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LOCATING RESILIENCE IN ART: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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Abstract

This autoethnography aims to explore how resilience supported me in navigating identity confusion after discovering my Métis heritage at 19, coinciding with meeting my father for the first time. The data sources I analyzed were reflective journal entries, photographs, a self-written letter, and three art pieces to track my progress. Informing this process were feminist theory and Indigenous research methodologies, ensuring it was approached from a decolonized and feminist perspective. My key finding was that resilience-building strategies must be intentional and ongoing to work effectively. In addition to personal resilience-raising capacities, a network of support, positive self-talk, self-love, critical reflection, and trauma-informed care were essential to sustain resilience through adversity. While short-term resilience can be maintained independently, sustaining resilience over the long term necessitates interdependence, collaboration, and structural changes at a broader, systemic level.

Résumé

Cette auto-ethnographie vise à explorer la manière dont la résilience m'a aidé à naviguer la confusion identitaire provoquée par la découverte, à 19 ans, de mon héritage métis au même moment de rencontrer mon père pour la première fois. J'ai analysé comme sources de données des réflexions de journal, des photographies, une lettre écrite à moi-même et trois œuvres d'art pour suivre mes progrès. Ce processus fut orienté par la théorie féministe et les méthodologies de recherche autochtones afin de l'aborder à partir d'une perspective décolonisatrice et féministe. Ma principale conclusion était que les stratégies pour favoriser la résilience doivent être intentionnelles et continues pour être efficaces. Au-delà des capacités de renforcement de la résilience, un réseau de soutien, un dialogue intérieur positif, l'amour-propre, une réflexion critique et des soins tenant compte des traumatismes étaient essentiels pour maintenir la résilience face à l'adversité. Bien que, à court terme, la résilience puisse être maintenue indépendamment, pour maintenir la résilience à long terme il faut l'interdépendance, la collaboration et les changements structurels à l'échelle systémique plus large.

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Keywords

Autoethnography, resilience, Red River Métis, feminist theory, Indigenous methodologies

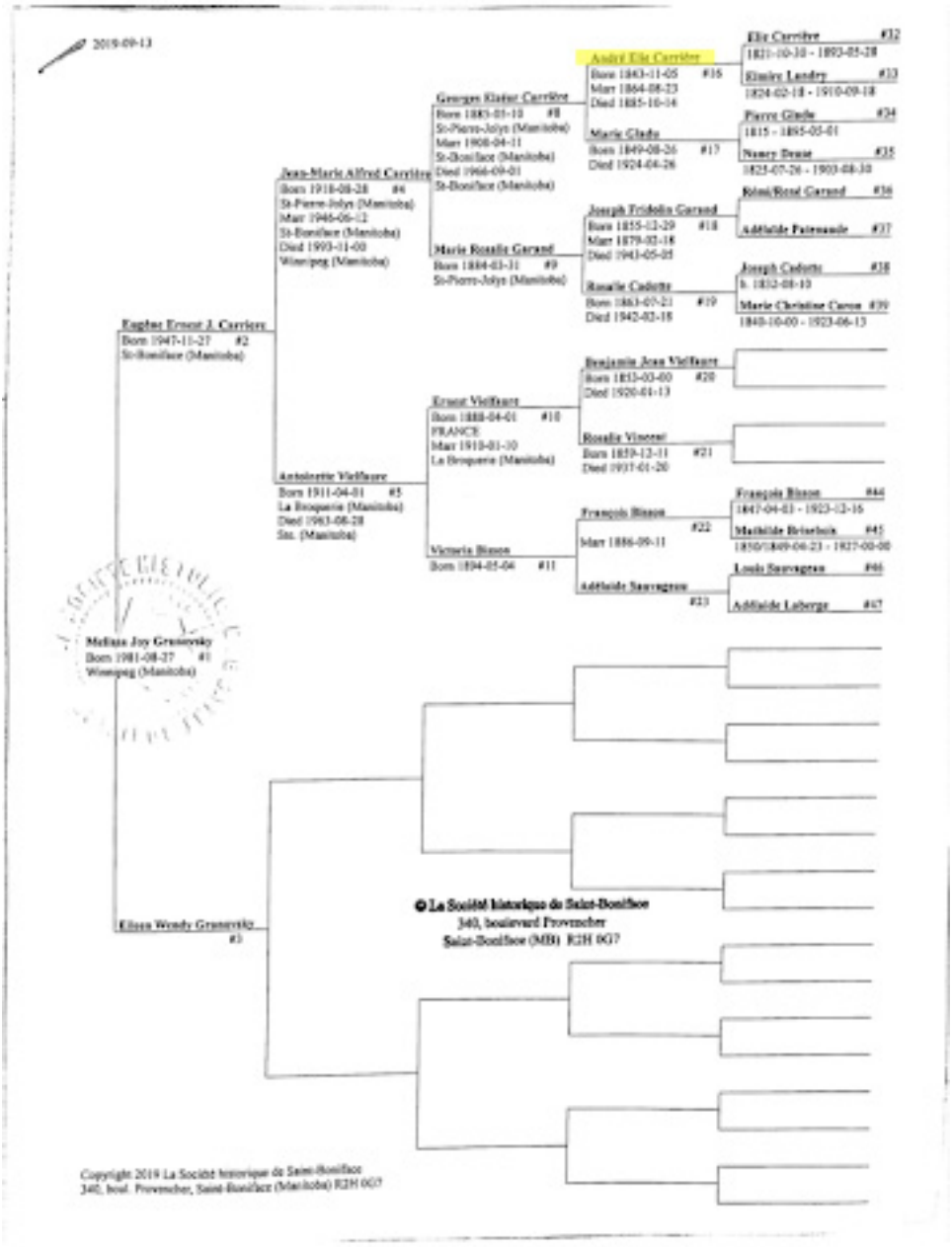
In this autoethnography I delve into how resilience helped me navigate the complexities of identity confusion stemming from my disconnection from my Métis heritage. I embarked on a self-reflective journey to renegotiate all aspects of my identity. During the initial stages of this autoethnography, research unveiled a contentious debate surrounding the definition of Métis identity and who resides within this definition. The direct French translation of "small m—métis" as "mixed" was misleading because it holds little consideration for Indigenous ways of knowing and for community understandings of identity. Vowel (2018) asserted that defining Canadian Métis identity is challenging due to the absence of any legislative context that outlines the criteria that affords someone Métis status. Nevertheless, Teillet (2019) emphasized the unique, intensely political identity of the Métis Nation and highlighted the history of dispossession of the Métis People, their battles for rights and freedom, and their resistance against those who denied their unique culture.

Unravelling my story posed several challenges due to various factors. First, my maternal family withheld significant details about my paternal lineage during my childhood. Second, navigating the intricacies of my Métis heritage alongside my Jewish background stirred internal conflicts. Questions arose: Would embracing one aspect of my identity diminish my connection to the other? Was it necessary to choose one identity to live authentically? How could I re-establish ties with the Métis community, honour my family's unique narrative, and remain cognizant of the pervasive impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups?

This profound dissonance led me to question the validity of pursuing this autoethnography and whether I was equipped to continue my research. To guide my work, I turned to Smith's (2012) Indigenous research agenda, which emphasized four key principles: decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization (p. 120). These principles helped me navigate tensions between the local, regional, and global contexts. Engaging with this framework prompted deep introspection, allowing me to identify the underlying beliefs that shaped my world view, and provided a supportive learning space to unlearn any biases hindering healing and transformation. Recognizing that my journey of exploration could ultimately contribute to knowledge mobilization and support to others fuelled the meaning of this work and my resolve to persevere with this project.

To establish a firm connection to the Red River Métis Nation, I sought paternal genealogical evidence, a challenging process that began with ordering a long-form birth certificate. This necessary step evoked anxiety due to familial secrecy on my maternal side. I did not know whether my father would be recorded on the certificate; thankfully, my father's name was listed in the document. I then accessed my paternal genealogy from La Société historique de Saint-Boniface in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This visual document traced my lineage to great-great-grandparents André Elie Carrière and Marie Gladu. The family tree revealed names of many Métis ancestors through the Carrières and Gladus, and I also discovered there were Métis ancestors through my great-grandmother Marie Rosalie Garand's family. With the birth certificate and genealogy in place, I acquired my Manitoba Métis Federation membership card, strengthening the belief that I had a legitimate place in

the Métis community. I have known since I was 19 that I was Métis, and it felt so affirming to hold empirical evidence documenting my family members' names and their communities.



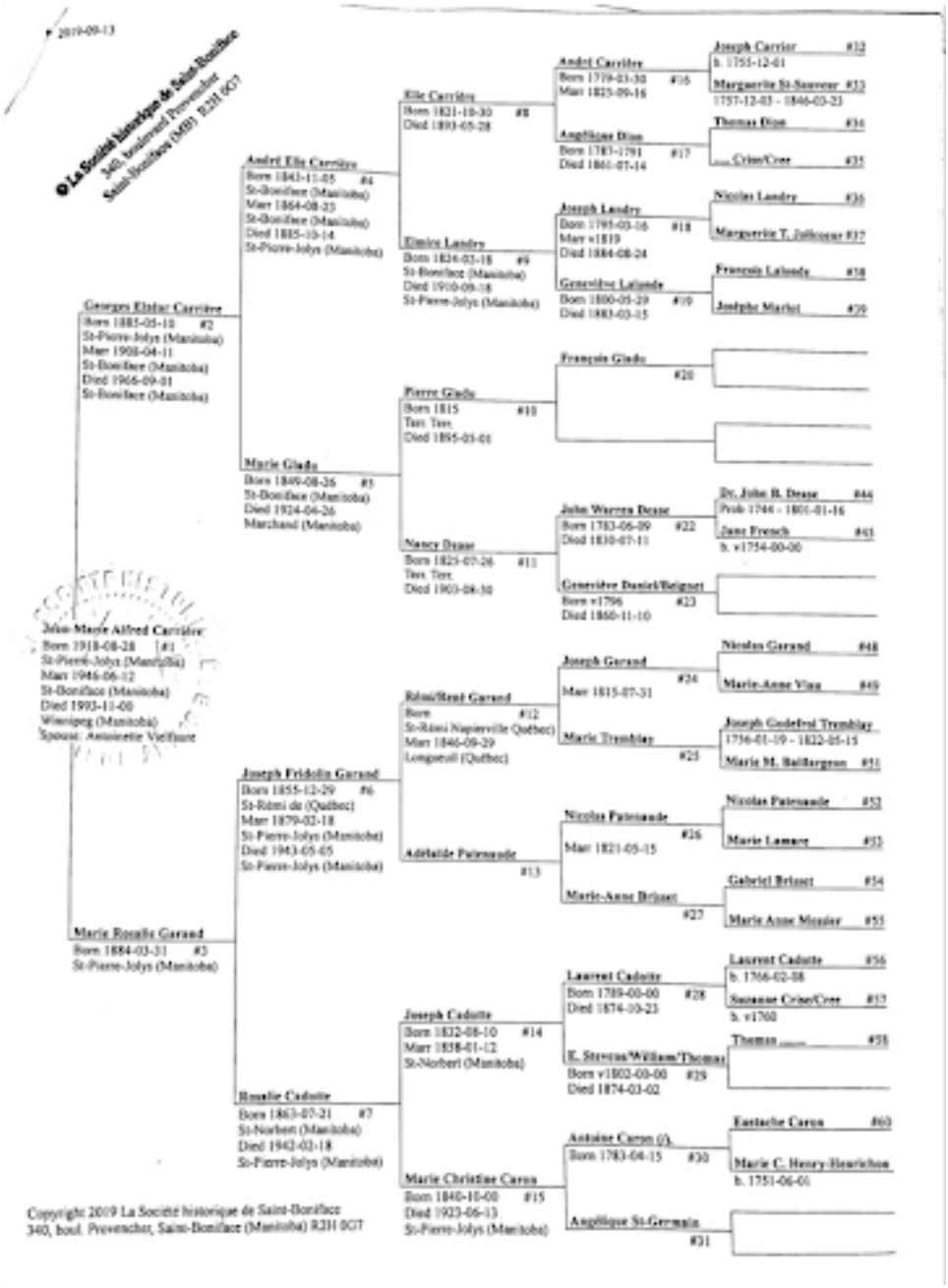


Figure 1. Paternal Genealogy—Document From La Société historique de Saint-Boniface

While official validation was essential for reconnecting with family and community, validation of my identity extended beyond the presence of external documents. Exploring Indigenous scholars' works revealed that reconciling my Métis heritage with my other identities was crucial for personal and professional growth, as it affirmed the interconnectedness of all aspects of who I am and fostered the need to examine all aspects with care. Battiste and Henderson (2009) believed that Indigenous individuals can decolonize themselves, their communities, and their institutions, and this internal work will lead to transformative change. This realization resonates with principles in adult education, feminism, and decolonized methodologies, which aim to address power imbalances as a means for societal change. Butterwick (2013) highlighted the importance of feminist pedagogy in creating inclusive educational spaces where all voices are heard. Crenshaw et al.'s (1995) concept of intersectionality illustrates how identities intersect, shaping lived experiences and highlighting the impact of identity politics on lived experiences.

Crenshaw et al.'s (1995) approach also helps analyze how structural factors, like dispossession and poverty, affect Indigenous Peoples differently, contributing to hierarchies and patriarchal oppression. Green (2017) advocated for including diverse participants in research settings, which humanizes and diversifies the narrative and provides a nuanced understanding of the wide range of Indigenous experience. As Crenshaw et al. (2019) discussed, intersectional subordination results from burdens interacting with vulnerabilities, creating further disempowerment. Recognizing and addressing these intersecting forms of oppression is crucial for promoting equity and justice. As an adult educator, I am committed to nurturing others and promoting the expression of diverse learners. Conducting this autoethnography deepened my self-awareness and empathy toward students, reminding me of my responsibility to celebrate inclusion and encourage the elevation of marginalized voices and experiences in my classes as much as possible.

Decolonized Methodologies

Decolonized methodologies offer a transformative lens through which we can reconceptualize research approaches. To fully grasp the value of this paradigm, it is essential to delve into the historical context of colonization in Canada. The colonial legacy entrenched notions of white superiority and Indigenous inferiority, leading to the suppression of Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and cultures (Green, 2017; Kovach, 2021). The oppressive policies of assimilation sought to erase Indigenous identities and hinder their cultural resilience. Decolonization presents a pathway to rectify these historical injustices. Tuck and Yang (2021) aptly described decolonization as a paradigm shift, challenging conventional notions of justice and offering an alternative perspective rooted in Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. Researchers who adopt this framework are urged to recognize the interconnectedness of all things—the land, animals, and the cosmos—to foster a holistic approach to relationality and care (Wilson, 2008). Doing an autoethnography became an action that strengthened the quality of work and care I can offer others because I have done this meaningful work.

Central to decolonized methodologies is the amplification of marginalized voices and the promotion of diverse representation within academic research spaces. By elevating Indigenous narratives, researchers can challenge stereotypes and foster mutual understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Datta, 2020).

Qualitative research is a platform for embracing the richness of Indigenous knowledge systems and acknowledging Indigenous rights within the Canadian landscape (Green & Smith, 2014). Understanding that counter-narratives are integral to disrupting racial superiority infused a lot of meaning into my work. Engaging in this process is an active way to disrupt Eurocentric narratives within adult education. Brookfield (2003) stressed that "adult education as a field of academic study in the United States has been characterized since its inception by an unproblematized Eurocentrism" (p. 497). Promoting the representation of counter-narratives across Turtle Island offers a gateway to the diverse Indigenous experiences and provides an environment for rich dialogue and mutual understanding, a valuable reconciliation tool.

Decolonized methodologies promote the imperative to humanize research practices. This entails fostering respectful and inclusive environments in academic institutions, characterized by active listening and dialogue (Archibald, 2022). Moreover, it involves empowering Indigenous communities to shape the research process, thereby challenging traditional power dynamics (Azzarito, 2023; Smith, 2012). Decolonized methodologies offer a transformative research framework rooted in principles of respect, reciprocity, and inclusion. By centring Indigenous perspectives and challenging colonial legacies, researchers can contribute to a more equitable and just academic landscape, guided by a commitment to truth and reconciliation efforts (Datta, 2020; Kovach, 2021; Quinless, 2022).

Resilience

By embarking on this autoethnography, it was paramount that I unpack what resilience meant in order to ascertain whether I demonstrated resiliency. Many scholars have discussed resilience to gain a clear understanding of the internal and external supports needed to thrive well. Khambati et al. (2018) suggested that critical tenets of resilience include effective communication, collaboration, and adaptability while maintaining a positive mindset during hardship, whereas Brown (2017) stated that resilience is

> the ability to become strong, healthy and successful again after something bad happens, the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, bent, etc., an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. (p. 123)

Strategies that support resilience are demonstrated when someone is self-aware enough to employ them in a crisis. Christman and McClellan (2008) maintained that resilience is more difficult if individuals believe they must manage their suffering independently.

Redefining resilience through the lens of decolonization is not just advisable but imperative. Amo-Agyemang (2021) emphasized the urgency of this paradigm shift, highlighting that

> discourses of resilience invariably involve examining the capacity to be aware of and responsive to feedback effects, thereby bringing emergent processes and interconnections to the transparent surface. It is this recognition that increasingly drives the Western modernist ontology. (p. 6)

Consequently, challenging Eurocentric views on resilience becomes indispensable. Thomas et al. (2015) presented a compelling argument on Indigenous resilience, contending that

> Indigenous resilience is thus inherently tied to the resilience of Indigenous cultures in their entirety. Rooted in conceptions of the land, Indigenous knowledge serves as a fundamental wellspring of resilience, often manifesting in intricately interwoven discussions that resist easy disentanglement. (p. 5)

Indigenous resilience and the ability to exercise cultural and land-based traditions are, then, inextricably linked. This underscores the idea that sustained resilience hinges on interdependence and the interconnectedness of experience. Such a profound shift in world view required a comprehensive examination and re-evaluation of individual and collective resilience concepts throughout this work.

Research Methodology: Autoethnography

I selected autoethnography as my research methodology because it allowed me to weave art, critical reflection, and theory into telling my story. Autoethnography is a writing methodology where researchers embed their experiences and different forms of expression to create meaning from the self and surrounding culture (Denshire & Lee, 2013). Autoethnographies provide the flexibility necessary for this work to unfold. Autoethnography "is often a multi-purpose endeavour simultaneously involving research, learning and evaluation" (Weber, 2014, p. 8). Creating an autoethnography allowed me to reflect on and be curious about how colonization and disconnection from my culture shaped me. Armila et al. (2018) said that "critical ethnography as a form of activist or rebellious research rests upon the idea that knowledge produced by researchers should bring benefits to those individuals and groups whom it concerns" (p. 130). Autoethnographies provided a framework that supported the freedom to allow reflection and artmaking to evolve organically. Weber (2014) posited that "self-knowledge is power; sharing self-knowledge is empowering" (p. 17). Sharing self can be the inspiration and catalyst for positive social change, and I hoped that this autoethnography could do just that.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this research, I employed autobiographical reconstruction, personal journal and self-written letter, document analysis, and artmaking and artifact analysis as data collection methods. I focused on artmaking and artifact analysis due to their historical connection to Métis culture.

Throughout the artmaking process, I recorded my reflections and observations within 24 hours to ensure they were as fresh in my mind as possible. Leavy (2009) stated, "Arts-based practices are beneficial for research projects that aim to describe, explore or discover. Furthermore, these methods are generally attentive to processes" (p. 12). Combining varied data sources, such as artmaking and analyzing artifacts, personal letters, and journal entries, provided more comprehensive results for text and image analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It provided a balance of information, more than art, letter writing, or reflection would have done in isolation. The artistic components informed my journal reflections. I wrote the

letter to my future self and read the letter after the study to understand the learning and growth that had occurred because of completing this autoethnography.

Regarding data analysis in this study, I employed word count, word lists, and keywords in context methods to extract general themes, sub-themes, and keywords from my reflective journal and self-written letter. Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie (2019) defined *word count* as quantifying the total number of words or frequency of specific words. They defined *keywords in context* (KWIC) as identifying and understanding the meaning of keywords in their surrounding context, as outlined in the "Presentation of Findings" section. These keywords and word lists were derived from three close readings of my journal and letter. Ryan and Bernard (2003) emphasized the effectiveness of word lists and the KWIC technique for understanding discussions by closely examining the language used. The process involved identifying unique words and tallying their occurrences. I studied each piece to create a word list for my art, noting keywords emerging from my observations. This comprehensive approach ensured a nuanced analysis of my study's textual and visual elements.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based methodologies encourage artists to engage in artmaking that fosters self-reflection, dialogue, connection, and collaborative meaning making (Wright & Coleman, 2019), which were all goals of my autoethnographical process. Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018) underscored that arts-based research's "starting points are also united by the cyclical progress of the project, alternating between planning, practical action, reflection, and evaluation. Respectively, artistic research and art-based action research are practice-driven" (p. 12).

Figure 2. Disconnection [Sculpture]

Documentation of this process through the incorporation of journal writing has also been invaluable, balancing structure and creativity to drive research aims. Art's immersive, tactile nature offers profound healing potential, enabling the processing of emotions and

the transformation of pain into significance (Cox et al., 2014, p. 4). Engaging in artmaking has given me a valuable avenue for introspection and expression beyond written language.

In my first artwork, *Disconnection* (2019) (Figure 2), the fractured, rough edges symbolized the rawness of my mother's feminine body, directly linked to the time spent watching her battle and eventually succumb to cancer when I was 11 years old. I fashioned two halves of a silicone mould to create this piece—a binary representation of the light and darkness within myself and my childhood. This also reflected the idea that there is no light without darkness. The two halves were held together with jewellery wire and connected by different-coloured resin. The execution deviated from the original plan, resulting in imperfections that, upon reflection, resonated more authentically with the imperfections of my past.

Blue and white paint signified my connection with and immersion into Jewish life, while black paint interspersed throughout the piece represented the sickness and darkness my family faced. On one of the stones, the Hebrew word מְנוּתָק is written, which translates to *disconnection*. The sculpture aimed to convey the pain of my childhood, when I felt disconnected from the weight of my story and, surprisingly, from the artmaking process itself. Despite the initial deviation from my expectations, I realized that my childhood was far from picture-perfect, and the sculpture eloquently communicated aspects I could not necessarily articulate in written words.

The dark green container holding my childhood together was a repurposed ashtray, symbolizing the impact of smoking and lung cancer on my mom and my life. Witnessing a visual representation of my struggles was humbling, prompting a realization that I needed to be gentler with myself as I confronted the conditions of my formative years.

Through the second artwork, *Unattainable Belonging* (2019) (Figure 3), I realized how I stretched myself unrealistically in pursuit of belonging. Ultimate and absolute belonging is ideological and is not a reasonable objective: it is impossible to belong to all groups, in all ways, without abandoning oneself. Recognizing this underscored the importance of prioritizing stability and self-care in my personal life. At that juncture in my research journey, I attempted to remain strong. I could not focus, and my energy was frenetic and unproductive. I needed to cultivate a sense of strength and be myself without shame, comparison, or fear. At that time, I felt very scattered, trying to grow as an adult while reconnecting with my roots. The painting demonstrated the tension I faced from trying to take on this monumental task while moving forward in personal and professional spheres.

In the third artwork, *Imagining New Futures* (2019) (Figure 4), I painted a picture to represent the messiness of the creation and healing process, complete with my easel, paints, and paintbrushes present. Unstructured creativity revealed layers of grief and allowed me to identify and make meaning from the backlog of feelings I had carried for years, as represented by the messy brush strokes and colour choices. I had always stigmatized messiness, and at that point in my process, as Ahmed (2017) stated, "Diversity work is messy, even dirty, work" (p. 94). I understood it was necessary to fall apart to examine every aspect thoroughly, as this realization was reflected in this art piece. My advisor urged me to embrace the artmaking process over the desired final product, and I am thankful for this lesson. Despite its imperfections, this piece was more optimistic. The use of colours showed infinite possibilities for the future while being held in place by my Jewish foundation. My head rested on the Jewish Star of David, and my eyes looked up toward the infinity sign, a symbol of Métis identity. The hope and optimism that emanated from this work marked a

Figure 3. Unattainable Belonging [Painting]

profound transformation in my perspective. I believed that although my childhood was fraught with hardships, I stood at a precipice to speculate a future that is more joyful and meaningful overall. This was a transformative paradigm shift. Cranton (2008) suggested that

> people really do prefer to be joyful than to be burdened down, and as long as they are indeed learning—perhaps in a different, perhaps even in a more meaningful way—they become engaged in the magic of it all. (p. 128)

I needed the magic of art to carry me through the darkest points of this process, and it became a vehicle for resilience and focused intention throughout this autoethnography.

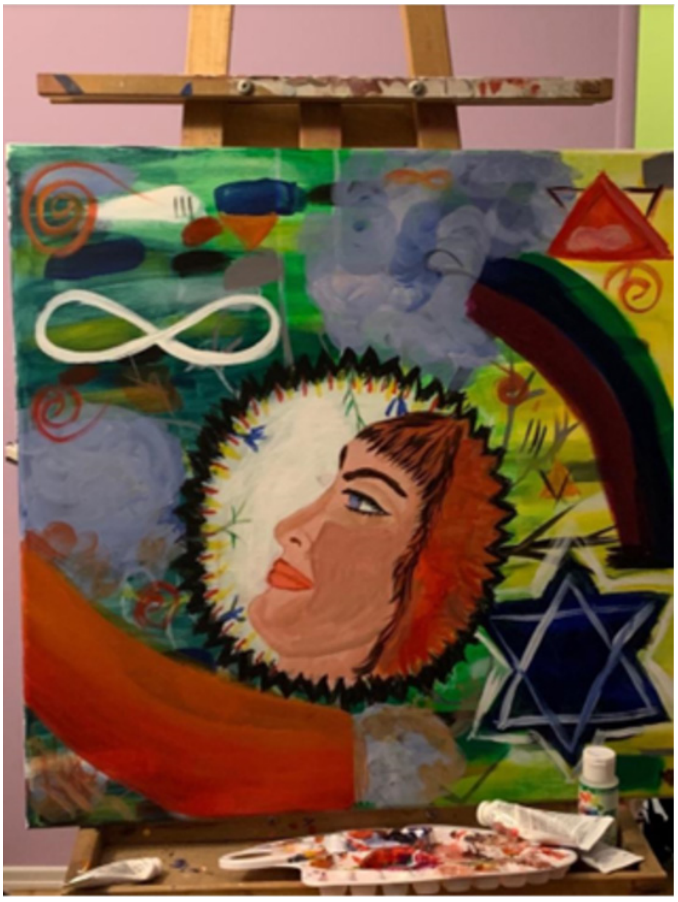


Figure 4. Imagining New Futures [Painting]

Presentation of Findings

The study revealed four major themes for deeper analysis: grief, change, healing, and resilience. I will discuss how these themes influenced my narrative and my relations with others personally and professionally, ultimately shaping my understanding of resilience.

Grief

I find grief challenging to define, and part of what was challenging about this autoethnography was confronting my grief. Böhmer and Steffgen (2022) asserted:

> Grief always represents an individual process, so it is not the management of the different stages of grief as well as the mode of expression that should be considered, but rather the intensity and duration of the grief until the affected person is able to lead a content life again. (p. 4)

Through critical reflection, I recognized that I had spent much of my life in survival mode, so finding space to grieve appropriately did not feel accessible to me. I did not trust myself to explore these aspects without a safety net if I needed to take time off to heal. On some level, I did not know if I could endure the darkness in this process and bounce back quickly enough to be a functional adult.

As mentioned earlier, my story included several situations of grief. I mourned the loss of loved ones in my immediate family. Losing my mom, grandmother, and grandfather affects me to this day, especially since my grandparents were my sole guardians after my mother's death. Through this work, I have accepted that death is a part of our human experience, and I came to terms with my grandparents' deaths. Still, losing my mom when I was 11 was not the natural progression of life. I have missed her presence at the many events she did not get to see since she died at age 42. This loss profoundly affects me today, especially at major events, birthdays, and holidays. In those moments, I am reminded of everything that was lost. The enormity of this grief felt shameful somehow, because I wanted to be the example of someone who overcame adversity. I had little capacity for daily tasks outside the healing process, such as socializing and leaving my comfort zone. Numbing through negative coping strategies was not a sign of resilience, but at the time I did not realize how comprehensive the effects of grief were on my life, and how much I needed help to start healing. Feeling the full range of emotions was integral to healing and moving forward effectively. I have intentionally processed these emotions and will continue to do so, and I will rely on the resources and tools I learned to use to transform my grief, such as therapy, journaling, and connecting with nature and art. I now know there is no weakness in getting help, and my healing will extend past the scope of this study. I am proud to say that I have never felt more like myself than I do now, and I am incredibly grateful.

The second event to be analyzed was the grief surrounding my father's absence. As mentioned earlier, it was not until my grandfather's shiva, when I was 19, that my grandmother told me the truth about who my father was. She worried that I would have no family left, which led her to disclose my father's identity. It was a very trying time. Understandably, my relationship with my father was awkward at first. He tried to get into a parenting role immediately, which did not resonate with me. We both felt grief because we did not know how to function as father and daughter. We felt grief because we wanted to be close but could not reasonably form a strong connection. Through this research, I gained compassion for myself and for my father. I understand that we may not ever be able to be close due to our personal struggles, but I am grateful that we continually attempt to find ways to connect and be in each other's lives.

Change

During this introspective research, I observed subtle yet profound shifts in my world view. Change has been a recurring theme in the lives of Métis and Jewish communities, marked by forced displacements and the lack of stable homes. Such constant flux, experienced by my father and me, has helped me develop a deep compassion for myself and him. A nomadic existence, devoid of roots or a secure home, fosters the need to stay in survival mode, which invariably impacts personal growth and limits space for healing. The hypervigilance and adrenaline resulting from living in survival mode becomes addictive, thus stalling true self-growth. I needed external support, such as therapy, to harness a sense of safety and

learn strategies to slow down and make life-changing decisions with a clearer mind so I could disrupt these negative patterns. Change also occurred due to physical limitations and psychological challenges, forcing me to slow down, which was a blessing in disguise. This recalibration affected my artistic approach by allowing me to acknowledge and honour my limitations as a disabled learner. Initially, self-hatred consumed me, but I eventually realized that only self-compassion could propel me forward. I recognized I was worthy of self-care, a necessary shift toward healing.

Healing

In addition to this project, my therapy work enabled me to forgive myself for my past perfectionism and the predilection to compare myself to others along my path. I continue to work on the unrealistic burden of hyper-independence and total self-sufficiency, acknowledging that it is not a measure of success to bear the brunt of stress and pain alone. My past lack of resilience stemmed from my inability to rely on others, but therapy and research have allowed me to extend the gentleness and care I deserved to my younger self. In a journal entry, I wrote,

> Healing journeys take work, and I am making this my full-time job. I have always felt like I needed to do more. I am enough. My job does not define me. My worth is not linked to how successful I am. I know I will find my greater purpose when I am healed and my capacities are higher. Healing is my full-time job, and I am finally embracing it. (October 31, 2019)

Acknowledging and feeling my inherent self-worth and the realization that healing is a non-linear process has shifted my perspective, emphasizing that external achievements do not determine the value of my humanity. This self-reflective journey has shown me the potential to build connections and create the family I have longed for while honouring what has been lost. I can incorporate meaningful rituals that align with my identity and explore growth opportunities. Examining my Métis and Jewish identities through a feminist lens is the closest I have come to living authentically. Ahmed (2017) suggested that "feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge, in how we write, in who we cite. I think of feminism as a building project: if our texts are worlds, they need to be made out of feminist materials" (p. 14). Feminist theory has taught me that the personal is political. By crafting my story through art and words, and being mindful of how power influences counter-narratives in academia, I can contribute to the essential process of systemic change.

Resilience

The original aim of this autoethnography was to understand resilience and what had helped me be resilient in the face of adversity, including navigating multiple traumas, losses, colonization, isolation, and identity confusion. Ahmed (2010) asserted that "to be affected by something is to evaluate that thing" (p. 23). During the study, I understood resilience is highly subjective and cannot be measured in absolute terms. Resilience depends on values, circumstances, resources, context, cultural norms, and socio-economic status. Resilience is a practice rather than a goal. I am confident in this process, and I plan to model the importance of resilience to my students.

Knowledge, reflection, therapy, social connections, and art have brought me to where I am today. I now see the gifts and strengths of different and alternative ways of knowing, but it has taken much work. For me, resilience is the power within to call on during times of struggle—grief, loss, uncertainty. When I'm in the darkness, not knowing how to get out, resilience is the light that got me through. The struggle was genuinely deciding to rise above and choose the light. With the proper support, I have the power to reframe my experience. We may also raise our collective resilience and offer opportunities for growth and self-betterment—for ourselves and the people around us. It is a quiet power.

As an adult educator, I aim to cultivate empowerment among individuals who share similar life experiences, guiding them to recognize their inherent value and diverse perspectives. In this journey, I now understand that resilience strategies are deeply personal; what works for one person may not necessarily apply to another. Amo-Agyemang (2021) eloquently underscored this point, stating:

> Resilience cannot be universally achieved through standardized solutions, disregarding the richness of individual experiences and perspectives. Local knowledge and practices disrupt conventional notions of resilience, challenging the efficacy of externally imposed interventions. (p. 7)

Through this adoption of new knowledge, I endeavour to model resilient behaviours and capabilities, aiming to foster stronger educational communities. However, I am mindful that there is no fixed formula or universal model of resilience. Instead, I seek to empower myself and support others in their empowerment by focusing on their agency, power, and voice, especially during challenging times. I strive to remind my students that we are not alone in navigating our narratives. Acknowledging the importance of seeking support is paramount for sustained resilience in adversity. By nurturing a sense of community and encouraging open dialogue, I aspire to instill a culture of resilience that embraces individual strengths and collective support systems.

Significance of the Research

I did not wholly understand resilience at the beginning of my journey. Initially, I frequently asked myself questions to pinpoint resilience and why it was so important. I understood the definition but wanted concrete examples of how resilience manifested and the driving forces behind it. I questioned whether resilience was a mindset, an ongoing practice, or both? Upon reflection, I see that resilience is an act of love. Resilience in my personal life motivated me to work through the more complex aspects of this vulnerable project and see it to completion. Resilience is tapping into my inner power and knowing I hold wisdom and transferrable skills to stabilize and drive me through difficult experiences. Tapping into our individual and collective spectrum of emotions in a safe environment provides a wealth of knowledge to learn and grow into. It also sheds light on the fact that healing is more assured when done with others, and we can enable ourselves to feel and move through grief healthily. Everyone needs to find a place to be heard and cared for. Our individual healing and decolonization work ripples out and benefits our families and communities, making connections where pain and disconnection previously existed. I understand how the chaos of loss and colonization shaped my sense of inferiority and lack of belonging. This has negatively affected how I form relationships with others. Resilience emerged when

I looked at my fears of belonging, honoured them, and still did the heavy lifting to connect with others. Professionally, this study demonstrated the value of creativity in processing pain as a vehicle for transformative healing. "Creativity involves intellect, but also intuition, inspiration and flexibility. At its core is the development of something new and possibly profound" (Pangle et al., 2022, p. 43). Learning self-compassion was profound and has taken me much farther than self-criticism ever could.

Conclusion

Miriam Greenspan (2004) claimed that "healing through the dark emotions is an unarmed journey into vulnerability—a journey through, not a departure from, pain" (p. 12). Looking inward during this study has been one of the hardest practices I have ever done. It was critical to engage in this healing journey to renegotiate who I am and explore how the impacts of colonization and disconnection from culture shaped my world view. Looking inward was beneficial and provided immense information to pull from, allowing transformative learning to emerge. Although I feel very vulnerable sharing my story, I feel it is vital to let students know their stories matter and that they are not alone, even in darkness. "Sharing what one has learned is an important Indigenous tradition. This type of sharing can take the form of a story or personal life experience and is done with a compassionate mind and love for others" (Archibald et al., 2022, p. 2). My love for others is essential to my resiliency and the will to align with my values and be the best educator I can be for students.

My work surrounding resilience has also stimulated my advocacy and commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice (EDIJ+). Resilience cannot be sustained in isolation. Equity principles demonstrate the urgent need to dismantle institutional barriers to support intersectional identities. Embracing diverse learners with varied backgrounds enriches the educational environment, fostering richer discussions, connections, transformative learning experiences, and social change. Students need to see themselves reflected in adult and art education to position themselves within the field. Acuff (2013) asserted that "it is apparent that there needs to be a destabilization of dominant narratives and official histories that are foundational in this field" (p. 227). Equity, diversity, and inclusion are paramount in decolonized research practices, acknowledging the importance of clear communication and intentional care in collaborative endeavours (Hackett & Allan, 2022). Reciprocity and relationship building further underpin this approach, emphasizing the mutual exchange of knowledge and the cultivation of authentic partnerships (Archibald et al., 2022; Wilson, 2008).

In my pedagogical philosophy, inclusion underscores the importance of welcoming all contributors into the learning environment, valuing diverse ways of knowing, cultural knowledge, and perspectives as integral components that elevate the ethos within educational spaces. Ahmed (2017) suggested that "diversity work is feminist theory: we learn about the techniques of power in the effort to transform institutional norms or in the effort to be in a world that does not accommodate our being" (p. 91). Recognizing diverse ways of knowing becomes a cornerstone in dispelling the notion of one singular path to success. As Thomas and Arday (2021) wrote,

> We are responsible for drawing attention to and attending to the injustices of our time. Racism is an injustice; it is supported by slavery-derived attitudes of "entitlement." Racism curtails diversity, damages a sense

> of belonging, and limits representation. In a diverse society, diverse management and progress go together. (p. 21)

As adult educators, our responsibility is to create inclusive spaces where diverse voices are acknowledged and actively contribute to academic discourse, helping to prevent student burnout and sustain resilience. Failure to facilitate such inclusivity risks impeding substantial institutional changes. Consequently, I advocate for establishing environments conducive to the flourishing of diverse minds to thrive under optimal conditions, not conditions that require sustained resilience.

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