

Using found poetry to illuminate the existential and posttraumatic growth of women with breast
cancer engaging in art therapy

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Biography

Rosemary C. Reilly is an Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Human Sciences and Graduate Program Director of the MA program in Human Systems Intervention at Concordia University in Montréal. Her research interests focus on the use of qualitative, arts-based and contemplative methods in researching adversity and the impact of trauma on individuals and communities. She also investigates both individual and social creativity and posttraumatic growth.

Dr. Virginia Lee is Interim Senior Nursing Research Consultant at the McGill University Health Centre and Assistant Professor at the Ingram School of Nursing in McGill University. Her research focuses on the study and evaluation of supportive care interventions to manage the existential crisis of cancer and improve quality of life across all phases of the cancer patient experience.

Kate Laux is an art therapist and arts-based researcher, who founded the art therapy program at Cedars CanSupport in 2010 by creating an open art studio for patients in oncology. Kate recently relocated to Ithaca NY, where she co-founded Open Art Hive by partnering with local non-profit organizations to bring free and inclusive open art studios to different communities. She currently works for the Mental Health Association of Tompkins County.

Andréanne Robitaille is the Cedars CanSupport program director at the McGill University Health Centre since 2014. Cedars CanSupport provides free, humanitarian support to cancer patients and their families, from their time of diagnosis and treatment, through post-treatment, and when necessary end of life. Andréanne is a Registered nurse, with a Baccalaureate and Masters degree in Nursing and is a PhD student at Université de Montréal.

Abstract

Arts-based research (ABR) is a methodological genre, which adapts the tenets of the creative arts to make social science research accessible, evocative and engaging. It crosses the boundaries of both art and science, but has made few inroads within psychology. This paper describes a pilot project examining how art-making shaped the trajectories of women diagnosed and treated for breast cancer. Using ABR as a way of distilling the findings, we demonstrate how experiences of existential and posttraumatic growth can be understood more profoundly through found poetry. *Found poems* (interview excerpts reframed as poetry) offer a richer, more meaningful, and potent evocation of themes than traditional coding. Poetry permits the voice of the participant to be more clearly heard, and allows the reader to access deeper insights and understandings of the complexities of growth through adversity.

Keywords: existential growth; posttraumatic growth; found poems; arts-based research; poetry; women; breast cancer; art therapy

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About Carol¹

**I loved making the box from clay.
Inside, is a little flat rock.
It's very smooth on both sides.
But in the middle,
There's a streak that's rough.**

**I felt like that.
My life was smooth before.
But there's this rough patch,
Having cancer.
But now it's getting smooth again.**

Carol was 65 when she was diagnosed with stage-two breast cancer. After a lumpectomy, she received chemotherapy and radiation. During her treatment she participated in an art therapy group with other women with breast cancer. This ten-line found poem captures the essence of her experience. The poem urges us to be empathetic, revealing this moment of her social reality (Leavy, 2015). It fosters a connection between Carol and us since we, as the audience, can relate to, embody, and experience the poem as if it could be our own (Faulkner, 2017). Through this poem we witness Carol's journey (Prendergast, 2009).

This is an example of arts-based research (ABR), the systemic use of artistic processes as a way of understanding and examining lived experiences (McNiff, 2008). It is an expanding methodological genre, which attempts to make research publically accessible, emotionally and/or politically evocative, and socially transformative by engaging the audience into seeing and thinking differently (Chilton & Leavy, 2014). However, ABR has made few inroads within psychology. This article makes a case for using this methodology by describing the existential growth (EG) and posttraumatic growth (PTG) experiences of women with breast cancer who engaged in art therapy sessions as they navigated their cancer experiences.

Poetry as a Form of Arts-Based Research

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Poetry is, perhaps, one of humanity's oldest literary forms. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* from ancient Mesopotamia is regarded as the earliest surviving great work of literature. Poetry has the ability to clarify and magnify our existence, creating an alternative way of knowing what it is to be human (Hirshfield, 1997). As a mode for dissemination, poetry can make research more accessible to the reader, especially when trying to describe the indescribable (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009). It demands us to listen deeply- putting ourselves inside the experience of another- feeling, tasting, hearing what someone is saying, or not saying (Neilsen, 2004). Poetry gives us a space and a form to experiment with language in order to fashion, know, and imaginatively engage with experience (Leggo, 2008).

But poetic representation is not an end in itself; it is political. Its goal is to change the way we think and feel about people and their lives (Denzin, 2014), and how we think about research. "The poet makes the world visible in new and different ways, in ways ordinary social science writing does not allow" (p. 86). Poetry is a frequent ABR form since it lends itself to the representations of authentic voices, counteracts the typical power and authority structures of scholarly texts, and is a more powerful, sensorial, and emotionally moving method of data representation than traditional academic prose (Faulkner, 2009).

Found Poetry

A found poem is created by taking words, phrases, and whole passages from other sources (e.g. interview transcripts) and reframing them as poetry by changing the spacing, order, and/or lines (Butler-Kisber, 2010). In this way, it honors the participant's language and speaking style (Prendergast, 2009). Found poetry is an imaginative reconstruction that has the "unique ability to capture and present aspects of the past (in memory), present (in experience), and future (in hope/fear)" (pp. 369-370). The found poem is a compressed, concise, yet complex, representation

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of data, signifying a union of both participant voices and researcher perspectives. As a method of data distillation, found poems concentrate the voice of the participant while illuminating the wholeness of meaning and interconnections of thought (Glesne, 1997), contrary to the disconnected, parsed categories within traditional coding processes. They bring the researcher closer to the data in ways that are capable of yielding fresh insights, which may be imperceptible using conventional procedures. They are useful for cutting through a researcher's filters, subjectivities, or blinds spots, increasing the ability to really *hear* the data (Bhattacharya, 2008). Found poems attempt to reconcile the tensions between commitments to participants' voice, researcher insight, and political rationales (Leavy, 2015).

Description of This Project

This pilot study, embedded and conducted in a tertiary care cancer center, examined the impact of participation in an on-going art therapy and support group on the experiences of women diagnosed, treated, and living through breast cancer.

Methodology and Research Questions

Using an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and accessed through language and shared meanings, we adopted a comparative case study qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2012). As a multidisciplinary research team of four women, a psychosocial-oncology nurse researcher, a credentialed art therapist, an executive director of a cancer support organization, and an educational psychology researcher, we were particularly interested in the following research questions:

- How does art therapy shape the processes of meaning making of women diagnosed with breast cancer?
- How does this meaning subsequently impact their lives?

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Participants and Methods

Ten women between the ages of 41 and 67 years, diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer, participated in a series of 2-hour art therapy group sessions. We interviewed each woman about the impact of art-making on her cancer trajectory, employing a semi-structured interview process, with an open-ended, conversational format. In addition, we analyzed the artist statements of five of the participants, prepared as part of an informal exhibition at a local library and open art studio.

Analysis

As a team, we collectively and simultaneously coded one interview transcript in depth using open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We developed and defined the codes and their relationships, creating a codebook. This formed the foundation for the analysis process for the remaining transcripts and artist statements. The remaining data were then analyzed using the constant comparison method, collectively revising the codes and the code structure as new themes and relationships emerged.

When we collectively and individually examined the data, we were struck by the poignancy, yearning, and emotion evident in the interviews. The participants demonstrated profound insight and growth that emerged from facing death. However, when we examined the codes and transcript excerpts, we noticed that the emotional resonance that affected us most deeply was missing. Though our conclusions were rigorously derived, and the themes of EG and PTG were found across all cases, they did not communicate the depth of lived experience, feeling, and self-disclosure that these women had shared. We were moved by the expressive vulnerability of these women.

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Richardson (1997) states that writing is a process through which we can connect more directly to others. We wanted to more directly access and share the textured emotional lives of these women that more traditional analysis limits. We wanted the participants' lived experience to be more clearly and directly communicated to the audience, bypassing the emotional distance placed by traditional modes of data analysis. We wanted to invite the health services community into an open space for thinking about the nature of whole person cancer care and communicate these findings using a different mode of knowing than the dominant paradigm. "Aristotle articulated three kinds of 'thought': knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis)" (Irwin, 2004, p. 27). So we, therefore, turned to found poetry.

Crafting the Found Poems

The first author created the found poems, since she had the most experience with this method. Creating found poetry is not a linear procedure. It requires returning to the transcripts many times to get at the subtleties of the participant's words. Having coded the transcripts using open coding, she already had done a close reading of the material. She created the found poems by going through each transcript numerous times, highlighting nuggets (Butler-Kisber, 2002), sentences, phrases, or words that were particularly meaningful, powerful, moving, or thought provoking. The nuggets were then transferred to another document, and reconstructed into a poem, using words in order to paint a feeling-picture (Leavy, 2015). These feeling-pictures tried to honor the participant's original meaning by representing the prevailing and underlying thoughts and feelings expressed by that particular participant.

Rosemary decided to use the format of free verse, an open form of poetry. Free verse does not use consistent meter patterns or rhyme, and tends to follow the rhythm of natural speech, thereby conserving as much as possible the original voice of the participant. Consequently, the majority

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of the found poems are relatively “untreated” (i.e., she conserved virtually the same order, syntax, and meaning as the original source) with minimal alterations or additions (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Changes were added to make grammatical sense or to increase the lyrical quality. The poetic line, the unit of language into which the poem was divided, was used to give the piece a sense of structure and to add emphasis, rhythm, silence, and breath to the poetic representation. Reading the poems out-loud became a key process since poetry has a performative/auditory dimension (Butler-Kisber, 2002). One participant tinkered with her poem to increase the clarity of her experience. Not all transcripts lend themselves to creating found poems (Butler-Kisber, 2010); some of the results sounded flat and uninspiring to the ear. Therefore, Rosemary concentrated on the transcripts of six participants, which yielded poems that were deemed to be the most powerful and evocative. Only then were these poems compared to the themes derived in the customary method of analysis.

Though Faulkner (2009) rightly contends that, “some poetry published as academic research...seemed sloppy, ill-conceived, and unconsidered” (p. 19), we believe that these found poems speak with a compelling, resonant truth, revealing something tangible and palpable about these women’s experiences navigating breast cancer and making art. We opted for achieving verisimilitude, the creation of a realistic, authentic, and life-like portrayal of the breast cancer experience (Leavy, 2015). This resonance was evident when the poems were first shared with the research team, the participants, and their family members, who confirmed the poems’ effectiveness in communicating something essential about their experience. They reported that the poems truly reflected what they felt there and then, that the poems still spoke to them even though time had passed. This resonance was further underscored when shared with members of the general public.

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Findings as Found Poems

Since art-making was the catalyst for growth, the first poem illuminates the theme *Art as Reconnector-Connector*. Art-making as a process created opportunities for the participants to reconnect/connect with past and/or present Selves and relationships. This reconnection-connection allowed them to (re)discover something essential or new about the Self in the context of facing cancer. Making art fashioned an interstitial reflective space for the participants to reconfigure their perceptions of themselves as more than women with breast cancer. These reconfigured perceptions acted as fertile ground for processes of growth to take root.

I'm like you now... About Sofia

**I remember when I was diagnosed,
People asked if I felt *Why me?*
Why me?
I never said *Why me*.
I said, "The statistics are there, so it's one of us."
Why me means I wanted that for somebody else.
But I did say, "*Why now?*"
I remember that.
"*God, why now?*"**

**Because I was as old as my mom,
When she went through cancer.**

And my mom didn't make it.

**The thing about my mom and me is that she used to always say,
"You are not like me. You're not like me,"
In terms of personality, in terms of how we looked at the world.
"You're not like me."**

**But as you grow up,
You want to be like your mother.
And I found,
I was like her, when I was going through cancer.
When I looked in the mirror,
I re-lived my mom's cancer at the same time as my own.**

**I used to be a free spirit, when I was young,
But I lost myself.
I guess I followed the path that everyone wants you to,
To be successful in this**

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And that.

And I lost myself.

I'm not a traditional Italian woman.

I'm not.

My mom was more traditional.

I'm more the free spirit.

But all the values, of course,

That was her.

We were three girls, and she would always say,

"You're not like me. Your sister is more like me."

It was more the second phase of my cancer that was the hardest one,

When I lost my hair.

When I looked in the mirror, when I didn't have hair,

I used to look at my face and I used to see her.

And that was even harder for me,

Because I was reliving her cancer,

Knowing very well that she didn't make it.

I looked at my mirror,

And it's not like we had the same features or anything.

But I saw her

And I said to her,

"I'm like you now. Look, I am like you now."

Existential Growth

Individuals facing life-threatening illness are more likely to become cognitively engaged with fundamental existential questions about death, meaning, and the purpose of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). EG involves the deep psychological and spiritual changes that occur when individuals face, rather than deny, their mortality (Sodergren et al., 2004) while confronting life-threatening adversities. One area of growth involves the *quest for authenticity* (Wong, 2010), which is the reconsideration of fundamental priorities. Facing a life-threatening illness, and exploring this through art-making, participants came to clarify for themselves a fresh sense of what was important. The following poem illustrates facing death, and how, in facing death, the participant reconsidered and reordered her fundamental life values.

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*Time in the before, the now, and the after: About D.A.P.**Time in the before*

**The before was this kind of dark place, after starting chemo,
That I'd go to sometime.
We all go there when we are cancer patients, I guess.**

**Things were being done to me,
External treatments, infusions.**

**So I took to colouring mandalas during my appointments,
Every week
Throughout the months of treatment.
One part distraction,
One part expression,
One part coping.**

**We spend a lot of time in waiting rooms,
Waiting around in waiting rooms with tons of old magazines,
None of them very interesting.**

**At first they put the needle into my right arm.
So I would just use my left hand.
It took forever.
But that was ok, because I was given 4½-hour infusions.
It would take the whole time to do a mandala with my left hand.**

**But I thought the process itself would infuse my troubled veins, bones, and organs
With all the protective love and energy I required.**

**The mandalas became that space,
Became a little escape.
So instead of a place to be stuck by needles, it became a place to make my mandalas.**

And it did help.

**It's allowed things that are otherwise tangled to be separated.
It allowed things that were drowning or buried to surface.**

Time in the now

**Now, it's really about one thing at a time:
The objective *now*,
The moment *now*,
The me *now*,
My situation *now*.**

**This is kind of how you have to be.
I think it is the only way you can deal with it.**

What's relevant is the *now*.

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Now, money is mattering more.

Time in the after

**Money is more important, because I want my son to have the opportunity to go to school.
I want him to be supported in ways that I never was.
I want my son to have a better footing than what I had,
Which he already does.
But if I don't live long,
I want to make sure there is something here for him.
I've committed myself to doing a lot of things for the sake of long-term gain,
That is more attached to my son than it is to myself.
I still have time to make that happen.**

I have a future but it is such an ambiguous place.

Within EG there are additional quests (Wong, 2010). The *quest for fulfillment and freedom* is often expressed by desiring increased self-direction, choice, and autonomy. Feeling out of control while navigating cancer and undergoing surgeries and treatments, participants wanted to exert some level of self-determination in their lives. Art-making provided opportunities to express this need. The *quest for community* is frequently reported as a need for closer and deeper relationships, and the need to be part of a community. Not only did the women in this inquiry discover community in the relationships they formed in the art therapy group, they also were able to express these feelings for friends and family through their artwork. The following found poem reveals the participant's existential needs to have closer, deeper relationships, as well more agency and self-efficacy in the face of cancer.

Abstract / Concrete: About Louise

**Cancer is both abstract and concrete.
I don't look like I have cancer.
It doesn't say CANCER on my forehead.
Other than the fact that I lost my hair,
I don't look like the typical cancer patient.**

**With cancer, you don't have control of your body.
Being a cancer patient is like being an object in a factory,
Like going through an assembly line.
Each person at each station does something to me.**

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Disassembled...
 Assembled...
 Pieces put back together to make the new me.
 And then, when it's all done,
 I'm just going to be spit out.

Battling cancer is long,
 Painful,
 Hard,
 And there's no guarantee for success.
 It's a fight for my life.
 Not being able to *see* my cancer was a roadblock.
 It prevented me from taking control of my battle.

I needed to *see* my disease in order to deal with it.
 Making art was the only way that I could have some sort of control
 About what I have
 And what I'm going through.
 It's the only thing that is helping me deal with the cancer,
 That's concrete,
 That I can control.
 So when I make art I try to make something abstract concrete.

Making art helped me reflect on
 My life
 And the people that meant the most.
 My past is the bridge,
 Where my husband and I used to kiss when we were teenagers.

My present represents where my daughters live in B.C.
 I created this when I thought I was going to die from my cancer.
 I wanted my loved ones to know I was thinking about them
 In my time of darkness.
 I wanted them to know that should anything happen,
 That I always thought about them.
 I wanted them to know how much they meant to me,
 That they had a huge,

They still do,

Have a huge place in my heart.

See I speak in the past tense, as if I'm gone.

An additional dimension of EG is the *quest for meaning and purpose* (Wong, 2010). These women actively sought meaning and a sense of purpose in the cancer experience and in life with cancer. In the following poem, a participant articulates her renewed appreciation for life,

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especially regarding taken-for-granted aspects of it, and her active attempt to reorder her priorities. Art-making was a catalyst for examining how to live life differently.

To mean something... About Sofia

**I'm your typical career woman.
I work in finance.
I wear suits.**

**When I announced that I was going to get a tattoo,
My own kids said,
"You can't do that."**

But I did it.

**I did it because I had cancer
And I had to change my life.**

**I think it was the September issue of National Geographic.
It was about ancient Egyptian times.
There was a picture of a bracelet that had a two-headed serpent.**

**Neheb Ka...
The symbol of protection and regeneration.**

**When I saw it, I knew that *this* is what I needed.
My daughter would say, "Mom's got a Hells Angel tattoo."**

**But I needed protection.
I needed to survive this.**

And I need to change my life.

**When I was diagnosed with cancer,
I went through treatments.**

I'm still doing treatments.

**And believe me,
I went through all the emotions,
All the pain,
The physical and emotional pain,
Because when you are going through cancer, you are doing this with your whole heart and soul.
You don't feel like you are living.
You are just there waiting.
For me, art therapy was the one thing that I actually looked forward to.**

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**People would say I look good.
But I wasn't feeling good.**

**I realize now that I was angry,
Because they didn't know how to deal with my cancer.**

I didn't know how to deal with it.

**I didn't have the words to express how I felt.
I didn't connect to people,
To family or friends.
They didn't understand what I was going through.
I think they expected me to go on as if nothing was wrong with me.**

Of course, something was different with me!

**You go through hell.
But you don't realize that others close to you are going through hell too.
It's not physical, but they are going through hell as well.
I realized now how much impact I can have on somebody else.**

**But this tattoo is a reminder,
That if I had a second chance,
Then my life has to be lived differently.**

**I'm not regretting my life up to now.
But I always felt that I had to follow rules or expectations.**

**I think we get carried away with ambition,
Career,
This and that.**

**But that doesn't matter anymore.
I need to appreciate more how precious each minute is.
What matters is that you're here to appreciate.**

**I have to find something positive in all this.
I don't mean that we need to go through cancer to learn this lesson.
That's not what I meant.**

I just need to make this mean *something*.

Posttraumatic Growth

PTG is the positive psychological change experienced as a result of struggling with highly challenging life circumstances. It is not about returning to the same life as was previously lived; rather, it is about undergoing significant life-changing shifts in thinking and relating to the world

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that signifies deeply meaningful change. One feature is a sense of *feeling strengthened to meet future life challenges* (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999). Even though they were navigating a life-threatening illness, participants described a fortified sense of resiliency. Art-making created transitional spaces for participants to discover wells of strength in order to go on living in the face of cancer and to tackle difficult treatment regimes. A further aspect of PTG is *feeling greater compassion for others* (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Participants reported feeling a deeper bond with those who experience adversity, other individuals with cancer, and family members who also navigated the cancer experience with them. This sense of empathy emerged during, or as a result of, art-making. The following poem illuminates the participant's fortified sense of resiliency and ability to meet future challenges, as well as an increase in compassion for others.

My golden tears... About Maria

**It was the best thing that could have happened to me,
The time when breast cancer veered its ugly head.**

**I have never considered myself an artist.
I don't have a lot of skill.
I am still a "stick man" in terms of drawing.**

**But what was important was what the art revealed.
You could just let yourself go.
The colors- the colors talk to you.
The images- they came out. They weren't perfect,
But they represented what they represented.**

**Making art helped me to get in touch with my emotions, to put words to them.
Had you asked me how I felt,
Or what was going on,
I don't think I could have shared the same reflections
Had I not used art as a way to get there.
So the art speaks volumes.**

**When I look at the work that was done,
I think the ones that have been the most powerful,
Even today,
Represented certain dichotomies in my life back then.**

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Even today.

**My famous golden tears-
They were mine then.
And they are still mine today.
Some days,
There are days when tears are still shed.
I consider those golden tears because I understand them.
I accept them.
I wish they weren't there,
But they're a part of me.**

**You see that's the dichotomy.
It's you and you're always kind of alone.
There are other people.
But can you really share 100% with others?
I don't think so,
Not even with your partner.**

**And you don't want to burden your friends.
So there will always be that dichotomy.
There will always be those tears and hopefully more places to shed them,
Not only when I am alone,
And not just in the shower.**

**If the artwork speaks to other women, and, other women can identify with it,
Then they can actually accept that they have those tears.
And that each time they do, it's something special to them.
And that it's okay to shed them.**

PTG is not just about bouncing back, but the ability to bounce forward (Manyena et al., 2011).

This involves the *emergence of new opportunities and new possibilities* (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). For many of the participants, making art was something that they had not done since childhood. Engaging in art-making gave them a sense of new landscapes to explore. They were able to test new skills and ways of expressing themselves, which were unavailable prior to their cancer diagnosis and participation in the art therapy group. The following poem illustrates art-making as a new endeavor generated passion, hope, and enthusiasm.

Healing → Becoming: About Gabriella

**At the beginning I was very scared,
Because art was kind of mythical to me.
I had always liked art, but I hadn't done any in my whole life.**

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I didn't even know how to use a brush!

**So when I came here, it was a challenge for me.
When I came,
I was scared.**

**But at the same time,
It was the only thing that I believed could help me.**

**I felt pain everywhere,
Too much pain.
Not only physical,
But I was confused.**

Everything was dark like winter.

**I didn't know how to deal with all these worries,
And fears,
And insecurities.**

I was so depressed when I came.

I had no hope.

**But I knew that coming here,
It might be possible to start changing and to heal myself.**

I found comfort.

I found an environment where I could speak.

**I could express what I was feeling,
At least something!**

And I knew that was hope.

**Making art was the most important thing that happened to me after my disease.
It opened my eyes,
And my heart, as a way
Of healing my body,
My soul.**

**Sometimes you have to move something,
Some little thing.**

You have to go into yourself.

**You have to look inside
And discover what is going on inside.**

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**Art was like a door opening into a new world,
Because in every kind of work, I discovered something different.**

**That's why it is very difficult to tell you,
Because each piece was related to my fears,
My difficulties,
My concerns.**

But what I also discovered was my hope to change.

Can you believe I didn't know how to knit?

**Now I want to learn how to knit.
I want to learn how to crochet.
I want to know all these things.
I discovered that this is part of me now.**

**Painting has become part of my life,
As an inward journey.
Every time I explore my *innerscape*,
I learn more about my true self:
My inner peace,
My beauty,
And the joy of being myself-
Feeling connected as a whole being.**

This is part of me and I don't want to stop.

I will continue.

I'll never stop.

Boundaries of This Inquiry and Issues of Validity

This inquiry occurred in a particular time and place, under particular circumstances with unique individuals. However, given our description of the research process and approaches used to create the found poems, limited transferability by the reader may be warranted. At the very least, this inquiry expands and enriches our knowledge about using poetry to present research findings and deepens our understanding of complex psychological concepts.

Within qualitative research, the notion of validity has been highly contested. Lincoln and Guba (1985) rejected validity in favor of trustworthiness as more aligned with an interpretive paradigm. Currently, more transgressive notions of validity are preferred (Cho & Trent, 2006).

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We anchor this research in a dimension of validity that emphasizes an authenticity that can transform individuals, relationships, and organizations. We contend that this research, and ABR in general, demonstrates empathetic validity, i.e. the potential of research to transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other, in order to create greater empathy, understanding, and compassion (Dadds, 2010). Dadds outlines two dimensions: internal empathetic validity (that which changes the researcher and participants) and external empathetic validity (that which influences audiences with whom the research is shared). Research with empathetic validity generates connectedness, growth and healing in human relationships, and therefore, has a special contribution to make wherever it takes place- hospital wards, professional practice communities, or healthcare organizations. Based on the reactions of the team, the participants and their families, members of the general public and the medical community, we believe that we have achieved this dimension of validity with these found poems.

Discussion

Using found poems to communicate findings about EG and PTG can be a richer evocation of the themes than traditional coding. The found poems inject life, blood, and yearning back into the analysis, and allow us to access deeper insights into the landscape of what it means to be a woman navigating breast cancer: the ache of hair loss; the feelings of grief, isolation, and emotional pain; and the possibility of death. We presented a variety of poems that represent a multidimensional, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the breast cancer experience and the impact art therapy can have on navigating this experience. The poems allow the complexity and apparent contradiction of psychological and emotional growth as a result trauma (a salient paradox of EG and PTG) to exist and breathe in the same space. They illustrate in meaningful ways how art therapy can be a useful, important supplement to conventional medical

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treatment for women with breast cancer. Functioning as distilled essences of meaning, these found poems are more persuasive about the power of art-making during times of adversity than the distanced understanding that analysis produces, even when using participants' exact words from transcripts.

These found poems also function as tools for reflection that have a *collective* dimension. Once shared, poems resonate and belong to everyone (Grisoni, 2008). Poetry's strength is that it allows us to understand another's subjective reality from the inside. These found poems open up spaces for co-constructing understanding between the researched and the audience, which is especially critical in psychological and healthcare settings. These textual spaces not only invite knowing, but create spaces of connection (Leggo, 2008). Since poetry is about rhythm and breath (Leggo, 2008), these breath spaces become interstitial, leading to new perspectives. These spaces cultivate comparisons, pooling the reader's own emotions, meanings, and resonating experiences into the breath space. Closer, more empathetic connections between those who are receiving care services and care providers can help to support the move towards whole person care. As Clough (2002) has suggested, qualitative research needs approaches that allow for depth penetration into life in a way more traditional methods do not permit, ways that "...opens up to its audiences a deeper view of life in familiar contexts" (p. 8). Poetic representation is a means of accessing the truth of these women navigating breast cancer, which could not be told as effectively any other way.

Harkening back to the idea that poetic representation is political and a form of visionary activism (Faulkner, 2017), these found poems are aligned with the purpose of the study. Art therapy provided an important and beneficial therapeutic supplement to conventional treatment. The emotional and psychological rollercoaster that women experience post-breast cancer

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diagnosis must be addressed as a care priority, along with medical intervention. We, as researchers, wanted to expand the notions of what constituted whole person care. And we wanted to do this in such a way as to change the hearts and minds of medical professionals. Our plans for future research include distributing these poems in the form of a chapbook², and to chart the impact this may have on attitudes and professional practices.

Conclusion

Traditional forms of dissemination cannot evoke the texture and complexity of lived experience. These lend themselves well to artful approaches, which can develop insights and connections that otherwise might be inaccessible. Poetry has the potential to uplift the human spirit to a vision of another's reality. It educates, moves us, and "enlists the art of the possible more directly than it does the facts of the actual" (Brady, 2005, p. 1003). It starts with the raw truth of experience as lived from the inside. By reflecting on the unique experiences of the women across their distinctive cancer trajectories, and representing these as found poems, we illuminate the telling of a common experience from numerous personal perspectives. In this way, "truth" about EG and PTG and its relationship to art-making emerges from a refracted meaning that arises from reflections on these poems.

In answering the question, "Is this poem research?" Neilsen (2004) provides a path for reflection on the function of research: When our research raises awareness and activates a sense of responsibility (and response-ability); when we attend to the world with the aim of representing it with integrity, respect, and humility; and when we offer that representation in the hope that it will provoke or inspire change for the better, we are honoring our social contract to contribute to our communities.

Endnote

¹ A member of the research team created these found poems from the interview transcripts. Therefore, these poems create a third voice, one that is neither the interviewee nor the researcher, but a combination of both (Glesne, 1997).

² Chapbooks are small collections of poetry, generally no more than 40 pages, centered on a specific theme, and frequently self-published. The chapbook from this project can be found at <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/982600/> in English and <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/982602/> in French.

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