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Reflexivity Woven Through Qualitative Health Research: A Researcher's Experience

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Abstract: Engaging in a qualitative, autobiographical research project as a nurse researcher, provided a place and space to explore my reflexive ways of being. This article focuses on describing the reflexivity practices in which I engaged throughout a twenty-four-month research study. This article focuses on a reflexivity practice while researching recovery from eating disorders, and while living during the global coronavirus pandemic. Throughout the research project, and in efforts to deepen understandings of the reflexivity experiences, I read related literature and focused on best and promising practices for eating disorder assessment, treatment, and management. I sought to scaffold and find a place to safely approach and respond to the dataset and artifacts. As an expression of reflexivity alongside the research, I journaled and created art as a medium to illustrate my practice. Simultaneously, I engaged in related conversations with trusted peers. In this work I am therefore both a participant and researcher (Roberts, 1982). Guiding this work were my understandings of stories and lived experiences which, in time, allowed me to create and live out new stories. Linda Finlay's (2012) approach to reflexivity informed and guided the project. As well, Dewey's (1934, 1958) writings on art and nature as experience allowed me to be mindful of my reflexivity practices. Finally, Susan Finley's (2011) critical arts-based notions gave me permission to create in multiple mediums as part of the reflexivity process. Four themes emerged from the reflexive thematic analysis: 1) the importance of scheduling time to conduct reflexivity activities and inquire into and understand responses; 2) the importance of spiritual care; 3) the role of trusted, supportive peers can help re-story shame; 3) the process of living out future, educative stories are possible; and 4) a reflexive practice can include embodied responses.

Keywords: Stories, artwork, arts based research, reflexivity, researcher's experiences

Stories "help understand the palpable pain and suffering of another human being" (Coles, 1989, p. 8).

In this paper, I share a story of my reflexivity practice as a researcher (Coles, 1989; Crites, 1971) that included an embodied response (Finlay, 2014). I made purposeful efforts to

heed reflexivity practice throughout a research project focused on eating disorders (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). This inquiry took place over 24-months and while living and working during the coronavirus pandemic (Greene & Park, 2021). In this work, the role of reflexivity in research was positioned and valued as critical, and when enacted, the elements became interwoven throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). I tried to foster reflexivity throughout the research activities and processes thereby allowing a simultaneous engagement. This was important as the researcher produces new knowledge generated from their experiences (Faulkner et al., 2016). I share how I sought to understand my relationship to the shaping influences on the research and specifically, how embodiment (Finlay, 2014) and arts-based activities (Finlay, 2011, 2018), as an expressive medium, can illustrate one's reflexive practice. In addition, I leaned into Finlay who wrote "the key question regarding reflexivity is how we do it, not whether it is an option" (2016, p. 120). I appreciate reflexivity is complex and includes physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual engagement, and that these experiences and responses cannot be forced or ordered (Frankl, 1982). I also learned my responses did not always fit comfortably within recommended timelines of a formal research inquiry (Roberts, 1982). Moreover, reflexivity is individually expressed and when practiced provides a space where one can be uncomfortable with the challenges of qualitative research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Finally, though I am not a psychotherapist, I believe the story shared is valuable and relevant to day-to-day clinicians who engage in reflexivity alongside their therapeutic work, research, education, and clinical practice (Kuhnke & Jack-Malik, 2019). This work seeks to encourage therapists to understand and enact reflexive ways of being.

Positioning

As a nurse researcher at a Canadian university, I am responsible for teaching, research, and service activities (Berg & Seeber, 2016). While engaged in the eating disorder research, I was responsive and engaged in reflexive practice which, for me, included journalling, art and creating using found objects, writing poems, prayer, song, and long hikes into the bush with my trusted blue heeler dogs by my side. I also have come to understand more fully the actions of my physical body in research as embodied; I am never isolated from the context in which I practice (Finlay, 2014; Spatz, 2017). This sensory knowing became evidenced in my reflexive writing, art, and bodily movements (Bach et al., 1999). In these times, I also engaged in uncomfortable wonderings that included searching for meaning and purpose on earth (Frankl, 1982), in the academy, and in my research activities.

At the beginning of and alongside the eating disorder research, to improve my understanding of the *process* of art making, I also completed a certificate in therapeutic arts (Hinz, 2015; Malchiodi, 2020). This was an important part of my growth as a researcher, as I came to pay attention to: time, the interaction and process of creating, and the associated thoughts, feelings, and behaviours while art making (Malchiodi, 2007, 2020; Moon, B. L, 2016; Moon, C. H, 2009). Additionally, I came to grow my understanding of the role of expressive arts therapy in relation to persons who have experienced traumatic events, and persons living with or recovered from an eating disorder (Courtois & Ford, 2016; van der Kolk, 2014).

In relation to reflexivity, I began wondering if researchers like me conducted reflexivity activities. If so, how do they engage in this practice? How is their practice reflected in their research studies? How is it presented in their research posters, presentations, and peer-reviewed articles? My interest was further prompted by reading articles where I often questioned why such an important part of research, reflexivity, was only given one or two descriptive lines in a peer-reviewed study? I also wondered, what is the experience of the researcher as they research? Where do they find a place and space to express their reflexive practice? This motivated me to describe and visually share. I also wanted to encourage others to develop and grow their reflexivity, within and alongside their research practice.

My passion to live out my reflexivity practice allowed me to appreciate that I was ready to share a story of resilience, healing and of one living in recovery. As an academic, I was deeply cautious of self-disclosure and possible reaction from peers and the university at large (Jolley, 2019; Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). Yet, I also knew that what makes a conversation seem dangerous in the beginning is often framed within the influences of family, socio, political, cultural and employment influences in which we live, work, and create. I also knew through writing and sharing that perspectives change and grow (LeFevre & Sawyer, 2012). Over time, I learned my viewpoint broadened, when what is perceived as uncomfortable or difficult is spoken of aloud. This has occurred because of expanding the audience, peers, and media (conversations, art created) with whom I interact and trust.

Finally, reflexivity engagement raised my awareness of trust, brought forth courage, resilience, and kindness. This is not to say the process was smooth. I regularly wondered throughout

the development of my reflexive practice, how I would be viewed in the academic world should I choose to share my learning? Would I be understood as less than? Would I be viewed or treated differently? (Brown, 2021). I understood that once shared, stories live on paper, and that I would not have control of the outcome. Taking this into account, I still believed the themes that emerged from the reflexivity practice were of value. I knew that these learnings could touch the lives of others seeking to understand themselves within and when surrounded by research (Jolley, 2019). I also believed that if the work encouraged one person to engage in or develop a reflexivity practice, the journey would be of benefit.

Background

Eating disorders, the pandemic, and the current state of affairs

To begin the eating disorders research, I tentatively sought to understand the current state of the disorders worldwide (APA, 2021; National Health Service, 2021). I also began to read literature and reflexively journal in response (Alexander et al., 2016). As a reflexive researcher, I attended to how reading this literature would make me think, feel, behave, and respond. I wrote, "I wonder if I will find my journey reflected in statistics or stories, what will I do if this occurs and how will I respond?" *(Reflexive journal*, June 2020).

The literature states eating disorders, especially in women, continue to increase worldwide (Galmiche et al., 2019). In the United Kingdom, Sweeting et al. (2015) state that males living with eating disorders are underestimated in the statistics and in social media presentation. This under-representation of males and other genders leads to the stereotypical view that only young adolescent girls are susceptible to development of an eating disorder. In Canada, the situation is also alarming. The National Initiative for Eating Disorders (NIED, 2023) reports approximately one million persons have a diagnosis of an eating disorder and an associated mental health issue.

During the pandemic researchers focused on the health of persons living with eating disorders. Rogers et al. (2020) researched the disorders during this time and reported that the risk of experiencing an eating disorder increased. This was attributed to dramatic changes and limitations in an individual's personal, social, and work routines. This was partially attributed to patients' increased media time watching videos and having to rely on web-based platforms for healthcare appointments and support services that may have previously been face to face. Branley-Bell and Talbot (2020) also stated the pandemic interrupted routines, perception of control around food, and some technologies negatively triggered additional psychological stress. Haghshomar et al. (2022) similarly reported negative effects. They stated that people diagnosed with eating disorders experienced deterioration of their mental health and wellness during the pandemic. In contrast this research group also reported that some people benefited from increased family support while living in tight quarters at home. Interestingly, some participants reported feeling less social pressure when living in quiet isolation under pandemic rules, rather than trying to live up to the social demands they previously experienced. Finally, Gao et al. (2022), in a systematic review, stated persons with eating disorders experienced worsening health related to: changes in eating patterns (access to and or monies for food), increased anxiety and depression, and living in restrictive environments may in fact have triggered or worsened one's symptoms.

While reading this research, I reflexively journaled and created art. These findings reminded me that people with eating disorders are all around us. Yet, people living with such a complex and challenging disorder often remain hidden from the supportive care they require. When living with the disorder individuals may experience emotional shame and guilt, and some live with psychological stress, bodily pain, and body image distortion (McBride, 2019). As well, living with an eating disorder impacts one's quality of life, leads to risk of suicide, and in some cases leads to early death (NIED, 2023). I wondered if, though I had lived in recovery for many years, was I taking on too much in researching into the current state of eating disorders? Yet I, in my journals, noted that I regularly returned to my belief that I could conduct and share my reflexivity experience in effort to find my voice (Chase, 2011) and grow my understanding of reflexivity in a qualitative research practice (Finlay, 2012).

Reflexivity in research comes alive

My doctoral supervisor first introduced to me the concept of reflexivity in a qualitative research course. During this time, she shared articles and discussed that reflexivity could be messy, swampy, mired in questioning and yet, it also could be a place to learn and grow as a graduate student (Finlay, 2002). She also described that art, created in any medium, could be utilized as a form of expression of reflexivity (Kuhnke, 2012). Importantly,

Finlay (2012) also described reflexivity as a critical self-reflection in which one attends to the role of the researcher within and around the research. For me, learning about reflexivity provided a space to support engagement in difficult encounters of which graduate school, healthcare and nursing are immersed (Finlay, 2005).

In a growing body of literature there is increased evidence of researchers enacting and sharing their reflexivity practice (Faulkner et al., 2016; Finlay, 2014; Greene & Parks, 2021; Rae, 2018; Rae & Green, 2016). This expression is important, as it supports one to explore and consider their worldviews and beliefs about their research inquiry and how as researchers, they are shaping influences throughout the research process (Creswell, 2014; Wolf, 2012). Reflexivity practice includes a sequence or repetitive inquiry, an "iterative loop…[that] enables researchers to place themselves within the study" (Salmons, 2015, p. 48). Living out a reflexive practice also puts demands on the researcher to plan time and a space to think, feel, reflect, illustrate, and think again. This ongoing woven process engages the researcher and may move one's wonders and subsequent learning in multiple directions, resulting in unexpected connections and deeper understandings of self, the research process, and the topic(s) under study (Finlay, 2011). For example, I often asked, "how does being engaged in qualitative health research including a history of adverse experiences and an eating disorder influence my thinking, feelings, and behaviors and how do I influence the research processes as a result?" (*Reflexive journal,* March 2020).

Furthermore, reflexivity practice is complex, personal, and unique to each researcher. It is grounded in a "rich heritage" (Finlay, 2017, p. 121) and a growing sophistication of "typologies" that may be considered for use (p. 121). Faulkner et al. (2016) states reflexivity, alongside research, is purposeful as it nudges one along to find their 'voice' within and around the inquiry being undertaken. Liamputtong (2007) also states researchers, when working alongside persons identified as vulnerable (e.g., mental health issues, eating disorders), who purposefully engage in reflexivity activities may gain additional insights into the research analysis and findings. Finally, Finlay (2002) states reflexivity may open the researcher to new perspectives and insights, and as a result the researcher may disseminate the findings with more detail and confidence.

How reflexivity evolved

I began to undertake a broad, three-pronged research study focused on eating disorders and recovery. From a large dataset I sought to understand how spirituality (Kuhnke, 2022), arts-based activities (Kuhnke, 2020), and trust-filled relationships (Kuhnke, 2022, unpublished manuscript) helped one to recover from an eating disorder. Alongside this research, I purposefully and mindfully engaged in multiple reflexivity activities using multiple mediums (journaling, photography, sketches). This article shares the personal, interpersonal, and contextual reflexivity journey while engaged in this broad research study (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

My personal reflexivity practice was birthed and grew as I lived quietly and sometimes fearfully in lockdown from the coronavirus pandemic (Greene & Parks, 2021). Amid layers of uncertainty, I began to immerse myself in a large dataset (files) that housed a long journey of living with and recovering from an eating disorder. I began by tentatively sitting on the floor next to the filing boxes. My stomach was in a knot, sour bile in my mouth, my physical response unexpected (Finlay, 2014). I struggled as I sat amidst medical notes, images, photographs, art created, eating disorder books and research articles, reflective sketches, food diaries, hand-written and typed journals. I was reminded of how I was both a researcher and participant (Roberts, 1982). The process of reading, re-reading, and immersing myself in the dataset took months. In response I often walked away closing the file boxes, yearning instead to be in the clear, fragrant air of the bush far from the tensions of the inquiry. Likewise, I regularly wrote in my reflexive journal, read stories of recovery, created art and poetry. I often remembered all the people, family and friends that were alongside during the difficult and healing times (Fox, 2010).

Throughout the research, I purposively committed to engage in reflexive time, regularly create, and journal. This was reinforced by the discussion offered by Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) on the importance of having a concrete reflexivity plan. My plan was not ridged, but a personal commitment to heed my efforts to be creative, reflexive, and heed the tensions I was experiencing. I leaned into Finlay's work (2011) where she reminds us that when preparing to conduct research, it is important to surround yourself with support systems and trusted peers. For me, it was critical to have peers with whom I could talk reflexively, wonder, and interrogate my learnings. We met using web-based platforms, phone calls, emails, and shared photographs and art, in efforts to reflexively share learnings. I expressed that I was deeply aware that the research and reflexivity processes could evoke uncomfortable feelings, including difficult conversations, and was associated with disclosure and possible consequences (Jolley, 2019; Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). Equally important, I knew that conducting research could be demanding and rewarding. In response I journaled:

> I am tired of hiding out and pretending I did not experience adverse events and as a result live a life immersed in an eating disorder. I must say, at times I feel shame and ashamed of this part of my life (Brown, 2006). Yet, now I want to grow, live authentically and congruently as a person, researcher, and teacher (Brown, 2010, 2017). I know my journey to health has been difficult and yet rewarding and that I live in the present and imagine a future. I also believe if I can encourage another researcher to engage in reflexivity, including difficult and challenging questions often mired in grimy dust and the past, then it is worth taking the risk. (*Reflexive journal*, April 2020)

Reflexivity in action

Reflexivity, for me, was not an afterthought; it is the hard work that surrounds, threads, and weaves gently throughout the research (Finlay, 2002). As I began my reflexivity journal, early in the research, I sketched several images to visualize and capture reflexivity in action (See Figure 1: Reflexivity in Action).

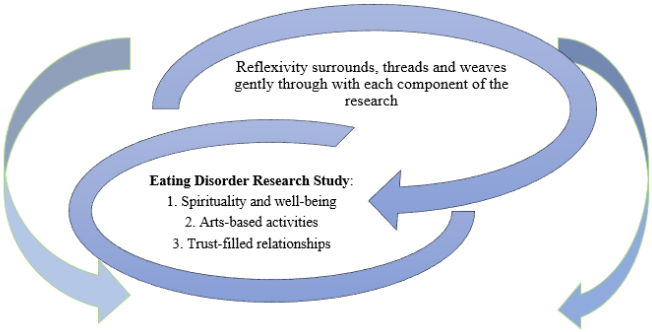

Figure 1: Reflexivity in Action

The following image was first sketched with pen and paper, coloured crayons and art paper, and then electronically. This image represents the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research. Further guiding reflexivity was Finlay's (2011) summary where she wrote:

> With careful, reflective planning at the beginning of research, I would say you stand a better chance of producing sound results. But your plans, just like your research expectations, should remain modest. Research findings can only ever be partial and provisional. They may intrigue, resonate and surprise but they are not going to 'change the world'. Instead of setting out to discover new territory, plan simply to go exploring. Go on a voyage of discovery and see what emerges. Instead of setting up the research with the aim of scaling Himalayan peaks or unveiling new continents, trust that through its respect for individual human stories and experience your research will allow something of real value to emerge. Know that however modest your research it has the transformative potential to open up new horizons. (pp. 194-195)

Therefore, this inquiry aimed to deepen my understanding of the shaping influences on the researcher and processes undertaken when engaged in reflexivity practice.

Influences Guiding Reflexivity

This section discusses influences, from those before me, that encircled and threaded through reflexivity. In this section I discuss the importance of 1) stories and the stories we tell; 2) contextual-discursive reflexivity and embodiment; and 3) arts-based activities. Each contributed to reflexivity, none were dominant, each intertwined to support the inquiry and hope of new discoveries.

1. Stories

First, literature on stories and the stories we tell, and retell, informed and underpinned reflexivity. Stories are all around us and therefore are an important element in reflexivity (Chase, 2011; Coles, 2004; Crites, 1971; Paterson, 2004; Saldana, 2011). The writing of stories was utilized by researchers to compile and thematically analyze the reflexivity journals and art create. The reflexivity learnings are shared using a story format (themes). This approach supported re-storying experiences into educative ways of knowing, where one reframes events and experiences into new stories (Dewey, 1938). To understand stories, think of the following example. In my journal I wrote:

> I experienced an event. I told the story about the event for the first time, then I told it to another peer, and then to another. When I first shared the story, I noticed that when I re-shared, the story slightly changed. I wondered, why does this occur? I wondered if others do this as well. Why do I not tell the exact, same story? Why am I slightly changing the story, what is to gain?" (*Reflexive journal*, May 2021)

From the literature we know, in telling and re-telling our story, the story changes and we ideally may gain insight into the topic and the socio-cultural and political contexts in which the event

occurred (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). It is this storying and re-storying process in which I reflexively engaged. I knew that my raw, initial story needed to be re-storied to allow the learnings about reflexivity practice to emerge, evolve, and be discovered (Finlay, 2011). Otherwise, I might have remained focused on the research (three smaller studies) and not been nudged forward, to ultimately grow as a reflexive researcher. This was an important understanding to heed, as at times the research was difficult to undertake and be immersed in. Using a story format helped me to be responsible and own (Fox, 2010) the reflexivity process of which I engaged. The story format grounded me, especially when I found myself distracted and immersed in the past, or when I temporarily had moved away from the reflexivity experiences of which I was studying. In the literature, there were several bodies of work focused on stories that supported my understanding.

Dewey, an influential educator, notes that experiences and the stories we tell, frame who we become or are becoming as persons. Dewey states focusing on human "observation alone is not enough. We must understand the significance of what we see, hear, and touch [from the past, present and future]. This significance consists of the consequences that will result when what is seen is acted upon" (1938, p. 68). He also emphasizes the importance of exploring past experiences, reflecting on and considering how they "go on to form a judgment of what may be expected in the present situation…and the future" (p. 68). Additionally, Crites' seminal work focused on the narrative quality of experience and our bodily movements that accompany the stories we tell. He described how our experiences become our stories, and how at times we re-story or re-tell our stories to gain further insight and personal understanding. As humans we often re-story events, life experiences and relationships in order to come to a greater awareness of self within our lived, social contexts. The act of storying and re-storying our lives help us grow and mature in many aspects of day-to-day living. Crites also states that stories from memories inform the present and future; each are purposeful as our "sense of self and world is created through them" (1971, p. 295). He also discusses the role of mundane and sacred stories and how each interplay a role in the "dwelling places" (p. 295) in which we live, work, and play. Crites states the stories we tell, called mundane, are "among the most important means by which people articulate and clarify their sense of that work" (1971, p. 296). Sacred stories in turn, are intertwined with and alongside the mundane, especially when one awakens to a sacred story that includes "ahh moments", moments when we gain additional clarity, moments when we pause, feel emotion and bodily experiences.

Patterson (2004) discusses the hidden joy and internal strengths that can be gained and discovered in one's narrative or storytelling. He states stories, when critically analyzed, reveal something in us that supports our growing understanding of all our parts, those elements that make us whole. Saldana (2011), a qualitative arts-based researcher, further asserts that working with stories reminds us to go slow, and not demand immediate, scientific responses to research inquiries. In turn he states stories remind us to pause, reflect, and wonder. Saldana also addresses the role of bodily movement in research including dance and art as ways to express our research and reflexivity. He purports that observing the body, bodily responses and associated movement through yoga, dance, walking and running, each bring additional insights to the research, when heeded. Finally, Coles stated, stories are "what is happening to you, right here, right now" (1998, p. 204) and that stories possess an immediacy and power "as it connects so persuasively with human experience" (pp. 204-205).

2. Reflexivity is active, threaded, woven, and unwoven

I utilized a contextual-discursive, reflexive practice approach (Finlay, 2012). This approach to reflexivity is a "way of critically interrogating the research process" (2012, p. 320) of which one engages. This was purposeful alongside my effort to be transparent, open to possibilities and insights personally and interpersonally. Reflexivity gave me a space to weave and unweave (action) beliefs, understandings, and ways of being. Finlay states it is important to think of reflexivity in research as co-occurring within "the social context and world of shared meanings, in terms of both the proximal research situation and the broader structural (sociocultural) domain" (p. 321). I wanted to challenge myself to be uncomfortable and sit quietly while researching and be reflexive. I wanted to question the meaning of the research and my reflexive responses through art and wonder.

During these times, I nudged up against my initial lack of understanding of being an embodied researcher (Finlay, 2014). In my journal I wrote: "I really thought I had dealt with this body thing, from the eating disorder treatment, how naïve" (*Reflexive journal*, Nov 2022). Finlay reminds us that reflexivity includes heeding and finding "a way to give voice to bodily experience [and asking] how might I listen to the body's language and hear its innate wisdom?" (2014, pp. 5-6). Roberts' writings also focus on the importance of biographical research. He states that over the timeframe, in which we conduct the research "we [also] reflect on the research process

and our own experiences; [and] by a reflective questioning of expectations, we can come to a fuller understanding of the research process" (1982, p. 159).

Importantly, Crites (1971) emphasizes the role of physical movement alongside storytellers' [our] stories we own. For individuals (living with and or in recovery from eating disorders), physical movement can be conscious and unconscious as the connections between mind, body and soul may be interrupted or disrupted by power and power over by others. Bodily movement can be a small gesture, a grandiose movement, or gentle and fluid – each mirrors our known or unknown stories, told and untold. Movement can co-occur when sharing when we are walking, dancing, hiking, creating music, drama, worshiping, or in speech, yet we may not heed these together, congruently. Each movement is owned and known as an individual's style; it becomes part of one's ordinary life while they tell stories. Crites states further of bodily movement:

> Actions are the movements of bodies, but unlike other movements they are performed by bodies that are both the subjects of experience and purposive agents. It does not occur to us, in common speech, to attribute style to unconscious bodies. Movements must be conscious to have a style. Yet, that does not imply that one necessarily attends consciously to these movements or to their style. But … [the person] has a style, regardless of whether … [they] ever concerns [them]self with it. Typically, the style is formed quite unconsciously by an agent intent on the various projects to which … [they] directs [their] action. (1971, p. 292)

Within stories may be embedded a focus on one's bodily movement or how one lives an embodied life as a researcher (Finlay, 2014). The understanding of a person's body, perception of their body (e.g., size, shape, weight, movement) and whether they are feeling pain, are aware of harm, or care for their body as a researcher were important concepts to consider (Perey & Cook-Cottone, 2020). In the literature, eating disorders are well-described as one of the more complex and challenging disorders as they are often accompanied by co-occurring issues such as body dysmorphia, depression, anxiety, trauma; and for those living lives in recovery, some of these issues may prevail (Cook-Cottone, 2020; McBride & Kwee, 2019). Long-term, this results in eating disorders being identified as one of the more complex disorders to prevent, assess, manage, and treat (APA, 2021).

As a researcher I was challenged by the dual roles in which I was engaged, the researcher and the person living in recovery. In response, I wondered was I living an embodied or disembodied life while researching? Was I paying attention to my bodily responses to what seemed to be "abstract movement" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 138). I wondered if I paid attention to my movements, would new meanings emerge alongside a growing awareness of self? I was researching eating disorders deeply aware I was the person who experienced body dysmorphia, shape, and weight issues, and who was now living a life as a researcher. I am the researcher living in the present, one who did not want to attend or document whether I was living an embodied life. However, I was comfortable expressing my emotion, social and spiritual elements, yet I was challenged to express my physical – embodied experiences as a researcher (Cook-Cottone, 2020; McBride & Kwee, 2019). In response to this growing understanding, I journalled the following:

> I feel numb. Though I spontaneously hike vigorously through the bush, I do not, or did not, initially pay attention to the timing of these physical bursts of movement in relation my journaling reflexively. Yet in time and with feedback on the first draft of this article from Linda Finlay (2022, *private communication*), I came to study and understand about being an embodied researcher. I realized I was not really prepared to delve into my physical self. I thought I was okay with my size and shape. So, I realized when reading the data set, and in response, I was unsure. When I was uncomfortable, full of tension, I hiked, I just went for a run (or so I told myself). It took time to appreciate the links between my physical responses in my reflexivity activities, the research into eating disorders, and my growing understanding of living an embodied life. I heeded my new physical awareness through reflexive activities. I tried to be more consistent in making links with my mind, body and soul. (*Reflexive journal*, January 2023)

Cook-Cottone (2020) states that people who live with eating disorders may come (in time) to understand that they are experiencing embodied responses. I found this concept challenging. I thought I did understand being embodied, but I learned that going for a hike is not necessarily embodied knowing. Coming to understand one's body in relation to emotions takes time, especially when one has experienced trauma and as a result they may carry their pain, happiness, tensions, and sadness within their physical body, soul and spirit. As a researcher living in recovery, this was an important perspective to heed, as I thought I lived an embodied life. To further understand how being embodied emerges as a researcher, Cook-Cottone explains and asks:

> What is your embodied *why*? The answer can be a sense of mission that you have known since you were little, or it can

> be something that you contemplate for years. It can be one thing, or many. It integrated the heart, the belly, and the soles of our feet. Living and embodying our why is all about orientating our mind toward considering that there is a reason for doing what we do, thinking what we think, and creating what we create. It is bigger than we are rare, bigger than this moment, and most certainly bigger than any eating disorder symptom. (2020, p. 132)

As both the researcher and the study participant I was reminded of the importance of what Finlay describes as a focusing or of a "dwelling bodily meanings" (2014, p. 9). Being embodied includes one's "engagement of the body with the world, wherein the mind and body are inextricably linked and reciprocally influence one another" (Launeanu & Kwee, 2019, p. 35). Specifically, this is described from the perspective of one researcher and participant - one living in recovery or recovered (Alexander et al., 2016). It is important to note, for those who have lived with an eating disorder, our stories may include and refer to our bodies, but they may be described as objects something separate from ourselves; and in time and alongside integrated eating disorder team care, one may come to healing and "unity of the body-self" (Launeanu & Kwee, 2019, p. 50). Through reflexivity I learned I was not living congruently within my body. In my journal I wrote:

> Well, most days I feel and live congruently with my body. Yet I still feel awkward when I see images of perfect, air-brushed humans - I feel so far from this level of perfection. Yet, I also know many images to not be trueful or of a real person, made up, pretend. This was especially noted of social media imaging shown and displayed across our computers and televisions during the pandemic. During this stressful time, yearnings returned to be thinner, just a bit, you know just a little bit. I wondered if I should start to count calories and weigh myself, just a bit…just a bit, yet I knew this was a slippery slope, especially when stressed. (*Reflexive journal*, May 2022)

2. Arts-based mediums to express reflexivity

Further influencing my reflexive practice was my growing appreciation for therapeutic arts in healing (Finley, 2011, 2022; Fish, 2018; Moon, 2010; Rollings, 2013; Saldana, 2011). Arts-based approaches had become a growing part of my ability to express new insights and perspectives when engaged in research. Holm et al. state of arts-based, visual research is a growing way to express "human experience in more complex ways" (2015, p. 311). They recommend embedding visual representations of the art in research dissemination activities, and not transforming visuals – back into text. This balance was important as I approached the arts-based activities with the understanding that there are many ways to create new knowledge, including through art. Dewey stated "science is said to lay hold of reality, yet 'art' instead of being assigned a lower rank is equally esteemed and hono[u]red" (1958, p. 357); I understand my reflexive practice to be a dance between these elements.

I also leaned into the writings of Dewey who explored wide-ranging use of creative mediums including painting, music, sculpture, text, and poetry. Specifically, he reminds us to "cooperate with the product so that the outcome is an experience that is enjoyed because of its liberating and ordered properties" (1934, p. 222). Dewey also expands this notion and encourages us to be present with "the [human] delight that attends vision and hearing, and enhancement of the receptive appreciation and assimilation of objects irrespective of participation in the operations of [art] production" (1958, p. 356).

To strengthen my understanding of colour and its use in art created, I studied the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962). He details use of colours, and describes the linkages between our eyes, our body, what we perceive, and the perception of colour as elements of our consciousness. He describes a wide range of colour and the meaning of each when used to create. As a researcher this included being aware of "the whole system of experience-world, [my] own body and empirical self" (p. 241). Merleau-Ponty states the following:

> The sensor and the sensible do not stand in relation to each other as to mutually external terms, and sensation is not an invitation of the sensor by the sensible. It is my gaze which subtends colour, and the movement of my hand which subtends the object's form, or rather my gaze pairs off with colour, and my hand with hardness and softness, and in this transaction between the subject of sensation and sensible it cannot be held that one acts while the other suffers the action, or that one confers significance on the other. Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronized with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning. (1945/1962, p. 248)

In my reflexive practice, art (many mediums) nudged up against the pressure to express learnings in the dominant use of text, written words (Finley, 2011; Schwartx, 2007). This article on reflexivity is not about a specific moment of clarity from within, or an end production of art, but of a purposeful and thoughtful engagement in arts-based activities as a researcher (Rae, 2018). It is not about the end outcome of an art piece; it is about the being and living that occurs alongside

the research. It is also my interest in use of images and why we are often pressured to add words to explain learning, where in my mind the learning is the time, we pause and reflect on the image (Schwartz, 2007).

To visualize reflexivity, I hiked into the bush with my camera. Blowing in the wind were grey, verdant green lichens known as Old Man's Beard (Usnea trichodea) each gently wrapped around the trees. I was standing in and surrounded by dense sea fog; it reminded me of reflexivity, woven, threaded around us as researchers (See Figure 2 - Reflexivity as a Complex Living Organism). The lichens are multifaceted organisms (Brodo et al., 2001) that respond to air quality and monitor the ecological integrity of a forest area (Nova Scotia Forest, 2016). This reminded me that my bodily movements (hiking, eyes viewing trees, raising arms to photograph) were my embodied reflexive activities. It also reminded me that I do not research in isolation; I research from within, without, alongside the academic community, society, and the earth (Dewey, 1934).

Figure 2: Reflexivity as a complex, living organism

The Process I Followed

I understand the importance of transparently sharing my reflexive process that led to interpretation of my reflexive journey (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The reflexivity journals and art were created as I worked on a research inquiry into living with and living recovered from an eating disorder. I read and re-read the reflexive journals, field notes, and arts-based creative objects and artifacts created over a 24-month period (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Also, I was deeply aware of the long-standing criticisms of reflexivity (a soapbox, a power over perspective, or a form of narcissism) (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Yet I would argue that being reflexive, writing and using art, for me was a place and space for the voice of the researcher alongside the research (Finley, 2011).

For me, this was important work as I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of my reflexivity activities and how they eventually became my stories (Crites, 1971; Dewey, 1958). I collated 25 pages of reflexivity journal notes and art in the form of photographs and art created. I reflexively, critically and thematically analyzed the journals and art with the goal of gaining new perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). During these times, I did not always feel brave or courageous. In fact, many times I felt vulnerable. At times I was reluctant and not prepared for any self-disclosure (Jolley, 2019) or for new insights to emerge (Finlay, 2022). At times, I was flooded with feelings of shame and guilt, immersed in shrouded silence and emotional pain (Brown, 2006, 2012). I could not envision sharing the reflexivity journey, yet in my heart, I knew I wanted to live authentically (Brown, 2010). Yet, I read, re-read and stayed quietly with the reflexive journals and art created – this takes time and energy. This process helped locate self as a researcher and subject within the inquiry (Finlay & Gough, 2008). Finlay (2011) also states this includes the dance between distancing oneself from research and being "engaged, involved, interested in, and open to what may appear" (p. 23). The reflexivity journals revealed additional layers of insight into the stories told and re-told, specifically about researching complex topics such as adverse events and eating disorders. I knew these as my "sacred stories…because…[my] sense of self and work is created through them" (Crites, 1971, p. 295).

To critique the art created, I made hand-written notes about each image or artifact (Fish, 2018; Holm et al., 2015; Rollings, 2013; Saldana, 2011). These themes were discussed in-depth and revised with peers. I wanted to know why images that to me were self-explanatory, needed text, word, and explanation (Schwarz, 2007). I wanted to understand their response to the progress in eating disorder research and my passion to engage

with and further demystify reflexive practices and possibilities (Finley, 2011). We also explored and considered the influences, biases, and assumptions about adverse events and eating disorders that I had arrived with, alongside the research inquiry. This was especially important as my story and my "identity … [were] particularly pertinent to the research topic" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 303).

Ethical considerations

While engaged in my reflexivity practice, I experienced a heightened sense that aiming to be reflexive was a "conscious endeavor" and of becoming "wide-awake" (Greene, 1977, pp. 120 & 121). Greene discusses in detail Alfred Schultz's work, and the importance of discriminating thoughtfulness while thinking and writing, when stating:

> Heightened consciousness and reflectiveness are meaningful only with respect to human projects, human undertakings, not in a withdrawal from the intersubjective world. He… [also points out] that human beings define themselves by means of their projects, and that wide-awakeness contributes to the creation of self. If it is indeed the case, as I believe it is, that involvement with the arts and humanities has the potential for provoking precisely this sort of reflectiveness, we need to devise ways of integrating them into what we teach at all levels of the educational enterprise. (p. 121)

I also knew my reflexive journey to include self-disclosure (Jolley, 2019) and as a result, possible growth (Finlay, 2022). I would interrogate the relationship between myself the researcher, subject, and writer (Roberts, 1982). Finally, I was aware that as the researcher, author, and subject – one's "safety – physical, psychological and emotional -… [should be] taken into consideration as part of [the] research design" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 65).

Stories Shared

Dancing with my reflexive leanings

Using a story format (Weitkamp, 2016) I share stories that emerged from thematically analyzing the reflexivity journals (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and the art created (Fish, 2018; Rollings, 2013; Saldana, 2011). Using a story format focuses on the importance of heeding a person's personal and interpersonal stirrings to new considerations surrounding "what takes place in the world" (Coles, 2004, p. 278). Stories enlighten us to write transparently and in a style that allows new ideas to flow forward. This format also supports us as researchers and practitioners to be open to learnings and varied use of art mediums to express reflexivity. Additionally, I followed Ammon's (2022) suggestion that combining traditional findings and discussion sections may be purposeful when discussing creative research outcomes. Specifically, it gives the reader the opportunity to examine the researcher's learnings and related literature simultaneously. The four stories included are the following: 1) the importance of scheduling time to inquire into and understand responses 2) trusted, supportive peers can help re-story shame; 3) living out future, educative stories are possible; and 4) a reflexive practice can include embodied responses.

Story 1. Look up While Hiking: Lessons in Blue

While analyzing my reflexivity process (journals, field notes, art) I simultaneously conducted a literature review focused on reflexivity. As well I again studied current eating disorder care and statistics. This took time, periods of reading and making notes. I highlighted the growing prevalence of eating disorders worldwide, especially in women, and the lack of data on males and other genders (Galmiche et al., 2019). As well, I noted the multiple links between development of an eating disorder to experiences of adverse events (Courtois & Ford, 2016; Rienecke et al., 2022). The National Institute of Mental Health (2018) reminds us that eating disorders are about more than food alone. The disease is about underlying mental health issues, human genetics, psychosociological contexts, adverse events, and the ongoing need for advocacy and research into causative factors. While reading the statistics, I reflexively responded by writing. "I am reflected in the statistics, this is me, I am a number" (*Reflexive journal*, May 2020). Then I responded viscerally. "I am nauseous. This is too hard to read. I know I am a researcher and a participant. I am coming to understand how complex and challenging this reflexivity inquiry is becoming" (*Reflexive journal,* June 2020).

During this time, focusing on reflexivity affirmed my heightened awareness of embodied research. Finlay states embodied research aims to capture the "bodily experience both of my participant and of myself" (2014, p. 16). I know myself as one who reduces tension through physical movement. Therefore, in response to the research I often documented how I hiked alone, my blue heelers (dogs) by my side. I had to remind myself to look up to and through the trees

and skies. To look up into the skies beyond, was a reminder that God my Higher Power was alongside for the journey. I realized walking released the tension in my neck. I paid attention to my breathing, my stride, and my pace, while thinking of the research issues, challenges, and rewards.

Cook-Cottone (2020), in her work on embodiment and eating disorders, describes the need for individuals to pay attention and grow one's understanding of the physicality of our bodies while we live. She recommends the use of the *Mindful Self-Care Scale*. So, as a researcher and participant I felt the need to complete the scale, curious as to my state. In subscale two, there is a recommendation to conduct an exercise assessment of bodily movement over a two-week period. I completed the assessment and wrote the following:

> I was surprised how high I scored on the exercise assessment; I can see where I use exercise to release tension and clear my head and release my neck pain as a researcher who spends hours reading on a computer. Yet, I am deeply aware of my past tendency to over-exercise, so I wore an old watch to monitor my walking time and to not trigger old patterns of too much activity. Interestingly, I scored low on exercising for fun and enjoyment. I wondered if I would return to hiking for fun in the future. (*Reflexive journal*, July 2021)

As part of my reflexivity process, I planned and took regular breaks from analyzing the data set and searching the literature. This was in efforts to maintain my physical health through activities such as hiking and snowshoeing. Again, I regularly reminded myself to look up to the blue skies, the heavens, the clouds for a breath of quietness. This was especially important when difficult and uncomfortable conversations arose with self and peers about the research progress. I often asked them, "had I taken on too much, why do this research, what would be the critique of art created" (*Reflexive journal,* December 2022). Le Fevre and Sawyer when exploring difficult and dangerous conversations recommend heeding how we first tell a story, then re-tell or re-write the story. Our ability to create a story, and re-create the narrative is often purposeful in our efforts to "deconstruct the sociocultural contexts surrounding our [initial] narrative ways of knowing to promote a transformative process" (2012, p. 262) within and without ourselves. For example, when I read about times when I discharged myself from eating disorder units, I could now see an adult making decisions that were framed within the healthcare supports available at the time. Today, and in reflection I wrote: "No one failed me in offering care, I refused the care. I was the one walking away, arrogant, unknowing, yet knowing" (*Reflexive journal*, June 2021). To further my contextual-societal understanding, I researched the paucity of in-patient and community-based eating disorder services I was offered. Similarly, today many eating disorder services remain outside of publicly funded health care and are underfunded and under-resourced (NIED, 2018; Stone et al., 2021). Yet, I know somehow, I did not become a mortality statistic. I am alive. Also, alongside this knowledge and in my efforts to be a reflexive practitioner, I have re-storied my story into an educative opportunity to help others. These efforts were purposeful as living in the story of self-deception (Crites, 1971) was no longer viable. Crites states:

> People do, after all, find ways of coping with self-deception, even while they live with it. They cope with it by methods they have learned from experience, too manifold for summary…But anyone who supposed that he has won his way to permanent immunity from self-deception, by whatever method, has not learned much from the experience at all. (1971, p. 128)

The reflexivity activities further described how emotionally charged and physically draining this research had become. This was a new realization as it helped me understand my responses to other research projects of which I am part. Focusing on reflexivity was challenging at times. I often sat quietly, immersed in the data, wondering, my "intuitive gut feelings" (Finlay, 2014, p. 9) overwhelming me. I wrote: "I am looking at past data, artifacts – art, images, poems, and photographs, each reflecting past ill-health and the journey to healing and present wellness. This seems so far removed from who I am today" (*Reflexive journal*, August 2021). I physically sensed and felt pain and guilt from dwelling in the data. I was experiencing feelings of shame and going against the social norm of not talking about eating disorder recovery and health. Kammerer (2019) states when one experiences shame, one negatively and inwardly focuses on self. Women are at greater risk for this response, and it may lead to or contribute to development of depression and low-self-esteem. I also knew that shame and guilt were different (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). I cognitively knew the risks and reached out to peers to discuss this element of the inquiry. As Brown states, with shame there is comfort in being with and talking with peers, "others who have had similar experiences" (2006, p. 51). This was the resilience of experiencing shame that when spoken of aloud, was reduced to a manageable state within the research (Brown, 2006).

Reflexivity, alongside the eating disorder research, allowed me to live in the present and envision a future (Dewey, 1938). In my journal I compiled the following poem titled:

Being in the Feelings

I am a participant, researcher, and author.

This work is exhausting.

My head hurts, swims, and I yearn for air.

My heart pains, races, I am filled with shame.

My eyes are burning - these come from tears.

I need to physically walk in the bush to release the angst and pain.

The black-capped chickadees follow presenting song.

The cool winds on my cheeks ground me, and

I can now breathe, deeply, quietly.

The visceral knots in my gut and chest wall ease.

I look up to see the blue skies, hope emerges.

(*Reflexive journal*, December 2020)

Story 2: Spiritual Self-care and New Awakenings

The second story emerged that was focused on the importance of spiritual self-care. Spirituality is understood as individual and is not the same as one's religion and religious practices or activities. Spirituality is not well-described in the literature focused on eating disorders (Kuhnke, 2022). Spirituality is a broad concept and was usually evidenced when I was hiking alone. For some, spirituality is merged and embedded within psychosocial literature (Akrawi et al., 2015; Richards et al., 2018). In my reflexivity practice, I leaned into Brown's definition that states spirituality is: "the deeply held belief that we are inextricably connected to each other by something greater than ourselves" (2021, p. 252).

Weathers et al. discuss spirituality as a broad concept including three key dimensions: finding meaning in life and in our work, connectedness to self and others, and transcendence - "the ability to see beyond the boundaries of the self, the environment, and present limitations" (2016, p. 91). Specifically, I leaned into the definition of transcendence as it supported me to see past the details of feeding tubes to how these experiences make me who I am today, and who I am becoming as a nurse researcher. This was important as at times, I was spiritually burdened and wondered "what was I doing in this inquiry? How would I be viewed in the academy? How would my peers view me?" (*Reflexive journal*, May 2020, 2021).

In relation to spirituality, Emerson (1965) elaborates on the human soul and our spiritual health. He reminds us to heed our spiritual needs and to attend to our soul-care. Frankl (1982), in his writings on searching for meaning in life, through horrors and adverse events, reminds us that in adversity our spiritual life lived can deepen, enrich, and grow. This was important as I am a spiritual being and at times, I felt distanced from the research, immersed in reflexivity, and reading about the hard work needed to heal from an eating disorder. Though I read my daily spiritual readings, sang hymns, and prayed, I vacillated in my writing and often felt deep pain, my chest wall aching. At times my heart rate rose, and my pulse pounded in my throat and neck. I wrote "I think I am trying to force reflexivity and the eating disorder research; I am tired of reading about the past, the present is so much more relevant, beautiful, my family, my work and life on earth brings me hope for the future" (*Reflexive journal*, August 2021).

In response, I again physically moved outside to hike deep into the quietness of the bush to pray. I felt pressure to hike aggressively, to burn off calories, though I logically knew it to be tension and internal angst from the research process. I experienced a yearning to be the thinnest at all costs "I think I could do this thin-thin' again, I was successful in the past" (*Reflexive journal*, December 2020). Yet, I knew I could not control what was reflexively occurring physically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. It was as though I was grieving the past and trying to let go of the previous pain; hard work that I thought I had completed previously (Wright, 2004).

Spiritual reflexivity activities kept me resilient when researching eating disorders and related issues. I could not prevent my bodily responses from occurring and emerging deep from within (Clay, 2015). I often wondered if this research inquiry was of value (I would return to this question often). I reminded myself to be kind to self, and engage in spiritual self-care, during the process was crucial (Finlay, 2014).

Finlay (2014) in embodying research discusses the role of somatic empathy. This was a new concept, and I therefore wondered the following: "Am I mirroring in the present what occurred in the past. As I am both the participant and the researcher, am I enacting, or thinking about re-enacting eating patterns to manage tensions of which I am reading? (*Reflexive journal,* December 2022). Finlay states this is a way of being "gentle, compassionate" with oneself "it helps us to listen and pay attention to our bodily gestures" (2014, p. 9). Our embodied selves are within, without and alongside. Finlay states this can be "likened to a shifting, improvised dance duet. Just as there is an intertwining of researcher and participant, there is one between one's body and self as the researcher

slides between intense bodily empathy and more detached bodily reflection" (p. 16).

In response when hiking, I often looked up to view the ever-changing blue skies to pray prayers of gratitude; I knew I could not conduct this inquiry without the guidance of my Higher Power and peers (see Figure 3). The photograph *Lessons in Blue - Brilliant Morning Skies* reflects the spiritual elements of reflexivity alongside the emotions and physical movements when determinedly hiking forward, while clouds simultaneously raced across the morning skies.

Figure 3: Lessons in blue – brilliant morning skies

Also, the colours envisioned by my human eye were a constant revelation. Colour is best described by Merleau-Ponty as the colours in our lives and on our palettes. He states: "we must live these colours as our body does" (1945/1962, p. 245). The colour blue, the cold white snow, and winter green boughs reminded me to press forward into reflexivity activities. The cold winds consumed me. I paid attention to the "rhythm of [my] respiration[s]" (p. 246) as I hiked. I continued to trek forward through the trees and deep undergrowth. As I moved into the bright sunlight on open hay fields, a new warmth and renewed vigor emerged, energizing me to continue to be immersed in reflexivity alongside the research.

In my journal I noted: "I stopped snowshoeing and pondered the beauty of the skies - my leg muscles pounding. I knew I could not physically have completed this hike in my years of ill-health, and now I can" (*Reflexive journal*, April 2021). With this pause a shift in research energy occurred from within, I heeded the physical sensations associated with hiking and attended to old memories of extreme thinness that hovered nearby. Processing and re-processing the stories of adverse events takes time; time I was afforded by having trusted peers alongside (talking, sharing, laughing, crying) and the place and space reflexivity provides. I was surprised that further re-processing of the events many years later, continued. Though the complexity of the adverse situation had receded, and the effects were less dominant, the process of engaging in a reflexivity practice enabled the hard work of healing to continue and evolve. Time and space were the healing factors, time to navigate body and spiritual responses to researching difficult topics.

Story 3. Shrouded and Seeking Comfort through Art created: Self-disclosure

A third story emerged reflecting a deep feeling of gratitude for my present health and wellness. I wrote: "I have lived recovered and in recovery for many years. I have terrific energy and enjoy teaching learners and researching. Most days I have a deep sense of belonging and am connected spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically. I am trying to reflect this in my growing love of creating art" (*Reflexive journal*, January & June 2021). Yet, when researching adverse events and eating disorders, feelings of guilt and shame were evoked alongside the sense of being exposed and a sense of being torn apart (Brown, 2021; Nechita et al., 2021). I felt vulnerable as a researcher and somewhat embarrassed (Brown, 2021). Shame is a complex and powerful emotion. Brown describes shame as resulting in feeling "flawed and unworthy of love" (2021, p. 134). I related to the discourse of experiencing shame about living in recovery, experiencing adverse events, and trying to write and express my reflexivity journey as a researcher. I often asked myself "who am I to present a manuscript on reflexivity expressed in several mediums including art and creative works-who do you think you are?" (*Reflexive journal*, May 2021).

Chan researched the importance of art making alongside efforts to promote health of self and others. Chan states:

> Interesting, the arts have always provided a means for seeking to illustrate all the invisible things which we know but find exceedingly difficult to articulate – images, metaphors, movement, tome, pixels, all commingled into a creating weaving of elements which we hope will conjure resonance and understanding. (2019, p. 114)

I turned to the creation of art, to find comfort from the evocation of shame and feelings of vulnerability while researching (Finley, 2011). I knew my art to be loyal, predictable and forgiving. I wrote:

> The process of creating art honours my inability, at times, to verbalize my reflexive experiences. I really wanted to run from the remnants of hating my body and being unable to breathe deeply while trying to research. I knew these responses as intimately linked to body sensations and reviewing records of adverse events; yet I needed to linger in the emotions, but not for too long. (*Reflexive journal*, February 2021)

Van der Kolk also reminds us that through art and re-storying adverse events in one's mind, alongside trusted clinicians and friends, individuals can or may develop "the power of the life force, the will to live and to own one's life, the energy that counteracts the annihilation of adverse events" (2014, p. 137). This was my experience as a researcher. I wrote:

> You responded to the eating disorder literature as a researcher – logical, yet you are also human and experienced human responses. It is okay to be, to pause in the past, but also to return to the present and nudge forward living your vision and dreams of the future. (*Reflexive journal*, January 2022)

Shrouded in comfort

I needed to create art in response to these new understandings. I headed out on my snowshoes and later wrote the following: "Today while hiking I came upon a large wasp nest hanging from the limb of a maple tree, thirty-five feet above the path, I wondered if I could retrieve the nest?" (*Reflexive journal*, January 2021). I tentatively crawled up a tall ladder and using a long pole, dislodged the vacated nest to the earth. Inside I excitedly exposed three layers of hexagon-shaped paper, each held with a firm stalk (the cells are created from wasp activity, wood cellulose and saliva) (See Figure 4) (Sciencing, 2021).

Figure 4: Complex pockets of life (Wasp nest)

Metaphorically, it reminded me to reflect on the many complex pockets of daily life, that together represent my present healthy state, far from the past. What was new and surprised me was the daunting recall of negative thoughts. When I smelled the musty odour from the wasp nest it reminded me of adverse events, that included smells of fuels, grease and associated body odours, memories, and triggers of the past. I immediately felt bad about being myself. I sat down hard in the snow, teary and childlike.

However, this deepened my wonder about the dark days of healing. The musty smell of the nest reminded me of the work "endure[d in] the dark nights of the soul" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 137) when yearning for safety, predictability and health. I thought at this point I would not use the wasp paper to create responsive art; the smell was too overwhelming, heavy, and reminded me of heady body odours related to past adverse events.

Yet, I also knew myself as changing. As part of my coming to understand the process of creating art during times of tension (Malchiodi, 2020) or as an expression of self, I eventually moved forward. I cleaned and dried the primitive, fragile paper. I related this to the sense of being torn apart, opened to a past life in the research data set. I tried to rest in the uncomfortable feelings, yet I yearned to be whole. I wrote: "At times, I was tired of the data set and the themes that emerged. I just wanted it to be over" (*Reflexive journal*, May 2022).

In response, I stood at the table and separated the multiple, coloured layers of paper into usable sheets. I envisioned beauty, art, yet to be created. I experimented with the paper, overlapping, and layering the medium into different reflexive shapes, the paper soft on my fingertips the odour minimal. The sense of being disconnected and immersed in the past dissipated, I was present, whole in the art creating process and activity. Stanghellini et al. describe this as hyper-sensing or being triggered by objects, events, odours, or memories. This is especially real for those who have lived with or have recovered from an eating disorder. They discuss the complexity of identity and hyper-sensing that occurs within oneself when stating:

> In persons with eating disorders, the disturbance of the experience of one's own body is interconnected with the process of shaping one's personal identity. The body shapes identity in the course of social situations. Sensations of attraction/repulsion, desirability/disgust, as well as all

> emotions as embodied phenomena are the basis to establish what I like and who I am. (2019, p. 132)

They further state that heeding one's felt self, and sensing one as intact or whole is an ongoing journey in healing from an eating disorder. While researching, I was experiencing this vacillation: competent/ incompetent, credible/ not credible, real/ not real, black/ white and questioning the overall goal writing about being reflexive. This made me wonder and self-doubt my reflexivity experiences. I wrote:

> I had an eating disorder and now lived recovered, or am living in recovery, whichever term or language you prefer. So, I wonder am I really expressing reflexivity in a real sense, my self-sense? Why do I doubt myself? I feel shame for attempting to share my stories. I often write, who am I, a researcher and a participant, thinking I can pull this paper together? Was I now not living in a world where through writing and art I had found my voice. Was this attempt at an article not my social action, my voice? Was I not still a work in progress? (*Reflexive journal*, March 2023).

The power of creating art was dominant, real, tactile, and vibrant. I sensed moving from shame and guilt and aimed to bring life to my effort to be a self-compassionate researcher. When writing and creating art the tensions of shame slowly drifted past, quietly they moved away into the deep shade of the trees. I felt I was gaining new insights into being a reflexive researcher (Finlay, 2022). I returned to the wasp paper creation and carefully placed each piece into a deeply walled box. I named the work *Shroud of Comfort* (See Figure 5). When gently layered, the wasp paper reflected my need for emotional comfort, kindness, and a blanket of healing (Dewey, 1958). The paper was soft, flexible, imperfect and the previously noted mustiness had faded; the symbolic meaning was deeply felt (Finlay, 2014). Wasps had worked to create a nest that lasts a season, and I am benefiting from their creation to enrich my "road to recovery" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 137). Finally, in relation to the use of art, Chan (2019) states that creating alongside efforts to heal from an eating disorder renders the artist- individual, with a voice, not mute. One becomes able to sense and embody the healing that is occurring. The wasp paper, which was stagnant and devoid of life, in turn provided comfort, a shrouding and a space to reflect and grow.

Figure 5: Shroud of comfort (Wasp paper)

Self-disclosure and fatigue

Maintaining physical and emotional comfort was key when experiencing emotions attached to self-disclosure within my reflexivity practice. Self-disclosure was slow to occur, it was "non-immediate" (Finlay, 2022, p. 44); I was deeply concerned about over-disclosure. Alongside my peers there were thoughtful, reflective conversations and review of the writing, each aiming to demonstrate a conscious effort to manage the narrative and find the "delicate balance required" (2022, p. 45). As I read the literature, I became more aware that the treatments and interventions I initially received in eating disorder clinics in the early 1980s and 90s focused on the weight, scales, and food diaries (Kwee & Launeanu, 2019). I knew I was eventually blessed to have received holistic treatment later in the 1990s and into 2000 as evidenced in care that included art, spirituality, nutrition, and a focus on who I was becoming.

My reflexivity practice grew as I responded to my inquiry into eating disorders, art, and healing (Kuhnke, 2021), spirituality and wellness (Kuhnke, 2022), and trust-filled relationships with registered dieticians (Kuhnke, 2022, *unpublished manuscript*). After each work I wrote reflexively: "I am spent, too tired and too fatigued to continue. Have I crossed the invisible line of self-disclosure" (*Reflexive journal*, May 2021). After each was published, I tentatively and very cautiously told a peer about the success; then I awaited their negative responses. None came. I had expected the worst and expected more shame to

be piled on me for publishing the content. None came. I was not prepared for 'none'. A few peers eventually sent comments to me "this is interesting and thoughtful work" (*Reflexive journal*, June 2021). It was as if I was not sure what do to with kind and positive comments. The third manuscript remains unpublished, though at times, I return and re-read the creation. I noted in my reflexivity journal, that what I had completed was enough for now. I was physically, mentally, and spiritually spent; I know I needed to nurture my creative self, alongside my spiritual and physical self - rest and heal (Kwee & Launeanu, 2019).

Story 4. Living Purposefully: Re-storied Narratives

The final story that emerged from reflexivity activities was that of living deliberately and purposefully. This included finding a voice outside my comfort zone, asking for and receiving feedback, and seeking to understanding the sense of being 'othered' as a researcher. These are discussed together as they relate to the new perspectives and insights gained (Finlay, 2014).

Nudged out of my comfort zone

Within my logical mind, I had quietly and deliberately (Emerson, 1965) determined that I was prepared to share my reflexivity stories. I naively thought it would be challenging and yet rewarding at the same time. However, I quickly learned I was not prepared for the emotional, spiritual, and bodily responses. Though I continued to write reflexively it seemed as if I was having a "difficult encounter" (Finlay, 2005, p. 31) with myself. Though I had logically planned balanced periods time to thematically analyze the journals, responsive art, and phone calls and emails with my peers, realized I was being nudged out of my comfort zone. I was uncomfortable with the significance of my growing understanding of reflexivity.

Reflexivity activities were not ordered work. I could not force new discoveries to emerge in my preferred time frame. I realized I had to respond to my physical, spiritual, and emotional needs, and not rigidly adhere to the reflexivity plan. I had to respond to the needs of the subject- myself in the inquiry, the participant and not just the researcher. Acknowledging this early in the study supported a shift in my narrative. I found that the findings and associated literature searches emerged more fluidly, with less tension within and without. This was the dance that Finlay wrote about when she stated: "the success of the dance rests largely on the researcher's attitude and preparedness to be openly present to his or her partner" (2006, pp. 1-2). I needed to be with the subject of the study (myself) and with the details of the reflexive journal as a researcher. The process was effective, I danced somewhat awkwardly, yet generally swayed in line with the goal. I was nudged out of my comfort zone on many occasions. Uncomfortable steps were taken, conversations occurred, and quandaries were faced (Finlay, 2006); though at times I wanted the stories to remain ethereal. Frankl states story-work becomes "completely down to earth rather than afloat in the air or resident in an ivory tower (1982, p. 168). I call this learning – living purposefully, with self-compassion and kindness. This work was becoming something that I am, the redirection and re-storying of the reflexivity stories emerging alongside me, in my present life and the future (Malchiodi, 2020).

Sharing aloud: Open to learning

One of the difficult learnings of this inquiry was the notion of asking for and receiving feedback. Reading aloud sections of the manuscripts had become regular practice with my research peer over the last four years. Yet, due to the pandemic I had less opportunity to read the manuscript aloud, face-to-face, as was my preference. I instead took a risk (in my mind) and sent a copy of the reflexivity manuscript to two trusted researchers at the university. In response, I was again prepared for the worst - my catastrophic thinking armed (Courtois & Ford, 2016). I had made up a story of failure and rejection that would sound like this: "What are you doing? This is foolish writing. How does this add to the literature? Are you not afraid of repercussions on your tenure track application? What will you do when students read your papers?" (*Reflexive journal*, March 2021, December 2022). However, my peers responded with relevant comments, ideas, and suggestions. "Keep going, this is important work. This is brave work. Please keep sharing. The arts-based responses add to your textual descriptions" (*Reflexive journal*, May 2021). These were powerful words of encouragement in times of hesitation and wondering. Le Fevre and Sawyer in their discussions on relevant communication strategies between peers call these "open-to-learning conversations" (2012, p. 264). These were timely replies in the inquiry. Each peer's reply quietly nudged me forward in difficult times of doubt and questioning about the content and progress of the inquiry.

Of interest when thematically analyzing the reflexivity accounts, was the experience or feeling fear in response to the content emerging. I dreaded that I might be perceived as 'other' or 'be-othered' by my peers (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). I wondered if I would be 'that person' or 'that researcher' with a history of adverse events and an eating disorder. Would I respond professionally and confidently if I was asked about the

inquiry, and could I publicly disseminate the findings? van der Kolk states this can be challenging as "traumatic events are almost impossible to put into words" (2014, p. 233). I wrote the following in my reflexivity journal:

> I know sharing reflexivity learnings is hard work, especially to remain open to new insights. Fear of being othered, might literally bury me, shred me to nothing. I do realize this is my story, othering me will not change that fact. I am the person in the eating disorder data. This was me; this is how I used to live. I feel defensive, quiet, consumed with the fear of being rejected. Yet, I know this felt-sense will logically pass as I am also a researcher, seeking to gain and maintain opportunity to grow as a nurse. (*Reflexive journal*, May 2021)

I sought and gained solace by coming to name the reflexive experiences with words that describe emotions (Brown, 2021). Though using emotional language was never my forte, naming emotions was a growing experience. In the past, I might have rolled up pain and the unspeakable truths into the mastery of silence and quietness.

However, during further reflexivity analysis and writing, I regularly wondered if I was adding to the literature. I wondered if feeling brave as a researcher and living a brave life would carry me along? Brown (2018) explored being brave and encourages individuals to learn to trust self and others. I questioned if this was relevant as a researcher conducting autobiographical research. Was I being brave engaging in reflexivity? What I learned was that I could slowly frame and share reflexivity writings and subsequent learnings as a therapeutic healing tool (Alexander et al., 2018). Brown further challenges us to ask if we can be uncomfortable, stay and visit with, what she describes as the "rumble with vulnerability" (2018, p. 73). To understand this, I explored the work of Le Fevre and Sawyer who discuss the complexities of difficult conversations. They remind us that these challenging conversations can also be learning experiences that:

> Demand attention to both the relationship and the task in ways that enable people to share and examine ideas and interpretations within a relationship of respect. These productive conversations have been referred to as open-to-learning-conversations…are characterized by a number of core values, including the pursuit of valid information so that decisions are based on quality information and reasoning. Respect is an important value in open learning conversations and implies an essential relationship between the parties in the conversation so that one another's views are treated with the same care and there are opportunities for reciprocal influence. (2012, p. 264)

During the research, I regularly verbalized doubts about the eating disorder research. My friend reminded me that being brave, showing up, and acknowledging the feelings of being vulnerable was part of the process. Greene also offered hope by imagining possibilities, envisioning "things as they could be otherwise" (2002, p. 16). I envisioned a life where I could transparently speak of the past, knowing it contributes to the present and future (Dewey, 1938) as both a researcher and participant. Greene states, autobiographical research can "nudge… [us] out of somnolence and move… [us] somehow to choose to act, to engage in a beginning" (2002, p. 121). In response to these wonders and tensions, I painted *Pink in Winter* (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Pink in winter (Oil on canvas)

This image was inspired and emerged when hiking into the deep, white snow that graced the fields and blew wildly across my hiking paths. I perceived pink light and bright colours in contrast to the cold winds whipping around my body; each offering hope and brightness for the future (after the pandemic). This added to my feeling of contentment while outside in the crisp air; my senses were alive (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). In response to Pink in Winter I wrote the following poem:

Yearning for Colour

I know life to be quiet during the pandemic, research inquiries flow slowly.
Yet, I yearn for the comfort of colour in the winter morning.
Around me oak trees securely retain their gold and bronze leaves.
Green pine and firs are buried deep in snow and
Rest quietly, tips bright in the sun.
I regularly hike deep into the bush, my muscles pounding.
Against, the data focused on body image, size, and weight.
I pray for insights and hope.
I respond and journal.
The sun rises gently, bringing light and crowning the hills.
Pink softens the early skies; tree trunks reflect the flushed colours
Dawn awakens.
My perception of pink seems incomplete, and yet,
My canvas captures the light, imperfectly.
Hope emerges, and quiet purposeful living continues.

Writing and creating reflexively while undertaking research was complex, multi-layered and it was challenging to describe the many pockets, layers, and nuances. This was especially true when immersed in literature related to eating disorders and mental health, well-being, and healing. First, I was reading about my past disdain for my size, and yearning to be the thinnest, pummelling myself with harm. Second, I was immersed in years of data where I struggled and yearned to be well and gain health. Third, I was living in the present, with years of health on my side, practicing as a community-based researcher and clinician. Fourth, I was trying to study what it meant to be embodied, when I had spent years trying to be disconnected from any sense of my body.

Therefore, being, living and engaging in research and reflexivity activities as an embodied researcher was a new concept, a new way of being. I thought I was embodied, but I realized I kept my physical self out of my research. Kelly et al. state embodied reflexivity attends to "how individuals negotiate their everyday lived via their bodies" (2017, p. 3). Particularly the physical sense of self mediated alongside and within and when reflexively writing. Heeding my bodily responses when hiking, walking, and snowshoeing added a new dimension to my understanding. Through analysis of my reflexivity accounts, I also became aware of and heeded my body's physical responses to inquiring into past health living with adverse events and an eating disorder. For me, this enriched my learning (Finlay, 2014) and validated my preference to ignore bodily responses preferring to rest in cognitive and emotional frames (Kelly et al., 2017). I came to appreciate that my reflexivity activities could have been analytical and cognitive, less embodied. Yet, through analysis of the reflexive processes I immersed myself within, I was able to engage myself in my surroundings, my environment, my body, while researching (Spatz, 2017). I could now think of new ways to present my reflexive learnings and consider "new ways of examining an old problem" (2017, p. 3).

Finally, the term 'embodiment' arises in the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), a well-known phenomenologist. He emphasized that the "body is never isolated from the world but instead is always engaged in it, observed and touched by others" (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2018, p. 9). Merleau-Ponty further emphasizes the importance of exploring the lived "body from the point of view of the self" (1945/1962, p. 103). Specifically, this approach asks us to not perceive the body in "a purely statistical sense" (p. 105), such as score on a depression rating tool, a blood pressure measurement, a weight, or a laboratory value, but as a body intuitively sensed, belonging to, and perceived by the individual alone. Dewey further states, when congruent the body and all its' perceptive elements encompass our experiences and is in many ways our "means of communication" with self and the world (1934, p. 106). Is this not the challenge for us as researchers, living alongside participants, and living in society.

Finlay describes embodiment as a deep "felt sense" (2014, p. 9) one experiences within the body while researching. This includes a critical reflection on one's authentic self and lived experience while moving along through the research inquiry (Finlay, 2011). The researcher asks self, what is the expression and "language of the body" while engaged in the details of the analysis (Finlay, 2012, p. 322). Finlay further explains, the body "acts as a sensor, a detector of meaning which helps us empathize with, interpret, and understand participants' experiences. If we're alert, physical sensations and our own felt-sense arising out of the relational space between can provide crucial cues" (2014, p. 6). Furthermore, Spatz states the embodied alertness and understanding of one's experiences can be captured in many ways; embodiment may be understood through access of performative and arts-based activities such as "movement, rhythm, touch, song, speech, storytelling, combat, sexuality, gesture, and facial expression.

Each of these can be broken down into smaller elements of analysis and many technical systems exist for doing so" (2017, p. 9).

Discussion: Moving Forward Reflexivity Practice Continues

Based on the thematic analysis of my reflexive accounts I contributed - albeit cautiously, to the goal of growing my understanding of reflexive practice as a qualitative health researcher (Finlay, 2014). This learning was framed in my deep awareness of ethical responsibilities to myself and the goal of expanding my understanding of reflexivity processes in which we undertake as researchers (Finlay, 2022). Progress would not have been possible without coming to the early and uncomfortable realization of my participant and researcher positioning (Roberts, 1982). It also would not have been so rich an experience without editorial feedback on being an embodied researcher (*Private communication*, Finlay, 2022) and from reviewers.

Undertaking research on reflexivity processes lends itself to exploration of self within and without and alongside research practices (Roberts, 1982). Additionally, framing reflexivity within a contextual-discursive, reflexive practice (Finlay, 2012) and art-based approaches provided a fluid frame in which the researcher-participant could explore difficult and rewarding issues. Also, the use of a story format allowed the presentation of findings and analysis to occur simultaneously (Chase, 2011; Coles, 2004; Crites, 1971; Paterson, 2004; Saldana, 2011; Weitkamp, 2016).

In relation to embodiment, Vara (2021) states that in order to understand the role of embodiment and somatic experience it was necessary to heed bodily awareness. She states, this performative action can be the source of research knowledge, from both inside and outside. Within my reflexivity practice, my growing embodied knowing evoked vulnerability, in which I responded by reflexively journaling, engaging in conversation, and enacting arts-based activities thereby generating new research and understanding as a researcher. This was further evidenced in uncomfortable encounters as there were "…moments when I did not know who was responding to whom…I lost sight of my own identity as I embraced her [the client's] memories" (Roberts, 1982, p. 7).

Additionally, Frith et al. (2019) reviewed experimental research on embodied creativity (n=20) related to mind-body connections, and fine and whole-body movement, with the goal of exploring creativity outputs. They specifically explore the importance of ambulation (walking) and modality selection of physical embodiment. They emphasize the importance of cognition and embodied creativity as was seen in the reflexivity analysis. The researcher and participant were shaped and re-shaped by navigating and living out multiple roles within the research. This included physical responses and movement, and this was captured through reflexive practice activities (journals, art, movement, thinking, talking). The researcher and subject thereby experienced, lived, and imaginatively moved between the roles growing physically, emotionally, and cognitively – and adding to the research literature.

Spatz further reminds us that when practiced, reflexivity can be purposeful, engaged, and embodied. This approach to embodied research is about new discoveries of oneself, the topic, and the socio-cultural space in which the research occurs (Spatz, 2017). Spatz also reminds us of the importance of assessing if the research being undertaken produces outcomes that are new, clear, and reasonably based on the goal. In this case, the learning about embodiment within and surrounding reflexivity was significant. The reflexivity process began with reading the literature, surrounding self with trust-filled relationships and multiple mediums for reflexivity expression. Reflexivity provided a place and space where I was able to heed bodily, physical senses experienced while researching (Finlay, 2014). This reinforced my understanding that reflexivity is individual and may be "perilous, full of muddy ambiguity and [with] multiple trails" (2014, p. 212). As well, reflexivity requires one to consider "what am I trying to do; why am I carrying out the … [inquiry] this way; [and] how is my approach affecting the research?" (Finlay, 2012, p. 317).

Finlay furthers this discussion when reviewing the role of self, including "being relational and being present as a human being" (2022, p. 154). In reflexivity, being human, when having lived with and living in recovery from an eating disorder, and now researching the issue added a layer of complexity to my search for additional meaning. Yet this became a "being-in-relationship" (p. 158) with self, as a researcher, especially within in the socio-relational world" (p. 154) in which we research. Kwee and Launeanu discuss embodiment in the treatment and recovery from an eating disorder. Their emphasis on mind-body connections will help those suffering stand against the "objectification prevalent in our society and in treatment that perpetuates mind-body dualism" (2019, p.

356). When applied to one researching, I found this relevant and being lived out by myself. I was initially surprised by my lack of awareness of embodiment though it was occurring and being journaled about, I had not yet named the experience. Kwee and Launeanu discuss the long-term challenges when living in recovery, they state,

> recovering one's embodied agency goes hand in hand with experiencing an increased sense of freedom in one's body. Having become aware of what one's body wants, the person can now explore her capacity and responsibility for one's choices…Addressing freedom and responsibility together as they relate to one's body may be a powerful therapeutic tool for discussing some difficult or sensitive topics…. A special way through which embodied freedom can be fully experienced is through engaging in spontaneous and pleasurable body movement. (2019, p. 354)

Furthermore, the positioning of self in research should be explored, become clear, and remain fluid to give opportunity to create new learnings and perspectives (Finlay, 2022). Also, it is often the hope that one's positioning may change and grow through the reflexivity processes. Kwee and Launeanu state that when embodied "our bodies are the spaces through which each of our lived is realized and through which we dedicate ourselves to a sense of purpose. True recovery from eating disorders must integrate self within the body" (2019, p. 355). Pinnegar and Quiles-Gernandez (2018), in their self-study of researcher relationships with participants, also reinforce the importance of being committed to understanding each persons' story and role in research studies. They emphasize the importance of attending to one's sense of vulnerability in research relationships and the benefits of enacting reflexive activities. This was possible by utilizing a contextual-discursive, reflexive practice approach (Finlay, 2012). This approach provided a place and space to critically analyze the reflexivity accounts and the relationships between self and the analysis of the journals and art.

The opportunity to gently walk between roles, alongside trusted peers was of importance. This was of value especially the need to have physical space, and a place to emotionally be and to physically heed the bodily responses, reactions, and needs I was expressing. This included unstructured physical hikes and walking in the bush, creating quiet spaces to hand-write, type, and journal online, and create responsive art works in and outdoors, including paying attention to the process of creating (Dewey, 1958). Roberts (2002) further reminds researchers that the multiple roles we may play, author, researcher, and subject, are not one in the same. Roberts states that understanding these roles early and throughout the inquiry is possible through:

> concentration on the text, its literary and aesthetic character, the use of devices such as metaphor, description of the context, and the expectations of the audience, have been part of an emphasis on the composition of the text while challenging the author as having a superior, or privileged gaze or understanding. (1982, pp. 161-162)

The purposeful act of reflexive journaling and creating art aided in balancing emotional and physical responses while researching. Art and the production of a work may utilize different mediums (e.g., oil paints, pencil, charcoal, photographs) (Carpendale, 2009; Moon, 2010). Researchers creating art can utilize their works as part of the reflexive journey. The sheer amount of time required to write and create may be underestimated by some, and these processes cannot be forced or dominated by research time constraints or demands. As a researcher, the time it took to create a work of art often equalized and or circumvented to same amount of time it would have taken to try to verbalize or write what I was physically experiencing from being within the reflexivity dataset.

While researching and reflexively creating, researchers can ask themselves questions that focus on one's embodiment (Finlay, 2014; Spatz, 2017). For example: What your body is doing while you are researching? What are you thinking as you read, re-read, listen to data being read aloud, and talking with peers about the themes? How are you remaining healthy, curious and giving yourself a place and space to wonder? Malchiodi (2020), in her studies on expressive art and trauma, also focused on individual resilience in the face of day-to-day living. She recommends "warm-up activities" (2020, p. 288) to begin the reflective process. By starting one's research day with familiar creative materials, drawing and paint, one may become more confident in their reflexive practice. She reminds us that being engaged with self and with art mediums suggesting this gives further opportunity to provide "structure, boundaries, and opportunity to engage" (p. 288) moving forward in a learning mode.

Through research processes, one can choose to heed the physicality and bodily responses to the inquiry. By paying attention to one's physical, emotional, and social responses one may grow and simultaneously generate new research findings. In this inquiry, I began to heed a deep sense of needing to physically move within an outdoor environment.

The fresh air allowed me to breathe deeply and think otherwise, and to imagine possibilities (Greene, 1995). Greene states that

> in relation to the surging of experience and art, that human bodies can take shapes, you never thought a human body could take, with designs made by human limbs and shoulders and heads-until the very presence of the human body changes, shedding off all fixity, becoming itself a process, something changing, something becoming in space and time. (1995, p. 94)

Finally, reflexivity in this inquiry was threaded forward, around, and through the research questions and process. It is not inert. It was active, engaged, creative, cognitive, spiritual, and emotional (Finlay, 2022). From my direct observation and practice, reflexivity became alive when expressed in an arts-based medium or journaled in a text or poem. Reflexivity practice was part of the initial study plan, and was not an afterthought (Finlay, 2011). Though at times, the reflexivity practice involved uncomfortable, complicated conversations as I navigated multiple roles (Pinar, 2012). Dangerous conversations included asking for and receiving feedback and learning to find a voice aloud (Le Fevre & Sawyer, 2012). I tried to consistently seek additional truths and be open to new perspectives (Finlay, 2022). This is enduring work, it takes time, tea, and long walks to purposefully process the questions I was experiencing. I sought to understand some truths in my ongoing efforts to understand my responses and reactions to the process of engaging in autobiographical research (Roberts, 1982).

Conclusion

In closing, I believe this paper cautiously offers new insights into reflexivity expressed in research. This inquiry would not be possible if it was not for researchers ahead of me who are actively exploring embodiment (Cascino et al., 2019; Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo, 2018; King, 2019; Montelone et al., 2017; Rossi et al., 2021). As well, I am grateful to researchers exploring and sharing their experiences with reflexivity (Finlay, 2014; Spatz, 2017) and to those who were brave and published their reflexivity experiences (Clay, 2015; Finlay 2002, 2006, 2014). Finally, thank you to researchers who support use of arts-based activities to balance the use of text and art-created (Finlay, 2022; Finley, 2011, 2018; Holm et al., 2018; Malchiodi, 2020; Moon, 2010).

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She credits her artistic family members who are gardeners, florists, and handcrafters for her perspectives on art, reading, song and music. Her neighbours were carpenters, rug makers, painters, music players of many instruments, singers, and songwriters. Her public and high school teachers encouraged participation in band, theatre, dance, art, creative art, and woodworking. During the pandemic she began to study the practical joy of art as expressed through many books about Maud Lewis as she loved her colours, use of many media, and joy of painting.

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