

SEEKING LINES OF CONNECTION: PARENTAL MENTAL ILLNESS, AN HEURISTIC
ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

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A Research Paper
in
The Department
of
Creative Arts Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

AUGUST 2020

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This research paper prepared

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Entitled: Seeking lines of connection: Parental mental illness, an heuristic arts-based re-
search

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Creative Arts Therapies; Art Therapy Option)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality as approved by the research advisor.

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August 2020

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the researcher's personal experience with parental mental illness. The intention was to develop a deeper understanding of the sentiments, challenges and overarching social impact that this significant life factor has on the adult-child. The foundation of this research is based on attachment theory, which is used to facilitate a personal reflection of my journey. The results provide an opportunity to reframe the narrative surrounding the stigma of mental illness, and the parent-child relationship. Through a heuristic arts-based research, the researcher reflects on past and present recollections with the aim of gaining new insight on how these personal unveiling can support the growing topic of parental mental illness in art therapy. A heuristic arts-based exploration is applied and follows Moustakas's six phases. Following a literature review, five personal artifacts that are significant to the researcher's lived experience are explored, and artwork is created in response to each item. Upon reflecting on these artifacts using Pat Allen's witness process, the researcher teases apart themes from the data and provides insight towards this topic. This research acts in protest of social stigma surrounding parental mental illness and encourage an openness in society about such themes. Furthermore, the findings contribute personal insight to the existing research on parental mental illness from an adult child's perspective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my father for teaching me the many forms of perseverance, love and resilience. I am forever grateful for the time and experiences, sharing moments of discomfort and discovering the courage within them.

Thank you to my mother and stepfather for sharing with me life lesson one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine. Reminding me that even though the journey may be long that one day I will get to my destination. To Grace, Robyn and Phil, thank you for a lifetime of tender listening, explosive laughter and warm hugs.

Thank you to Elise and Chuck, for being some of my biggest cheerleaders and feeding my heart through my stomach. Special thanks to Elise for using your beautiful eye and incredible talent in helping me document my artwork.

Dina, and Andy, you will be forever missed.

Thank you to Betty and Sarah for helping keep the stories of my father and our family alive.

Thank you to my beautiful cohort, professors and supervisors Heather, Josée and Amanda for being incredible role models. Thank to Maria for supporting me through this journey and special thank you to Sarah, a kindred spirit whom supported me through some of the most challenging parts of this process.

Thank you to Chelsea and Isaac, without your open arms and backyard this paper would not be as fruitful or rich.

Thank you to Bean and Widdy, you are my home. The amount of gratitude appreciation that I feel towards you both cannot be merely communicated with words. My heart has been deeply imprinted by your love. It is the fuel that keeps me going.

This research was conducted and conceived on unceded Indigenous lands in the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka people. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal has historically been and continues to be a gathering place for many First Nations.

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Introduction

My father growing up struggled with mental illness, which eventually led to our living separately, as the support he needed was elsewhere. As a result of his recent passing, I have found myself reflecting on the relationship and considering the role and influence of Parental Mental Illness (PMI) in my journey. As a means of exploring PMI's impact on an adult child, I chose to conduct a heuristic arts-based research. The use of these methods is to diverge from cold statistics to a qualitative voice on these lived experiences. The intention is to develop a deeper understanding of the emotions, the challenges, and the overarching social impact that this experience has on the adult-child: myself, the researcher. The foundation of this research is based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) which facilitated personal reflection of my journey and offered an opportunity to reframe the narrative surrounding the stigma of mental illness and the parent-child relationship.

The goal was to reflect on my past and present recollections with the aim of gaining new insight and understand how these personal unveilings supported parental mental illness in art therapy. A heuristic arts-based exploration was applied and followed Moustakas' (1990, 2011) six phases of heuristic inquiry. The theoretical frame for the research is provided by John Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory and Donald Winnicott's (1971) objects relations theory. Further investigation is given to PMI representation in research, its potential impacts on the parent-child relationship and the adult-child, and the gaps in the current research on PMI. From there, the use of art therapy in PMI is investigated and examples of artists that explore PMI are identified. Further investigation is given to PMI representation in research, its potential impacts on the parent-child relationship and the adult-child, and the gaps in the current research on PMI. From there, the use of art therapy in PMI is investigated and examples of artists that explore PMI are identified. After the literature review, I define the arts-based heuristic methodology steps (Moustakas, 1990, 2011) that were taken. For this process five personal artifacts that are significant to the parent-child relationship were used to create response art. Upon reflecting on these artifacts using Pat Allen's (1995) *witness process*, I determined themes from the data and provided insight towards this topic. Moreover, the ethical considerations, validity will be defined within this research. Which will aid contributing to the existing research on parental mental illness from an adult child's perspective. Throughout this paper, I have added my poetic responses to reference the personal journey I went through while engaging in the research process.

Literature Review

I am walking through molasses

I am stuck

John Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory suggests that the bond created between the parent and child is essential to the child's development. As a means for survival, children rely on the parents' ability to attune to their needs, and thus the development of this bond will significantly impact their lives (Levy & Orlans, 2014). There are factors that can contribute to parental challenges in developing such strong bonds, one of which is, mental illness. As a point of departure, this literature review explains attachment theory (Bowlby 1982) and objection relations theory (Winnicott, 1971), and how they are both worked into an art therapy framework. Then, it dived in to exploring the current discussion in research on PMI and its effects on child growing up with PMI. It will then provide examples of artist sharing their experience of PMI and engage creatively to build resilience. Following this, it considered art therapy's mitigating factors with this population and the gaps in literature surrounding adult children's lived experiences with PMI.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1982), one of the founders of attachment theory, examined the relationship between the caregiver and the child. The primary caregiver and will impact the child's sense of self, their ability to self-regulate, and their ability to create and maintain significant relationships (Bowlby, 1982). The primary caregiver's ability to adequately read their child's cues and provide for their needs is defined as the creation of a "secure base" (Levy & Orlans, 2014, p. 15). This secure bond shows that the world is a safe place, which is essential for the child's development (Levy & Orlans, 2014).

Conversely, if the primary caregiver is unable to effectively attune or provide for the infant's needs, the child is negatively affected and might grow up with the belief that the world is unsafe, and people cannot be trusted. The type of relationship the child has with their primary caregiver sets the precedent for the child's worldview, as the child continues to grow into adulthood and build relationships with others (Levy & Orlans, 2014).

Attachment Theory and Art Therapy

Art therapists that work from the attachment theory, such as Malchiodi (2013) who specializes in attachment disorders, highlight "[f]irst and foremost, the creative arts therapies provide a sensory experience; that is, they are predominantly activities that are visual, kinesthetic

tactile, olfactory and auditory in nature” which offer a secondary means of communicating (p. 1). Art therapy allows for an alternative approach to the deep-rooted talk therapy, where one is meant to verbalize their emotions and memories. This alternate route to accessing their subconscious workings could entail communication through drawing, music, storytelling, among other modalities. Malchiodi (2003), discussed that individuals are often drawn to relationships that mirror the earlier ones set with their caregiver. Therefore, when working from this perspective issues that are addressed focus on identity of self in relation to others through independence, separation, and intimacy (Malchiodi, 2003).

O’Brien (2004) completed an art therapy case study with children that investigated attachment trauma and its connection to the brain and mess-making. It has been noted that the right side of the brain is where early life experiences are stored, and also the area where arts-based activities function. Thus, the creation of mess could be linked to early lived experiences that have been stored away, and not able to be regulated through verbal communication. In knowing this, the therapist can develop a better understanding of the child’s internal working and be supportive of this self-regulating process and allow for a space that a child can be found “pouring, mixing, dripping, swamping, spilling and smearing” the art products (O’Brien, 2004, p. 4).

Object Relations Theory and Art Therapy

Winnicott (1971) described that infants learn that when they cry, their caregiver will tend to their needs, easing their stress through a feeling of satisfaction, relief, or comfort. This sequence reinforces the bond and the caregiver being identified as an ‘object’. However, this object is in fact separate from the self, and over time the primary caregiver’s ability to satisfy the infant’s needs decreases (Winnicott, 1971). The transitional object is conceptualized internally, but found externally, and is meant to satisfy their need for comfort; it will become a substitute when the parent is not available (Winnicott, 1971). The control that the child has over this object allows the child to slowly transition from the parent to the object over time, which allows for the process of developing a sense of self and independence to occur (Winnicott, 1971).

Winnicott (1971) goes on to discuss the potential or transitional space, where the experience he calls ‘humanity’ occurs, where the caregiver and child build connections, explore, and learn acceptance and love through play. The art therapy space reflects that potential space, where the art therapist and client’s relationship mimics that of the caregiver and child. The use of creativity becomes a means of play between therapist and client, and the artwork created in the

session represents a client's transitional object.

Object Relations Theory and Art Therapy

The separation-individuation process between child and caregiver can experience disruptions or never fully come to fruition (Winnicott, 1971). Through the role of art therapist, the environment will facilitate a process of repair for this crucial developmental stage. Isserow's (2008) work was based on object relations theory and highlighted the value of jointly looking at the art object that was created in the session. This process is deemed integral to art therapy as it sheds light on "the vertices of the triangle between patient, image and therapist, enabling the structure of the art therapeutic relationship" (Isserow, 2008, p. 34).

Both attachment and object relations theory can easily work in conjunction with one another as they both are based on early-life interpersonal relationships. They look at how these relationships are key in the child's development in learning to self-regulate and separate from the parent, becoming independent. When art therapists work from these perspectives, they often function from the assumption of mending early relationship trauma (Malchiodi, 2003). The above theories will guide the frame of my research.

Current Research on PMI

PMI is a term used to describe the situation where a parent is a caregiver to a child while also living with a diagnosed mental illness. This mental illness effects the parent, lacking mental and emotional capacities to be present for the child, impact their ability to parent (Gellatly et al., 2019). Reupert and Maybery (2016) looked at the prevalence of families that had a parent with mental illness. Their research conducted across the United States, Sweden and Australia suggested that an estimated 30-50% of women, and 25% of men with serious mental illnesses will become parents. Moreover, one in four children in both Sweden and the United Kingdom live with parents suffering from a mental illness. By the time those children turn 16, more than 50% of them will seek out external support as their parent's mental health issues become significant enough to propel them to do so (Reupert & Maybery, 2016). These findings suggest that the children are often the agents of change within their own family, as they seek out the desired support (Gellatly et al., 2019). A number of areas of concern come to surface for this population of children who are imbued with a sense of responsibility at a young age, gaining outside support for the family as well as managing the stressors associated with mental illness (Gellatly et al., 2019) They have an increased risk of developing mental illness themselves, and facing stigma.

Mental health services accessed by parents experiencing mental illness often do not include the children in the intervention services, and especially children who do not present symptoms of mental health difficulties themselves (Nolte & Wren, 2016). This means that children who are still struggling within their family's dynamics are not attended to and supported and may turn to acting out in different ways, increasing their risk for maladjusted coping strategies (Nolte, 2013). These children will often conceal their background from others, are more likely to experience separation from their parents, and are at higher risk of being a recipient of physical abuse or neglect (Nolte & Wren, 2016). These elements leave them to have increased negative encounters within school, their communities, and even the judicial system (Nolte & Wren, 2016). Even more concerning is the limited evidence-based research that supports the efficacy of interventions in place to support children whose parents live with mental illness (Grove et al., 2017).

Adult Children Faced with PMI

The studies on children of PMI that have now, grown into an adult, also known as adult children of PMI focused on the dysfunction of the family life and genetic predisposition to experiencing mental illness themselves (Reupert & Maybery, 2016; Foster, 2010). As children, they often had to take on a parental role, as a result of their parents lacking mental and emotional capacities that impacted their ability to parent. The adult child may need to manage the household by taking care of siblings and emotionally supporting their parents, becoming caregivers themselves, which adds more responsibilities (Patrick et al., 2019). Adult children who are forced into such a role that they were not prepared for at an early age, often face outcomes that are typically outside their control and experience increased stress levels which carry on into adulthood (Foster, 2010). The stress is triggered from attempts to adapt and compensate for the instability in their lives due to the unpredictable behaviour of their parents. They often feel shame about such lifestyles and reported feelings of fear, loneliness, and loss (Foster, 2010). Adult children unconsciously internalize feelings of depression and anxiety, which can manifest in aggressive and oppositional behaviours and could lead to social isolation (Foster, 2010; Patrick et al., 2019;).

Adult children of PMI report disharmony within the parent-child relationship due to difficulties in relating and connecting to one another because of the manifestation of the mental illness (Patrick et al., 2019). The depth of the relationship with the parent is often limited, partly due to physical distance either from the parents being hospitalized or the parent separation (Fos-

ter, 2010). Others experienced difficulties in developing and maintaining intimate relationships with others and general conflictual interpersonal relationships (Foster, 2010; Patrick et al., 2019). The impact of their childhood experiences left a great impression on them, and consequently the adult children of PMI reported that it significantly shaped the way they parent their own children (Patrick et al., 2019). These studies also showed that adult children of PMI were often not informed about their parent's mental illness, and they could not differentiate the mental illness from the parent's personality (Foster, 2010). The adult children of PMI recalled difficulty focusing as children, as they were preoccupied with making sense of the world around them, affecting their sense of self and identity later in life (Foster, 2010).

When considering the issues that arise, including risk factors that detract from adult children being able to cope, there are several protective factors to be considered. These factors will aid in mitigating the inevitable stressors of mental illnesses are instrumental in positive outcomes for a child's development. These protective factors include level of intelligence, flexible problem-solving skills, connecting with others in community activities, and healthy coping skills (Patrick et al., 2019). Conversely, no protective or risk factors can definitely predict the child outcome (Gellatly et al., 2019).

Research on adult children of PMI is still being established (Patrick et al., 2019). The predominant research currently focuses on statistics regarding whether disorders are hereditary, as well as the negative impacts of the experience. Moreover, research tends to focus more on the parent opposed to the child's experience (Foster, 2010). It glosses over vital information such as the specific needs that the adult children have growing up, and also neglects to reflect thoroughly on the impact of having a caregiver role in one's youth and the lasting influence of such events into adulthood (Grove et al., 2017).

Artist and PMI

There are many working artists who have shared their experience of PMI through their creative practice. Adolescent and adult children of PMI was explored in a Canadian documentary called *I Am Still Your Child* (Durnford, 2017). One of the individuals followed in this documentary was Von Allen (n.d.), who illustrated his experience using the format of a graphic novel. The topic of adult children of PMI was also explored by Amanda Tetrault (2004) in her book *Phil and Me*. Where she compiled photos, documenting her relationship of her and her father. These artists provided a personal and in-depth look at their lived experiences of having parents

with mental illness, through creative media. They were able to convey a sense of emotions through their creative medium of choice, that was witnessed and digested by their viewers. Furthermore, these contributions provided an alternative way of accessing these stories easily for the public and offered experiential insights that emphasized the research frame. They proposed a way for other people who have experienced PMI to see their life reflected back to them that is not just portrayed in a negative light (Tetrault, 2004; Durnford, 2017).

Art Therapy and PMI

Mental illness it is often depicted as a taboo subject: something that we should not talk about, or that we try to brush under the rug. This internalized social stigma can make discussing mental illness difficult and uncomfortable. Art therapy, overarchingly known as a therapy that considers communication differently, appears to be an effective route that one could take to explore the difficulties they are faced with (Malchiodi, 2012).

A phenomenological study conducted by Sheller (2011) looked at an attachment-based art therapy intervention for children and adults that experienced PMI. In this study, the researchers explored an intervention called the ‘Bird’s Nest,’ where the participants were required to draw a bird’s nest. Some of the key tell-tale features of the image, such as the construction of the nest, the colours used, and the ways in which the birds were incorporated, provided information regarding the relationship between parent and child and attachment patterns that were further explored within the sessions (Sheller, 2011). This study is the only published and peer-reviewed journal that addressed issues with relational issues of PMI.

The master’s thesis written by Sorbara (2018) is one of few current research projects that specifically looks at the adult child’s experience of PMI, and narrative therapy approaches to creative art therapy interventions. This research had the participants create a visual timeline of their life, as well as a timeline of the relationship with their parents that experienced mental illness. When reflecting on this intervention, the participants expressed feelings of reconciliation, validation, and developed new perspectives, as well as catharsis (Sorbara, 2018). This process enabled them to reframe their experiences, allowing them to gain a new perspective (Sorbara, 2018). Shores (2014) highlighted the benefits of using art therapy to support clients who struggle with disrupted attachment trauma by using an arts-based approach. By facilitating a therapeutic reparative process, as the actions of the right brain is able to support emotional regulation through the process of creativity. Furthermore, art therapy can also be used outside an individual

therapy format by being utilized in family therapy, where the focus is to build on the parents' attunement to the child's needs (Grove et al. 2018).

Pointer (2001) examined the effect of group art therapy on depressed mothers and their young children, working to improve the quality of interaction between mother and child. An object relations framework was used and focused on mothers' perception of self, their self-esteem, as well as how the mother perceives the child and overall attachment between mother and child (Pointer, 2001). The interventions were focused on mirroring, using body tracings of mother and child, using collage to highlight positively shared experiences, and lessons the mothers had learned through the shared relationship (Pointer, 2001). Another intervention that was used was sharing a game of "Follow the Leader" on a large piece of paper. Though the therapeutic work was focused on the mothers, the most significant positive changes were seen in the behaviour of the children (Pointer, 2001).

Other research includes Shore's (2000) case studies which explored the strengthening of parent-child bonds in outpatient dyadic art therapy. The processes relied on the creative expression and the therapist to be a conduit in building and developing communication between parent and child in attempts to repair relational ruptures (Shore, 2000). The therapist worked to facilitate communication and support the parent in recognizing their own strengths.

The literature showed that art therapy can be used as an effective tool to address the challenges that arise within childhood, growing up with PMI, as it provides an alternative means of communication. However, additional research is needed to underline the unique combination of challenges that adult children face with PMI. Artists like Tetrault (2004) and Allen (n.d.) have been a great example of adult children's stories of PMI, showcasing the power of art as a means of communication and amplifying experiences of those that usually go unseen. Moreover, their personal stories highlight a different narrative, a stark contrast to the pejorative headlines of mental illness, and signal the beauty within the challenges of mental illness. Attachment and object relations theory clearly identify the significance of parental relationship on a child's development and its potential for foundational growth or hindrance. Art therapy has been shown to be an effective tool in the reparative process of addressing the unique challenges that children of PMI face (Grove et al., 2018; Malchiodi, 2012; Pointer, 2001; Sorbara, 2018; Shore, 2014; Shore, 2000; Sheller, 2011). Though this literature review has highlighted art therapy's strengths, there is still much research that needs to be invested in. The health care system has not always

been able to help those with mental illness, especially if they do not seek help, which can lead to overlooking those who are experiencing secondary effects of the mental illness (Nolte & Wren, 2016). Consequently, children of PMI go undetected and wrestle with challenges that they carry into adulthood.

Methodology

*I am a potato in the dark,
my eyes search for light*

As a means of exploring PMI's impact on an adult child, I chose to conduct a heuristic arts-based research. The combination of these methods allowed my own inquiry to be aimed at filling gaps in the current research, such as offering personal insight from the adult child's experience, as well as giving voice to a lived experience rather than relying on statistics that pervade the current literature, as well as providing a more accessible and alternative perspective. The main focus of this research was exploring the emotional and psychological impacts of growing up with a parent with mental illness, and further, how this insight could be used to further expand the field of art therapy. The combined use of heuristics, and arts-based methodology allowed for a personal exploration, and insight of my experience through the externalizing process of art making. Using personal artifacts that were significant to my relationship with my father and responding to them creatively was a means of garnering insight from the past and present of our experienced relationship. In conducting such research, my internal voice was promoted, and in doing so I developed a deeper self-awareness that can be used to contribute to my personal and professional life as an art therapist.

Arts-Based Heuristic Inquiry

Chamberlain et al. (2018) asserted that arts-based research is an organic and gentle unravelling of one's process that allows for an expanding of ideas. Art has been used as an illustrative way to develop a deeper understanding of concepts and taken into consideration links to social constructs that could be influencing their sense of self. Arts-based inquiry can facilitate a deeper exploration and benefit the heuristic process that pulls oneself into internal process of reflection (Leavy, 2015). It encourages dialogue between the artwork and the viewer, exploring topics that may be difficult to discuss or express in words. This process can facilitate new insight, showcasing the strength and value of the creative process, which is central to art therapy

practice (Leavy, 2015). Using the creative process through response art making allows for a means of exploring challenging topics at a distance, which allows an exploration of vulnerable subjects in a less threatening manner (Leavy, 2015).

Furthermore, the process of art making can promote a profound emotional exploration and embodiment of existence outside and within the self. The differentiation of arts-based research and scientific research is the way the data is analyzed which influences the way in which the researcher interprets and understands the information that is being shared. Arts-based research empowers the viewer, providing them visual information allowing the interpretation to be done by the viewer, speaking to the viewer in a language outside of words. This process enables the viewer to generate questions and provide new ways of understanding and knowing (Chamberlain et al., 2018). Providing an alternative means of learning supports exploration and problem solving in a holistic manner that utilizes art as a way to reflect and communicate insights to the viewer (Leavy, 2015).

Heuristic Research

The heuristic inquiry supports a person-centered approach enabling an introspective and insightful exploration of an individual's lived experience (Mihalache, 2019). This process is guided by tacit knowledge, based on the assumption that the researcher has all the knowledge within themselves, as the research uses their own experience of what they aim to explore (Moustakas, 1990). This method of research provides the space for the author to be both the researcher and participant, allowing for a transformative process that is led by intuition and individual transformation. It works to turn inwards and search internally to find a new way of seeing and understanding to one's life (Ozertugrul, 2017). This process allows for one to step outside a traditional scientific means of gaining knowledge and into one that is led by personal experience and knowing (Ozertugrul, 2017). Moustakas (1990), who developed a six-step framework that the researcher can follow, shows how this process will continue to occur until the researcher feels they have come to a point of resolution (Kapitan, 2018).

As defined by Moustakas (2011), heuristic research is based on one's experiences; it focuses on a specific phenomenon that the researcher has engaged with personally. In this methodology, the researcher fosters a dialogue with the self, processing experiences and emotions, unravelling them and then putting them back together. This facilitates a new way of understanding the chosen phenomena. This process supports the opening of one's unconsciousness, through the

use of one's own knowledge. This research is a combination of both heuristic and arts-based process, which fosters new ideas using tacit knowledge and intuition (Moustakas, 2011; Leavy, 2015). Moustakas' (2011) six phases of heuristic research outlines a step-by-step process that facilitates an organic unveiling of creative learning and new understanding: (1) initial engagement; (2) immersion; (3) incubation; (4) illumination; (5) explication; and (6) creative synthesis. These phases are not literal, as they may be recycled multiple times, fostering new questions and insights before the final conclusions are drawn (Kapitan, 2018).

Procedure

Initial Engagement. The first step of the six phases is the "initial engagement" (Moustakas, 2011). This is the researcher feeling a sense of being summoned, a significant pull that is often brought on by a sense of connection within a social context (Moustakas, 2011). These elements develop jointly to where the research question takes shape. The researcher internally reflected, and relied on her own personal awareness, tacit knowledge and intuition. In this phase, the researcher engaged in a literature review, researching the information that pertained to parental mental illness in the context of art therapy.

Immersion. The next step is "immersion" (Moustakas, 2011), where the question has been clearly identified. This research focused on the emotional and the psychological impacts of parental mental illness on the adult child. The researcher submerged herself in this question. This step entailed self-dialogue, searching inwards, following feelings that the researcher experienced. In this phase, a visual journal was used to aid in supporting the researcher in this journey. Furthermore, during this phase the art making began. Five objects were chosen as well as the starting points that inspired the art making. Each object has personal significance to the researcher, reflecting the relationship to my father, providing moments from our relationship. The objects included (1) a Father's Day card; (2) a letter and drawing sent to my father as a child; (3) sets of photos of my father and I; (4) a birthday card give to my father, and lastly, (5) his car. With each object, I allowed myself between one hour to four days to create a response work. This flexibility in range of time provided the space I needed to fully engage with the objects, taking more time for more sentimental items.

The process began by sitting with each object, observing it, exploring it through sight and touch for a minimum of 10 minutes. Then, there was a creative engagement with the work. Response art was used to respond to the object using art materials. These materials consisted of

two- and three-dimensional materials, as shown in Table 1. Once the art object felt complete, or when the researcher reached the end of the fourth day, the process was completed.

Table 1.

Art materials

| Two-dimensional materials | Three-dimensional materials | Tools |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paper - Pencils - Pencil crayons - Fine tip markers - Permanent markers - Oil pastels - Watercolours pencils - Watercolour paints - Acrylic paints - Wooden canvas variation in sizes - Fabric canvas - Watercolour paper - Drawing paper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plasticine - Air-dry clay - Fiber materials; Silks, cotton fabric, natural - Dying material - Yarn - Found objects; objects within and outside the home. - Organic materials: branches, leaves, flowers, plants, rocks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scissors - Eraser - Glue sticks - Fabric glue - Superglue - Paint brushes for acrylic and watercolour - Crochet needles - Knitting needles - Sewing needles; varying in size - Steamer - Iron - Mordants: Iron and sodium sulphate - Bucket for dying |

Incubation. At this point, “incubation” (Moustakas, 2011) takes place. This is where the researcher separates themselves from the process. This is to allow for tacit knowledge to work its course and give space from the intense process, allowing for greater realization and understanding (Moustakas, 2011). I had to step away from the work for a week to give an opportunity to allow my unconscious to come to the surface and present itself to the research.

Illumination. Consequently, “illumination” (Moustakas, 2011) will occur. This is where the researcher is responsive and open to the knowledge, where there will be the emergence of new layers of mastery: reflectiveness is critical at this point as it supports the facilitation of a new perspective (Moustakas, 2011). This phase allowed me to reflect on the five previous response art objects, and correspondingly I have created a final response art object. I used a similar

methodology as I did to the previous objects, however, I allowed a time frame of one week to create the final art object. Once completed, I analyzed each work using Pat Allen's (2019) Intention Witness Process. In doing so, I used the first four phases out of the five. This began with observing the work, then describing the work in writing, only focusing on what I observed (Allen, 2019). This was followed by writing down any thoughts or feelings that were brought up when reflecting on the work (Allen, 2019). Lastly, I work to create a dialogue with the work, writing down insights or thoughts that arise while observing it (Allen, 2019). Once this was completed, I worked with a photographer to document the five pieces of response art. This provided a sense of completion and allowed me to create my final response to the five pieces. Through this process, I sat with the images, and new insights occurred while looking through the works again, as this process occurs in cyclical waves (Kapitan, 2018).

Explication. The next phase of "explication" (Moustakas, 2011) examines what revealed itself in the previous phase and supports organizing and understanding new and significant threads of meaning and themes. This showcases the core elements of the research to the researcher, making it more accessible (Moustaka, 2011). During this phase, I worked to engage with the final images as I began to collect all of the data and begin to analyze it. In this phase, I sought support from my peers, as a means to regulate the oversaturation of data (Leavy, 2015). Furthermore, I continued to reflect back on the attachment theory throughout data analysis in order to anchor the process and stay on track (Leavy, 2015). I organized the data using a thematic arts-based analysis, organizing the data into themes, recurring symbols, colours and materials and draw on them in order to garner further insight (Schenstead, 2012). From there I worked to create my final response piece, using the insights gained from the previous five response pieces. I created an arts-based conclusion from which I cycled back to the incubation, illumination, and explication phases once more.

Upon completing this final work, I worked with the same photographer to document the piece and create my final edits to the images. I then used the compiled written data collected from Allen's (2019) Witness Process, reading through all the written material, extracting and organizing the data into themes, identifying emotions that were felt internally as well as witnessed in the response work. I also identified recurrent meanings, symbols, colours and materials that presented themselves.

Creative Synthesis. “Creative synthesis” (Moustakas, 2011) is the final phase. This is where the researcher recognizes all the data and its components, putting all the themes together to showcase the experience in its entirety. This process cannot be forced, as it needs to be guided by tacit knowledge and intuition (Moustakas, 2011). In this final phase of the research I assembled the written research paper, added final images of the response artwork, created a whole synthesized piece, and finalized the research paper.

Limitation, Validity and Reliability

This research methodology challenges the scientific frame, and as a result, there are some limitations when it comes to the themes of validity and reliability. In heuristic arts-based research, reflexivity is essential. This process is defined by “a process of inquiry that involves ongoing process of the examination of self-awareness; political, social, and culturally consciousness; and ownership of perspective on the part of the research as well as participant.” (Kapitan, 2018, p. 354). Since this research is based on personal experience, it is inherently biased. I am a white, middle-class female living in North America and am limited to the lens in which I experience and see the world. This research cannot be applied to all individuals that experience parental mental illness, as everyone's experience is unique, each land and culture has vast differences in the way they respond individually and collectively to parental mental illness. To further the reflexivity, I also had to acknowledge that attachment theory stems from a White, North American lens and is limited to that perspective.

The intent behind this research is to provide a personal voice to research that can otherwise feel removed from their subject. In this, I hope to offer more personal suggestions or avenues that can be explored and used to support the art therapy process. The validity of heuristic arts-based research is founded on the person's experience with it, and in the process of it being witnessed, cements the validity of the research (Leavy, 2015; Moustakas, 2011). As a means of addressing issues of validity, I created written details of the artwork through the data analysis process, therefore ensuring transferability of the results. Furthermore, I maintained validity for this process by uniformly following the methodical steps, maintaining consistency while engaging with each object, as well as a consistent set up and time limit while creating the response artwork. For further validity of this research, I also used the guidance of my peers and supervisors to encourage and support my process of reflexivity (Schenstead, 2012). In order to ensure

this, I have respected the themes of attachment theory and object relations to ground the research.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations of this methodology began with the challenge of consent. As a way of navigating this challenging ethical consideration, I have connected with my living family members and obtained their verbal consent to include my father's story. In order to further safeguard this process, I sent my family members the research prior to publication. Another challenge with using heuristic research was confidentiality. Throughout this process I had selected pertinent data to disclose, limiting any personal identifying information. Furthermore, there is a certain level of awareness and consideration that is important to acknowledge while holding multiple roles of art therapy student and heuristic researcher. Being both the participant and the researcher allowed me the privilege to withdraw information, I may deem too personal and change the parameters of the research if something was too overwhelming.

I reviewed the ethical code of conduct offered by the Association of Art Therapy in Quebec (AATQ) and I have followed the recommendations. The first ethical concern is the right to autonomy, which included my capacity to disclose certain information. Secondly, I have considered the issue of non-maleficence to ensure that my actions and shared information would not cause harm (AATQ, 2019). Thirdly, beneficence needed to be considered, as I strived to ensure that this research would benefit others in the field of mental health. Fourth, the issue of justice was taken in consideration, as I ensured fairness and equality with those I came in contact with for the research. Fifth, the concept of fidelity guided me to respect commitments to professional responsibilities. Lastly, veracity facilitated truthful communication with others and my research (AATQ, 2019).

Findings

*I feel like a tube of paint with holes all over
my body wants to hold everything in but
with just a little pressure
my paint will ooze out.*

While reflecting on the response art, each piece came with a wave of reactions indicating emotions and affects. These artworks demonstrated some similarities in colours, such as shades

of light to deep pinks, shades of mauves, blue-green and champagne (see Table 1). There were also similarities in the use of resistive and fluid art materials such as fabric, acrylic paint, organic materials and found objects (Hinz, 2019). Each work had its own distinct presence, as each object signified a period of time in the relationship I had with my father, providing a chronological quality to my artwork. Each response work reflected overarching memories and emotions of the period of time that each object represented. This showcased my maturity and ability to understand my father’s illness, as well as the development of our relationship.

Table 2

Response Art Associated with Emotions and the Literature

| <i>1st Response: You Are My Best Friend</i> | <i>2nd Response: Where Were You?</i> | <i>3rd Response Weighted Smile</i> | <i>4th Response: Heavy Lifting</i> | <i>5th Response You and Me</i> | <i>Synthesis Response</i> |
|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Emotions Associated with Each Response Art | | | | | |
| Longing | Emotional defenses | Uncertainty | Mending | Beauty within the messiness | Grieving |
| Fragility | Holding opposites | Questioning | Love | Intimacy | Growth |
| Pain | Hidden feelings | Caring | Nurturing | Grief | Resilience |
| Love | Caring | Concern | Tenderness | Pride | Pride |
| Tenderness | Anger | Powerlessness | Resilience | Protection | |
| Yearning to connect | | Despair | | | |
| Emotions experienced and its Connections to the Literature | | | | | |
| Foster, 2010 | Foster, 2010; Patrick, et al., 2019; | Foster, 2010; Patrick et al., 2019; | Patrick et al., 2019 | | Patrick et al., 2019 |

Figure 1

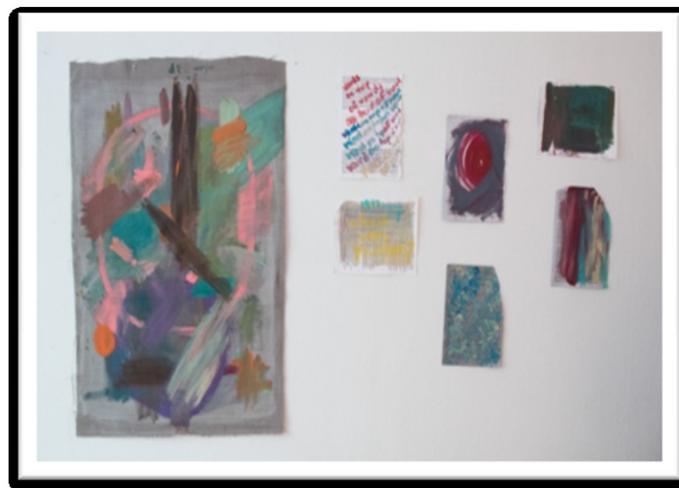
You Are My Best Friend



The first response seen in *Figure 1*, titled “You Are My Best Friend,” shows an overarching feeling of longing, fragility, pain, love, tenderness and a yearning to connect. The work highlighted the separation and the yearning for closeness, demonstrated through the use of the fragile thread connecting the two images. This response work unfolded slowly, from choosing the fabric to steaming the natural plant matter and dyes into it, then allowing the bleach to eat away at each fabric simultaneously. This work highlights the negative state of arousal which Bowlby’s (1982) discussed as a state of arousal which the child experience due to the separation (Levy & Orlans, 2014).

Figure 2

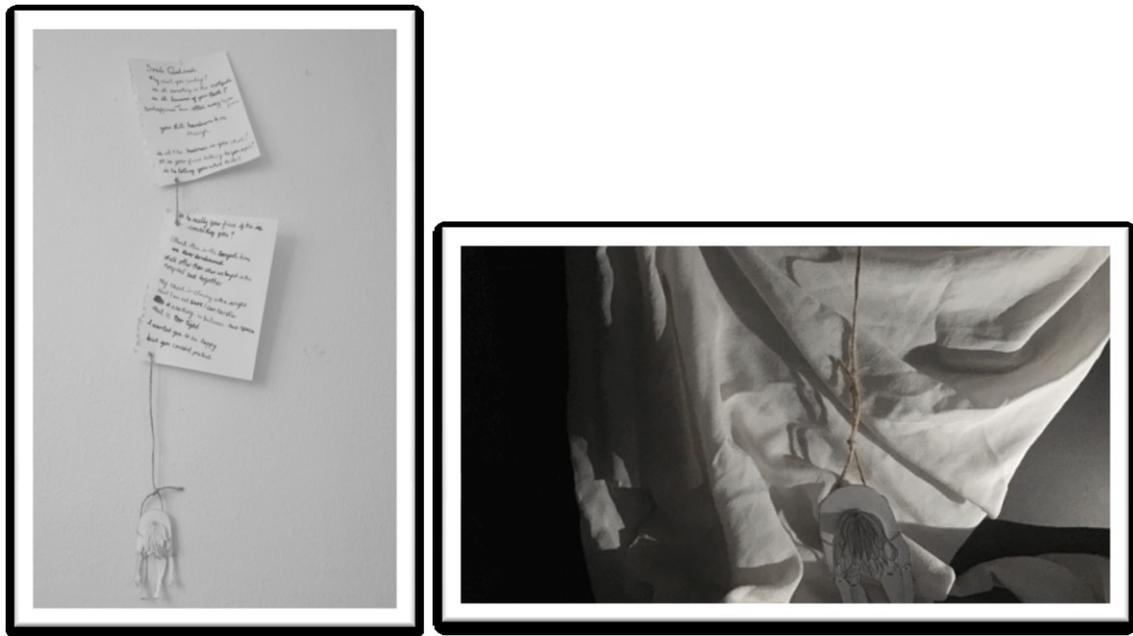
Where Were You?



The second response work, titled “Where Were You?”, presented themes of emotional defenses, holding opposite emotions, hidden feelings, and compartmentalization. This response art unraveled organically, as I was drawn to painting straight away. Two distinct works were created. The large painting on the left represents outward appearances, attempting to hide feelings of anger. Slowly, with time, these feelings of anger bubbled to the surface. I used an old magazine to clean my brushes, which gave me the awareness to continue the painting. Once the images were ripped out of the magazine it became a cluster of small paintings representing defense mechanisms, an attempt to compartmentalize my feelings towards my father in an effort to adapt to the cognitive dissonance between loving him and feeling anger towards him (Muller, 2010).

Figure 3

Weighted Smile

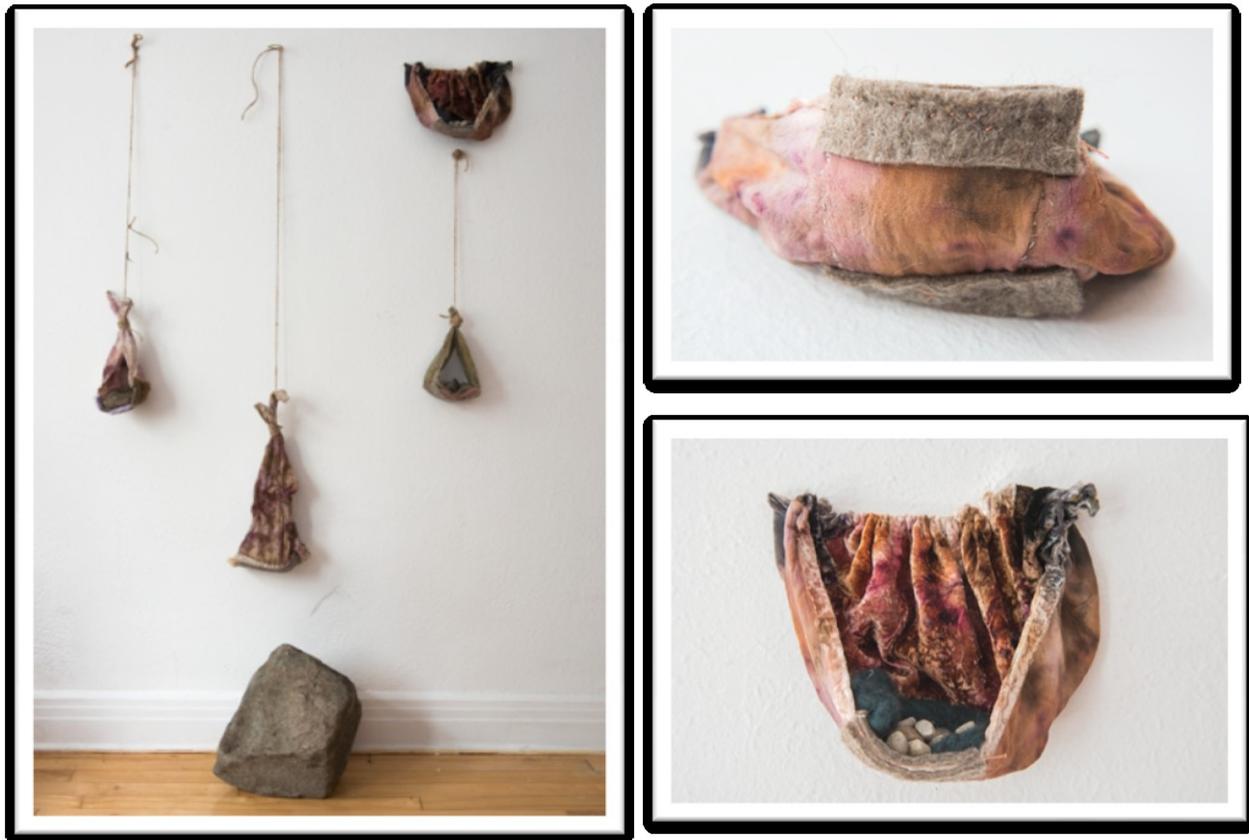


The third response, titled “Weighted Smile”, begins with a poem showcasing feelings of uncertainty, questioning, caring and concern. However, the stop motion and the three-dimensional figure in the artwork elicits feelings of powerlessness and despair. This response work was the most challenging of all, as I needed more time to emotionally process my feelings before moving forward. This provided an internal point of contention, as I struggled as a re-

searcher trying to complete the response work more quickly. However, as the participant, I needed to take the time to take care of the feelings that were arising.

Figure 4

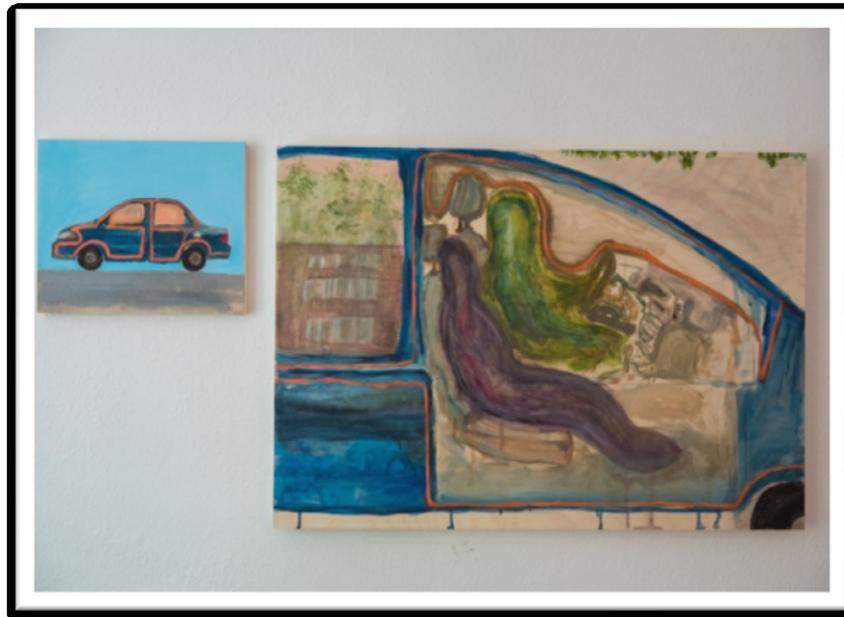
Heavy Lifting



The fourth response work, titled “Heavy Lifting,” reflects my struggle with the rawness of the art process; I felt I had to be contained, observing my unprocessed feelings of grief that were spilling out. Though this response was to the object, it felt as though it was also to the previous work. This work involved lifting pebbles with fabric and string. In choosing the materials need to lift the pebbles, I used fabric that I dyed from the first response art and reworked them. The process of sewing the fabric with the string and reusing the fabric felt reparative. This work showcased feelings of mending, love, nurturing and tenderness, as it represented a metaphor of carrying the weight in ways that felt manageable.

Figure 5

You and Me



The final response work, titled “You and Me,” represents the car that I inherited upon my father’s death. This was commemorated in two paintings, providing a vision of shared space and the relationship. This work showcased beauty within the messiness, intimacy, grief, pride and protection. During the process of this response work, feelings of deep mourning arose to the surface. While creating the paintings, I went through a process of putting a brush stroke on the canvas, wiping it away and then doing it over again. As if going through a process of doing and undoing, it symbolized a sense of working through the emotions or process.

After documenting and analyzing the five response artworks, I moved to reflecting over them in order to create the final synthesized response. This work came to me over a period of contemplation: I was initially drawn to make multiple pieces and then whittled my ideas down to one. I created this response during the anniversary of my father’s passing, making it very emotional because I was in a state of mourning. The major themes were grieving, growth, resilience and pride. I transformed the heaviness that I was carrying into a literal platform to stand on, showcasing growth from the process, and repair, providing a new perspective on the relationship. All while simultaneously continuing to work through feelings associated with grieving.

Materials. One of the overarching themes that became apparent was that of choice in materials. The materials symbolized identity and sense of self, as humans are constructed of their

DNA makeup: a combination two entities to create one. The most predominantly used material was fabric, which was featured in three responses. Fabric represented the fabric of self, how we are fabricated both from our parents and the environments of those around us. Those who created us are embedded in us throughout life both genetically as well as socially. Furthermore, the use of organic material, such as natural dyes, rocks, and moss, symbolized deeper concepts of self. In the first use of the organic material they symbolized a stain or a sense of heaviness, but later were identified as symbols of something that could be used to ground oneself, or a platform in order to raise oneself in an action of pride (see Table 2).

Table 3

Response Art Associated with the Materials Used

| 1st Response: You Are My Best Friend | 2nd Response: Where Were You? | 3rd Response Weighted Smile | 4th Response: Heavy Lifting | 5th Response You and Me | Synthesis Response |
|--|---|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Materials Used in Each Response Art | | | | | |
| Silk | Lenin | Drawing paper | Hemp rope | Wood canvas | Men's shoes |
| Velvet silk | Acrylic paint | Ink | Material made from the 1st piece, naturally dyed | Acrylic paint | Cement bricks |
| Natural powder dyes | Recycled magazine paper | Hemp rope | Thread | | Moss |
| Plant materials | | Thread | Roving | | Ripped pages (Bowlby's book) |
| Thread | | iPad | Rocks | | Black pansy |
| Bleach | | Silk | Industrial felt | | |

Throughout the response art pieces, the materials used also went through a process of shifting perspectives. For example, the fabric pieces from the first response were transformed into vessels to hold the rocks, which started out as small pieces of stone. The rocks then went from being carried to being something to stand upon. The transformation of the materials showcases elements of resiliency that develop over the course of time. There were also recurring col-

our themes, often pinks, blues, greens, and copper tones. Though they changed in depth, they mostly remained as a consistent colour palette. This reflected elements of continuity in the work, highlighting emotional potency from the opacity to colour intensity. Hinz (2019) mirrors this sentiment, stating, “colour can aid in accessing emotions” (p. 140). Recognizing the recurrent materials and colours that were used aided in identifying the emotional material that were felt and experienced. Furthermore, this aided in responding to the question relating to the emotional and psychological impacts of growing up with a parent with mental illness.

Themes

Pairs. Another recurrent theme in the response work was that each one of the art pieces often had two components to it. The first and last pieces each contained a pair, two pieces of fabric in as seen in *Figure 2*, or the final work with the pair of shoes, signifying the child and father relationship. Other examples include the bird-like nest and the large rock seen in *Figure 4*, or the poem and the stop-motion animation *Figure 3*. Throughout the rotation of the work, there were always two components. These components were either paired together, or the response work involved two elements that mirrored each other. This reflected the relationship between my father and I, the similarities in each of us and the desire to feel connected to each other while also recognizing how challenging that can be. The body of the work represented the point of contention; us oscillating between separation and managing the way we could feel sense of closeness. Together in the beginning, to separation and then coming together in death.

Lines. Another prominent theme that was present in the work was the use of lines, either indicating as tying together pieces through string or rope, or through painted or drawn lines. This use of lines symbolizes a sense connection as well as a sense of togetherness. Pairs and lines were used as symbols of connection and attachment throughout the work, which echoes Hinz’s (2019) sentiment surrounding use of space in order to reflect relationships.

Grief. Another common theme that was noticed throughout the response work was grief. Though there were different components of what was being grieved, there was a strong tone of grief consistently throughout the work including parent-child relationship, environment, and length of grief. In *Figure 3*, an overarching sense of grief comes through, first through the struggle to reconcile the desire for a ‘typical’ parent-child relationship, as opposed to a father who struggled with mental illness and was not emotionally available. The grief further surrounds the lack of physical presence of my father in my life. This was seen through the space and placement

of the response work (Hinz, 2019). In *Figure 1*, the two pieces were close in proximity to each other—yet placed separately—connected by a string. This showcases an inherent sense of tension: struggling with a desire for physical and emotional closeness with him that was unattainable in his presence (Hinz, 2019). This form of grief is seen in *Figure 2* with the question, “where were you?” Grieving his death represented the third form of grief in this work. Since my father had passed, there was an undertone of feelings of grief, most significantly in the last two response works. In *Figure 5*, I had painted my father’s car in attempt to immortalize the space that we shared. The timeframe that the final response piece was created in significantly overlapped with the anniversary of my father’s passing.

These works therefore served the purpose of concluding the research while also serving as a personal means to celebrate his life and acknowledge his passing. These emotions were most clearly identified in *Figure 6*. The piece showcased the shoes as symbols for his soul, hence why they were suspended in a location that had been visited to commemorate his death. There are theories concerning bereavement, one of which entails fluctuating between “orientation to the loss” and a “restoration of contact with a changed world” (Weiskittle & Gramling, 2018, p. 10). Though I recognized that his passing would be present in the work, I underestimated all the elements which needed to be grieved, and the art brought me back to engage in a more in-depth manner with the grief.

Figure 6

Synthesized Response Art



Resilience. Lastly, the theme of resilience appeared within the entire body of work, within all the response art pieces. However, this was seen through the journey and process, rather

than distinctly in each individual work. This was something that was also acknowledged and indicated throughout the works and identified, moreover, in the analysis process. This was seen through the transformation of colour from dark to light, and dark to light again, indicating the emotions that were processed and the courage in perseverance.

The interpretation of the data, through which I was able to recognize themes and create connections to the literature, facilitated a greater understanding of my lived experience. It facilitated an illustration of the challenges that can arise when one has a parent with mental illness. Moreover, it provided insights on how to further the use of art therapy in mental health field, when dealing with these kinds of lived experiences.

Discussion

I have given my tears the permission to be released

I have finally watered all the seeds that lay dormant

The results indicated that emotional and psychological impacts of growing up with a parent with mental illness are related to affective perceptions and reflections in later adulthood. The results showed how these insights could be used to further the practice of art therapy. Consequently, the feelings and experiences perceived overlapped within the research, helping me to make connections with previous research on adult children of PMI. Similar emotions were identified in the research of adult children of PMI, such as emotional heaviness, stress, social isolation, and a sense of obligation or being parentified.

There were further emotions minimally represented in the literature that could be related to my experience and to the use of imagery in my subjective process. This included love and the admiration of the parent's resilience and perseverance. Furthermore, there were no specific findings regarding the adult child's ability to be empathic to those with mental illness from an early age, resulting from their experiences of PMI. Therefore, the question considering the positive impact of the child's experiences with parental mental illness from an early age was left unexplored. The artworks associated with the findings made me recognize that children of PMI, through their own experiences, learn that people with mental illness are humans that struggle with challenges, and have the potential to be loving, insightful, and supportive. It may be more difficult for those who have not been exposed to such experiences to understand and recognize the innate sense of understanding of mental illness. In my experience, through the emotions ob-

served, this research showcased a profound understanding of the diversity of human experience from a young age carried throughout life. Furthermore, grieving was not brought up within the literature, which may occur due to a separation or lack of the parent's physical presence. Grief is a theme that came up during interpretation of data along symbols, found objects, response art, and the process of working through experiences were all prominent themes throughout the research. This insight can be used to further art therapists' understanding of some of the struggles that adult children may face as well as interventions that have potential to be used within an art therapy setting. These will be identified later in in this chapter.

Symbols

Objects as Symbols. The interpretation of symbols was initially perceived to be universal. Over time this has changed, as symbols are now understood to have various meanings, depending on the context in which they are used, the cultural history and context, and the people using it (Walker, 1988). When symbols present themselves in art therapy, it is the client that attributes their own meaning, creating their own language through the representation of symbols. Morrell (2011) discussed that “art [is] a middle ground for primary and secondary processes, signs and symbols, and therapist and client. It can be both distancing and symbolic—both safe and profoundly representational” (p. 29). This author explains that symbols are more than just a visual language; they constitute a platform for dialogue. Furthermore, connections are made to seemingly mutually exclusive ideas and concepts becoming integrated as a whole. Throughout my personal investigation, a few symbols came to the surface within the research. One symbol was the doll, seen in *Figure 4*, which was a representation of the self and depicted feelings of conflicted obligation. A part of my identity development was tied to my knowledge of my father's mental illness and the weight of being a responsabilized child.

Pairs and Lines as Connections. Other noted symbols that appeared within the response art were pairs and lines. These two symbols, which were utilized through various materials, were representations of the connection, and even more specifically, the yearning for connection. This symbol can provide insight to what Bowlby (1982) discussed as attachment. In the initial phases of the response work there was a sense of longing and sadness that was conveyed through the fragile thread connecting the two pieces through the large holes in the center of each piece, as seen in *Figure 2*. These emotions belong to the heightened state of emotional arousal due to the separation of child and parent. The child seeks the parent for emotional regulation and comfort to

resolve the distress (Levy & Orlans, 2014) and due to the parents' lack of availability these needs go unmet, leaving the child to process the difficult emotions on their own. Subsequently, this prolonged separation is known as disruptive attachment, in which the attachment process has become interrupted (Levy & Orlans, 2014). Hinz (2019) discusses how objects and the space between them can be used to showing relationships, further explaining how symbols can aid through a process of "creative problem-solving, [encouraging] contact with healing inner wisdom, [increasing] self-acceptance and [promoting] peaceful self-understanding" (Hinz, 2019, p. 142). Through the creative process, I was able to acknowledge these feelings and work through them, showcasing a sense of repair through resolve and reconnection (Malchiodi, 2012).

The Bird's Nest. *Figure 5* displays the nest, or womb, holding the small rocks. This became one of the most significant symbols of this research and was connected to the emotions associated with the relationship, such as caring and love. This symbol can be seen as a representation of an intervention that fostered problem-solving and resilience (Hinz, 2019). It is a depiction of a safe place to carry the experienced heaviness and perceived obligations of the relationship. This soft and secure space is meant to transform the seemingly unmanageable into something that can be carried and held onto, supporting a new kind of attachment. Sheller's (2011) research examines the use of the bird's nest drawing as an assessment for a child's attachment style. Although this research used the Bird's Nest as an intervention rather than assessment, it showcases the possibility to use this assessment using various materials giving more freedom to explore two-dimensional and three-dimensional works. In this research, the nest became a physical manifestation of the process of finding way to problem solve the relationship, symbolizing resilience and nurturement. Morrell's (2011) notion of analyzing the creative process and identifying and defining one's own symbols provided a link between my internal and external worlds. This added a sense of transformation and a place where I was able to contemplate more deeply, fostering a sense of comfort while confronting feelings that may be overwhelming. This process showcased the ability art making has to provide a space for problem-solving and mirroring back one's resilience and strength, in such a difficult situation such as having a parent with mental illness.

The Use of Found Objects as Materials

Found objects are recurring materials identified in the data. These items were either personal objects or were found in nature. While in midst of creating the response art, I would go

outside for walks to process my emotions. This embodied procedure gave me the opportunity to regulate my emotions and to connect to my unconscious, by supporting the process of free association (Fish, 2019). As mentioned by Brooke (2010), “found objects enable the client to connect to thoughts, feelings and memories and be recognized and processed in a way which would not have been reached by simply providing standard traditional art therapy studio materials” (p. 27). Moreover, an association can also be made to the object relations theory: when choosing and giving a personal significance to an object, feelings and ideas have the potential to become represented within the object (Camic, 2010). Once the object is in the therapeutic space, becoming the transitional space, it allows one to problem-solve and to explore issues that might be ignited through what the object may personally represent (Brooke, 2010).

Isserow (2008) discussed the caregiver and child dynamic, where the caregiver provides acknowledgement and validation. This author explored the notion of bringing a found object into a session and using it in the creative process to allow one to look at their earlier relationships. If the acknowledgement and validation had not been provided in the past, this process could potentially recreate it. The therapeutic art space can function uniquely by inviting these found objects within the space and looking jointly at the newfound object (Isserow, 2008). Moreover, this can also be used with the client by introducing personal artifacts, using them to help facilitate a process of remembering, encouraging conversations, and standing as a symbol of the individual that the object is interrelated to (Brooke, 2010). This process can contain some limitations that would need to be considered and revised for each client in relation to their needs or worldviews. Art making with found objects was an abundant means of finding material that I may not have found otherwise and provided symbols that allowed me to connect personal meaning, facilitating a more fruitful creative experience (Brooke, 2010).

The Art of “Working Through” in the Creative Process

As a means of exploring PMI, the results of this study showed that the personal artifacts were used to fuel a process of recalling, reflecting, and responding to memories that signify different periods within my relationship with my father. It allowed me to go within and engage with the inner-child stages of unprocessed feelings that re-emerged, as seen throughout the response work in *Figure 1*, *Figure 2*, and *Figure 3*, as they each tapped into different stages of my childhood and adolescence. Freud (as cited in Philips, 2016) cited the importance of “remembering, repeating, and working through” when addressing loss and conflict in psychoanalytic therapy (p.

375). This psychodynamic approach invites the client to create connections through free association, eliciting memories that are a substitute for the “lost object” when an object of comfort is no longer available (Philips, 2016). When the client remembers, and travels through a process of repeating the unconscious conflict and working through their defenses, they can resolve conflict within the therapeutic space. Freud believed that these defenses are crafted in such a way in order to protect oneself from emotionally harmful information, such as traumatic memories, socially unexpected desires, or self-focused wishes (Shapiro, 2006). This shift was seen throughout many phases of the research, in particular the transition from *Figure 3* to *Figure 4*, as I worked through my feelings toward my father. The first image presents a sense of heaviness, seen through the stop-motion animation and poetry, whereas *Figure 4* presents a nest-like womb. This transition implies that there is a transformation from the emotional heaviness, to that of finding ways that I was able to manage the heaviness in a productive way.

In the final phase of the response art, I created *Figure 6* as a conclusive response to all the previous work. This allowed me to process multiple layers of grief and delve into unaddressed mourning. Philips (2006) further explained that mourning is a means of resolving painful emotional experiences. The ability to work through grief brings forth points of contradiction, between acknowledging and denying it (Keenan, 2014). This was seen throughout the artwork, but more specifically in *Figure 5*, by immortalizing the time that my father and I spent together, as well as through the process of conceptualization, doing and undoing, allowing for me to take further steps process and let go my emotions.

Response Art as Personal Exploration

Response art was an integral component of the methodology, allowing me to create artwork in response to personal artifacts. This process was pivotal in evoking a profound change, allowing me to have different perspectives. It facilitated moments of gentle conjuring, and knee-jerk visceral reactions, as well as profound inner movements to shift my perspective. This process took me on a rollercoaster journey that nourished the process of self-discovery and introspection. Within the literature of art therapy, response art has been used in early conception of art therapy as a means of exploring challenging countertransference (Wadeson, 1990). As it became more predominantly used in the creative field, it has multiple applications: evoking the therapist's ability to empathize with the client, promoting self-care, furthering clinical supervision and promoting activism (Fish, 2019). Fish (2012) described that response art can create a creative

dialogue where the therapist produces response work alongside the clients' arts-based process, allowing the therapist to become an ally. Within my research, my final response art acted as a conduit and representation of being able to place myself in my father's shoes, as seen in *Figure 6*. This image provided an alternative prospect, seeing my relationship with my father in a new light, and therefore empathizing with the memories of my father when he provided for me the best that he could within his capabilities (Fish, 2019). Furthermore, I was able to witness my relationship from an outside perspective, facilitating a shift from the participant to the researcher.

This response art process provided great insight, through personal exploration of my lived experiences (Allen, 2019). Through this response art process, I was able to identify significant emotional and psychological effects that impacted my life experience as a child of PMI. I was able to correspond the emotions I was experiencing such as anger, powerlessness, longing, and yearning for connection with what was found in the literature, and thus foster resilience. There were also other feelings I experienced such as love, admiration, and pride, which were under-represented within the found research. The art-making process became a vehicle for externalizing emotions, through providing a reparative space in which I was able to process unresolved or unaddressed emotions that came with my lived experience as a child with PMI.

Implications

This investigation has offered the opportunity for self-discovery that has led to a deeper understanding of my lived experiences. I was able to gain insight concerning the challenges that may arise within an art therapy session and in my own artistic path as an art therapist. The concerns include the witnessing of underlying defense mechanisms, such as resistance, hesitations, and limitations with the creative process. This evoked an understanding that as a future art therapist, I may need to continue my self-exploration in order to process vulnerable thoughts and feelings in relation to my personal story: elements that I was aware of but had not incorporated internally. This research has elicited many findings that can be applied within the field of art therapy, such as using adapted interventions with found objects. This could be used to explore challenges around the grieving process and exploring identity or used to evoke memories. Furthermore, when working with diverse populations, the use of repurposed materials and non-traditional organic material can also foster cultural collaboration. Using objects coming from my home environment and from my neighbourhood allowed me to expand my choice of art materials. The current coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has greatly shifted the world of art therapy where

online art therapy has made us more aware of using common art materials, therefore found objects are a way of making materials more accessible and personal.

Furthermore, the Bird's Nest Assessment has potential to be expanded, as it can be conducted with three-dimensional materials, as well as found objects. These arts-based interventions support the process of meaningful art making in art therapy. Moreover, the use of response art within sessions as an intervention is to be considered, as well as the art therapist's personal use of response art outside a session (Fish, 2019). Response art can be a viable process to support the art therapist by providing a means of working through the many roles that they have. By integrating response work as a part of their practice, art therapists can gain insight about their clients, as well as maintain a routine of self-care (Fish, 2019; McNiff, 1988). As Moon (2000) discusses, this would further a professional and personal balance, allowing the practitioner to externalize their own emotions and continue to foster a relationship with art making. In this way, art making facilitates an exploration of a therapist's limitations and self-knowing, providing a way to listen to one's internal voice. Moon (2000) expressed the value of having a solid understanding of oneself both as a practitioner and an individual. Self-knowledge can be a gift to your clients, as it allows us to recognize our personal journeys and the challenges we may go through along our paths. As a final suggestion, I would recommend further research to be conducted on the potential of using personal artifacts to aid in the exploration of memories. Moreover, there is potential in the use of artifacts as a means of exploring relationships, especially when the individual is not available. Consequently, though, some ideas in this research can be adapted or used as a starting point for intervention with adult children of PMI, there is need to conduct further research.

Limitations

Though this research garnered new insight, personally and professionally, there are various limitations to be acknowledged. This study was an exploration of PMI through a heuristic arts-based process, only reflecting my perspective which limits its application to the population of adult children of PMI. The time restrictions put upon the exploration of this research were due in part to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, and thus also limited the results of this research.

The dual role of being both a researcher and a participant was challenging which helped to create boundaries as well as feeling pressure by staying within them. Although the method gave me more time to create the response work, with even more time and additional support from other researchers, the insights could have been further analyzed, deepening the findings. In

maintaining the role of researcher and participant, I struggled against my own defense mechanisms, making it challenging at times to garner insights and thus limiting the analysis process. These multiple roles, including becoming a professional art therapist, made me remove a portion of the data, such as poems and other response pieces, as I felt that they were becoming too personal. As Leavy (2015) discusses, another limitation with arts-based research is that of the translation process of the research converts that art object into data, there for transforming its meanings.

This research was anchored in attachment theory, but one must consider that “attachment theory represents the Western middle-class perspective, ignoring the caregiving values and practices in the majority of the world” (Keller, 2018, p. 11414). This means it limits the applications to other countries and cultures because it is not universal theory. The theories chosen also limit the elements that were explored, analyzed, and interpreted. One of the other main challenges of this research was that it was conducted during a world pandemic, and for this reason social isolation was mandatory throughout this process, limiting the resources that were available as well as exacerbating any feelings of grief and mourning which affected the results as well. Finally, because this research was conducted within my home environment with not as many strict conditions that would be present within a therapeutic setting. I was free to go and buy some materials that I did not have as well as go outside of my home to acquire found objects. In identifying the conditions of the research, I recognize the difficulty in replicating it.

Conclusion

*I will wear
my tears and wounds
proudly like badges*

This research has called for practitioners and researchers alike to look closely at the experiences of adult children of parents with mental illness. Heuristic, arts-based methodology has been used to contribute to this research. It was a self-exploration that provided a deeper and more personal insight to the lived experience of adult children of PMI. The first question that was explored through this research was: What are the emotional and psychological impacts of growing up with a parent with mental illness? This provided the foundations to answer the second question: How could these insights be applied to the field of art therapy? I was able to identify that

there were in fact many overlaps with the current research, but it was also missing a personal perspective. The personal context allowed for a more tender side to this experience, such as feelings of love and admiration, and the impacts of having a strong role model. The heuristic arts-based research, though not a therapy process, has provided a transformative process that allowed for a restructuring of my experiences. I was taking previously fragmented and chaotic elements of my life and reframing them into a story of resilience. This process shifted me, personally and professionally, from something that I once experienced shame from. To witness my own resilience, to feeling a sense of empowerment, I am incredibly thankful. I strongly encourage future research to explore the topic of adult children of PMI, as they are a large population that easily fall through the cracks of the health care system and have a voice that should be heard.

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