtful reflection, and intra-action with others. To ask questions, create and hear stories, and make and see art was a natural way for me to be relationally be-with others in the world. Stories and art invite us to see what one only imagines. The interplay of our stories and art creates relational meaning – verbal and visual witnessing enriches connection with self, others, and the world. Stories and art continue to seduce emergent ideas and knowledge; they are a means of making sense of difference and diversity. Does a fish see under the water where she swims? Does a fish hear under the water where she swims? Does a fish know the water where she swims? White (1990) proposes that our stories share the experiences of our lives; our stories speak to who we are, shaped in our social

and relational contexts. Stories teach us about difference and multiple ways of knowing and relationally being-with others. Walther and Carey (2009) state, “we are all composed of many stories and live multi-storied lives” (p. 3). As a therapist, social worker, and social work instructor, I attempt to incorporate the multiplicity of narrative and art into my multi-storied practice, to provide rich, resourceful descriptors and conjoint meaning making of everyday practice. The remarkableness of our verbal and visual narratives relative to the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and the relational transformative process in this re-search provided generous meaning to the complexities and significance of my future relational practice. We honoured and intertwined our experiences, co-created a sense of awakened understanding, and explored meaningful avenues of hope, strengths, resistance as a confluence and transformation that invites improvisation in practice. It takes courage to be improvisational in practice and leave the old maps of knowing and certainty behind.

Throughout this re-search we embraced our stories and art, we edited, re-wrote, re-linguaged, and co-authored the meaning of the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance and transformation in our stories and art inquisitively for use in my future practice. We deconstructed and un-mapped our conventional research knowing. Dissolving the boundaries of traditional research generated freedom and space to explore the language of our conversational everydayness both for therapeutic practice and re-search. Pelias (2011) says, “I lean in through language; I distance myself through language; I negotiate meaning through language. In short, I language my way into being as a social being” (p. 17). Our positions as co-inquirers were essential to this re-search and to my future practice; we did this together. Deconstructing the researcher/subject research archetype speaks to the importance of relationality and shared conversational space in this re-search and the creation of future practice possibilities (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Our verbal and visual narratives and witness writing in this relational inquiry reminds me that re-search and therapy is social construction and social construction is a construction (S. McNamee, verbal communication, January 31, 2016; Shotter, 1999). Co-inquirers’ conversations became a collaborative co-constructive process and deepened my relational awareness of my therapeutic practice. This process encouraged multiplicity of voice, striking moments, and intra-active experiences, co-creating depth in understanding and rich meaning making, with the courage to invite different ways of thinking. Future re-search is a larger conversation.

Our relational achievements show our stories and art embodied re-search and therapy as conversations (Gergen, 2009a; McNamee, 2009, 2013; McNamee & Hosking, 2012; White 2007). Our ability grew in empowering and participating in conversations. Our hope for therapists regardless of theoretical discourse is that of gracious guests in relational dialogue, invited to partner and co-perform a dialogical dance in discursive therapeutic space (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; White & Epsen, 1990). Our collaborative re-search experience illustrated a means of welcoming people into the conversation. Re-search and therapy are relationally orientated in conversation. Witnessing and joining re-search and therapy as conversation invites multiplicity of voice to be shared and

heard; further engaging possibilities for respectful, responsible, and meaningful relational practice (Anderson, 1997; McNamee, 1996, 2004; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Clad in relational armor dialogical discourse and meaning making throughout this project, I am curious what conversational lessons I would be able to share with students if I were to teach them how to conduct relationally orientated re-search. Our conversations were both intra-actively curious and courageous. Curiosity fosters un-knowing and un-certainty, “breaking up our familiarities” (Foucault 1996, p. 305) with the promise of rich relational dialogical engagement (Gergen, 2009a; McNamee & Hosking, 2012) for both therapy and re-search. Addressivity personifies a relational dialogical dance that defies a monological individualist approach to re-search and practice (Hosking, 2011; McNamee, 2013; Sampson, 2008; Shotter, 2011, 2012). Accrediting a social construction stance we un-mapped an individualist approach and un-directionally, un-knowingly, and un-certainly co-constructed an alternative process toward relational being-in the re-search about the interconnectedness of hope, strengths, resistance, and transformation. In turn this invited many curious questions and respectfully curious conversations. Our conversations and relational dialogical process of inquiry moved us beyond the literature presented in Chapter Three to new ways of thinking about therapeutic practice. Our conversations challenged our un-learning of dominant therapeutic discourses, the views of these entities by dominant discourse, conventional research methods, and confidently epitomized comfort in un-certainty and un-knowing to co-create counter stories for therapists in preferred practice. The act of addressivity co-performed a new language of ideas, meaning, possibilities, and action. Our verbal and visual narratives constructed rich collaborative meaning about the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance and the transformative process generated in discursive therapeutic space. This invites imaginable creativity for collaborative meaning making and possibilities for my future practice. David Epston (2015) suggests this is “wonderfulness in inquiry” (D. Epston, personal communication, April 30, 2015), an inquiry of appreciation. The multiplicity of voice in this dissertation illustrates the practice of the wonderfulness of inquiry for the practice of practice. Our re-search suggests that the context of our personal lived experiences and our respectful presence in relational dialogical engagement (Gergen, 2009a; McNamee, 2009, 2013) is, as McNamee states, a useful resource for practice (Guanaes & Rasera, 2006).

Our verbal and visual narratives exposed us to different ways of being-with and being-in the world together. Everyone thought I knew, but I had no idea where to begin. Curious questions about strengths, resistance, hope, and an unnamed transformative dynamic engaged us in adventurous dialogical movement of innovation regarding the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and a process of fluid transformation. Our conversations moved us in many directions; shoulder-to-shoulder we took up new territory for both therapy and re-search. And then there was no turning back. Our collaborative process of curious dialogical co-inquiry continually surprised us – a rhizomatic journey of adventurous learning for my practice within the poetic art of therapy. Located in a social construction stance, our co-inquiry co-created safe and appreciative conversational space, a

community of co-inquirers engaged in continual conversations relative to our re-search puzzle. Our way of understanding this inquiry as social construction invited our collaborative conversations and actions that co-created new meaning for future therapeutic practice. Conjointly we experienced new ways of seeing, hearing, talking, and being with each other – relationally engaged practice. McNamee and Hosking (2012) share their thoughts of relationally engaged practice, “They seem to involve certain practice orientations: shifting from pathology to potential, entertaining multiplicity, suspending certainty, entertaining possibilities, moving from critiqued to appreciation, and moving from e-valuation to valuation” (p. 86). Together, we coordinated meaning and action applicable to future practice possibilities (McNamee & Gergen, 1999; McNamee, 1996, 2000, 2008, 2012). We hope our curious conversations about the confluence of hope, strengths, resistance, and transformation will inspire more conversations about the use of this confluence and transformative process in relational practice for social workers, therapists, and academics. At times the re-search journey was tumultuous and messy and at other times it was impassioned and amazing. These were magical conversations, experiences of awe. Ending the journey was even more difficult than the beginning, as our conversations and experiences relative to our meaning making composed a never-ending phenomenon of “opening up possibilities for re-storying practice” (McNamee & Hosking, 2012, p. 52).

Our verbal and visual narratives created neither certainty nor knowing; if certainty or knowing is implied or perceived this was not our intention. Our conversations assert no “T” Truth, no measurable data. They do not privilege a final word or conclusive meaning. Our verbal and visual narratives co-create a confluence of fluidity and movement, an open and relational approach to re-search and therapeutic practice (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Although this dissertation comes to an end, the conversations generated are not over; we invite an open dialogue to further our reflections and initiate meaningful conversations in practice ...

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