Failure: A Heuristic Inquiry of the Experience of Failure Through a Nature Based Art Therapy Process

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Failure:
A Heuristic Inquiry of the Experience of Failure Through
a Nature Based Art Therapy Process

By

Lisa A. Manthe

A culminating dissertation submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Art Therapy

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Abstract

The aim of this arts based study was to investigate the experience of failure during the dissertation process. Through a heuristic lens, its objective was to gain an understanding of the tacit experience of failure and the influence of a nature art based process on the understanding of failure. Failure is integral to the scientific method (Wang et al. 2019), enhancing understanding and teaching us valuable skills. Intentional engagement with our response to failure allows us to address and incorporate possibilities that are often unseen (Nelson et al., 2017). The art process illuminates tacit knowledge, unearthing creative solutions and untapped possibilities (Joseph, 2006; Manthe & Carolan, 2017). The process of creating art in nature welcomes curiosity and provides containment for the expression of emotional experiences (Berger & Lahad, 2013). The study was guided by Andy Goldsworthy’s process of making collaborative art pieces with nature to incorporate the process of taking risks and utilizing failure (Malapas, 2005). An elite sampling of art therapists (N =6) who had been enrolled in a doctorate program engaged in a nature based art process inspired by the work of Andy Goldsworthy and the open studio process (Allen, 2016). The art therapists, along with the researcher, focused on a failure they encountered during their dissertation and engaged in a nature art process and narrative reflection. The creative work was displayed in a private online gallery, which was viewed by participants to aid the inquiry. The intentional immersive depth of heuristic inquiry supported the illumination of tacit knowledge and unique contributions to the understanding of failure.
Dedication

This research is dedicated to the many adolescents and families who inspired me with their curiosity, authenticity, resilience, and dynamic growth.
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I would like to extend my appreciation to my committee members for their consistent support, inspiration, and commitment to my research and growth. My committee’s ability to walk with me on the path, supporting the work through collapse and wanderings, reflects both the depth of their commitment to scholarship and their innate understanding of the process of creation. Their wisdom and compassionate collaboration created a strong foundation for exploration and growth. It was an honor to benefit from their wisdom.

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Table of Contents

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................... v
Abstract .............................................................................................................................. iii
Dedication .......................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................... v
List of Tables ..................................................................................................................... ix
List of Figures ..................................................................................................................... x
Chapter 1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  Failure ........................................................................................................................ 11
  Art Process as Data and Self-Understanding ............................................................. 18
Chapter 2 Literature Review ............................................................................................. 11
  Failure ........................................................................................................................ 11
  Art Process as Data and Self-Understanding ............................................................. 18
Chapter 3 Methodology .................................................................................................... 46
  Research Questions .................................................................................................... 46
  Definition of Concepts ............................................................................................... 46
  Research Design ........................................................................................................ 46
  Population .................................................................................................................. 49
  Procedures .................................................................................................................. 50
  Ethical Considerations ............................................................................................... 57
  Materials .................................................................................................................... 60
  Data Evaluation and Analysis .................................................................................... 60
  Implications ............................................................................................................... 60
Chapter 4 Results .............................................................................................................. 62
  Overview of Results .................................................................................................. 62
  Participants’ Demographic Data................................................................................ 66
  Participant Artistic and Narrative Responses ............................................................ 71
  Participant Heuristic Responses .............................................................................. 94
  Researcher’s Findings and Synthesis ....................................................................... 101
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 110
Chapter 5 Discussion ...................................................................................................... 111
  Overview of Research .............................................................................................. 111
  Critical Subjectivity ................................................................................................... 111
  Participants .............................................................................................................. 112
  Heuristic Components of Analysis ......................................................................... 114
  Scope ........................................................................................................................ 115
  Relevance to the field of Art Therapy ....................................................................... 116
  Findings From the Participants ................................................................................. 117
  Overview of Researcher’s Experience ..................................................................... 125
  Limitations ............................................................................................................... 126
  Future Studies .......................................................................................................... 127
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 128
References ....................................................................................................................... 131
Appendix A Letter of Permission ................................................................................... 154
Appendix B IRB Acceptance Letter ............................................................................... 156
Appendix C Letter of Introduction to Participants in Online Survey Research ............. 158
Appendix D Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study ........................................ 161
Appendix E Informed Consent to Publish Images .................................................................. 167
Appendix F Qualtrics Online Invitation and Survey ............................................................ 169
Appendix G Medical Allergies ............................................................................................ 175
Appendix I Participant Research Protocol ............................................................................ 177
Appendix H Participant Heuristic Inquiry Directions ........................................................... 184
Appendix J Researcher Protocol for Heuristic inquiry ........................................................... 186
Appendix K Medical Resources ........................................................................................... 188
Appendix L Online Gallery ................................................................................................ 190
Appendix M Researcher Heuristic Inquiry .......................................................................... 209
List of Tables

Table 1 Heuristic Process ................................................................. 48
Table 2 Participant 5's Identification of Themes, Patterns, and Unique Experiences..... 98
Table 3 Participant 6 Considers the Process of Participants 1-3 .................................. 99
Table 4 Participant 6 Considers the Process of Participants 4-7 ................................. 100
List of Figures

Figure 1 The Six Stages of the Heuristic Process ........................................................... 44
Figure 2 Heuristic Process of the Researcher ................................................................. 55
Figure 3 Responses to Q8 of the Online Survey .......................................................... 67
Figure 4 Interfering Symptoms or Conditions of the Potential Participants .............. 67
Figure 5 Self-harm Behaviors of the Potential Participants .......................................... 68
Figure 6 Responses to Q10 Referring to Thoughts of Hurting Self or Others or Suicide 68
Figure 7 Suicidality of the Potential Participants ........................................................ 69
Figure 8 Sexual Orientation of Participants ................................................................ 70
Figure 9 Age of Participants ...................................................................................... 70
Figure 10 Ethnicity of Participants ............................................................................. 71
Figure 11 First Art Process of Participant 1 ............................................................... 72
Figure 12 Second Art Process of Participant 1 ........................................................... 72
Figure 13 Third Art Process of Participant 1 ............................................................... 73
Figure 14 Failure Narrative and Art Dialogue of Participant 1 .................................... 73
Figure 15 Art Process of Participant 2 ......................................................................... 74
Figure 16 Failure Narrative of Participant 2 ............................................................... 75
Figure 17 Failure Narrative Continued and Art Dialogue of Participant 2 ............... 75
Figure 18 First Art Process of Participant 3 ............................................................... 76
Figure 19 Second Art Process of Participant 3 ........................................................... 76
Figure 20 Third Art Process of Participant 3 ............................................................... 77
Figure 21 Fourth Art Process of Participant 3 ............................................................ 77
Figure 22 Failure Narrative of Participant 3 ............................................................... 78
Figure 23 Art Dialogue of Participant 3 ...................................................................... 79
Figure 24 Art Dialogue of Participant 3 Continued .................................................... 79
Figure 25 First Art Process of Participant 4 ............................................................... 80
Figure 26 Second Art Process of Participant 4 ........................................................... 81
Figure 27 Third Art Process of Participant 4 ............................................................... 82
Figure 28 Fourth Art Process of Participant 4 ............................................................ 82
Figure 29 Failure Narrative of Participant 4 ............................................................... 83
Figure 30 Failure Narrative of Participant 4 Continued ............................................. 83
Figure 31 Art Dialogue of Participant 4 ................................................................. 84
Figure 32 Art Dialogue of Participant 4 Continued .................................................. 84
Figure 33 First Art Process of Participant 5 .............................................................. 85
Figure 34 Second Art Process of Participant 5 .......................................................... 85
Figure 35 Third Art Process of Participant 5 ............................................................. 86
Figure 36 Failure Narrative of Participant 5 ............................................................. 86
Figure 37 Art Dialogue of Participant 5 ................................................................. 87
Figure 38 First Art Process of Participant 6 ............................................................. 87
Figure 39 Second Art Process of Participant 6 ......................................................... 88
Figure 40 Third Art Process of Participant 6 ............................................................ 88
Figure 41 Failure Narrative of Participant 6 ............................................................. 89
Figure 42 Art Dialogue of Participant 6 ................................................................. 89
Figure 43 First Art Process of Participant ............................................................... 90
Figure 44 Second Art Process of Participant 7 ......................................................... 90
Figure 45 Third Art Process of Participant 7 ............................................................ 91
Figure 46 Failure Narrative of Participant 7 ............................................................ 92
Figure 47 Failure Narrative of Participant 7 (Continued) ......................................... 92
Figure 48 Failure Narrative of Participant 7 (Continued) ......................................... 93
Figure 49 Art Dialogue of Participant 7 ................................................................. 93
Figure 50 Art Dialogue of Participant 7 (Continued) ............................................... 94
Figure 51 Creative Synthesis of Participant 3 ......................................................... 95
Figure 52 Creative Synthesis of Participant 7 ........................................................... 101
Figure 53 First Creative Synthesis Film: The Beginning ......................................... 107
Figure 54 Second Creative Synthesis Film: The Collapse ...................................... 108
Figure 55 Third Creative Synthesis Film: The Resolution ...................................... 109
Chapter 1 Introduction

Understanding failure is central to scientific inquiry and experimentation (Wang et al. 2019). Intentional engagement with our response to failure allows us to address and incorporate possibilities that might otherwise go unseen (Nelson, et al., 2017). Societal narratives regarding failure lead us to turn away from this established process of learning and uncovering solutions. Society expresses an aversion to failure that is rooted in shame and discomfort with uncertainty (Williams & Brown, 2014). Whereas we depend on the wisdom of evidence-based scientific findings to inform our practice and decisions, too often we turn away from dialogue regarding the process that supports it. This is especially true with respect to failure. The silencing of dialogue around failure perpetuates the erroneous notion that failure lies outside of the normal part of growth and development (Catalano et al., 2017). Our aversion to broaching the topic of failure blinds us to possible creative solutions, potential growth, and acceptance of the normalization of our fallibility. This fear-based façade creates barriers to self-understanding and connection with our peers and communities, stifling collaboration.

In the face of such societal resistance to failure, a movement of leaders, inventors, and innovators who embrace creativity are amplifying the voice of failure in conferences, workshops, and journals (Carmeli, 2007; Childs, 2009). This inclusive movement celebrates the process of scholarly discovery and humility. Through open dialogue focusing on personal and professional failures, they are uncovering potential solutions, growth, and shifting the failure narrative (Biggs et al, 2011; Provera et al. 2010). A cultural acceptance of the normalcy of failure—one that embraces curiosity and the shared belief that failure is not always the result of wrongdoing, sets the stage for the
interpersonal work of confronting failure and embracing the eventual learning outcomes. This stance was defined by Edmonson (2012) as “creating a learning approach to failure” pg. 125 and has been shown to contribute to psychological safety in processing failure. In a *fail forward* culture, which refers to a culture that embraces the process of growing through failure experiences, dissent and outlying data are seen as necessary components of the process of learning and experimenting (Edmondson, 2012; Hirak et al., 2012). A culture that embraces learning from failure is founded in trust, psychological safety, and the understanding that a consistent river of authentic feedback is essential for understanding and learning (Carmeli, 2007). Failing forward fosters authenticity, resilience, and collaboration (Childs, 2009).

An area in which the experience of failure could offer fertile ground for learning is the dissertation process. The season of a doctoral student’s academic career should be one of experimentation and interpersonal dialogue as they nurture their emerging identity as a researcher and scholar. The immersion in collaborative academic dialogue engenders the exploration of identity and authentic thought (Kamler & Thomson, 2007). The dissertation is the culmination of students’ doctoral studies, and it represents the amplification of their original thoughts and identity (Kamler & Thomson, 2007). A central component of a doctoral education is the fostering of new knowledge, which requires innovation (Kamler & Thomson, 2007). Scholars completing their doctoral education are building their academic identity and developing their unique contributions to their field. This piece of scholarly writing is steeped in pressure, as it is the pathway to publication, career appointments, and academic standing.
The process of writing a dissertation is often a stressful experience exposing personal vulnerability. If students remain open to the possibilities that are unearthed by their exploration, this process can be a fertile time for potential growth and development. Unfortunately, doctoral students often do not feel free to share their mistakes or to give voice to their fears of being uncovered as an imposter or not worthy of their responsibilities and achievements (Zhang, 2016). Stereotype threat, which connotes a concern that personal failures will contribute to negative stereotypes attached to a facet of their intersectionality has been also shown to negatively influence doctoral students experience (Zhang, 2016). Imposter syndrome and stereotype threat have been linked to a experiences of stress, anxiety, and self-sabotage during the dissertation process (Clance & Imes, 1978; Crusan, 2014; Gardner & Keans, 2012).

It is important to consider the social and cultural implications of both the imposter syndrome and stereotype threat. Both syndromes, which are rooted in how we are perceived by others, can amplify the anxiety experienced by some marginalized groups (Edwards, 2019). Macro level experiences of classism, ableism, racism, and sexism mirror back to many doctoral students that they do not belong (Edwards, 2019). Edwards (2019) held the view that both the imposter syndrome (Chapman, 2017; Clance & Imes, 1978; Crusan, 2014) and stereotype threat are rooted in a fear of failure. She further found that normalizing failure was essential to human nature growth and her success as a doctoral student.

Research has shown that doctoral students are prone to stress, mental health issues, and an increasing dropout rate (Brown & Watson, 2010; Dabney & Tai, 2013; Pallos et al., 2005). A University of Berkeley (2014) study identified a 47% rate of
depression in doctoral students. Elevated mental health concerns within doctoral students have been found globally in research. A study investigating the wellness of 219 doctoral students from Japan found that 53% of the students met the criteria for a diagnosis of emotional disturbance (Pallos, et al. 2005). Stress and pressure can be anticipated within the doctoral process; however, studies have demonstrated that doctoral students experience an inordinate level of stress, as well as increasing psychological concerns (Sverdlik et al. 2020), which contribute to completion rates as low as 40% in the United States (Xu, 2014; Zhou & Okahana, 2016). One possible causal agent for these challenges, among many, is the lack of a structured system that supports the embracing of failure experiences with curiosity and psychological safety. However, the exploration of failure in doctoral students has many benefits. Experimentation and the natural experiences of failure could promote a growth mindset in doctoral students (Thomson, 2007).

Art therapy doctoral students represent a minority, and they practice on the margins of the mental health system (Gerber et al. 2020), fighting for inclusion and economic stability, which has led to a felt sense of vulnerability. The art therapy profession is developing, and only recently have doctoral programs focused on its area of study (Gerber et al. 2020). Art therapists completing a dissertation have a unique voice and their contribution is often considered to represent an outlying perspective in the field of mental health. Although the field of art therapy research is seen as an outlier, it has a strong reliance on scientific data; the field also embraces multiple ways of knowing as it utilizes the process of engagement with materials to create an understanding of self, other, and essential issues (Allen, 1995). Kaimal (2017) pointed to the need for art
therapy to develop methodologies that reflect the intrinsic nature of art therapy to foster greater growth and understanding. Art therapists are at the center of research that supports new emerging possibilities and the efficacy of our practice (Reader, 2017).

Art therapists’ preferred voice may be the process of art (Leavey, 2020); as such, art therapists embrace the understanding that art pieces can be reworked and changed and that there is valuable information from experimentation and engagement with materials. Through the process of artmaking, they are able to communicate in ways in which words are unable to convey.

As such, art therapists’ challenges during the dissertation process may be unique and more easily understood through the power of the art process. Arts based methods have been shown to circumnavigate outside influences and provide a safe space for the authentic expression and personal dialogue of experiences. The process of engaging in art focusing on failures may foster the necessary psychological safety for processing deeply personal and vulnerable experiences. The opening of a failure dialogue through art process is inclusive, naturally creates community, and may resist societal pressures. Understanding the unique experiences of failures experienced by this elite group could support the development of art therapy programs and art therapists as scholars. Failure data harvested from an arts based process is likely to speak from a place of strength and authenticity.

Art contains the propensity of defamiliarization, which allows for people to look at something in a new way (Leavey, 2020). bell hooks (1995) explored how the visual arts embodies a transformational power that can shake the foundation of stereotypical thought (Leavey, 2020). hook asserted that art can allow us a window into the authentic
experience of those who are otherwise marginalized and unseen. The diversity in perspective that arts based research provides could add to the strength of foundational knowledge (Barone & Eisner 2012).

Nature art therapy in particular establishes a sense of safety and a safe place for growth (Berger & Lahad, 2013), as well as an opportunity to dialogue with failure. Nature art therapy allows the individual to create that sense of safety through the involvement of right brain interventions, as well as the resolution of attachment to the environment. Research in the fields of nature-based philosophies asserts the reciprocal importance of the relationship between nature and the developing self, both neurobiologically and in wellness (van der Kolk, 2014). In addition, nature based art therapy data offer new possibilities to understanding embodied experiences, in which the body contains experiences of trauma (van der Kolk, 2000) and intense emotional encounters. Installation art stresses the embodied experience and is an example of art based data that reflects a holistic, immersive experience (Bishop, 2014, Lapum, 2018). The art therapy process has expanded into nature based installation work that invites a flattening of hierarchy and incorporation of the concepts of impermanence and change, inviting participation (Whitaker, 2017).

There are societal pressures that influence our awareness and ability to dialogue with our failures (Edwards, 2019). The failure process requires personal and collective psychological safety. The art process can provide the safety needed to rework and resolve personally and collectively troubling events and experiences (Allen, 1995, Berger & Lahad, 2013, Chapman, 2017, Dissanyake, 2008). Art can be a portal into self-understanding and allow us a window into our inner landscape and a chance to resolve
emotional issues within the mirroring and process of artmaking. Marek (2001) wrote “Trungpa Rinpoche once spoke of the power and beauty of unobstructed perception” (p. 55). Pat Allen uses the power of the relationship between the artist and art in her open studio process, which offers a chance to know our truths that have remained distant. This process can be instrumental in capturing tacit knowledge about issues that are heavily impacted by societal pressures, trauma, and fear.

Andy Goldsworthy’s process of making collaborative art pieces with nature incorporates the process of taking risks and utilizing failure (Malapas, 2005). Andy Goldsworthy’s inspired nature art therapy provides a metaphoric template in which one can explore time, change, and loss. Andy Goldsworthy’s artwork speaks to the importance of touch and the heightened haptic (or tactile) state that nature sculpture evokes within the artist (Goldsworthy, 2004; Malpas, 2007). This whole body, mindful contemplation of place and the present directly connects to the asserted need of the individual struggling with trauma or fear (van der Kolk, 2014).

Nature forces the contemplation of past, present, and future (Moon, 2010). In its resilience and strength, it teaches the concept of a “good enough mother and father” and creates a natural holding space for growth and the healthy development of attachment. Andy Goldsworthy’s process of making collaborative art pieces with nature explores resilience, letting go, and the experience of fantastic reality (Berger, & Lahad, 2013). Winnicott (1973) described the infantile omnipotence of “creating the world” as providing relief and often occurring in the trance-like state of the fantastic reality. Through the experience of making art within nature, participants can experience an expression and containment of their experiences (Berger, & Lahad, 2013). These
expressions incorporate the emotional, cognitive, and somatic self, offering a template for healing and letting go of emotional experiences and issues.

Nature art therapy allows the participant an opportunity to explore inner experiences and emotions with temporal materials that press upon the artist the experiences of change, power, control, and agency. Working with a constantly changing natural matrix fosters a development of somatic awareness and a held sense of self in relation to environment (Kopytin, 2017). One’s relationship to nature holds an essential role in personality and identity formation (Kopytin, 2017). Nature art therapy supports an individual in connecting the personal with the universal and normalizing difficult experiences (Berger, 2009; Berger & McLeod, 2006) while supporting identity development.

Andy Goldsworthy’s inspired nature art therapy integrates curiosity and exploration of decay, collapse, and failure (Goldsworthy 2004; Malapas, 2007). The process Goldsworthy uses to create sculptures in nature incorporates the use of trial and error, normalizing and seeing the value in collapse (Goldsworthy 2004; Malapas, 2007). The reliance on the earth and artist to provide the necessary materials, promotes inner resilience, human potential, and the acceptance of imperfection. This art process can support art therapy doctoral students in creating safe inner and collaborative dialogues about failures experienced during the dissertation process. Their experiences are unique deeply personal and contextual, holding a potential connection to the understanding of failure and the effects of nature based art process on failure.

In research, when sample sizes are small and unique, it is often more valuable to use phenomenological based research to understand the qualities of each individual’s
experience (J Health Care Chaplain, 2014). Noe (2000) proposed that research utilizing phenomenological methods gain valuable insights from the use of arts based data that captures the individuals’ embodied experiences and their environments in experiential ways. Heuristic inquiry was intentionally chosen in this study to allow the researcher and participants a holistic understanding of their experience of failure. Whereas heuristic inquiry and the phenomenological approach are often used interchangeably, “heuristic inquiry is a person-centered approach, whereas the phenomenological method is a phenomenon-centered approach” (Mihalache, 2019, p. 136).

Heuristic inquiry allows for the immersion and expression of unique expression to be captured and understood by the self and others (Kenny, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). In heuristic inquiry, the researcher becomes the instrument (Moustakas, 1990) and a receptacle for the data, utilizing all senses and ways of knowing. The researcher engages in externalizing inner dialogue that stresses the importance of self-understanding. Self-understanding allows the researchers to be authentically open and receptive to the experiences of others (Kenny, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). The reflective nature of the method allows the researcher a deep understanding of the data and a sensitivity to issues of power, gender, and context (Kenny, 2002). Intuition and personal experience are values that are connected to the acceptance of tacit knowledge (Polayani, 1983), which lies at the core of heuristic inquiry.

This research project was inspired by the many failures I have experienced during the process of completing my first dissertation project and the transformational learning these failures supported in my development as a doctoral student. Failure dialogue has unearthed powerful personal findings within me, which were often hard to communicate
with written language. I found myself looking for the bridge to collective experiences, which could hold my experiences in a broader context. I yearned to understand the experiences of others and create spaces for intentional dialogue about failure experiences in the hopes of influencing the shaping of a culture that embraces failure as a way of knowing.

The purpose of this arts based study was to investigate the experience of failure during the dissertation process. Through the heuristic lens, the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the tacit experience of failure and the influence of a nature art based process on the understanding of failure. The art process illuminates tacit knowledge, unearthing creative solutions and untapped possibilities (Joseph, 2006; Manthe & Carolan 2017). The process of creating art in nature welcomes curiosity, containment, and expression of emotional experiences (Berger Lahad, 2013). Andy Goldsworthy’s process of making collaborative art pieces with nature incorporates the process of taking risks and utilizing failure (Malapas, 2005).

An elite sampling of art therapists who had been enrolled in a doctorate program engaged in a nature based art process inspired by the work of Andy Goldsworthy and the open studio process (Allen, 2016). The art therapists, along with the researcher, engaged in a nature art process and narrative reflection while focusing on a failure they encountered during the process of researching and writing their dissertation. The creative work was displayed in a private online gallery, whose viewing was part of the inquiry. The intentional immersive depth of heuristic inquiry supported the illumination of tacit knowledge and unique contributions to the understanding of failure.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Failure

Failure is an essential part of development and growth; however, it carries a heavy social stigma and often has a deleterious effect on personal identity (Catalano et al., 2017). The influence of the dominant culture on the experience of failure is deeply rooted and broad. We internalize messages that simultaneously convey that failure should be avoided and learned from. Yet both failure and success seed opportunities for gaining a greater understanding of self and foundational concepts (Hobbs, 2009). When we privilege success as the only way of learning and knowing, our understanding becomes biased and we lose potential insight into solutions and knowledge.

For the purpose of this study, failure is defined as a result that deviates from an expectation following a challenge. Failure rarely has one cause, and the attributions of blame both drive and limit an individual’s potential understanding of the experience and the opportunity to realize growth as a result of that experience (Reason, 2000). There is a held aversion to uncertainty and discomfort with failure (Williams & Brown, 2014), which contributes to the silencing of our mistakes. This silencing amounts to a tacit acceptance of the notion that our failures do not exist (Catalano, et al., 2017)—a notion that is more devastating than mere hypocrisy.

Alternatively, a culture that learns from failure through open dialogue reduces fear and deepens our understanding and growth from the experience (Provera et al. 2010). Data collected regarding openness to failure allows us to pause and rethink our mental models (Biggs et al, 2011). When we only embrace success, we are simply reinforcing what is known rather than exploring what could be known (Catalano, et al., 2017). A
culture whose only focus is on success leads to a culture that is intolerant of that which lies outside of the margins (Sitkin, 1992). Popper’s (1959) black swan thought experiment portrays the value and importance of negative results. In his experiment, he hypothesized that all swans are white. Finding only white swans confirms the existence of white swans. Finding a black swan gives substantially more valuable data, helping us conclude that all swans are not white. Failure propels us into deeper analysis because our results are not anticipated, which creates an opening for new learning and greater knowledge (Anderson et al 2017).

Several factors impede an individual’s willingness to engage in dialogue and learn from failure; one is cognitive dissonance (Festinger et al 1956). Dissonance can cause us to avoid, deny, and justify a failure. It is difficult for us to confront our own deficiencies because we seek to preserve our ego (Tarvis & Aronson 2007). Cognitive bias also affects our ability to recognize and engage with failure. Our societal awareness and understanding of the many biases that affect failure continue to emerge in the literature. Some biases that are well recognized include our need as humans to create a coherent narrative, retrospective bias, and confirmation bias (Kahneman, 2011).

The influence of bias lead us to believe that we have a clearer, more truthful understanding of past experiences than we do and stems from a fallacy that we can accurately predict the future. Unfortunately, being aware of bias does not mean that an individual is immune to its influence. Both psychological safety in the exploration of failures experiences and bringing in an outsider’s perspective have been seen as valuable helpmates in the process of debiasing (Catalano et al., 2017). A shift in culture that embraces curiosity and the shared belief that all failure is not bad or the result of
wrongdoing sets the stage for the interpersonal work of confronting failure and embracing the eventual learning outcomes.

This approach is called “creating a learning approach to failure” (Edmonson, 2012, pg, 125), and it has been shown to contribute to psychological safety. In this culture, dissent is seen as a necessary component of the process of learning and experimenting (Edmondson, 2012; Hirak et al. 2012). The conditions under which one learns from failure must include trust and psychological safety, with the understanding that a consistent river of authentic feedback is essential for understanding and learning (Carmeli, 2007). The art of failing forward teaches empowerment, resilience, and collaboration (Childs, 2009). It can transform one’s understanding and seed creativity.

A movement towards embracing a fail forward culture is emerging and can be seen in business conferences and workshops that center their dialogue on failure and ritualize the celebration of failure. Silicon Valley and the entrepreneurial nature of the start-up culture has fertilized this important cultural shift. Innovators and inventors know that creative solutions often lie within the outlying data, and they use that knowledge to harvest new solutions. Academically, Stikin, Edmondson, and Kolb's work have fostered a greater understanding of the experience of failure and the loss of possibility that we encounter when we give in to social stigma, emotional response, and fear. Ashley Good’s consulting firm in Toronto called Fail Forward was founded on their foundational academic knowledge. Fail Forward works with businesses and entrepreneurs to establish the psychological safety, mindset, and the curiosity necessary for learning from failure. Internationally, there is a movement towards acceptance of this model (Sindall & Barrington, 2020).
**Doctoral Students**

Despite an emerging cultural shift regarding failure, doctoral students feel hesitant to vocalize their mistakes (Zhang, 2016). Economic and academic pressure, in addition to social stigma, often silence the important dialogue of failures experienced by doctoral students during the process of writing a dissertation. This singular piece of scholarly writing demands dissertation students’ unique contribution and a reverence to the current scholarship in their field (Kamler & Thomson, 2007). Publishing, career appointments, and academic standing rests on this pivotal piece of writing. In academia one’s identity and one’s writing are intertwined (Kamler & Thomson, 2007), which adds additional pressure to the process.

Research has shown that doctoral students are prone to stress, mental health issues, and an increasing dropout rate (Brown & Watson, 2010; Dabney & Tai, 2013; Pallos et al., 2005). A University of Berkeley (2014) study identified a rate of depression in doctoral students within their school at 47%. A wellness research study investigated 219 doctoral students from Japan and found that 53% of the students qualified for a diagnosis of emotional disturbance (Pallos et al., 2005). Although stress and pressure can be anticipated within the doctoral process, studies have shown that the elevated rate of stress and anxiety students experience is maladaptive and increases psychological concerns (Sverdlik et al. 2020). Rates of completion of a doctoral program in the United States are as low as 40% (Xu, 2014; Zhou & Okahana, 2016). One possible causal agent for these challenges, among many, is the lack of a structured system that supports embraces the failure experience with curiosity.
Research on the Dissertation Process

Research on the challenges of the doctoral process has focused on the idea of the imposter syndrome (Chapman, 2017; Clance & Imes, 1978; Crusan, 2014). Imposter syndrome reflects the identity that is activated during the doctoral work. Embarking on a doctoral education can evoke internal feelings of fraud and a belief that there is a gap between one’s ability and the work one is expected to do in academia (Clance & Imes, 1978). Imposter syndrome has been linked to a higher experience of stress, anxiety, and self-sabotage during the dissertation process (Clance & Imes, 1978, Crusan, 2014, Gardner & Keans, 2012). Awareness, self-inquiry, and cohort and chair support have all been linked to a decrease in imposter syndrome (Lewis & Puckett, 2022). Research on the connection between perceived belongingness and imposter syndrome showed a negative correlation (Hall et al., 2020), meaning the extent to which students feel they belong at the campus or institution, the less they are likely to experience imposter syndrome. The current study encouraged doctoral students to continue their work by exploring the challenges during the dissertation process. The hope is that this collaboration will further support the students and the development of doctoral programs (Hall et al., 2020).

Another important psychological phenomenon to consider is stereotype threat, which is the fear that an individual will contribute to the negative stereotypes of a facet of their intersectionality through their lack of achievement (Edwards, 2019). Stereotype threat was originally identified by Stale and Aranson (1995). It is important to consider the cultural implications of both imposter syndrome and stereotype threat. They both highlight the anxiety that some marginalized groups experience, which is rooted in how
they feel they are perceived by others (Edwards, 2019). Embodied experiences of “otherness” are experiences stemming from oppression and privilege.

Macro-level classism, ableism, racism, and sexism mirror back to many doctoral students that they do not belong (Edwards, 2019). Edwards found that both the imposter syndrome and stereotype threat were rooted in a fear of failure. She further found that normalizing failure was essential to human nature growth and her success as a doctoral student (Edwards, 2019).

The completion of a dissertation that focuses on art therapy is rare (Gerber et al., 2020). The art therapy profession is developing, and there have only recently been doctoral programs that focus on its area of study (Gerber et al. 2020). Art therapy embraces all ways of knowing and utilizes the process of engagement with materials to create understanding of self, other, and immediate issues (Allen, 1995). Kaimal (2017) spoke to the need of art therapy to develop methodologies that reflect the intrinsic nature of art therapy to foster greater growth and understanding. Art therapists are at the center of research that supports new, emerging possibilities and a greater understanding of the efficacy of our practice (Etherington Reader, 2017).

The art process embraces the understanding that art pieces can be reworked and changed and that there is valuable information from the experimentation and engagement with materials. Art therapists’ preferred voice may be the process of art (Leavey, 2020). They often see that it has the ability to communicate what words are unable to. The experience of failure or challenges during the dissertation process by an art therapist may be unique and more easily understood by them through the power of the art process. Understanding the unique experiences of failures experienced by this elite group of
doctoral students in this study could support art therapy programs in their development and art therapists as scholars.

Both the experience of failure and nature based art therapy research are areas of emerging inquiry that are underfunded and lacking in research. Emerging research has underscored the importance of investigating interdisciplinary ways of knowing to capture full awareness of knowledge of an issue (Gerber et al. 2021). Methods that illuminate knowledge beyond the dominant understanding reflect an acceptance of multiple perspectives and push against the Eurocentric bias that is dominant in Western cultures. Doctoral studies have highlighted success and stressed a Eurocentric single voice of quantitative methods (Jackson, 2017). This overreliance on quantitative data creates barriers to important understanding and data. It further marginalizes doctoral students who hold cultural identities outside the majority. The dissertation and the doctoral students’ identity are seen as intertwined (Kamler & Thomson, 2007). Often doctoral students fear that they will not be able to contribute to new knowledge, and they stand behind the assertions of others rather than taking risks amplifying their own voices. This sometimes stems from their voice falling outside the majority and their experience of anxiety related to culture biases that assert one dominant voice. Fear of failure in the community and the subsequent impact on doctoral students’ identity fuels their retreat to safety. Doctoral writing is also shaped by the social constructs in which it was created. The doctoral culture in the United States stresses success instead of curiosity, and this supports fear of mistakes in scholarly writing.

We often learn more through our mistakes than through our successes. Failure contributes to our creativity and illuminates untapped possibilities when we embrace it.
with curiosity. Our willingness to explore new knowledge and become curious about our failures could help shift the culture embracing collective knowledge. This study hopes to address the gap in research and understanding in the areas of failure, nature art therapy, and the process of writing a dissertation to encourage further inquiry and collective understanding.

**Art Process as Data and Self-Understanding**

Artwork can serve as a container to help individuals process and illuminate important aspects of the failure experience. Art allows us to connect with authentic experience and it is a way of knowing our true beliefs (Allen, 1995). Allen (1995) reminds us that “knowing what our beliefs are requires confronting ourselves, our fears, our resistance to change. Once we know what our real beliefs are we can allow them to evolve and change” (p. 3).

Pat Allen uses the power of the relationship between the artist and art in the open studio process; it is a process that offers us a spiritual connection and opportunity to know our truths that have remained distant. The process consists of three steps: intention, artmaking, and witnessing. The artist begins by stating the intention in the first-person active present tense. An intention could be an inquiry, engagement, or celebration. Intentions should be clear, specific, and simple. Intentions are the externalization of what we desire to receive from the creative force. The artist then lets the intention guide the artmaking. In this way, the artist uncovers other ways of knowing through pleasurable connection to the art process and making energy visible. Following the creation, the artist witnesses the art by responding in writing. Witnessing is not censored and can include dialogue with the image, descriptions, reactions, and free association. This process is
influenced by the intellectual ideas of Yeats, Steiner, Jung, and Cane (Allen, 2014). It is important that all reactions be recorded, both positive and negative. Witness writing can be read out loud on a voluntary basis. This powerful experience is focused on the relationship between the artist, art, and self.

During witnessing in groups, there is a strict, no comment rule to guard against outside influence on personal insight. This process trusts and safeguards the spiritual relationship the artist has with the art and themselves. The open studio process reflects and engages the relationship between art and self-understanding. This highlights the depth of the uniquely personal and powerful experience an individual can have in producing a piece of art that they are the only witness to (Allen, 1995). During the open studio process, artwork becomes data for the individual on deeply personal lines of inquiry.

Art is the externalization of the inner self (Dewey, 2005), the language of emotion (Langer, 1954), and the expression of the right brain’s truth (Chapman, 2014). Expression through creativity and visual art is intrinsically cathartic. Moore (1995), wrote about the need to externalize the magic of art as an instrument of soul making. Symbols are both an end and an instrument (Langer, 2009). The true potential of art lies within the powerful provocative change that can occur within the relationship between art, self, and others. Art is grounded in the earliest forms of communication (Dissanayake, 1995, Berger, 1972) and reflects multiple expressions of realities. Through art, we gain understanding of ourselves, others, culture, and their evaluation throughout time. Art is a cathartic expression whose value is amplified through thoughtful witnessing and reflection. Art
therapy utilizes a way of knowing that values images as the language of the human mind and as the x-ray of the soul (Gerber, 2014).

Art and play allow us to know what we already believe and to externalize our imagination (Allen, 1995). Dissanayake (2013) defined art and play as “making special” (p. 83). Art is the universal way that humans change aspects of their lives to make them unique (Dissanayake, 1995). Both art and play are pretend; they engage the inner experience and draw it outside of oneself. Play allows us to play out fantasy, sublimate, and be something extra outside of held experiences (Winnicott, 1971). Within play we practice socialization, wish fulfillment, recreation, and necessary skills (Winnicott, 1971). Special areas are put aside by communities for play, enhancing its definition of “making special” (Dissanayake, 2013, p. 83). Art and play both evoke joy in the creation of something unique and the expression of emotional content.

Historically, “making special” (Dissanayake, 2013, p. 83) was driven by the expression of concerns for survival. Artistic rituals were developed to contain and cope with psychologically troubling matters (Kalma, 1986). “Making special” (Dissanayake, 2013, p. 83) unified the group and allowed for collectively held emotions to have form. This form and ritual allowed the group to externalize the emotion and shape the outcome (Dissanayake, 1995). Through the aesthetic process of “making special” (Dissanayake, 2013, p. 83), communities are able to evaluate troubling events and shape the future. Shared emotional experience of art helps us transcend and heal. Artists often compare the act of creating to giving birth (Freidman, 1987). Art is both cathartic and pleasurable, drawing us out of our singular experience to that of the polis. We are seen, and we are
heard. Through art, we experience shared emotions and weave the tapestry of the collective.

Art offers a container to hold a cognitive and emotional conversation regarding important events and concepts. Suzanne Langer (1953) believed that the arts are the common language of emotion. The language of the arts communicates a core understanding of feelings. She felt that through art we are able to communicate the complexity and varied nuances of emotions that cannot be expressed verbally. The art piece is then held emotion. Langer (2009) also proposed that humans have a basic need to create meaning in their world through symbolizing their experience. Meaning is an inner experience that is projected outward to bear upon objects and experiences (Langer, 2009). The viewer engages with the image and experiences the depicted emotion, which creates a bridge to understanding the other. She believed that “the real education of emotion is not the conditioning affected by social approval and disapproval, but the tacit personal illuminating contact with symbols of feelings” (Langer, 1953, as cited in Langer, 2009, p. 401). In this way reality is created by symbolic form (Langer, 2009).

Langer (2009) asserted that creating art is a cognitive way of projecting feelings into perceptible forms. This assertion links art to the mind and biological process. She went on to assert that ideas evoke emotion and emotion evokes attention, which results in symbolic expression, which then reshapes emotion. Having this process occur in a contained way within an art product allows the individual some necessary distance from intense emotions. Distance allows the individual to act as a witness to their own process, gain clarity, and experiment with options. The concrete nature of the art product also allows the individual to express transference reactions in a contained, tangible way.
Intense emotional experiences can be flooding and overwhelming to process. The experience can lead to secondary trauma. The individual can become retriggered by the material they need to process. Having the feelings contained in a product allows a natural empowerment over the emotional experience as the artist can further destroy, rework, repair or further contain the image. This process fosters a sense of control and a concrete representation of successes and growth.

The making of art is a demonstration of the unbroken continuum of the mind and body (Langer, 1953). Langer (1953) felt that healing represented the integration of acts. The kinesthetic nature of the art therapy process directly speaks to the mind-body connection and the importance of addressing the wounding and helping the whole person heal. The artist/client engaging in art learns from what the art therapy process teaches, role models, and asserts: the experience of self-soothing through art work. Artmaking reaffirms the individual’s ability to express internal conditions and confidence in predicting outcomes (Carr, 2008). The physical interplay of emotional content and artmaking provides a place for the expression of bodily held memories and issues. Failure to identify or express and reconcile emotionally upsetting images over time contributes to stressful, felt experiences, which correlate to medical problems and a sense of loss of control (Henry & Wang, 1995).

Individuals may not be able to consciously remember traumatic memories. Art therapy allows those memories to have a voice and a physical release. Through art therapy, we can build up, tear down, cover, uncover, and rework our stories and images. Art therapy allows us to give a voice and a language to that which had no voice. Buck (2007) contended that exercise educates the physical side of our lives, religion educates
us in the moral aspects, and learning the intellectual side; however, only art can educate our emotional side. Art therapy educates our emotional side by using the art product as a mirror of the self and relationships, which is concrete and fixed.

Langer (1953) described how a sculpture made in art therapy can reach out to the viewer or towards itself; the form may be static but communicates movement. Each art piece is an act that concretely communicates movement. This then can serve as a template for further movement and growth and situates the artist/client in the present moment. This ability to situate the client in the here and now allows the client to see tangible evidence that they are not reliving the story of their trauma. It provokes a sense of mastery, a sense of control, and a natural hope and belief that change is possible in its inherent natural template.

Artwork also encapsulates the complexities of the cultural differences within the concept of self. Art has often been described as the mirror to the soul or self (Moon, 2000). My artwork reflects complexities of the self and societal and environmental influences. The meaning, materials, purpose, and gestalt is determined by the culture in which it is situated. Art communicates our deepest experiences and held memories, and culture touches us deeply, affecting our earliest experiences of relationships. Early affective experiences situate our responses and are rooted in the early bodily experiences of culture (Kirmayer, 2007). Culture shapes our perceptions and relationships. The experience of stillness, introspection, and felt emotions that one has while engaging with great works of art connects us to a greater sense of community and larger, spiritual experiences. We relate to the right brain narrative of another when it is conceptualized through a tangible concrete image. This promotes the idea that the viewer’s personal
experience of the artwork is a relationship. Through that relationship follows soulful understanding and depth of understanding of shared emotions.

Bruce Moon (2000) also proposed the idea of images as entities, which create space between the artist, art, and viewer. When we think of artwork as an entity, we can experience the engagement of art as soulful creation. When we view art in this way, we reengage the spiritual aspect of art therapy, artmaking, and art appreciation. The understanding of artwork as a relationship is the foundation of understanding art therapy from both a postmodern perspective and one of cultural humility (Hoshino, 2008).

The imprint of social forces on artistic products is inescapable. Artwork reflects the social and political context of one’s culture and experiences. As the United States becomes more polarized, so does the art. The same struggle is seen within the context of other cultures and has occurred throughout history. Our artwork will reflect how we were cared for as infants and the conceptualization of society that we were inducted into.

Viewing the self as an expansive living system illuminates our interconnection and allows us to connect to a broader sense of the world (Vaughn, 1985). As art therapists, we are founded in the acceptance that multiple realities exist simultaneously based in many ways of knowing, including sensory, emotional, kinesthetic, imaginal, and intersubjective (Gerber, 2014). All of these reflect our truths. We situate ourselves within the postmodern construct; we know that we cannot see the complexity of any given image, individual, or a piece of art (Gerber, 2014, Gergen, 2001). Bohr-Heisenberg’s view of indeterminacy reflects this view, that reality itself is an unfixed maze of possibility (Zohar, 1990). Art therapy also reflects the many worlds theory in its constructs of the infinite possibilities and versions of ourselves (Zohar, 1990). Art can be
the vehicle for understanding of self and of the universal archetype, a transformative process of healing and growth (Lewis, 1997). The practice of art therapy naturally holds the same properties as the transpersonal perspective, embracing the world’s wisdom (Franklin, et. al 2000).

Whereas art reflects the social construct of our collective, it is less affected by dominant power than language is. Language is directly socially constructed and necessarily reflects the dominant culture and its beliefs (Gergen, 2001). The premise that language is truth is reflective of the defined power in society (Gergen, 2001). The reliance on language and the scientific method as truth reflects positivism (Gilroy, 2006). Language mirrors only one way of knowing. Art is the most free and universal language and the most effective means of externalizing and communicating an experience to oneself and others (Dewey, 2005). As Berger stated, “It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world” (Berger, 1972, p.1), and artwork captures the early process of communication, reflecting it as a primary source.

Art conveys meaning regarding our inner experience, a mirror of experience to the evolving self and others. The process of externalization of the inner world is itself a powerful process that has value outside of the witness experience. Primary emotional expression of the right brain truth is important and healing (Chapman, 2014). It is the powerful language of the right hemisphere of the brain. This is where the constructs of our emotional lives, senses, and traumas are held (Siegel, 1999; van der Kolk, 1994). The early developing right brain generates the implicit self, the system of the unconscious (Schore, 1994, 2005, 2007). Chapman (2014) spoke to the importance of attachment and
relationship on the development of the right brain. The art process can hold the powerful identity work necessary for growth and development.

**Nature Art**

Art therapy draws from the foundation of fine art practices in the creation of interventions. Interventions carry theoretical and sensory meaning, stemming from the materials and the art period reflected in the interventions. It is vital to understand the foundations of the art practice to understand the psychological implications of an art therapy intervention. Andy Goldsworthy’s nature-based artwork falls within the postmodern art movement (Malpas, 2014). Postmodern art asserts the existence of multiple ideologies and meanings (Alter-Muri, 2007). Art in this context comes to represent an evolution of meaning that situates the viewer in the past and present (Morse, 2004). Meaning is in constant motion representing the collage of multiple perspectives (Alter-Muri, 2007).

Installation art was an exciting development in postmodern sculpture. Installation recreates the perception of the environment and highlights new meanings based on context (Malpas, 2007). The work of the land artists of the postmodern era, including Andy Goldsworthy, is directly related to the installation work of the same era (Malpas, 2007). Land artists were first identified as exclusively connected to large-scale earth works in remote areas. Works by Heizer, Smithson, and Walter de Maria encompassed a range of environmental art works, mediums, and scale. These works also reflect a broad area of contexts and range of permanent to impermanent. Andy Goldsworthy’s work contemplates the symbiotic relationship between the temporary and the permanent (Malpas, 2014). In his work, art finds its voice in the sculptural architecture of nature. His
work, and the work of other land artists, draws the viewer into nature spaces and provides a catalyst for the viewer to look at what may have been overlooked (Malpas, 2014).

The work of Andy Goldsworthy (1990) directly focuses on the process of change and time within place. Conscious engagement in the process of awareness of the effects of time and change on place and identity are central concepts within his work (Goldsworthy, 1990). His work taps into what Ball (2001) called the self-made tapestry, and is a reflection of spontaneous reaction to environment and materials. The land artist’s work has no boundary between the natural world, art, and self (Malpas, 2014). Rather, the land artist works directly with the physical world creating and reflecting change and significance of place.

Place is a central concept in land art and the art of Andy Goldsworthy. Making land art can be seen as a sacramental experience, the sacralization of life (Malpas, 2014). Making art is not merely a reflection of life, but life itself is a core concept of land art and the art of Goldsworthy (Malpas, 2014). Mircea Eliade wrote of the mythic center, which was the spiritual core of one’s life. This core was spatial and arose from the concept of place. She saw artwork as a reflection of that spiritual center. These concepts are also reflected in the artwork of the Australian Bushman’s alcheringa experience, in which life is sung into existence. Joseph Campbell utilized the pollen path metaphor of the Navajo Indians to voice the same concept. Pollen represents the life source, the pollen path, the path to the center, in the same way the creative journey is following the pollen path to the center. This idea asserts that paradise can only be now. Goldsworthy work embraces multicultural ideas of the spiritual metaphor of place.
Place is both universal and local, reflecting the nuances of the moment and location and the connection to universality of place (Malpas, 2014). Durell (1963) asserted that man is only an extension of spirit of place and his art a reflection of it. Land art is then a process of centering oneself in the essence of place and creatively responding. The artwork of a land artist must primarily please oneself, as its ethereal quality may make its creator its only audience. In that way, it provides the deep interchange between the internal and external worlds, the tapestry of the developing and evolving self. The artist works within the art as an experiment of living in which one is available to all of the aspects of living. In this way, the land artist is also utilizing a phenomenological point of reference in reflecting their whole experience of the place. This search for the essence connects Goldsworthy with the phenomenological perspective, Zen Buddhism, and existential philosophers, such as Kierkegaard.

The relationship between Goldsworthy’s art and oriental philosophy draws from commonalities, such as the here and now, spontaneity, enlightenment, intuition, change, nature, the void, meditation, and cosmic unity (Malpas, 2014). The Zen Buddhist concept of the eternal now, for example, is reflected in the ethereal transitory nature of his sculptures, such as poppy lines, in which the flowers are only present for an instant and then blown in the wind. Satori is often described as seeing into one’s own nature (Malpas, 2014). Suzuki (1970) termed it the insight into the unconscious, which reflects Goldsworthy’s (1990) thoughts about his sculptures, which are about seeing and time itself. Nature too is considered a teacher in land art and Eastern religion (Malpas, 2014). The essence of the void is clearly seen in the sculptures as they reflect the paradoxical
ideas that emptiness is fullness and the idea that the microcosm and macrocosm are interrelated (Malpas, 2014).

Change is central to the art of Goldsworthy and Taoist mysticism, in which the ying and yang create change, yet the great whole remains the same. Nature reflects the same process whereby flow is crucial. Land artists relish decay and collapse. Goldsworthy (1990) asserted the piece becomes more complete as it falls apart. This radical assertion of metaphor reflects hope and resilience within its core.

Contemplation is central to the process of making land art; in the process, the artist embraces a meditative state in the intensity of relationship to subject. The process is kinesthetic in nature, involving walking and physical labor. Walking has a long historical association with improved physical and emotional health. It releases chemicals in the brain that produce physical pleasure and has been known to soothe babies; moreover walking has been incorporated into spiritual and meditative practices. In the creation of land art, the artist utilizes themselves to reaffirm their sense of home, a cultural and spiritual place, where they are the core center (Malpas, 2014).

As sculptors, artists use their whole self, embracing this haptic sense that involves the whole body when making a creation. The process of land art and the art of Andy Goldsworthy share core commonalities with current neurologically based trauma treatment (Chapman, 2014; Malpas, 2014; van der Kolk, 2014). Whole body involvement, contemplation and meditation, acceptance of collapse, reestablishing a core sense of home and safety, and awareness of change as a constant are shared concepts.

Nature therapy stems from the core belief that there are psychological benefits from interacting with nature (Jordan, 2014). Several theories have been developed to
explain and capture the psychological effects of nature on the wellbeing of an individual (Jordan, 2014). Nature provides an aesthetic and affective response, which promotes wellbeing and is linked to brain chemistry (Jordan, 2014). Current research supports these findings (Tsunetsugu et al., 2007, Lee et al., 2011). Research in Japan focusing on the effects of nature on brain chemistry revealed that subjects experienced lower levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, after Shinrin-Yoku (the Japanese ritual of walking in the forest) than those who walked in an inside environment (Tsunetsugu et al., 2007, Lee et al., 2011). Selhub and Logan (2002) found that nature promoted a sense of physical vitality or aliveness. Frumkin’s (2012) research demonstrated the importance of nature and relationships with animals to an individual’s wellbeing. He also pointed to the need for others to articulate the connection of nature to psychotherapy in an empirical manner (Frumkin, 2012). Eco psychology asserts that not only does humankind benefit from the relationship to nature through wellbeing and identity, but we also suffer from distance and miscommunication with the environment (Roszak, et al., 1995).

Evidence for the role of nature in identity formation can be seen in the early work of Searles (1960), in which he asserted the importance of the role of the mother, as well as the role of the environment in the infant’s development of sense of self (Searles, 1960). Searles (1960) found that infants’ relationship to their nonhuman environment was important psychologically in the development of the self. Expanding on this theory, Barrows (1995) proposed that a new concept of infant development be put forth that includes the ecological context. The idea that we need to reconnect with the natural world is a common theme in the eco psychology and ecological theories (Jordan, 2014). Jung (1921) believed that the earth was within us; he pointed to the lack of definition between
the earth and identity demonstrated in indigenous people. Many have utilized that theoretical construct in their therapeutic work within nature (Jordan, 2014).

When considering work in nature, therapeutically, it is important to evaluate how the artist defines nature. It is also important to consider the historical changes in definition of nature and wilderness evolving from technology and culture (Jordan, 2014). Nature is both semiotic and real, as well as a process (Jordan, 2014). Theories of *becoming* offer a fluid definition of self and nature as unfolding in constant movement (Faber & Stephenson, 2011, Connolly, 2011). These theories stem from the philosopher A.N. Whitehead (1988) and the geophilosophy of Deleusze and Guattari (1994). According to Whitehead (2004), a process philosophy views everything existing in relationships within particular forms in which they are dependent on perspective. Nature in this context is seen as an experience of events in motion (Whitehead, 2004).

Vitalism also focuses on the concept of nature in terms of relationships that are constantly in motion, without clear mechanistic or material definitions (Jordan, 2014). Geophilosophy argues that the earth and thought are connected and interdependent (Bonta & Protevi, 2004). This encompasses the idea of nature as becoming and capable of affect (DeLanda, 2006). In considering therapeutic work with nature, one needs to consider the interdependence of humankind in a relational process of movement towards becoming (Jordan, 2014).

Vitalism has also been a theme in psychological literature (Stern, 2010). Stern (2010) expanded on his original work on infant development, in which he viewed the self, comprised of sensate connections of relationships, thoughts, feelings, actions, and the unfolding relationship between the individual and the internal and external worlds, as
a dynamic force of becoming. He proposed that therapy accesses the fingerprint of movement of the individual, including the unique adaptations to past and present situations that shape the actions and presentation of an individual (Stern, 2010). The arousal system is directly connected to vitality and the unfolding of the self (Stern, 2010). Stern (2010) saw vitality as essential in infant development, as it helps the infant gather information about the environment and make adaptations where warranted. Shepard (1982), Barrows (1995), and Louv (2008) also recognized the importance of the sensate connection of infants to their environments and nature in their developing arousal system. Research in the fields of nature-based philosophies asserts the reciprocal importance of the relationship between nature and the developing self, both neurobiologically and in wellness (van der Kolk, 2014).

The natural growth project is the compilation of research on the process of hosting therapy in natural settings, such as gardens and green spaces (Jordan, 2014). Linden and Grut (2002) utilize gardens as a medium and source of healing for refugee torture victims in their group work. In this context, the gardens are presented as a nontaxning way to engage those struggling with trauma (Linden & Grut, 2002). The authors termed it *psychotherapy in a garden*, where the role of the therapist is a reflective process of mirroring the individual’s experiences within nature back to them (Linden Grut, 2002). Nature is utilized as a metaphor and a container of the projection process, and the natural distance provides safety for the process (Linden & Grut, 2002). The sensate and aesthetic nature of the experience is of vital importance (Linden & Grut, 2002). The engagement with nature offers the trauma victims opportunities to work
through trauma metaphorically and to be present to the process of growth towards a healthy future (Linden v Grut, 2002).

Berger’s (2006) nature therapy embraces some similarities to the growth project in that nature is seen as a dynamic third party in the process. Berger’s process draws on concepts from art therapy, drama therapy, gestalt therapy, and shamanism. Berger’s (2007) research highlights how the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship change due to the more democratic healing space of nature. In this case, asking one’s client to make their home in nature helps to develop a three-way relationship of nature to self to therapist situating the individual at the center, in control of the work (Berger, 2007). Berger (2007) utilizes metaphor and symbolism as central to his practice. He also focuses on the interplay of the natural elements on the process and the spontaneous process of existential and personal challenges. It is important to note that Berger does not articulate practical considerations regarding the frame of therapy from either a practical or theoretical stance (Jordan, 2014). Berger’s development of “a safe place” program grew out of a need to address PTSD in children and adolescents living in war-torn Israel. Group work addressing PTSD by engaging nature helps children and adolescents address their core feelings of unsafety by engaging the imagination and utilizing a model that addresses every aspect of the trauma (Berger, 2013).

Berger (2013) asserted that the group element increases personal and collective feelings of safety and increases resilience. Berger employs Winnicott’s (1971) seminal idea of potential space and Lahad’s (2006) idea of fantastic reality to harness the creative ability of a child to abandon the left hemisphere and act in dramatic play. The left hemisphere can then take in and reevaluate what has happened in the right hemisphere
and transpose it onto reality (Berger, 2013). Berger utilizes the healing process of imagination and play in collaboration with metaphor and the uncertainty of nature to help children create a core sense of safety and resolution of trauma.

Berger (2013) drew on concepts utilized in creative art therapies in his creation of a “safe place” protocol within outdoor spaces to help those children with PTSD heal from their trauma. Creative arts therapies, such as art therapy, have also recognized and utilized nature within their process. In these therapies, the healing process involves engaging an individual’s creativity and symbolic expression. This healing process involves the inner subjective experience and that which cannot be expressed in words or is better expressed in other modalities (Frizell, 2008).

Art therapists who conduct creative arts therapy recognize the power of creative expression to capture experience while acknowledging that the process of the creation or expression is curative in nature (Knill, 1999). In expressive arts therapy, art is a term that has multiple meanings and can be defined as any experience of artmaking, such as dance, visual art, theater, and music. Arthur Robbins (1994) focused on the essential aesthetics in art therapy, voicing that the process and product of the piece of art was a powerful vehicle of expression and growth. Robbins utilizes the relationship between the art and the artist in the process of self-understanding and healing.

Creative arts therapies draw from the fine art movements in their work, such as the land art movement (Kastner, 1998; Tiberghien 1995). These art pieces utilize natural space and process to explore and create pieces of art situated in nature. An example of such an artist is Andy Goldsworthy (2004), whose art, as mentioned previously, expresses a deep connection to place, space, time, and process. His work reflects a


connection to personal narrative in relationship to the earth. Goldsworthy speaks to the importance of touch and engagement of the senses in creation of nature sculptures. This active engagement promotes the reestablishment of whole-body involvement, safety, and trauma resolution, (van der Kolk, 2014). Berger’s (2013) directive to create a home in nature reflects Goldsworthy’s (2004) process. Henley (2002) also drew from the concepts of Andy Goldsworthy in his outdoor work with children who have experienced trauma. Creative art therapies draw on the sensate right brain focus in their use of nature in therapy (Friszell, 2008).

The creative art therapies recognize the dynamic force of process and the diverse embodied connection we have to the larger world (Farelly-Hansen, 2001). Siddon Heginworth (2008) focuses on the use of ritualized art creation in the outdoors as healing opportunities to consider change as a concept in our lives and in our psychological growth. The fields of creative art therapy and art therapy have come to utilize nature as part of the creative process in a parallel trajectory as the field of contemporary art.

When working therapeutically in nature, it is important to understand the differences that exist in the therapeutic relationship; these differences need to be explicit in the informed consent and in the therapeutic choices. Berger (2006) described the influence of natural space in therapy as having a democratizing effect on the therapeutic relationship. When therapy is conducted in an office that is a space owned or rented by the therapist or an agency, outdoor space is shared. This flattens the power hierarchy and can empower the client (Berger, 2007). The relational schools of psychotherapy focus on the transference and countertransference relationships (Jordan, 2014). The shared space may offer more experiences of mutuality (Bridges, 1999; Mitchell, 1988). This needs to
be considered actively by the therapist in order to maintain the integrity of the therapeutic work (Jordan, 2014).

Special consideration must be made to the attachment of the individual client to nature and nature as a container for transference. If we conceptualize the pattern of behavior to nature as an attachment, we can apply attachment models that can help us understand or lead our treatment (Jordan, 2014). Complicated issues of attachment arising from the relationship to the primary caregiver are thought to be projected onto one’s relationship to the earth (Shephard, 1995).

Shephard (1995) proposed that individuals develop a unique attachment to the earth or our environment that is shaped in infancy and based on the complicated relationships we are exposed to early on. Attachment is a key consideration in psychological evaluation and intervention in object relations theory (Robbins, 1994). Another key concept is having a secure base (Bowlby, 1969). Jordan (2014) postulated that nature provides just that: a secure base and the relational aspects of the mother and the father. Nature, then, can be seen as a source of comfort and security. Affect regulation is directly influenced by our early attachments (Schore, 2014). Individuals can address affective states and to understand and process of experiences of helplessness and loss through the natural process inherent in nature (Jordan, 2014; Nicholson, 2003).

Nature can also act as a transitional object providing the transitional space that Winnicott (1958) described as the space between the inner and outer. Nature can serve as a transitional object reflecting back the good enough mother, offering space to externalize and capture the needs of the individual (Jordan, 2014). In a similar way, nature also can become the holding space, a space Bion (1971) conceptualized as the therapeutic space in
which issues can be expressed and contained. In traditional psychotherapy, this has been considered the room, a static and predictable environment. Nature can act as a transitional object, a holding environment for transference and countertransference and a way for the client to explore attachment and affective issues in a nonthreatening way.

Affect regulation is an important component of psychological wellbeing, wellness, and is neurobiologically reflective of the experiences we had in early childhood and throughout life (Chapman 2014; Schore 2014). Mindfulness teaches the right brain affective regulation through focusing on the present (Van der Kolk, 2014). Mindfulness has been integrated into many disciplines and is gaining popularity (Jordan, 2014). Drawing from Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness is a process of focused awareness (Mace, 2007). Recently, literature has been developed that links the practice of mindfulness in nature, such as hiking (Altschuler, 2004), walking meditation in nature (Altschuler, 2004), and focusing in nature (Gendlin, 1962).

Schroeder (2008) utilizes focusing in nature to gain a greater awareness of felt sense and affective regulation. Nature is seen in Schroder’s work as the egoless other. Through contemplation of felt sense, we gain a greater awareness of ourselves and our connection to the earth. Theorists, such as Swanson (2001) and Abram (1996), draw on the I-Thou relationship to capture the power of nature and mindfulness in therapy. Burns (2012) postulated that the embodied relationship between the individual and nature contains reciprocal communication that reflects object relations and somatic experience.

Projection in an outdoor environment can be utilized to have the individual project and work through issues within the container of nature; as mentioned earlier, in this way, the projected material can be worked on from a safe distance (Jordan, 2014).
This is one of the ways in which art therapy and nature-based therapy hold core commonalities (Jordan, 2014). Farrelly-Hanson (2001) is an art therapist who utilizes nature in her practice and sees the combination of nature and art as a powerful vehicle for process and change. Within nature, the actual experience of change and growth can be apprehended in a concrete fashion, which is not possible linguistically (Bennet, 2010). Artwork in nature becomes a dynamic force field of change that reflects back the issue and solution in a developing field.

The concepts of embodied life metaphors in nature offer rich possibilities for enactments (Stanostefano, 2004). Stanostefano’s (2004) work in nature with children who have experienced trauma reflects an understanding how enactive movement can encapsulate a child’s emotional experience. Ian Siddons Heginworth (2009) utilizes the seasons to help individuals explore personal journeys of healing through art and nature. The idea that we are evolving and dynamic helps transcend issues and change within our lifespan.

Siddons Heginworth (2004) utilizes ritual as a component of his work in nature, and others have also asserted the importance of ritual in nature and within the field of psychology. Dissanayake (1998) asserted that ritual was a vital manner in which communities came together to express, contain, and transcend troubling events. The containment of issues and events in ritual allows for the remembrance of the past, the experience of the present, and the creation of the future. In this way, the ritual provides both closure and the promise of something new (Dissanayake, 1998). Ritual has been utilized for centuries to connect with a deeper sense of self (Jordan, 2014). Ritual is intrinsically part of the therapeutic process apparent in the setup of the therapy rooms and
the manner in which the therapy session is conducted (Chandler, 2010). Nature can provide a healing space that is sacred and connected to what is larger than ourselves (Jordan, 2014).

Jung (1989) saw nature as imbued with spirit. The use of ritual within nature can help individuals connect inner and outer realities while connecting to something larger than themselves. A Jungian perspective draws on the central idea that we are all connected, and all of nature originates from a single substance (Jung, 1989). It is also important to consider that emotions do not just happen within people but also happen between them. This understanding deepens the need to consider the space in which the therapeutic work is unfolding (Jordan 2014). The interconnection between man and earth is also celebrated in indigenous cultures. The power of the forces of nature and our connection to change within nature is at the root of those practices. Andy Goldsworthy’s (2004) nature sculptures incorporate change, time, and decay as central elements. His sculptures incorporate the Taoist concept that everything changes and transforms, but the earth remains as a whole. Nature can be a mirroring source, a reflection of the whole self.

Linda Chapman and Allen Schore (2014) spoke of the importance of utilizing a treatment model with adolescents struggling with PTSD that embraces physical-somatic memory, verbal cognitive memory, and all components of the trauma. Nature art therapy addresses all of the senses and provides a window into fantastic reality that directly speaks to the held trauma. Making art in a natural environment speaks directly to themes of change, death, decay, and growth (Whitaker, 2010). There is a certain degree of unpredictability in nature that compels the artist to consider it and react to it directly within the art. Nature inspires us to evaluate the bigger picture and gain perspective on
meaning (Whitaker, 2010). Hillman (1995) suggested that the deepest layers of the psyche emerge in reaction or response to organic matter. The natural world is not static; it is constantly changing, evolving and pressing on the notion of time. The work stimulates capacity for sensory, cognitive, and affective engagement.

Nature art therapy and Andy Goldsworthy inspired art therapy provides a metaphoric template in which an adolescent can explore time, change, and loss. Nature forces the contemplation of past, present, and future (Moon, 2010). In its resilience and strength, nature teaches the concept of “good enough mother” and creates a natural holding space for growth and healthy development of attachment. Andy Goldsworthy’s process of making collaborative art pieces with nature explores resilience, letting go, and the experience of fantastic reality (Berger & Lahad 2013). Winnicott (1973) described the infantile omnipotence of creating the world as providing relief and often occurring in the trance like state of the fantastic reality. Through the experience of making art within nature, an individual can experience an expression and containment of their traumatic experiences (Berger & Lahad, 2013). These expressions incorporate the emotional, cognitive, and somatic self, offering a template for healing and letting go. Berger and Lahad (2013) developed a model of treatment utilizing nature art therapy. Their “safe place” intervention is based on the healing powers of imagination, creativity, and play. Playing in fantastic reality allows the individual to explore new ways and have a sense of control. When one returns from the transcendent state of fantastic reality, the left hemisphere and its control and critical cognition can reevaluate those ideas that emerged and apply them to concrete reality (Berger & Lahad, 2013).
Nature art therapy allows the individual to reestablish trust within their environment and connection with others. Nature art therapy speaks to and disrupts the hyper individualized focus of modern society reconnecting us with the shared collective. Attachment to the environment as the “good enough mother and father” can be established offering a template for healthy attachment.

Andy Goldsworthy’s (2004) art pieces provide a role model for acceptance, letting go, and contemplation. His work speaks directly to our sense of self and place within the universe. Modern society often forgets that when the connection to nature has disappeared, we have also lost our connection to self (Goldsworthy, 2004). Nature art therapy based on the work of Andy Goldsworthy challenges individuals to contemplate time, the past, present, and future, which allows them to contain their trauma or experiences and regain trust in the constant change of the earth. The process allows them to establish a sense of inner security and resolution of their issues. Through the right brain process of the nature art therapy, they are able to resolve relational attachment disruptions that could have occurred as a result of their trauma or experiences. The processing of their pieces through photography stimulates the right to left-brain connection causing containment, an intellectual understanding, and a witnessing. This is an essential process in resolving the trauma or issue and visualizing and experiencing a healthy sense of self and hope for a future.


**Research Approaches to Capturing Art Therapy Processes**

**Qualitative Research.** Empathic understanding and inclusion is at the center of qualitative research. A type of qualitative research that captures a unique way of knowing, one of empathic subjective understanding, is the phenomenological approach. Franklin (2013) explored the relationship between the intersubjective projection into the inner world of another, response art, and *action understanding* (Gallese, 2008), tying the process of reflective artmaking to the empathic understanding of another’s feeling state. The process of witnessing the art process and then reflecting on it should offer a connection to the emotional state of the individual who created the artwork. The process of the phenomenological evaluation of art process reflects the exploratory nature of art therapy (Capitan, 2010) but has limitations in validity. Research outcomes depend on researchers’ skill and ability to bracket, or put aside, their own biases (Kapitan, 2010). Phenomenology also attempts to grasp the essence of experience; however, in capturing the essence, important details of the participant experience may not be included. It is also important to note that the essence of this qualitative approach creates difficulty for those who wish to replicate the process (Gilroy, 2006).

**Arts Based Research.** Research has often relied on artwork and imagery to narrate, document, analyze, resist, and to give voice to new knowledge (Leavy, 2020). Arts based research provides diversity in perspective that adds to the strength of foundational knowledge (Barone & Eisner 2012). bell hooks (1995) explored how the visual arts embodies a transformational power that can shake the foundation of stereotypical thought (Leavey, 2020). hook asserted that art can allow us a window into the authentic experience of those who are otherwise marginalized and unseen.
Art therapists have used the power of art to harvest meaning and illuminate what has been unseen in research and within their roles as supervisors and clinicians. Barbara Fish (2018) and Gwen Sanders (2017) have used response art in this manner in their work as researchers to gain a holistic understanding of relationships and experiences. Art based research allows for the multiplicity of meaning, deepening engagement, and reflection (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavey, 2020). Because of these process-based outcomes, its ambiguity can be seen as a strength (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavey 2020).

**Heuristic Inquiry.** Heuristic inquiry allows research to study experiences that are personal and embodied, capturing sensitive outlying data. Moustakas’ (1961) method of heuristic research is rooted in the autobiographical experience of loneliness that he experienced while he was exploring a possible surgery for his daughter. The process embraces a holistic understanding of the object of research through the exploration experiences of self and others without a predetermined hypothesis (Hiles, 2002). The process begins with the identification of an embodied personal question that is deeply felt by the researcher (Moustakes, 1990; Jaspers, 2003). Moustakas (1990) suggested that the researcher live the question, setting aside the impulse to jump to answer the question. Moustakes asserted that the exploration of the question and experience can transform the researcher and lead to greater growth and understanding (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic research stresses the importance of the journey and process, which is congruent with the core belief in art therapy (Jaspers, 2003). In heuristic inquiry, the researcher becomes the instrument (Moustakes, 1990) and a receptacle for the data, utilizing all senses and ways of knowing. The researcher engages in self-dialogue, in a way that emphasizes the importance of self-understanding. Self-understanding allows
researchers to become more fully authentically open to the experiences of others (Kenny, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). This reflective nature of the method allows the understanding of the data to be more sensitive to issues of power, gender, and context (Kenny, 2002). At the core of heuristic inquiry is the foundational acceptance of tacit knowledge asserted by Polanyi (1983); it is one that values intuition and personal experience.

When engaging in heuristic research, using an aperture or framework to support inquiry is essential. Moustakes (1990) developed the following framework for researchers to follow when utilizing his method (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*The Six Stages of the Heuristic Process*

The interchange between the researcher’s internal exploration and harvesting the experiences of others is organic but also must be systematic, and these phases support the outcome of meaning. Captured data should include the essence of the participants’ held experience, and efforts should be made by the researcher to clarify if their understanding
is valid. The process of evaluating the data calls for the creation of unique representations for each participant followed by the recognition of emerging themes, recognizing those individual experiences that best represent the themes and the whole referred to by Moustakas (1990) as *exemplary portraits*. The researcher then works with the themes and emerging data, integrating it with their own. Moustakas then urges the researcher to bring this new knowledge together in the form of an artwork, a poem, or a story (Moustakas, 1990).
Chapter 3 Methodology

Research Questions

The research questions this study was designed to address are as follows:

RQ1: What is the experience of failure explored through a heuristic nature art based lens?

RQ2: What understandings are gained from the experience of an Andy Goldsworthy inspired art inquiry regarding the experience of failure during a dissertation?

Definition of Concepts

The following definition and operational definition is provided for the reader to ensure clarity of terms utilized in the study. For the purposes of this study, failure is defined as a challenge encountered and a result that deviates from an expectation.

Research Design

An interpretive phenomenological heuristic art-based method was utilized to illuminate data on the experience of failure experienced during a dissertation. The participant’s artwork and narratives were evaluated utilizing a phenomenological heuristic framework. Phenomenological evaluation of writing and artwork in research is a disciplined mindful practice of thoughtful attunement to the focus of study (Kapitan, 2010). The researcher used the heuristic process of evaluation to identify themes, patterns, and unique contributions to the fundamental understanding of the participant’s experience of failure through the nature based artwork and narrative expressions. Heuristic inquiry allows the researcher to study experiences that are personal and embodied by capturing sensitive outlying data. The process embraces holistic
understanding through the exploration experiences of self and others without a
predetermined hypothesis (Hiles 2002). Heuristic inquiry begins with the identification of
an embodied personal question that is deeply felt by the researcher (Jaspers, 2003;
Moustakas, 1990) and leads the researcher to live the question, setting aside the impulse
to jump to answer the question. In heuristic inquiry, the researcher becomes the
instrument (Moustakas, 1990) and a receptacle for the data, utilizing all senses and ways
of knowing. The researcher engages in a self-dialogue that stresses the importance of
self-understanding. Self-understanding allows the researchers to become more fully
authentically open to the experiences of others (Kenny, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). As
mentioned previously, this reflective nature of the method allows the interpretation of the
data to be more sensitive to issues of power, gender, and context (Kenny, 2002). At the
core of heuristic inquiry is the foundational acceptance of tacit knowledge that values
intuition and personal experience (Polayani, 19830. Tacit knowledge refers to internal
wisdom, intuition, or insight that is difficult to communicate to others but is felt and
known. Table 1 presents the framework designed by Moustakas (1990) that was followed
by the researcher.
### Table 1

**Heuristic Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial engagement</td>
<td>The emergence of the question that comes into focus for the researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion</td>
<td>The full engagement in the inquiry by the researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incubation</td>
<td>The pause and retreat that the researcher takes from the absorption in the data to gain perspective and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illumination</td>
<td>The researcher experiences a connection to new understanding and perception of the subject of inquiry led by their immersion and retreat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explication</td>
<td>Exploration of the data that has been illuminated and emergences of possible meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative synthesis</td>
<td>The divergent data and experiences are woven to create a cohesive whole that defines the experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The phenomenological evaluation of the art process reflects the exploratory nature of art therapy (Kapitan, 2010) but can have limitations in validity. The research outcome depends on the researcher's skill and ability to engage in the heuristic process (Kapitan, 2010). The use of the art therapist participant’s perceptions will help to address these issues and is central to the understanding and research; nevertheless, the influence of biases may not be entirely eliminated. In this study, efforts were made to capture all the data, including the outlying data, through the heuristic process. In capturing the themes and patterns highlighted by the researcher and the participants, it is possible that important details of the participant experience may have been lost. It is also important to note that the essence of this evaluation measure creates difficulty in replication (Gilroy, 2006).
The research design utilized in this study was intended to highlight tacit knowledge and what may have gone unseen by previous research, which has mainly used quantitative methods and written language. This creative approach was utilized in an attempt to capture the whole experience in the perceived artistic language of the participants, provide findings, and generate questions for continued inquiry in clinical practice and research.

The findings of this study were compiled in this dissertation. The qualitative data are shared as a unique contribution in the Appendix L. Links to the gallery are included to offer the audience a closer to real experience of viewing the artworks as the participants and researcher experienced them. The creation of a format that offers this space for witnessing was intentional by the researcher to reflect the held power of the art process in this design.

**Population**

The study involved a experiential structured art protocol with adult participants. The participants represented an elite sampling of PhD candidates in clinical art therapy. They were contacted to invite their possible participation through email based on their past or present enrollment in an art therapy doctoral program. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and participants were not offered financial compensation or any other incentives.

**Inclusion Criteria**

Participants met the inclusion criteria through their current or past enrollment in a PhD clinical art therapy program at either Notre Dame de Namur University or the Dominican University of California. They had to have a willingness and ability to meet
the expectations of the study, were currently completing or had completed their dissertation, and had the ability to take and upload images through digital means and/ or coordinate the delivery of artwork to be photographed for the study.

**Exclusion Criteria**

Potential participants were excluded from the study if they had the presence of mental health vulnerabilities. These included (a) any symptoms or conditions that could interfere with the ability to function at work, school, or in relationships; (b) presence of self-harming behaviors within the past 2 years; and (c) presence of self-harm or suicidal ideation.

**Procedures**

- An email was created and delivered to Dr. Richard Carolan, chair of the doctoral program, asking for approval to recruit doctoral students who had attended or were attending the doctoral program. This letter was signed and included in the IRB application (Appendix A).
- The IRB application was created and submitted for approval (Appendix B).
- Informed consent form (Appendix D), consent to publish images (Appendix E) and narratives forms were created along with the Qualtrics survey (Appendix F), and the resources form for medical allergies and potential injury while in nature (Appendix G).
- Protocols for participant engagement in the research (Appendix H), for participant and researcher in the heuristic inquiry (Appendix I) were created.
● Email invitations were sent to all PhD candidates and graduates of the PhD programs in Art Therapy at Notre Dame de Namur University and Dominican University of California (Appendix C).

● The email invitation contained a description of the research project, an overview of potential risks and benefits, and clear expectations regarding the scope of participation. A link to the consent form was included in the email.

● When participants indicated agreement to participation by signing the consent form, they were asked to answer demographic information to inform the study.

● Demographic information and consent forms were coded to protect the identity of the participants.

● After consenting, and indicating that they had no questions to address regarding the study, participants were directed to the Participant Research Protocol (Appendix I).

Participant Research Protocol (Appendix I)

The participants were guided through the following research protocol:

● Create a short narrative (1-2 pages) or statement of the failure that you experienced within the process of your dissertation. This is an example of my statement of a failure I experienced during my dissertation:

I awoke to hazy brown purple skies heavy with smoke and ash. Another wildfire . . . I hope everyone is OK, I know that everyone will not be OK . . . .

Diving into a flurry of action, reaching out to students and families and ensuring they have a connection to basic needs and safety . . . I can’t believe
this is happening again . . . . I feel so selfish . . . but my heart breaks as I realize that my dissertation research will be set aside again. I was poised to start our groups in the coming week. Maybe this time the fires will be contained quickly . . . . In my heart I know that this is not probable . . . . I will have to start again . . . . How ironic that the power of natural forces have continued to impact my research on nature based art therapy . . . . wildfires, flooding, and the economic fallout have caused continual waves of failures. (Manthe, 2022)

- Following the writing of your narrative, watch the excerpt from *River and Tides*, a documentary on the work of Andy Goldsworthy provided in the link.
- Focusing on your experience of failure, create an art piece within nature without the use of additional tools, materials, or adhesives.
- Take a photo or series of up to the photos that capture your art process.
- Complete a written dialogue with your art piece based on Pat Allen’s open studio process. Document this dialogue without filtering your responses. Create this narrative, capturing your thoughts, feelings, and ideas as they arise.
- Witnessing your writing and artwork, identify three words that capture your experience with failure.
- Send the images and narrative responses to the researcher.
- The researcher will create an online gallery of the deidentified images and narratives. Participants will have consented to the online publishing of their
images in this gallery. Only the participants and researcher will have access to the online gallery (Appendix L).

- View the gallery of images and narratives and identify themes, patterns, and unique experiences through the stages of heuristic inquiry (Appendix F).
  - Step 1: Allow yourself to engage with the images and written narratives in the gallery.
  - Step 2: Allow yourself to be fully immersed in the images and narratives and open to all of the thoughts and ideas that are connected to the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
  - Step 3: Allow yourself to step away for an hour or more from the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
  - Step 4: Highlight themes, unique outcomes, and patterns that you notice have helped you come to an understanding of the experience.
  - Step 5: Share your new knowledge in form of free association.
  - Capture those themes patterns and unique experiences in a written document and send this to the researcher through email.
  - The researcher will engage in the same art process protocol as the participants, creating her own artwork and narrative responses and add these to the online gallery.
  - The researcher will utilize the heuristic process (Appendix I) to engage with the images of the individuals and the findings of the group of participants, harvesting the core findings on the process of failure.
Data and images gathered from the experience will be compiled and presented in a dissertation.

The artwork and narratives were evaluated utilizing a phenomenological heuristic framework. The researcher used the heuristic process of evaluation to identify themes, patterns, and unique contributions to the fundamental understanding of the participants’ experience of failure through the art work and narrative expressions. The participants also utilized the heuristic method to evaluate and understand the artwork and narratives of all of the participants. The participants followed this protocol for heuristic inquiry (Appendix H) developed by the researcher and based on the work of Moustaka (1990).

**Participant Heuristic Inquiry Directions**

- **Step 1:** Allow yourself to engage with the images and written narratives in the gallery.
- **Step 2:** Allow yourself to be fully immersed in the images and narratives and open to all of the thoughts and idea that are connected to the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
- **Step 3:** Allow yourself to step away for an hour or more from the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
- **Step 4:** Highlight themes, unique outcomes, and patterns that you notice have helped you come to an understanding of the experience.
- **Step 5:** Share your new knowledge in form of free association in three words or phrases.
**Researcher Protocol for Heuristic Inquiry**

Throughout the entire research process, the researcher engaged in a heuristic investigation. This investigation involved experiencing and reflecting upon the art process and narrative responses focusing on the experience of failure during the process of creating a dissertation and synthesizing the findings. Then, the researcher reviewed literature related to the experience of failure and used this as a foundation to explore the tacit knowledge that emerged from the research data. The student researcher then engaged in the six-part process of heuristic inquiry. See Figure 2 for the heuristic process of the researcher following Moustaka’s six stages of heuristic inquiry.

**Figure 2**

*Heuristic Process of the Researcher*
The researcher followed the six stages as follows:

1. **Engagement:** In a state of contemplation, the researcher experienced each art piece and read the connected narratives several times, immersing herself in the data. The researcher followed the same process for the images and narratives as a group within the online gallery.

2. **Immersion:** The researcher allowed herself to be fully immersed in the images and narratives and open to all of the thoughts and idea that are connected to the overall experience of the images and the narratives.

3. **Incubation:** The researcher allowed herself to step away from the overall immersive experience of the images and the narratives.

4. **Illumination:** The researcher highlighted themes, unique outcomes, and patterns that she noticed that helped her come to an understanding of the experience.

5. **Explication:** The researcher fully explored and developed her new knowledge in efforts to demonstrate a holistic understanding.

6. **Creative synthesis (validation of research):** The researcher shared her new knowledge in form of reflective art and written synthesis. The researcher compiled the findings within her dissertation.

The research protocol was utilized to assist with the highlighting of tacit knowledge and that which may go unseen by quantitative approaches. This creative arts based approach was applied in an attempt to capture the whole experience and provide new findings and questions for continued inquiry for continued research. The qualitative data are shared as a unique contribution in figures or tabular form. The photos and narratives of all of the artwork are included in Appendix L. Photos of the online gallery
were included to offer the audience a closer to real experience of viewing the artworks as the participants and researcher experienced them. The creation of a format that offers a space for witnessing was intentional by the researcher to reflect the held power of the art process in this design.

**Ethical Considerations**

In conducting therapy in nature, therapists must thoughtfully attend to the provision of safe and ethical treatment. Therapy conducted in nature is a developing field; the boundaries and the practices need to be adhered to in order to protect the safety of the participant (Jordan, 2014). The methods, procedures, and purpose of this research were reviewed to ensure protection for subjects. Each potential participant received an introduction email from the researcher, inviting them to participate and explaining the purpose, timing, confidentiality, risks and benefits, the expectations, as well as their ability to withdraw at any time from this study. Participants received the written HIPAA guidelines that were followed.

**Informed Consent**

Issues, such as confidentiality were thoughtfully handled, and the informed consent form provided sufficient information about the specifics of working in nature, including being seen in public spaces, the probability that the artwork would be seen by others and changed by the elements, and the possible effects of the elements on the process and on the physical self. The process of this nature based art therapy intervention was detailed in the informed consent. Participants were made aware of the governing bodies of the researcher’s discipline and how to contact them in case of questions or complaints.
Participants were informed of the purposes, potential uses, and publication of this study, as well as the efforts to ensure their confidentiality throughout the process. They were asked to sign the informed consent form if they were in agreement. Detailed data were kept in compliance with federal HIPAA guidelines. All participants were informed of the potential emotional and physical risks and benefits of creating art in a natural setting. Potential participants were given resources for possible allergic reactions or injuries (Appendix G, I) that might occur as a result of the process.

**Benefits and Risks**

The researcher provided each potential participant with the potential risks and benefits of participation in the study and the opportunity to ask questions. These risks and benefits were outlined in the informed consent forms (Appendix D, E). There were few risks involved in participating in this study. However, the participants were informed of the following possible risks:

- In working with any of the art materials, it is possible to feel discomfort or unfamiliarity with the mediums.
- There are some inherent risks in creating artwork in nature. Working outdoors may expose the participants to unexpected elements of weather that may cause them to become wet, cold, hot, or uncomfortable. They were advised of those possibilities.
- Participant were informed they would be interacting with plants and the earth. It was possible that they could have an allergic reaction. In efforts to decrease this possibility, participants were given resources about possible allergic reactions.
• It was possible also that participants could hurt themselves while creating art in nature. Superficial cuts from bushes or thorns may be possible. A list of potential first aid solutions and medical support numbers were provided.

• Others may witness the participants making art in nature in the community. These possibilities were discussed with the participants at the onset of the research.

• Creating art can bring up unfamiliar or uncomfortable feelings, as well as positive ones. Participants were told that if they decided they no longer wanted to be part of the study, they would be offered three referrals for services and a debriefing interview.

• Participants were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to them. They were told the researcher would be available during the study to answer any questions and provide necessary referrals.

Participants were informed of the following possible benefits of participating in this study:

• Participants may feel a decrease in their experience of symptoms and a clearer sense of their relationship to failure.

• Participant may find it fun and relaxing to work with art materials.

• Participants may experience a sense of accomplishment upon completion of the artwork.

• Participants may experience a sense of fulfillment from contributing to art therapy research.
- Participants could find enjoyment in being in nature.
- Participants may learn something about their experience of failure, artistic preferences, and creativity.

**Debriefing**

After the completion of the research, participants were invited to participate in an individual debriefing interview, and they were invited back for a second interview to discuss the results after the data were analyzed. Within this process, participants were informed of the results and each participant had a forum to ask questions or provide feedback.

**Materials**

The nature based art sculpture utilized elements of nature that are currently available, such as plants, trees, leaves, rocks, water, and dirt.

**Data Evaluation and Analysis**

The art therapist participants evaluated the artwork and the narratives utilizing the Participant Research Protocol (Appendix H) The researcher engaged in in the process of heuristic inquiry unearthing tacit knowledge key elements and unique findings (Appendix I). The results were coded and kept on a flash drive in a locked cabinet behind a locked door. Tables and graphs of the results were created and placed in the dissertation.

**Implications**

The results of this study provide data to understand both the effects of nature based art therapy inspired by the work of Andy Goldsworthy within the experience of failure and the experience of failure during a dissertation encountered by this population. This study contributes to the growing body of arts based research on art therapy and the
psychological experience of failure. In this manner, this research has implications for the
field of art therapy, the field of failure studies, and the field of nature therapy. This study
was conducted in the hopes of addressing the gap in research, inform treatment design
approaches in the area of arts based research, nature art therapy, and further the
psychological understanding of the experience of failure, as well as encourage further
inquiry on this critical topic.
Chapter 4 Results

In this chapter, the findings from the demographic survey and the arts based heuristic inquiry are presented. The study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of failure explored through a heuristic nature art based lens?
2. What are the understandings that are gained from the experience of an Andy Goldsworthy inspired art inquiry regarding the experience of failure during a dissertation?

This chapter will begin with an overview and summary of the results. This will include commonalities that were apparent in the art process and creative synthesis of the participants’ art work and narrative. Notable themes and patterns identified from the results of all of the participants are represented by key words. The demographics of the participants will then be reviewed. An overview of the raw data from the heuristic inquiry will then be presented including patterns, themes, and outlying findings. The participant’s heuristic inquiry findings and the researcher’s synthesis of their findings will then be presented.

Overview of Results

Key words, themes, and meanings emerged to the participants as central to the understanding of their failure experience. Throughout the nature based art process, narrative art dialogue, and creative synthesis, these words and meanings were universally used, and thus created a foundational understanding of their experience of failure. The primary researcher and participants noted this synchronistic sharing of verbal and art
based language in the communication of experience. This acknowledgement helped the researchers feel confident in critical subjectivity and their experience of saturation. The following words in bold were identified as representing the experience of participants’ failures, and direct quotes from the research are cited as examples of the findings.

**Strong emotions.** The following quotes elaborate the strong emotions that rose to the surface during the process: “I feel my heart sink into my gut in shame,” “I’m furious and filled with resentment,” “I'm anxious about the escalating responsibilities,” “[I feel] anger.”

**Impermanence.** Participants referred to the impermanence of experience as follows: “I have to grow wings and try again,” “You can’t alter the impermanence of all things,” and “How long will you stay the same?”

**Fragility.** The following quotes all illustrative of the quality of fragility in the process. Participants talked about being “Fragile and strong,” “feeling unstable,” “There were days I questioned if I were brave enough,” and the use of leaves, petals, and unstable materials in art process.

**Holding/ safe space.** Participants made the following comments that underscored the theme of holding/safe space: “I am safe in the unknown space,” “hold onto the rocks, let them remind you to be strong,” “I felt like I wanted to hold each person’s process cupped in the palms of my hands.”

**Paths/ movement.** Participants made comments that brought to the forefront the idea of path and moment, such as, “When I look at the piece, it seems to be going somewhere;” “It is your path,” and “I think of everyone climbing a mountain.”
**Scars/ wounds.** Participants mentioned scars and wounds using words, such as, “unexpected tragedy,” “pierced,” “layers left behind,” and “scar.”

**Juxtaposition/ contrast.** Participants spoke in contrasting terms, including “contrasting colors and patterns,” “seen and unseen,” “Fragile and strong.”

**Resilience.** Resilience emerged in phrases, such as “You weren’t broken and you didn’t quit,” “It pushed me in ways that were unexpected,” “I have to grow wings and try again,” and “brave.”

**Control.** The idea of control was salient in phrases, such as, “I’m a strong, rooted, immovable force that is beyond your control,” “letting go,” “You can't alter the impermanence of things,” and “These unexpected changes are causing confusion and anxiety.”

**Loss.** Loss emerged in words and statements, such as, “loss,” “grief,” “take you away Dad,” and “loving beyond the grief.”

**Ritual.** The idea of ritual emerged in words and phrases, such as “a small circle blowing kazoos,” “circle of my lifecycle,” and “Somehow, making actual marks in the sand seems important, rather than merely arranging natural objects on another natural object.”

**Connection/empathy.** Connection and empathy were salient in participants’ verbal expressions, such as, “held by the community of fennel stalks that shelters and beckons,” “I wish I had found these people to support each other along the way,” and “hold, hold, hold, I’m sorry I cannot offer more.”

Important outlying data included the following.
Participants made reference to spirituality in phrases, such as, “Remember how the divine helped to water and grow flowers from your tears,” “Struggling with faith and strength,” and “my cycle of life.”

**Spirituality.**

The use of words within the art process. The way participants used words within the art process was notable in phrases, such as, The word “Brave” made of small sticks, “hold, hold, hold. I’m sorry I cannot offer more,” and “I am not a failure.”

Participants noted in their responses that the nature based art process connected them to strong emotions and personal processes. The creative synthesis of the researcher and participants reflected that failure during these dissertation experiences often appeared as an unpredictable deeply personal event, with the locus of control outside of one’s self. Whether structural changes, personal life events, or systemic issues, these events can be experienced similarly to a trauma, which holds strong emotions. The experience can provoke feelings of chaos, loss of control, vulnerability, and feelings of reactive anxiety. The experience of failure in participants called for compassion, expression of emotions, and responsive resilience. Acceptance of the inevitability of change allowed the participants to show up with creative, resilient responses that incorporated the changes as a natural development. The process of viewing both the artwork and experiences of others on the online gallery led to a sense of empathy, perspective, connection, and belonging. Many of the participants reflected to the researcher that the nature based art process connected them to feelings that had been unresolved. They indicated that through the art experience they had both a better understanding of the experience of failure and had processed emotional content. Through the art process, the essential truths of the participants' experiences of failure were identified, the narrative reflection of failure
captured, along with the art dialogue and the creative synthesis after viewing the online gallery. The individual data are included in this chapter.

**Participants’ Demographic Data**

Demographic data on the participants was gathered through a Qualtrics online survey. The demographics from this elite sampling is provided to help identify the unique voices of the participants and in service of understanding their experience with failure. Fifteen adults of the 30 contacted through email outreach responded to the inquiry and participated in the initial survey, constituting an initial survey response rate of 50%. Nine were excluded from the study due to their answers regarding exclusion criteria (30%), leaving six adults eligible and interested in participating in the research. The researcher also participated in the research process as a seventh participant.

**Exclusion Criteria**

When the potential participants filled out online survey, they were asked to respond to Q8: “The following questions gather data to ensure you meet the criteria for participation in this study: Have you experienced any symptoms or conditions that interfered with ability to function at work, school, or in relationships in the past 2 years? Figure 3 illustrates the responses to this question.
Figure 3

Responses to Q8 of the Online Survey

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<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>The following questions gather data to insure you meet the criteria for participation in this study: Have you experienced any symptoms or conditions that interfered with ability to function at work, school, or in relationships in the past two years?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.58</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q9 asked, “Have you participated in self-harming behaviors within the past 2 years?”

Responses to Q9 are shown in Figure 4 and 5.

Figure 4|

Interfering Symptoms or Conditions of the Potential Participants

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<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Have you participated in self-harming behaviors within the past two years</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>12</td>
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<th>Field</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3
**Figure 5**

*Self-harm Behaviors of the Potential Participants*

Q10 asked, “Have you had thoughts or experience of hurting yourself or others or committing suicide in the last 2 years?” Figure 6 and 7 show responses to this question.

**Figure 6**

*Responses to Q10 Referring to Thoughts of Hurting Self or Others or Suicide*

<table>
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<th>Field</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Have you had thoughts or experience of hurting yourself or others or committing suicide in the last two years?</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Choice Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>91.67%</td>
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Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3
Figure 7

Suicidality of the Potential Participants

Participant Characteristics

All of the six of the participants identified as women. When asked about their sexual orientation, one participant (16.7%) preferred not to say, one participant (16.7%) identified as asexual, and four participants (66.67%) identified as heterosexual. Figure 8 presents the sexual orientation of participants.
All of the participants in the study fell between the ages of 36 and 65. Three participants fell between the ages of 36-45, two participants fell between the ages of 46-55, and one participant fell between the ages of 56-65. See Figure 8 for age of participants.

*Figure 8*

*Sexual Orientation of Participants*

*Figure 9*

*Age of Participants*
When asked about race and ethnicity, four participants (66.7%) identified as Caucasian, one participant (16.7 %) identified as Korean, and one participant (16.7%) identified as El Salvadorian and Native American. See Figure 10.

**Figure 10**

*Ethnicity of Participants*

At the time of the study, four of the participants had completed their dissertation and two were still within the process of completion.

**Participant Artistic and Narrative Responses**

**Participant 1**

Figure 11 through 13 show the first three art processes of Participant 1 and Figure 14 shows the failure narrative and art dialogue of the participant.
Figure 11

First Art Process of Participant 1

Figure 12

Second Art Process of Participant 1
Figure 13

Third Art Process of Participant 1

Figure 14

Failure Narrative and Art Dialogue of Participant 1

Participant 1

Failure Narrative
I awoke to hazy brown purple skies heavy with smoke and ash. Another wildfire....
I hope everyone is OK, I know that everyone will not be OK ....Diving into a flurry of action, reaching out
to students and families and ensuring they have a connection to basic needs and safety..... I can't believe
this is happening again... I feel so selfish.... but my heart breaks as I realize that my dissertation research
will be set aside again. I was poised to start our groups in the coming week. Maybe this time the fires will
be contained quickly .... In my heart I know that this is not probable..... I will have to start again .... How
ironic that the power of natural forces have continued to impact my research on nature based art
therapy....wildfires, flooding, and the economic fallout have caused continual waves of failures”

Art Dialogue
Layers left behind ... shedded.... I gathered them up ... so difficult to leave behind....maybe they can
envelope me and nurture me then I will not have to let go.... a nest .... no a tangled abyss...
Starting again ... the pieces lead and are left behind.... Through the wet and soft grass ... fragile and strong
..... they are seen and unseen.....held by the enduring community of fennel stalks that shelters and
beckons.... perched exposed to the elements ... a sphere that holds nothing and everything... it lets go ...
and leads you away
**Participant 2**

Figure 14 shows the art process of Participant 2 and Figures 15 and 16 show the failure narrative and art dialogues of the participant.

**Figure 15**

*Art Process of Participant 2*
**Figure 16**

*Failure Narrative of Participant 2*

Participant 2

Failure Narrative

My dissertation lasted approximately five years with four different IRB’s and I even moved to Canada to find a new population. At the beginning I was two weeks into my dissertation study after collecting 40 volunteers in a prison when I received news to put my study on hold. That day changed everything because a custody officer filed a complaint stating that research is not part of his contracted work duty. The next year I completed all tasks that were asked by IRB’s but then one day I received a letter in the mail stating the research was not accepted. To this day I still don’t know why... I completed everything they asked such as driving to Sacramento to stand in front of a committee for the protection of human rights and they even approved my research. After four years working with death row and trying to complete my dissertation at San Quentin State Prison I found myself realizing that in order to finish my doctorate I would need to find another prison... I would need to move. At the time, my mother mailed me a newspaper article which shared that inmates in Canada were looking for services. I packed up and drove as far north as I could to Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories Canada where my sister lives. In 2018 I found a job and then submitted a proposal to the prison. My application was received and approved in one month. The red tape and political boundaries are far less in Canada than America.

**Figure 17**

*Failure Narrative Continued and Art Dialogue of Participant 2*

Participant 2

Failure Narrative (continued)

I completed a ten week study on the effects of art therapy on depression and suicide ideation. Although we graduated in 2016, the failures and challenges after to complete my dissertation went on for years. Their were days that I questioned if I was brave enough to collect volunteers, stand in front of committees, pack up my life and drive for days, live in a winter that reaches -40 Celsius weather, walk into another prison and then write a dissertation. The dark days were stressful but my passion and belief for the work I do always kept me focused and in 2019 my degree showed up in the mail! It was all worth it. Looking back if I could give any advice for someone writing a dissertation it would be to ‘be brave’.

Art Dialogue

Today I work as an art therapist at Atascadero State Hospital and I’m working on my second doctorate to be a Psychologist while living in Pismo Beach, CA. I enjoying hiking at Pismo Preserve which is where I made my art piece. By using rocks and twigs, I created the word ‘brave’ which is something I try to be as I continue my work.
Participant 3

Figure 18, 19, 20, 21 shows the art process of Participant 3 and Figures 22 to 24 show the failure narrative and art dialogues of the participant.

Figure 18

First Art Process of Participant 3

Figure 19

Second Art Process of Participant 3
Figure 20

Third Art Process of Participant 3

Figure 21

Fourth Art Process of Participant 3
Figure 22

Failure Narrative of Participant 3

Participant 3
Failure Narrative:
I experienced perceived failure early-on in the process...feeling like I had many missed opportunities and ‘could have been’ thoughts bubbling up to the surface. Doubting the choices I had made up until that point. Wondering if I had painted myself into a corner. Doubting whether the dissertation process was going to result in any meaningful change in my life, the field, or the future.
I spent a long time doubting myself.
Prior to starting, I imagined myself charging forward with so much confidence,
Instead, I experienced all the old doubts. Intensified because so much was at stake.

That confidence—failure also resulted in downplaying my entire graduation. I witnessed and continue to witness other people’s processes of attaining the PhD and I felt like they had trumpets blaring while I had a small circle, blowing kazoos.

The lyrics to this kazoo fanfare seem to be “No big deal!”
Figure 23

Art Dialogue of Participant 3

Participant 3
Art Dialogue
The first thing that comes to mind when I look at the piece is it seems to be going somewhere it seems to be going in a direction I’m actually not sure if it’s going forward or if it’s going backward meaning is it going to the left calmly or is it going to the right in a spiky, aggressive manner.
I noticed the edge of the leaves and I notice where the leaves are worn from the wind I think about how worn I feel right now.
Reflecting on the frustration of never feeling like enough—I finished my dissertation, I finished my research, I went on to do so many other things and yet I still feel like it’s no big deal.
And when I went out to create today, I thought “oh I’ll build something” and then this is what I built. It is simple which is interesting because that's the theme the major emergent theme in my research was simplicity.
I think if this piece could speak to working on the dissertation self, it would say, “Keep going. Be gentle because this is a gentle process to build this piece. Select the right materials the Deodar Cedar needles had to be just right they had to be dry so that they could poke through the leaf, but they couldn't be so dry that they broken apart and they couldn't be not dry enough because then they would poke through once but not thread back through.

Figure 24

Art Dialogue of Participant 3 Continued

Participant 3 Art Dialogue (Continued)
I kind of love this piece I wonder where it went and that's why one of the photos is blurry because it is starting to blow away and I didn't want to grab it.
I like this process I would like to repeat it.
I'd like to experiment with it more.
I am feeling a little bit sad right now reflecting on failure and that failure comes in a lot of different sizes.
And has different duration.
I think that's a good thing to say the duration of failure doesn't diminish the emotional experience.
Participant 4

Figure 25 to 28 show the art processes of Participant 4. Figure 29 and 30 show Participant 4’s failure dialogue and Figure 31 and 32 her art dialogue.

Figure 25

First Art Process of Participant 4
Figure 26

Second Art Process of Participant 4
Figure 27

Third Art Process of Participant 4

Figure 28

Fourth Art Process of Participant 4
Figure 29

Failure Narrative of Participant 4

Participant 4
Failure Narrative
I can remember this day in vivid detail. I’m on a well-known trail, hiking furiously. In this moment I’m considering dropping out of my doctoral program because after months of brainstorming, dialoguing, reading books and articles, and writing the first three chapters of my dissertation, my advisor strongly recommended that I change my area of focus and start over. I’m furious and filled with resentment—at my advisor, my classmates, my university, myself, and the world. I’m having a pity party and quitting seems to be the only reasonable option. I will not start over. I don’t have another year in me, I told myself.

After meeting with my advisor that morning, I went for hike to try to move the energy out of my body. I talked to friends and family, anyone I could get on the phone, and eventually calmed down enough to think things through logically. I was excited about my research topic, but if I’m honest with myself, what brought me the most joy was the idea of moving forward with an idea. Any idea. I had been interested in so many ideas that narrowing it down to one research question had been the most daunting part of the process. I had spent the first year of my doctoral program making flow charts, paintings, lists, diagrams, and journaling late at night about the various ideas I wanted to explore. Choosing one topic meant letting go of countless others, and that was difficult for me. I put a lot of pressure on myself as I envisioned speaking about this topic for the rest of my life—in job interviews, at conferences, maybe even writing articles and books about it.

Figure 30

Failure Narrative of Participant 4 Continued

Participant 4 Failure Dialogue (Continued)
It felt like I would become known for this one thing, this one idea. Changing my focus meant going back to the drawing board, to the sea of ideas vying for my attention. My original research topic was exciting, but it wasn’t well-defined, and I couldn’t articulate how it would contribute to the field. I wasn’t sure how I would gather data and much of my plan seemed more like a dream than something I could describe as a realistic plan.

It was incredibly challenging, but I decided to follow my advisor’s guidance. I started over. It took much of my energy, and I lost a lot of sleep. In the end, I believe this was the best direction my advisor could have given me. Nine years later I can’t imagine how my original idea would have turned out. I’m no longer interested in that area of research and looking back, I’m grateful that this isn’t the topic I find myself discussing with colleagues, employers, and students. My second idea, the one that was to become my finalized dissertation research, has contributed tremendously to my professional and personal growth. I was even able to complete my dissertation about three months past schedule, rather than extending the process by years as I had originally anticipated. At the time, starting over felt like a failure. When I look back, it feels as if this experience pushed me to an edge and allowed me to grow in ways that were completely unexpected. It also prepared me for many failures to come, which is an inevitable part of living and working as a therapist.
Figure 31

Art Dialogue of Participant 4

Participant 4
Art Dialogue
Although the failure I experienced in the early stages of my dissertation was 8 or 9 years ago, I find myself experiencing another perceived failure in my personal life as I’m creating this art piece. I realize I’ve been trying to reframe this from a failure to an obstacle on a much larger path, since the growth and learning that has come from these experiences has been extraordinary.

Me: tree, what do you represent?

Tree: I’m a strong, rooted, immovable force that is beyond your control. You cannot go through me, over me, or fast forward as if I’m a barrier that’s in your way. You have no choice but to stop and reflect and breathe.

Me: What does it mean that I altered my path when I encountered you?

Tree: Your path didn’t end here. You weren’t broken and you didn’t quit, though I know you thought about it. Sometimes you need to change course. Or slow down. Or stop altogether. It doesn’t have to be black or white, fight or flight. You can choose to see me as an adversary or a teacher.

Me: Rocks, what do you represent?

Figure 32

Art Dialogue of Participant 4 Continued

Participant 4 Art Dialogue (Continued)
Me: Rocks, what do you represent?

Rocks: I’m each of the steps you’ve taken. Some are tiny pebbles; others are great leaps forward. They are each equally important and there are so many more that you can’t yet see.

Me: What if I get too far off course and can’t make my way back?

Rocks: That’s not possible. It’s your path.

Me: Twigs, what do you represent?

Twigs: I’m the momentum of your forward motion. The thread that connects each step you take. In the moment it might feel like a chaotic dance of missteps. It’s only when you look back that you can see the threads weaving it all together. Looking back on the failures you experienced during your dissertation research, you can see now why it had to happen the way it did. In this moment, you can’t see ahead, it just feels like chaos. Be patient. Let go of control. All you can see in this moment is a giant tree that’s in your way. You can’t see around it and you won’t be able to until you arrive at your next destination.

Me: Thank you.
**Participant 5**

Figures 33-35 show Participant 5’s art processes, and Figure 36 and 37 show her failure narrative and art dialogue, respectively.

**Figure 33**

*First Art Process of Participant 5*

![First Art Process of Participant 5](Image)

**Figure 34**

*Second Art Process of Participant 5*

![Second Art Process of Participant 5](Image)
Figure 35

Third Art Process of Participant 5

![Third Art Process of Participant 5]

Figure 36

Failure Narrative of Participant 5

Participant 5 Failure Narrative

The power of failure. I remember presenting my dissertation to my committee at the final stage...so much on the line...my father dying of cancer...will he get to see me graduate...can I withstand the stinging pain of this being rejected after so much work...oh no, they do not pass me...instead it is deemed "conditional"... it's not over...I have to find a way...

My Chair says "it's okay, only a few edits and improvements to completion"...but I can not internalize it...I can only feel discouraged and disheartened and remain disappointed that it's still not over...there is so much work left to do...But I have to continue no matter what the cost...This Ph.D. is my last gift to my father before he passes away...It will stand as a marker to let him know I made it safely and made good on his lesson...that education is everything and no one can ever take it away...it's meant to share with others to nurture hearts along the way. I feel like an exhausted failure but I have to get up, grow wings and once again find a way...
Figure 37

Art Dialogue of Participant 5

Participant 5 Art Dialogue

Oh, how the wind blew and threatened to take you away...it was unpredictable...just like the dissertation process held in the shadow of your father's impending death...Oh, how you hung on to build the pieces and to hold on to what you had, only to have the wind taunt you and test you and remind you...you were losing your Dad.

The storms came repeatedly and you struggled to find the faith and strength to face each day...knowing his time on earth was ending along the way.

I remember the music you used to keep you going...to keep writing...to keep believing...to keep creating...always headed true north into a place of freedom...where you could find the sanctuary of eternal abiding love...how you held it together so delicately...by the creativity you gave to each new day.

Hold on to the rocks, let them remind you to remain strong, and to let the rivers of change flow over you removing what is no longer needed so that you have less to carry along the way...remain enchanted by the changing of the seasons reflected in the beauty of the colorful leaves...hold on to the center of the memories where love met you in the valley of your grief.

Remember how the Divine helped you to water and grow flowers from your tears and the pain...the sticks and stones

Participant 6

Figures 38-40 show the art processes of Participant 6 and 41 and 42 show her failure narrative and art dialogue, respectively.

Figure 38

First Art Process of Participant 6
Figure 39
Second Art Process of Participant 6

Participant 6

Figure 40
Third Art Process of Participant 6

Participant 6
Figure 41

Failure Narrative of Participant 6

Participant 6
Failure Narrative
I am in the final year of my art therapy doctorate program, and meeting older adults to implement my research study has engendered mixed feelings inside me. Despite building excitement and eagerness, I am anxious about the escalating responsibility. This creates doubts in my mind. As much as I feel that what I am doing is an important contribution to the art therapy field and to myself as an art therapist, deep in my heart, I question: Is my research really for older adults? Who am I to older adults at this stage of their lives? Will older adults understand how participating in this art therapy research will be meaningful for them? What do they want at this time in their lives? These random thoughts have given me pause and hindered my progress since I began my doctoral research journey. Adding to these questionings and doubts, I was informed by the therapeutic director at the residential site where I would collect research data, that the residents’ status was unfavourable. I initially planned to invite older adults in the onset and the median stages of dementia to my art therapy experimental and control groups, but most of the residents of the center are at the end-of-life stage. According to the director, the older adults life expectancy is sadly less than a year in the most cases at this time. Compounding this unexpected situation, COVID-19 complicated many items on my detailed plan. For instance, the study will now have to be conducted one-on-one rather than in groups because the center is taking additional precautions against spreading the virus. This has caused a huge change by extending the time period needed to implement the study. Although I still trust I will get to the end point of my study, these unexpected changes are causing confusion and anxiety as I rapidly approach the time for implementation.

Figure 42

Art Dialogue of Participant 6

Participant 6
Art Dialogue
The word failure stands out to me constantly.
Is it really the right word choice for you?
I never considered any of the process during the dissertation to be a failure, of course there may have been a moment of confusion, anxiety, feeling of fear. There were moments of joy, excitement, and gratitude... all these mixed feelings and thoughts... in one circle.

When I look at you, I feel peace, promise, and my cycle of life. My confusion, anxiety, feeling of joy and fear are all balanced in a circle of my life cycle.

For this, I thank you for knowing that I am in this cycle of process, I am safe in the unknown space.
**Participant 7**

Figures 43-45 show the art processes of Participant 7 and 46-48 show her failure narratives and Figures 49 and 50 her art dialogues.

**Figure 43**

*First Art Process of Participant*

![First Art Process of Participant 7](image1)

**Figure 44**

*Second Art Process of Participant 7*

![Second Art Process of Participant 7](image2)
Figure 45

Third Art Process of Participant 7
Figure 46

Failure Narrative of Participant 7

Participant 7 Failure Narrative
My experience of failure with the dissertation began before it even started. “Can I really do this?” I asked myself. “I’m not sure I can do this!” I started sabotaging my confidence and motivation from the get-go. I avoided, procrastinated and down-prioritized my research. Sitting in class when Richard or Amy would say, “Here’s your chance to get feedback on your proposal, your study,” I would step back and let others step forward. After the commencement ceremony in spring 2018 had faded into an indistinct memory, I realized I was alone with my dissertation. I had passed up all the chances to share my ideas and get feedback from my cohort! Then, all my attempts to set up opportunities to work on it in a community setting failed. Two weekend writing workshops came and went and I wrote nothing. The clock ticked on...

In February 2020, a week before the first COVID lockdown, at a Mindvalley conference in LA, I attended an all-day workshop with inspirational speaker, Lisa Nichols. I was blown away by her story and her captivating, charismatic speaking. I decided to sign up for one of her year long programs in the hopes of breaking through my log-jam of resistance. Well, now I’m a third year veteran...

Every time a friend, neighbor or colleague asks, “How’s the dissertation going? Have you finished yet?” I feel my heart sink into my gut in shame. “No, not yet, but soon. I’ll be starting soon.” Instead, I played the “Once I finish ‘X’ I’ll work on my dissertation.” The project morphed into the Blob in my imagination. I couldn’t see into, over, under or around my dissertation. It became the ‘Big D.’ In the meantime, the clock ticks...

Figure 47

Failure Narrative of Participant 7 (Continued)

Participant 7 Failure Narrative (Continued)

In March 2021, I heard about a coaching program with weekly live Zoom calls and a community network for posting and commenting. I decided to enroll. I have been very consistent in attending the weekly calls but have stepped back again from posting much. “Let others have the podium,” I thought. I have joined a Power of Eight group after a 5-week training with Lynne McTaggart. I have certification as a Holobody coach and am currently pursuing a certificate in Life Coaching. I’ve laid down thousands of dollars like Tarot cards or lottery tickets to give me an edge over the odds. I meditate every morning, go to yoga two times a week, practice breathing...and intention-setting...and visioning...and feng shui...astral projection...spoon-bending...in an attempt to clear the energy path towards starting, writing, and completing the ‘Big D.’ And still the clock ticks on...
Figure 48

Failure Narrative of Participant 7 (Continued)

Participant 7 Failure Narrative (Continued)

There are two generations of ‘Dr. Sharpes’ in my family. My grandfather, Russell, got his PhD in education; he refused to go for an EdD. My dad, Bill, has a PhD in economics (and won a Nobel prize for his research...but that is a conversation for another day), and his sister, Saxon, my aunt, has her PhD in paleontology. I would be generation three. When my students call me ‘Dr. Sharpe,’ I feel that twinge of shame again. I am not a doctor...(yet?) Tick, tick, tick...

Some folks say, “Don’t make it so hard.” “Just do it.” “A good dissertation is a done dissertation.” They mean well, I’m sure, but it just empowers the shame to mark me as a failure. I am trying to depersonalize it. I am not a failure; I am experiencing failure. Sometimes that helps, but the clock keeps tick, tick, ticking on...

I have been making progress, of late. My early fears of ‘what if’ focused on whether anyone would respond to my online survey and/or agree to be interviewed. (“Without data, I have nothing!”) After a month, I have online surveys coming in and many friends, colleagues and strangers signing up for interviews. I feel loved and supported by an amazing community. If that were the key, I guess I would be done by now. But, in the end, it is me at my computer, writing. Failure still looms in my brain. “What if I can’t do it?” In the end, it is just me and my laptop riding the waves of fear and agreeing to write anyway. It’s the writing that scares me always. I know I am a good, solid writer, but somehow, I don’t really believe my own reassurance. It’s been an accident before, or good luck. The Blob has had some air taken out of it but it is still there, looking and leering at me. Will I be able to write it...the ‘Big D’?...

Figure 49

Art Dialogue of Participant 7

Participant 7 Art Dialogue

April 29th

I guess the fact that I am not satisfied with my first art piece might say something about my relationship with what I perceive as failure. I made my initial attempt in my garden, using a dried up, leathery SCOBY as the center of a mandala of radiating borage, nasturtium and trumpet vine blossoms. “Keep it simple. It doesn’t have to be showy,” I told myself. Still, I was dissatisfied with the results and decided to leave it for awhile to see what happened. I came back a couple of hours later. The ‘curly bugs’ and ants crawling around on and under the flowers were kind of interesting, but overall, I was still underwhelmed with my creation. Several hours later, some of the flowers and a few leaves had drifted away. Blah. Uninteresting. I feel no connection to this piece. I can do better. We are going to New Zealand! I should create a piece there. But I don’t want to keep Lisa waiting. Just finish and get it sent.

May 3rd

I still haven’t completed the dialogue with my garden art. We are going on a roadtrip today. Maybe I will create something in NZ! We have too many sights scheduled. Our first stop is Hot Water Beach; we have given ourselves fifteen minutes. While Liam and Bill head towards the water, I gather tiny shells and delicate seaweed. I have no idea what I am going to do with them. As my hat blows off my head, I tip it upside down and use it as a basket to hold my materials. There’s a large stone ahead, embedded in the sand. I kneel down and deposit my shells, driftwood and seaweed on and around the stone. A man walks by. “What are you looking for?” “Oh,” I reply, “I am
After viewing the online gallery of the images and narratives, the participants participated in the heuristic process, in which they were given specific directions to carry out (Appendix H). They shared their essential findings with the researcher. Half of the six participants chose to share their findings in a creative form, which fell outside of the research directions. Of these three creative pieces, one was a painting that also contained words, one was a blackout poem, and the third was poetry. Essential findings that were universal to this group of participants were the following themes; path/movement, impermanence /time, turbulence, intense emotions/fear, fragility, resilience, doubt, and empathy. Connection/ belonging was also a theme in six of the seven participants’ creative synthesis responses. The following represents their results.

**Participant Heuristic Responses**

As my hat blows off my head, I tip it upside down and use it as a basket to hold my materials. There’s a large stone ahead, embedded in the sand. I kneel down and deposit my shells, driftwood and seaweed on and around the stone. A man walks by. “What are you looking for?” “Oh,” I reply, “I am making some echo art.” “That’s great,” he says and walks on down the beach.

“How long will you stay the same?” “When will the tide come in and wash away my marks and scatter the small objects I collected here?”

Art: “You can’t alter the impermanence of all things.”

“My artwork seems so puny and insignificant. I am not sure I have even completed the directive correctly. Have I learned anything about failure from this exercise? What do I have to say, anyway?”

The most enjoyable part of this activity ended up being my attempts to photograph my piece. Because it was afternoon, the angle of the sun created shadows that were difficult to avoid. I allowed that I was part of the piece by photographing my shadow cast over my piece and then photographed the piece from different angles. I ended up with a feeling of affection for this piece that I created in a few minutes and would never see again. It is true, I cannot alter the impermanence of things.
**Participant 1**

See Appendix M for the researcher’s heuristic responses.

**Participant 2**

Participant 2 wrote of the process,

I wasn’t alone but I felt alone during my process. Wish I had found these people to support each other along the way. The artwork brings up a lot of emotions that I have put away since I have finished. Forgetfulness and procrastination to sit with my feelings what happened to myself, and others. Relief that it is over. I think of everyone climbing a mountain and reaching a beautiful view at the end when the work is done. Light at the end of a tunnel.

**Participant 3**

Figure 51 shows Participant 3’s creative synthesis. Her narrative regarding the heuristic inquiry follows.

**Figure 51**

*Creative Synthesis of Participant 3*

Participant 3 reflected,
I felt like I wanted to hold each person and each person’s process cupped in the palms of my hand as though I could soothe away the feelings that we seem to all share; not fix but hold because there did seem to be a peace, a sense of calm, a contemplative nature to everything that people shared . . . Even the difficulty. I had forgotten how and what I had shared and so it was interesting to reflect on that in the context of others some known some unknown.

**Participant 4**

Participant 4 wrote after engaging in the six-step heuristic process,

I noticed many themes related to the idea of a “path”: leaving something behind; leading forward or backwards, towards or away from; movement; being at a crossroads; moving forward; starting over; encountering obstacles and barriers; heading north; the unknown; moving in a circular pattern; storm; completing a life cycle; change; being unable to see the path forward or the future; making repeated attempts; starting over; and being unable to alter the path.

She added,

There was a strong theme surrounding self-doubt: selfish; dread; lack of confidence; downplaying; worn; not good enough; getting something just right; sadness; lack of a plan; discouraged; disappointed; exhausted; grief; escalating; doubt; mixed feelings; questioning; confusion; fear; self-sabotage; shame; depersonalizing; fear; dissatisfied; I can do better; insignificant; pierced; control.

There were themes of empowerment and growth: brave; determined; self-discovery; growth; power; peace; supported; loved; community; joy; Some themes of turbulence: storms; holding on; less to carry; change; sinking.
I also noticed themes surrounding time: the uncertainty; extending time; lack of control of time; the duration of things; unpredictable; time moving forward; clocks ticking; and the impermanence of things.

**Participant 5**

Participant 5 identified themes, patterns, and unique experiences after engaging in the six-step heuristic inquiry. Table 2 presents these observations.
**Table 2**

*Participant 5's Identification of Themes, Patterns, and Unique Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>Unique experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Circles</td>
<td>Unexpected tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Various colors</td>
<td>Coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragility</td>
<td>Contrasting patterns and colors</td>
<td>Obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Use of different textures and directions</td>
<td>Impasses (psychological and literally - red tape)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(backwards, upwards, downward, circular etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Crosses</td>
<td>Birth and death of hopes and dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>X's</td>
<td>Learning more about oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Overlapping</td>
<td>Letting go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Scattered</td>
<td>Holding on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginnings</td>
<td>Energy gained and lost</td>
<td>Forgetting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endings</td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Remembering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries</td>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>Reminding oneself of one's inherent worth and value regardless of failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td></td>
<td>Failure becoming a teacher, a coach, and ultimately a friend 😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling unstable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regaining stability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for stability &amp; grounding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bravery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming obstacles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shedding old ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant 6

Participant 6 wrote about what she saw and wrote about as a result of her engagement in the heuristic process:

Themes found as I engaged with the images and written narratives in the gallery were uncertainty yet desire, fear but resilience. I created a response poem with random words found lead by one after another in narratives as a free association.

Table 3 and 4 illustrates what Participant 6 described in poem form.

Table 3

Participant 6 Considers the Process of Participants 1-3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hazy and heavy.</td>
<td>My dissertation moved,</td>
<td>The power.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hope everyone is OK.</td>
<td>finding a new beginning.</td>
<td>remember presenting,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection needs safety . . .</td>
<td>On hold then changed everything</td>
<td>Rejected . . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart breaks.</td>
<td>a complaint . . . yet</td>
<td>I will find a way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power of natural forces yet waves of failures.</td>
<td>I completed it all.</td>
<td>Improvements,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layers shedded.</td>
<td>I still don’t know why . . .</td>
<td>Discouraged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe,</td>
<td>Approved!</td>
<td>Disheartened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fragile and strong . . .</td>
<td>Trying to complete.</td>
<td>Disappointed . . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holds nothing and everything . . .</td>
<td>Realizing, received and approved</td>
<td>My gift to my father.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let go leads you away.</td>
<td>boundaries are far.</td>
<td>Take you away, Dad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects.</td>
<td>I enjoy where I made rocks and twigs.</td>
<td>Struggling with faith and strength</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy where I made rocks and twigs.</td>
<td>Be brave.</td>
<td>I will end up on the way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remember, keep believing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delicately each new day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Participant 6 Considers the Process of Participants 4-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hold on and remind me.</td>
<td>In the process. . .I am feeling like</td>
<td>The final year mixed feelings of. . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change flows over you.</td>
<td>opportunities are bubbling up to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the surface.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove strong.</td>
<td>Doubting point yet wondering.</td>
<td>excitement and eagerness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change flows over you.</td>
<td>If,</td>
<td>Escalating responsibility creates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>doubts in my mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enchanted by the changing . .</td>
<td>Doubting is whether in any</td>
<td>Deep in my heart,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>meaningful change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>doubting myself, imagining</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>myself. Confidence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experienced all the old doubts.</td>
<td>What do they want?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That confidence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water and grow flowers from your</td>
<td>A small circle, blowing kazooos.</td>
<td>questions and doubts. . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the tears and the pain. . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>searching for,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving beyond the grief.</td>
<td>“No big deal!”</td>
<td>unfavorable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The first thing in mind going</td>
<td>At the end-of-life stage and in an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>forward . .</td>
<td>unexpected situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I noticed the edge, how worn I</td>
<td>Still trust unexpected changes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feel right now.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflecting feeling like enough.</td>
<td>causing confusion and anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So many other things.</td>
<td>Is it really right for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build something simple.</td>
<td>A failure, moment of confusion,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>anxiety, feeling of fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simplicity.</td>
<td>Moments of joy, excitement, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gratitude. . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>These mixed feelings and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>thoughts are in one circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peace, promise, and my cycle of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Circle of my life cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safe in the unknown space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant 7

Participant 7 was one of the three who chose to depict her process in the form of an image. Figure 52 shows her creative synthesis.
Figure 52

Creative Synthesis of Participant 7

**Outlying Data**

- One participant did not indicate a connection or a sense of community.

**Researcher’s Findings and Synthesis**

- The researcher immersed herself in the artwork, capturing the process; materials; color, line, and shape; themes; patterns; and outlying data. After a period of immersion in reflective artmaking and notetaking, the researcher stepped away from the images during a period of incubation. Essential messages for each piece of art and narrative were then identified from a review of the reflective artmaking, notes, and documentation. The researcher’s findings were considered against the creative synthesis of the other
researchers. The researcher then allowed for another period of incubation and
illumination then identified and wove together the essential findings (i.e., themes,
patterns, and outlying data) from the group’s experiences as a whole. This culminated in
the creation of three short films depicting a nature art installation that reflects the creative
synthesis, and essential findings of the researcher. The themes, patterns, and essential
findings depicted in each type of data and harvested by the researcher are shared below.
The following depicts the researcher’s findings regarding the artwork of the participants.

**Researcher’s Findings on the Artwork of the Participants**

**Participant 1.** Following are findings collected from Participant 1’s artwork.

**Piece 1.** Hole, nest, pieces shed, falling in, going inward, void, encompassing,
drowning, sink hole, wound, scar.

**Piece 2.** Pathway leading, impermanence, tumbleweed, pile coming apart,
perched, could blow away, fragile pieces, void holding space, magical.

**Piece 3.** The pieces become the path that becomes the whole, both coming
together and coming apart, holding nothing and holding everything, suspended, likely to
fall away or be taken by the wind, impermanence.

**Participant 2.** The researcher’s findings collected from Participant 2’s artwork
include one piece of artwork.

**Piece 1.** In the forefront the word “brave” is temporary, could fly away; the
elements could affect this; hard to see. Your eye is drawn away from the piece to the
what is in the future expansive, temporal. “Brave is made of sticks that are broken. Hard
work went into the bravery, yet it remains unseen what is in the future. Message word to
viewer.
Participant 3. Following are the findings collected from Participant 3’s artwork.

Piece 1. Green and new with vibrant energy going through the veins; sticks broken, and stitched through; the growth pierced, growth detached from source, scar, wound.

Piece 2. Shadows of the sticks moving towards the future; it could float like a boat, stitched with broken brown brittle pieces, moving.

Piece 3. Undululating pattern, folds, looks like it is moving towards the future like an insect, maybe a caterpillar, crawling, glowing green with growth, simple. What will it become?

Participant 4. The researcher’s observations of Participant 4’s two pieces of artwork follow.

Piece 1. Intricate pattern, repetition, stones and twigs, moving together, strength and fragility, path moving towards a tree, encircling and moving beyond. The path is not always clear and visible; temporary, methodical, planned, meditative. I could follow this.

Piece 2. Straight path that takes an abrupt turn, camouflaged, fallen leaves may cover it up, patterned, intentional, meditative; where does it go? Small in relation to the tree.


Participant 5. The researcher’s findings of Participant 5’s three pieces of artwork follow.

Piece 1. Mandala, whole rocks and leaves, seed pods in the center of vibrant green growth, colorful, reds, and greens, orange, yellow, tan, white, pink, brown, and gray. Rhythmic, meditative, sacred, holding, twigs, rhythmic pattern, intention, temporary, ritual.

Piece 2. Lotus leaf green boat holding seed pods, what will become? The mandala is a flower; growth and metaphoric, moving out from the center, centered, powerful, draws you in.
**Piece 3.** Placed on stone slabs, reflective, cold, will this be stepped on, fragile, intentional, temporal.

**Participant 6.** Following are the researcher’s findings of Participant 6’s three pieces of artwork.

**Piece 1.** Whole, beautiful, tender, temporary, ethereal, empty, vibrant green and pink; contrast, opposites, fleeting, holding, petals pieces. Will they fly away? Did they drop or were they picked? Could I come inside? Green soft grass, compassionate, ritual.

**Piece 2.** Encircled, holding, temporary, pink and fushia; growth and pulled apart, taken, placed, meditative, soft to touch, flesh like.

**Piece 3.** Green expansiveness looking towards the future; impermanent circle of pink petals taken and placed. They are close; I could touch it, and it might bruise. There is more beyond the circle; softness, a place to land, receptive.

**Participant 7. Piece 1.** The shadow is prominent, obscuring, and changing the piece, center drawn in sand, clear path to a whole center, intentional, sacred place, holding, gathered, collaged, rocks, sticks and stones, temporary, reflective; will it be washed away? Female symbol, large and powerful, ritual.

**Piece 2.** Rock is centered and buried, was it already buried, jagged, jutting up, central, womb like, primitive, connected, aboriginal, spiritual, meditative.

**Piece 3.** Creatures? Growing lichen? Barnacles? Things holding on; was this submerged and is now emerging? Second sculpture looks like a meditation bell, long and carefully placed, composed, wet sand, receptive, vulnerable.

**Themes, Patterns, and Essential Findings**

The common themes noted by the researcher in these artworks were as follows: impermanence, fragility, holding/safe space, paths/movement, scar/wound, juxtaposition/contrast, intentional creation, control, emotional content, resilience, and ritual.
**Outlying Data.** One participant created a word, “brave,” out of sticks.

**Art Dialogue.** The researcher’s observations regarding participants’ art dialogue follow:

**Participant 1.** Those things that you shed you can hold onto and wear in comfort. They need to also lead you, and this process will create holding and movement. This experience of holding and movement will be supported by the strength of others, if you allow the vulnerability to be completely felt.

**Participant 2.** Bravery was an important part of the process, with failure and needs to be cultivated and seen, even when fragile.

**Participant 3.** The process is moving and goes in both directions. It is simple and requires patience. It is emotional, evoking sadness. It emerged out of never feeling like enough.

**Participant 4.** The process involved acknowledging the obstacles and working around them with intention. It required letting go of control and knowing at the same time that I am in control. There was learning and reason that came from this, as well as frustrations.

**Participant 5.** The process was unpredictable, and at the center a loss of control and a loss. There was a connection to the elements, and loss of a parent, a spiritual connection that allowed a sense of purpose.

**Participant 6.** The piece reflects safety and holding, in a process of uncertainty that may feel unsafe.

**Participant 7.** The process reflected feelings of insignificance and self-doubt. It acknowledges the presence of the shadow and things that are alive and unseen that are central to the process. There is a questioning of impermanence and meaning.
Summary of Themes in Art Dialogues. The researcher documented the following themes noted by her as common in the art dialogues of the participants: strong emotions, impermanence, fragility, holding/safe space, paths/movement, scar/wounds, juxtaposition/contrast, resilience, control, loss, and ritual.

Outlier Data. Spirituality was a common theme in two pieces.

Creative Synthesis

The creative synthesis of the researcher is represented in three short films that capture stages of a nature based installation. Similar patterns and themes were noticed by participants through the heuristic process and what the researcher observed in the narrative responses and the artwork. The researcher wove those shared findings into her creative synthesis. The films communicate the essential findings of the researcher in response to the research questions.

The Three Films. The first film is designed to demonstrate the intention, thoughtfulness, personal connection, and hard work in the creation of a research study. The second film is designed to depict the unpredictable outside forces disrupting the plan of the research, leading to ambiguity, strong emotions, and fragility. The third film focuses on the resilient response, incorporating the changes of the event in a newly developed project. Figure 53-55 show a picture of the beginning of each film. The project was designed to return to an aesthetically pleasing and grounded composition, reflecting the alteration by, and the incorporation of, the failure experience.
Figure 53

First Creative Synthesis Film: The Beginning
Figure 54

Second Creative Synthesis Film: The Collapse
Figure 55

Third Creative Synthesis Film: The Resolution
The links to the films on YouTube are below.

**The Beginning.**
https://youtube.com/shorts/efCpdTQ4ong?feature=share

**The Collapse.**
https://youtube.com/shorts/XLMP1Q58Hi4?feature=share

**The Resolution.**
https://youtube.com/shorts/rwoTrqKJ004?feature=share

**Conclusion**

The essential findings of the researcher and the participants highlighted their emotional response and sense of isolation in the wake of failure during the dissertation process. The researcher found similarities of themes between the narratives and the nature based artwork. The process of the study and engagement within the art process, including narrative writing, online gallery, provoked empathy, a feeling of belonging, and perspective.
Chapter 5 Discussion

Overview of Research

The present study explored seven art therapists’ experiences of failure during the completion of a dissertation through heuristic nature arts based methods. An elite sampling of art therapists, which included the researcher, reflected on their failure experience through narrative witnessing, nature based art process, and art dialogue. These creative reflections were viewed by the participants in a private online gallery created by the researcher. Heuristic methods were utilized by the participants to gather essential findings on the experiences of failure from the creative responses. The researcher gathered the findings and wove them into a fabric of essential truths that included a place for outlier data.

The participants and researcher participated in the six stages of heuristic inquiry while utilizing the process of immersion, note taking, and creative responses to facilitate the illumination of essential messages from the data. The researcher created a temporal nature based art installation, which was filmed in three short films to express the foundational understandings in a creative synthesis from the experiences of the participants.

Critical Subjectivity

In heuristic methodology, critical subjectivity is determined by how well the methodology was able to address the research questions and goals of the study (Leavey, 2009). The researcher’s process culminates in a creative synthesis, in which a researcher creates an embodiment of the essential truth from the findings (Douglass & Moustakas, 2007). The heuristic process in nature is very subjective and centers on the illumination
of the authentic truth of these participants’ experience. Moustakas (1990) asserted that only the researcher can opine on whether the essential truth was clarified through the exhaustive application of methodology; therefore only the researcher can confirm validity. Multiple researchers in this study increased the meaningfulness of the results. Each participant opined the essential truth, expanding the understanding of the experience beyond the personal experience of the researcher. The researcher’s and participants’ confidence in the results and saturation was reflected in the synchronistic emergence of common elements, which were repeated in the data. The elite sampling was chosen for their unique familiarity and capabilities in communicating emotional content within the art process. Leavey (2020) noted that researchers turn to art as a form of data when traditional methods cannot access the researcher is after. Art process can uncover unconscious bias and material that we may normally filter out. This research study sought to understand the unique elements of the failure experience, which may not have otherwise emerged due to bias and societal filtering. The authentic commonalities of expressions and responses harvested from the research, and the strict application of methodology, confirmed to the researcher that the results reflect the essential truth of this group of participants. The arts based methodology was used to illuminate these authentic encounters with failure in hopes that they would provide a unique voice to experiences that have not been captured by quantitative and other qualitative methods.

Participants

The participants in the study represent an elite sampling from an art therapy doctoral program. Inclusion criteria required that participants had to be engaged in or have finished the dissertation process. Participants were excluded if they had participated
in self-harming behaviors, or suicidal or homicidal ideation, within the past 2 years. They were also excluded if they had symptoms or conditions that had interfered with functioning at work, school, at home, or within relationships within the same time period. Overtures were made to 30 possible participants through email outreach, and 15 possible participants responded. Six participants agreed to the study and also met the criteria. Nine possible participants were not included in the study due to the exclusion criteria. The researcher also participated as a seventh participant. The demographic data on the participants who were excluded from this research study were not included in the demographic data results.

Qualitative research typically engages a small number of participants, relying on the researcher to ascertain a sufficient number of participants to achieve saturation of data and themes (Mason, 2010). The researcher consulted with experts and evaluated whether saturation had occurred at the various stages of the research. The depth and breadth of the creative data provided by each participant helped to create saturation of data.

Spontaneous repetition of key elements supported the confirmation of saturation. Six participants were deemed sufficient for the purposes of this study to join the researcher in the inquiry. All of the participants identified as women, and they ranged in age between 35-65. One participant identified as asexual, one preferred not to identify their sexual orientation, and four indicated they identified as heterosexual. When asked about race and ethnicity, four participants identified as Caucasian, one participant identified as Korean, and one participant identified as El Salvadorian and Native American.
An elite sample of a small size contains many limitations. The homogeneity of the sample size necessarily narrows the focus and understanding of the experience. In this study, the elite sample of art therapy doctoral students represents a voice that is underrepresented in research. The narrow lens of focus may help increase the depth of understanding of their unique experience.

**Heuristic Components of Analysis**

A heuristic nature arts based methodology was intentionally chosen for this study because of its sensitivity to data that may have not surfaced during the original failure experience due to self-censorship and for its potential depth of illuminating authentic experiences (Leavey, 2020). Experiences of failure often stay buried due to shame and societal influences and are deeply personal in nature (Edmonson, 2019). Doctoral students are extremely susceptible to shame based responses to failure due to experiences of imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and the stresses inherent in doctoral education (Edwards, 2019).

Participants were asked to create a failure narrative, a nature arts based reflection on their failure after viewing an excerpt from the movie *River and Tides* (a documentary on the art process of Andy Goldsworthy) and an art dialogue based on Pat Allen’s open studio process. Participants were then invited to view a private online gallery of their work and participate in heuristic inquiry, noting essential messages and outlying data from the group. The creative synthesis following the experience of viewing the gallery and the spontaneous comments by participants to the researcher represent data surrounding the impact of the experience.
The researcher immersed herself in the creative data, creating response art and notetaking. Periods of incubation supported illumination of her sense of essential truths and foundational understanding. Efforts were taken to allow for an organic path towards the essential truth, through taking time for necessary reflection and reflective artmaking to provide clarification and connection to the material. This required a natural back and forth between immersion and incubation and a rigor of self-inquiry prior to the culmination of the creative synthesis. The inclusion of multiple participants in the heuristic process supported the evaluation and check of the bias of the researcher, ensuring that the essential findings were authentically representative of the group. Each participant’s creative synthesis of the online gallery became a voice in highlighting the essential truths and recognizing outlier data. Spontaneous multiple recognition of essential truths in the creative synthesis led the researchers to recognize saturation and acted as a check to bias on the part of the researcher.

**Scope**

The study aimed to illuminate the failure experiences of seven art therapists while completing a dissertation through heuristic nature arts based inquiry. There are many gaps in research in the areas of failure studies, doctoral education, art therapy doctoral education, and nature art therapy. The sensitivity of nature art based heuristic inquiry was utilized to harvest unique experiences that may have stayed buried within quantitative or other qualitative methodology. Emphasis on the unique voice of art based process data in the research was intentional and utilized for its ability to promote deep engagement, multiple meanings, and its sensitive, inclusive nature (Leavey 2020). The research is not meant as a replacement to traditional research on these topics, but as an addition that will
add to the holistic understanding of these areas of inquiry. It is the researcher’s hope that it provokes curiosity, inquiry, and inclusivity of voice and process.

**Relevance to the field of Art Therapy**

As doctoral educational opportunities grow in the field of art therapy, understanding of the unique experience of the art therapists who are pursuing this degree is necessary. Research in both failure and doctoral studies assert rising mental health concerns within this population (Zhang, 2016, Crusan, 2014); these experiences are also connected to imposter syndrome and stereotype threat (Edwards, 2019). Art therapists already identify and are viewed as outliers within the mental health system and the educational systems (Gerber et al., 2020), and as a result, may be more susceptible to experiencing these syndromes and see failure as validating their experience of not belonging. The identification as an outlier may make art therapists more vulnerable to the experience of dissonance between their identities as art therapists and doctoral students. This study aimed to amplify the unique voice of seven art therapists through nature arts based research.

Research confirms a statistically high dropout rate of doctoral students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, or whose race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality or language fall outside of what is traditionally experienced in doctoral education (Zhang, 2016, Edwards, 2019). Critical evaluation of failure experiences by doctoral institutions could support structural changes that lead to greater inclusivity, curiosity, and creativity. Connection, belonging, structural safety, and acceptance of failures by organizations have led to greater innovation, safety, and creativity (Childs, 2009). Failures are personal and can evoke buried trauma, fear, and definitional messages circulated by society. The
inclusion of a fail forward model in higher education could support inclusivity and address safety and fears experienced within the doctoral experience. This research adds to the understanding of the experience of failure as a doctoral student in art therapy and the use of nature based art process focusing on failure experiences.

Art process may be the preferred voice of the art therapist (Leavy, 2020), and its fluency may provide safety and more authentic data on the experience of the art therapist. Arts based data also represents a different way of knowing that provides all disciplines a wider perspective and a holistic understanding of experience. Art therapists are experts in the art process, and the voices of art therapists’ art based data can provide foundational understanding across disciplines that can lead to greater understanding and collaboration. This art based research was conducted in hopes of celebrating the inclusivity, authenticity, and depth that art based data can provide and encourage the utilization of art based research as an important contribution.

Within the field of art therapy, nature based art therapy is emerging, and although gaining popularity, as a treatment modality it is lacking in research. Recent international research on nature based art therapy focuses on its use with trauma based resolution (Berger & Lahad, 2013). The findings of this study add to the research and provide other potentials for research query. Nature based art therapy has the ability to connect us to the cycles of life and seasons, allowing a natural process of death, loss, and failure experiences.

**Findings From the Participants**

The purpose of the study was to gain insight and understanding into the failure experiences of art therapists through an arts based heuristic method. The study also hoped
to facilitate understanding of the engagement of nature based methods to communicate, express, and process failure. The rich complexity of each failure experience is powerfully unique and nuanced. Engagement with each participant's narrative and nature based art process provided an immersion into the subjective reality of their lived experiences. When viewed as a whole, commonalities and universal themes were easily harvested by the participants. Outlier data that stood out to the participants are also important to consider for further inquiry. Essential themes and commonalities from the participants will each be discussed, along with outlier data, followed by the creative synthesis, an overarching essential truth.
Essential themes

**Strong Emotions.** Intense emotional responses and reactions were experienced by these artists as a central aspect to their experience of failure. They communicated that their failure experiences provoked fear, shame, loss, and internalized negation that seemed to stem from personal experiences and “othering” messages adopted from a culture of societal oppression. Strong emotional responses can connect us to past traumatic material, amplifying the internal messages of those traumatic experiences. Past trauma and oppression may heighten the experience of failure during the process of writing dissertation and lead to a reactive sense of isolation. Efforts to normalize the failure experience as part of the process of learning could lead to doctoral students harnessing the power of their emotional experiences with responsive curiosity.

**Impermanence.** All participants incorporated impermanence and the experience of dynamic change as a core aspect of their failure experience. Failure was often conceptualized as outside the control of the doctoral student. The simultaneous lack of control and expectation of expertise are in conflict and can lead to frustration and strong emotions. A process that identifies and situates the reality of this experience may foster compassionate self-understanding and community amidst a cohort.
**Fragility.** Failure experiences were shown to evoke feelings of fragility and vulnerability. As we are confronted with the fallacies of our expectations, we need to break down our assumptions and predictions and create a new truth. Confronting and tearing down known truths can provoke feelings of fragmentation, loss, and lack of safety. Failures can cause us to pause and create stronger foundations, structures, and premises to build on when we can accept the fragility of our experiences. Being able to accept that failures are intrinsic in any human growth and not reflective of an abyss or end point engenders new discoveries and creativity.

**Holding/ Safe Space.** A sense of containment, safety, and holding were common to all of the reflective pieces on failure. The art therapists used composition, shape, and space to communicate a holding of their experiences of failure. The fragility and strong emotions experienced within failure call for a protective holding. Recent research has discovered the neurobiology of trauma and fear (Fu, 2022). Fear has also been shown to be a central experience to failure (Edmonson, 2011. Edwards, 2019). A trauma-focused response to failure may provide the necessary psychological safety for processing, growth inquiry, and responsive academic development.

**Paths/ Movement.** Paths and movement were common themes in the failure narratives and art work. Failure is a natural part of the learning process and the broader human experience. Failure may provide an overarching perspective and be a mirror of the organic motion of our lives. It is possible that we hold the curiosity, possibilities, and creativity inherent in failure naturally and that this can be utilized to silence the oppressive societal messages.
**Scars/Wounds.** Scars and wounds were common themes in the failure process of the art therapists. Failures may be experienced as a painful impact or blow from an outside force that warrant attention and healing. Scars and wounds are often also associated with traumas, leading one to consider that failures may be experienced as a type of trauma. Scars and wounds are associated with a deep painful injury that occur below the surface but are communicated visually on the skin.

**Juxtaposition/Contrast.** The consideration of opposites, contrasting elements, opposing forces, and juxtaposition was apparent in the failure process of the art therapists. Juxtaposition and contrast may communicate the movement and acceptance of challenges and welcoming of possibilities that are central to the experience. The experience of failure may contain elements of both birth, and death and the holding of these polarities.

**Resilience.** The transformational potential of the failure experience is captured in the resilience depicted in the failure narratives. Failure may call on the artist to connect to their inner and outer resources to move through the experience with a positive outcome. Intentional connection to inner resilience prior to taking on a dissertation may be an important component of moving through failure.

**Control.** Failures were depicted as outside forces that the participants did not have power over. The lack of agency experienced within failure can provoke powerful experiences of trauma and oppression in those who have previously experienced them. Sensitivity and awareness of the possibility that these experiences could be awakened could assist a doctoral student with failure experiences. A trauma-focused approach integrating this possibility will foster inclusivity.
Loss. When we experience failure, we experience an integrated loss of what is expected or what we thought to be possible. Experiences that foster acceptance and movement will foster development and the creation of new understanding and innovation. The loss and grief process calls for a compassionate understanding of the unique path of each individual. Time and safe spaces to contemplate and process failures as losses allow individuals to move through the experience and imagine the future.

Ritual. Ritual was incorporated in the participants' failure process. Failure may call for rituals that allow a safe process and create a better understanding of these important events (Dissanake, 1995). Art may provide a sense of ritual, safety, and containment that naturally connects the artist to creative solutions, compassionate understanding, and acceptance of movement to new truths. A safe art therapy ritual may connect the artists to inner resources and resiliency.
Connection and Empathy. Community, connection, and empathy were prominent themes in the art work and written narratives. A sense of connection to others was essential in the awakening of resilience and gaining perspective. The art therapists reached back to the researcher to express their feelings of empathy and connection through the experience of viewing the failure processes of others. The process of the research created a deeper understanding of the universality of the experience, which countered the sense of isolation experienced. Witnessing the failure experiences of others may strengthen collaboration, compassion, and empathy. Recent neurobiological research highlights the powerful empathy joining people when they share stories of troubling or traumatic experiences (Perez, 2021). Experiences, such as failure panels, which amplify the failure experiences of people, especially those in powerful roles, may help to create empathy and feelings of belonging that combat the fear, shame, and self-doubt circulated by dominant societal stories.

Outlying Data

Noteworthy outlier data included themes of spirituality and the use of words in artwork.
Spirituality. A central theme of spirituality was highlighted as noteworthy. There may be a connection between failure and spirituality that is important to understand. An individual's personal beliefs and worldview may shape their experience of failure. Spirituality’s interconnection to one’s understanding of loss may also be central to this experience. It is possible that one’s own spiritual connection could affect one’s experience of failure.

Words. Words were incorporated in art work as messages to the audience. Words also represent the dominant form of communication in both research and the dissertation process. The inclusion of words may communicate the process of reconciliation between the subjective experience of the art and the dominant language of words in which they need to communicate. There may be important messages about failure and the bilingual experience of the art therapist to harvest.

Creative Synthesis

The creative synthesis of the researcher is represented in three short films that capture stages of a nature based installation. The nature based art installation conveys the themes and essential messages that were noted by the participants and researcher in the narrative responses and the artwork. The films express the essential findings of the researcher in response to the research questions.

Failure during these dissertation experiences often appeared as an unpredictable deeply personal event, with the locus of control outside of one’s self. Whether they were structural changes, personal life events, or systemic issues, these events were experienced in ways that individuals experience trauma; these experiences tend to hold strong emotions and create wounds and scars. The experience provoked feelings of chaos, loss
of control, vulnerability, and feelings of reactive anxiety. Failure calls for compassion, expression of emotions, and responsive resilience. Existential acceptance of the inevitability of change and spirituality allowed the participants to show up with creative, resilient responses that incorporated the changes as a natural evolution. Personal spontaneous responses from the participants demonstrated that the nature based art process connected them to strong emotions and personal processes. The process of witnessing the artwork and experiences of others within the online gallery led to a sense of empathy, perspective, connection, and belonging among participants.

**Overview of Researcher’s Experience**

The heuristic process naturally drew me deeper into the layers of my responses and connected me to rooted influence. The inquiry supported my natural process of stepping away and allowed me to contemplate my understanding of emerging material. I naturally wander, and my wandering allows for exploration and catharsis. The nature based art process allowed me the safety to process and connect to powerful emotional responses and material I was not consciously aware of. The experience was releasing and transformational. Deep roots were tributaries feeding beliefs and understanding about myself that began early in my experience. Intellectually, I have had an awareness that these roots existed, but I was unaware of how activated that they became in response to the experience of failure. Welling feelings of self-doubt, insecurity “not being enough,” and traumatic memories came over me in waves pulling me into a self-created riptide. Learning how my past experiences and my present failure were connected was unexpected, and they were processed in parallel fashion during the nature art process.
The nature process allowed me a life line, pulling me into the future by providing a compassionate place to explore and understand my failure experience.

In many life experiences, we identify a sense of control that is false but protective. The nature art based process incorporates at its core the essential process of change that is outside of our control. It shows artists how this process can bring unexpected beauty while also connecting them to something larger than themself. This process engendered perspective, curiosity, and creativity.

The collaborative experience of the research allowed a bridge from my sense of isolation into a compassionate space of community. It fostered within me a sense of being seen and not alone in my emotional experiences. This type of call and response to my emotional experiences was validating, compassionate, and evoked a sense of acceptance and curiosity. These echoed experiences softly beckoned me to confront my own acceptance of my responses, which screamed that I do not belong and that I am not enough.

Many of the participants voiced a sense of powerful empathy after viewing the online gallery and a regret that they did not have earlier knowledge of the experiences of others. The online gallery and responses of the participants drew me into curiosity, empathy, and connection as well. It fostered a sense of belonging that confronted the past experiences of isolation and shame.

**Limitations**

Heuristic research is a deeply subjective methodology centering itself on the authentic human experience (Sela-Smith, 2002). This study focused on the failure experiences of seven art therapists during their dissertation process at a single university.
The uniqueness, depth, and authenticity of voice present strengths and limitations. The narrow frame of reference and methodology preclude the ability to make generalizations. Arts based research provides an incomplete snapshot of the topic (Barone & Eisner, 2012), and its purpose is to raise significant questions and engender important conversations that may have been overlooked. Another potential limitation of this study to consider is that it was conducted during the time of the COVID pandemic, which carried with it a unique variable of unsure influences.

An unforeseen limitation of this study was that a number of potential experiences and voices were not included due to the exclusion criteria. Although the exclusion criteria was thoughtfully developed in mindful protection of participants, it resulted in the loss of many essential voices of failure. The criteria did not take into consideration the impact of COVID, societal changes currently affecting communities, and the widespread experience of hopelessness among doctoral students (Zhang, 2016). Efforts to capture these excluded voices in future research will be important.

Replication of this research study would benefit from explicit directions on the ethical use of natural materials in the art process. This researcher made assumptions that the participants would use natural materials that were no longer living or that would support their continued growth within their art pieces. The art pieces reflected this value, but the value was not explicitly stated in the instructions.

**Future Studies**

**Failure**

As a society who strives to critically examine our structures and systems in order to facilitate inclusivity and wellness, it will be essential to focus on the framework we
utilize to respond to failure. Research that explores the impact of integrating the fail
forward mindset on sense of belonging, mental health issues, creative problem solving,
and inclusivity will help organizations develop supportive, growth, and trauma-focused
practices in education, agencies, and clinical settings.

**Art Therapy Doctoral Experience**

Doctoral programs in art therapy would benefit from research that continues to
explore the impact of intentional art process on the experience of failure during the
dissertation process and throughout the doctoral experience. Research within programs
that implement failure conferences and panels could help us understand the possible long-
term benefits for programs and students and the potential positive impact of such
programs on inclusivity.

**Nature Based Art Therapy**

Nature art therapy is an emerging practice that is gaining prevalence. This
research will add to the growing body of knowledge and will address gaps in
understanding, ethics, and practice. Internationally, practitioners are utilizing nature art
therapy to help process and resolve trauma and chronic complex trauma (Berger &
Lahad, 2016). Medical practitioners are also turning to experiences in nature to address
medical conditions and wellness. Such research can provide windows of opportunity for
collaboration between art therapists and medical practitioners in practice and research.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the experiences of the participants echoed themes from the review
of relevant literature. The exclusion criteria identified that hopelessness and issues and
events were affecting the daily functioning of the lives of some of the doctoral students.
The experiences of failure evoked intense emotions connecting participants to past experiences and structural and oppressive societal messages of hierarchical gatekeeping. Failure was experienced as a type of trauma by the participants, evoking a fear response and a sense of isolation. The nature based art process offered a holding space for processing the difficult emotions evoked by failure experiences safely. The art process acts as a ritual, encouraging an acceptance of impermanence and the inevitability of failure as an essential part of the human growth experience.

The artist’s responses illuminated shared common experiences between these participants and pointed to areas for potential research. Capturing the unique voice of the doctoral art therapist may create bridges to understanding and practices that engender inclusivity within doctoral art therapy programs. The authentic art pieces communicate nuances that are not easily translatable but experienced as a whole gestalt. A power of art based research is the inclusion of voices that lie outside the quantifiable. When we are able to have all voices heard, we create the potential for creative solutions.

This study aimed to explore the failure experiences of art therapists during the dissertation process through a nature based process. The art therapists engaged in a heuristic inquire using Andy Goldsworthy’s inspired nature based process to contemplate failure experiences. The research illuminated these artists’ experiences and the process of the research provided a space for a safe process of empathy and connection to community. Nature art process and failure inquiry understands that at the heart of failure is possibility, creative solutions, stronger foundations, and inclusion (Halberstam, 2013). There is beauty and hope in collapse and reconstruction. This research provides hope that
through our authentic voice of art, we can create a greater sense of belonging for all art therapists and strengthen our field through the process.
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Appendix A

Letter of Permission
APPENDIX H LETTER OF PERMISSION TO DOMINICAN FACULTY

Richard Carolan, Ed.D. ATR-BC Art Therapy Doctoral Department Dominican University of California

RE: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT Failure: A Heuristic Inquiry Of The Experience Of Failure Through Nature Based Art Therapy Process

Dear Dr. Carolan:

This letter confirms that you have read a brief description of my research project that examines the experience of failure through an art based heuristic inquiry, and that I have your permission to recruit participants for this project from the Art Therapy PhD program.

This project is an important part of my doctoral research requirements at Dominican. Dr. Etherton Reader, Ph.D. LMFT ATR-BC, is supervising my research. If you have questions about the project you may contact me at phone number or email address below. If you have further questions you may contact Dr. Etherton Reader Ph.D., LMFT, ATR-BC, at Ethics)t for the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants at (415) 482-3547.

Shortly after completion of my study, I will send you a brief summary of relevant findings and conclusions.

If my request to contact the students in your department meets with your approval, please sign this letter on the line provided below, date, and return this letter to me as soon as possible. I have enclosed a stamped self-addressed envelope for your convenience.

Thanks for your assistance. Sincerely,

Lisa A. Manthe, PhD Candidate LMFT ATR-BC
50 Acacia Avenue Psychology Student Research Box
Dominican University of California San Rafael, CA 94901
Email address: Lisa.Manthe@dominican.edu (415) 724.9944

I agree with the above request

Signature Date

Richard Carolan

7/4/2022
Appendix B

IRB Acceptance Letter
May 22, 2022
Lisa Martinez
30 Avenue Ave.,
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Lisa,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to approve your proposal entitled: "Effects of Exposure to the Conservative Franchise on the Experience of Falling Through Valence Based All Therapy During PEP/PEP Initial IRS Approval: [Redacted]."

In your final report or paper, please indicate that your project was approved by the IRB/PEP and include the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Marjorie George, Ph.D.
Chair, IRB/PEP

CC: [Redacted]
Appendix C

Letter of Introduction to Participants in Online Survey Research
Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Lisa A Manthe and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Art Therapy Department at Dominican University of California. I am conducting a research project titled, *Failure: A Heuristic Inquiry of The Experience Of Failure Through Nature Based Art Therapy Process*. This study is being supervised by Arnell Etherington Reader, Ph.D, LMFT ATR-BC Professor of Art Therapy at Dominican University of California. I am requesting your voluntary participation in my study as a member of an elite sample that includes students who have been enrolled in the doctoral program at either Notre Dame de Namur University or Dominican University. The research focuses on the experience of failure within the process of completing a dissertation using a heuristic arts based lens.

Participation in this study involves completing demographic information in an online survey, and independent participation in a heuristic nature arts based exploration of a failure you encountered in the process of your dissertation. Your work will be independent and confidential. The research will ask you to complete the following in this order:

- Create a narrative statement of your failure;
- Watch a brief excerpt from the documentary *Rivers and Tides*. The link will be provided to you embedded on the provided protocol;
- Complete a nature based art piece and take a photograph of the piece;
- Create a reflective written response of this experience following the provided protocol;
- Post the photos and narrative writing on an online gallery only accessible to those participating in the research;
- Reflect on the images and narratives posted in the gallery and share your findings with the researcher.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time. Likewise, your participation or nonparticipation will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Dominican University, or the Doctoral program of Art Therapy at Dominican University. Your survey responses are designed to be confidential, all information will be held as completely confidential. Filling out the survey is likely to take approximately 5 minutes of your time and the research protocol is designed to take about three hours. You will have three weeks to complete the process.

If you are interested in being part of the research, please complete the following steps

1. Complete the attached informed consent form sending it with your electronic signature;
2. Complete the demographics survey and the questions designed to indicate if you meet the criteria for this study;
3. Follow the protocol provided;
4. A debriefing summary will be provided at the conclusion of the study.
If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at the email address below. If you have further questions, you may contact my research supervisor, Dr Arnell Etherington Reader PhD LMFT ATR-BC or the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHP Office by calling (415) 482-3547 and leaving a voicemail message, or FAX at (415) 257-0165, or by writing to IRBPHP, Office of Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dominican University of California, 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, CA 95901.

If you would like to know the results of this study once it has been completed, please indicate this during the debriefing or email the researcher at the completion of the study. They will send you a summary of the results. Please contact the researcher at the email address below for further information.

Thank you in advance for your participation. Sincerely,
Lisa A Manthe PhD Candidate LMFT ATR-BC
Dominican University of California
50 Acacia Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901
Email address: lisa.manthe@dominican.edu
Appendix D

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Project Title: *Failure: A Heuristic Inquiry of the Experience of Failure Through Nature Based Art Therapy Process*

Student Investigator: Lisa A. Manthe, LMFT, and ATR-BC
Contact Information for Student Investigator: lismanthe@yahoo.com
Principal Investigator: Art Therapy Psychology, Arnell Etherington Reader, Ph.D., LMFT, ATR-BC
Contact Information for Principal Investigator: 

A. Purpose and Background

This research is an arts based phenomenological study that is investigating the experience of failure through a nature based art process. Through the heuristic process, the aim is to gain understanding of the tacit experience of failure for psychological insight, and development. The results of this study should further our understanding of unique and valuable role visual arts creation and reflection plays in the exploration and understanding of the experience of failure. The research project will be conducted through online surveys and participation in a private online gallery. Lisa A. Manthe LMFT, ATR-BC, a Ph.D. candidate at Dominican University, under the supervision of Arnell Etherington Reader, Ph.D., LMFT, ATR-BC, will conduct the research.

B. Procedures

In voluntarily consenting to my participation in this research study, I understand the following:
I will be asked to answer demographic information to inform the study through an online survey (Qualtrics). Demographic information and consent forms will be coded to protect the identity of the participants.
After consenting, I will be directed to complete the research protocol on my own. The participation in the project typically takes 3 hours, but may require more or less time.
You will have two weeks from the time of agreeing to be part of the study to complete the protocol on your own and a week to complete the review of the work in the private online gallery.

**Protocol**

1. Create a short narrative (1-2 pages), or statement of a failure that you experienced within the process of your dissertation.
2. Following writing your narrative, watch the excerpt from *River and Tides* (a documentary on the work of Andy Goldsworthy) provided in the link provided on the protocol statement.
3. Focusing on your experience of failure, create an art piece within nature without the use of additional tools materials or adhesives. Your piece should
be made and left outside. Take a photo or series of up to 3 photos that captures your art process.

4. Complete a written dialogue with your art piece based on Pat Allen’s Open Studio Process. Detailed instructions will be provided. Document this dialogue without filtering your responses. Create this narrative that capturing your thoughts, feelings, and ideas as they arise.

5. Witnessing your writing and artwork, identify three words that capture your experience with failure.

6. Send the images and narratives responses to the researcher.

7. The Researcher will create a private online gallery of the de identified images and narratives that will only be accessible to the participants and the researcher.

8. View the gallery of images and narratives and identify; themes, patterns, and unique experiences through the stages of heuristic inquiry. Capture those themes patterns and unique experiences in a written document and send this to the researcher through email.

9. The researcher will have engage in the exact same art process protocol as the participants creating their own artwork and narrative responses. The researcher’s responses will be included in the private online gallery that you will be viewing.

10. The researcher will utilize the heuristic process to engage with the images of the individuals and the findings of the group of participants harvesting the core findings on the process of failure.

11. Data and images gathered from the experience will be complied and presented in a dissertation.

12. Artwork may be reproduced for use in a research dissertation and for possible presentation and/or publication.

13. No identifying information will be on the artwork or kept outside of the double locked cabinet.

14. The photographic images of the artwork will remain the property of the researcher.

C. Risks

There are few risks involved in participating in this study.

1. In working with any of the art materials, it is possible to feel discomfort or unfamiliarity with the mediums.

2. There are some inherent risks in creating artwork in nature. Working outdoors may expose you to unexpected elements of weather that may cause you to become wet, cold, hot or uncomfortable.

3. Your will be interacting with plants and the earth. It is possible that you could have an allergic reaction. In efforts to both decrease and prepare you for this possibility participants will be asked to read an overview of allergic reactions and potential medical resources.

4. It is possible that you could hurt yourselves while creating art in nature. Superficial cuts from bushes or thorns may be possible. Please seek first aid when necessary. Resources for first aid will be provided.
5. Other people may witness you making art in nature. You may overhear conversations that other people are having in the community. Your conversations could be overheard.

6. Creating art in nature acknowledges that the forces of nature and time will change the creation. You may experience a sense of loss through this process.

7. Creating art can bring up unfamiliar or uncomfortable feelings as well as positive ones. If you decide that you no longer want to be part of the study, you will be offered three referrals for services and a debriefing interview.

8. There is always the possibility of tampering when using the Internet for collecting information. The confidentiality of your responses will be protected once the data are downloaded from the Internet. Hacking or other security breaches could threaten the confidentiality of your responses. Please know that you are free to decide not to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any time.

9. You may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence. The researcher will be available during the study to help participants answer any questions that may arise.

D. Benefits

The possible benefits of participating in this study are listed below:

1. I may feel a greater understanding of my experience of failure and how art process in nature can inform my understanding of failure.
2. I may find it fun and relaxing to work with art materials.
3. I may experience a sense of accomplishment upon completion of the artwork.
4. I may experience a sense of fulfillment from contributing to art therapy research.
5. I could find enjoyment in being in nature.
6. I may learn something about my artistic preferences and creativity.
E. Confidentiality

The records from this study will be kept confidential. No individuals will be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All artwork, questionnaires, demographic information, and narrative material will be coded with a number that matches the corresponding consent and the permission forms to use artwork. All forms and number key will be stored separately from all artwork, questionnaires, and narrative material and will be accessible to the primary researcher and student researcher only and stored in a locked box. Any IP addresses that are collected by the survey tool will be deleted. All responses will then be deleted from the online survey and online gallery. The resulting file that is used for analysis will be free of any identifiers, including IP addresses or other electronic identifiers. The data file will be stored on a password-protected computer.

All research information will be kept by the researcher for three years (seven years if published) and used only for research purposes. Unless published, all artwork, questionnaires, demographic information, and narrative information will be destroyed after the three-year period.

F. Alternatives

I am free to decline to participate in this research study.

G. Costs

There will be no costs to me as a result of participating in this research study.

H. Compensation

There will be no monetary compensation for my participation in this research study.

I. Questions

Lisa A. Manthe LMFT, ATR-BC, will answer any questions about my participation in this study. She can be reached through email at lismanthe@yahoo.com. Any questions or concerns about this study should be addressed to Arnell Etherington Reader Ph.D., LMFT, ATR-BC, arnellart1@gmail.com or (650) 576-3848. Complaints or concerns about this study may be addressed to at Dominican University.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. My consent is given voluntarily without being coerced. I may refuse to participate in this study, or in any part of this study. I understand that I may withdraw at any time, without penalty from Lisa A Manthe, LMFT, ATR-BC or any prejudice to my possible future contact with Dominican University.
Appendix E

Informed Consent to Publish Images
Title of Research Project: *Failure: A Heuristic Inquiry Of The Experience Of Failure Through Nature Based Art Therapy Process*

Researcher: Lisa Ann Manthe, doctoral candidate in Art Therapy at Dominican University, CA, under the supervision of Arnell Etherington Reader PhD LMFT ATR-BC.

This study is an arts based phenomenological study that is investigating the experience of failure through a nature based art process. Through the heuristic process, the aim is to gain understanding of the tacit experience of failure for psychological insight, and development. The results of this study should further our understanding of unique and valuable role visual arts creation and reflection plays in the exploration and understanding of the experience of failure.

Thank you for your participation in the above doctoral dissertation. This form is a second consent in addition to the original Informed Consent that you signed to participate in the research project. By signing this form in the appropriate places, you agree to allow Lisa Ann Manthe to publish photos of the art piece(s) you completed for the study. The purpose of publishing the photos will be to demonstrate clearly the intensity and meaning of the images that emerged in your artwork. As in the dissertation itself, your identity will be kept confidential in any publication that may emerge from the project. By signing this form you are agreeing to the photos being published in the current dissertation, an anticipated professional journal article, or a possible book. You have the opportunity to select which ones you consent to be published.

I, _______________________, give my written consent to Lisa Manthe to publish photos of my art piece(s) in the type of publications listed below. I understand that I will receive no monetary reimbursement for the publication(s).

_____ Lisa Manthe’s dissertation
_____ Professional journal article or book
_____ Book for the public

OR I, _______________________, do NOT give Lisa Manthe permission to publish any of the photos of my artwork.

Participant Name (Printed)______________________________
Signature of Participant Date ___________________
Appendix F

Qualtrics Online Invitation and Survey
Letter of Introduction to Participants in Online Survey Research:

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Lisa A Manthe and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Art Therapy Department at Dominican University of California. I am conducting a research project titled, *Failure: A Heuristic Inquiry of The Experience Of Failure Through Nature Based Art Therapy Process*. This study is being supervised by Arnell Etherington Reader, Ph.D, LMFT ATR-BC Professor of Art Therapy at Dominican University of California. I am requesting your voluntary participation in my study as a member of an elite sample that includes students who have been enrolled in the doctoral program at either Notre Dame de Namur University or Dominican University. The research focuses on the experience of failure within the process of completing a dissertation using a heuristic arts based lens.

Participation in this study involves completing demographic information in an online survey, and independent participation in a heuristic nature arts based exploration of a failure you encountered in the process of your dissertation. Your work will be independent and confidential. The research will ask you to complete the following in this order:

- Create a narrative statement of your failure
- Watch a brief excerpt from the documentary *Rivers and Tides*. The link will be provided to you embedded on the provided protocol
- Complete a nature based art piece and take a photograph of the piece
- Create a reflective written response of this experience following the provided protocol
- Post the photos and narrative writing on an online gallery only accessible to those participating in the research
- Reflect on the images and narratives posted in the gallery and share your findings with the researcher

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time. Likewise, your participation or non-participation will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Dominican University, or the Doctoral program of Art Therapy at Dominican University. Your survey responses are designed to be Confidential, all information will be held as completely confidential. Filling out the survey is likely to take approximately 5 minutes of your time and the research protocol is designed to take about two hours.

If you are interested in being part of the research, please complete the following steps:

1. Complete the embedded informed consent form with your electronic signature;
2. Complete the demographics survey and the questions designed to indicate if you meet the criteria for this study;
3. Follow the protocol provided;
4. A debriefing summary will be provided at the conclusion of the study.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at the email address below.
If you have further questions, you may contact my research supervisor, Dr Arnell Etherington Reader PhD LMFT ATR-BC or the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHP Office by calling (415) 482-3547 and leaving a voicemail message, or FAX at (415) 257-0165, or by writing to IRBPHP, Office of Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dominican University of California, 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, CA 95901.

If you would like to know the results of this study once it has been completed, please indicate this during the debriefing or email the researcher at the completion of the study. They will send you a summary of the results. Please contact the researcher at the email address below for further information.

Thank you in advance for your participation. Sincerely,

Lisa A Manthe PhD Candidate LMFT ATR-BC
Dominican University of California
50 Acacia Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901
Email address: lisa.manthe@dominican.edu
( _ _ ) - _ _ _ - _ _ _ _
Online Survey:

1. Gender Identity Demographic Data Collection Options: (Choose all that apply)
   - Non-binary
   - Transgender
   - Cisgender female
   - Cisgender male
   - Agender
   - Genderqueer
   - A gender not listed
   - Prefer to self-describe__________________

2. Sexual Orientation Demographic Data Collection Options: (Choose all that apply)
   - Gay
   - Lesbian
   - Bisexual
   - Queer
   - Asexual
   - Heterosexual
   - Prefer to self-describe__________________
   - Prefer not to say

3. Race/ Ethnic Demographic Data Collection Options: (Choose all that apply)
   - American Indian
     - Please indicate the name of the tribe you are a member of__________________
   - Alaskan Native
   - Asian
     - Japanese
     - Chinese
     - Korean
     - Mongolian
     - Tureg
     - Thaiwanese
     - Indian
     - Sri Lankan
     - Filipino
     - Other not listed
   - Black / African American
     - African - Please indicate country of origin__________________
   - Middle Eastern
     - Arab
     - Arameans
     - Assyrians
     - Baloch
173

- Berber
- Copts
- Druze
- Greek Cypriots
- Jewish
- Kurd
- Lebanese
- Lurs
- Mandaean
- Persian
- Samaritan
- Shabak
- Tat
- Zaza
- Other not listed please indicate________________

Caucasian

Hispanic/ Latinx
- Mexican
- South American - Please indicate country of origin__________________
- Central American - Please indicate country of origin__________________
- Spanish
- Cuban
- Puerto Rican
- Other not listed please indicate________________________

Native Hawaiian

Pacific Islander
- Poloneisian
- Tongan
- Somoan
- Tokelauan
- Tahitian
- Other not listed___________________

Caribbean - Please list country of origin_____________________

4. Age Demographic Data Collection Options:
- 18-25
- 25-35
- 35-45
- 45-55
- 55-65
- 65-75
- 75-85
5. I am still in the process of completing my dissertation
   Yes
   No

6. My dissertation has been accepted and completed
   Yes
   No

The following questions gather data to insure you meet the criteria for participation in this study:

7. Have you experienced any symptoms or conditions that interfered with ability to function at work, school, or in relationships in the past two years?
   Yes *
   No

8. Have you participated in self-harming behaviors within the past two years
   Yes *
   No

9. Have you had thoughts or experience of hurting yourself or others or committing suicide in the last two years?
   Yes *
   No

*If participants indicate yes, they will be directed to this statement and resources:
Thank you for your interest in this study and your valuable time. You currently do not meet the criteria for this study. If you are interested, the researcher will contact you with the results of the study.
I would like to receive the results of the study
   Yes
   My email address is:
   No

If you find that you could benefit from art therapy or mental health resources please consider utilizing the resources the researcher has provided.

https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/

https://www.opencounseling.com/suicide-hotlines

https://www.thearttherapypractice.com/
Appendix G

Medical Allergies
During this research you will be asked to create art within nature. One of the inherent risks of creating art in nature is exposure to natural materials that are known allergens to some individuals. Examples of these potential allergens include: poison oak, poison ivy, pollen, mold, animal dander, insect stings, trees (juniper, oak, pine, poplar, walnut), Ragweed, grasses, nettle sage bush, and tumbleweed.

Common reactions to allergens can include:
- Sneezing and a runny or blocked nose (allergic rhinitis)
- Itchy or watery eyes
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Hives
- Swollen lips tongue eyes or face

If you experience a common reaction, you should remove yourself from the potential allergen and seek medical advice.

Severe reactions to allergens can include:
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Heart palpitations

If you experience a severe reaction you should seek medical attention as quickly as possible after removing yourself from the potential allergen.

Anaphylaxis is a sudden severe reaction to an allergen. Symptoms include:
- Swelling of the airway
- Inability to breathe
- A sudden drop in blood pressure

If you experience a sudden severe reaction, you should seek medical attention immediately as this reaction can be life threatening.
Appendix I

Participant Research Protocol
Failure: A Heuristic Inquiry of The Experience Of Failure Through Nature Based Art Therapy Process

Lisa A Manthe LMFT ATR-BC
Dominican University
Table of Contents
1. Directions for Personal Failure Narrative
2. Link to view an excerpt of *Rivers and Tides*
3. Directions for the creation of your nature art piece
4. Directions for the creation of the written dialogue with your art piece
5. Directions for viewing the online gallery
6. Directions for heuristic inquiry
7. Wilderness first aid resources
8. Resources for medical allergies
9. Online gallery

Personal Failure Narrative

Participant Protocol

1. Create a short narrative (1-2 pages), or a statement of the failure that you experienced within the process of your dissertation. Failure for the purpose of this study is defined by an inability to achieve the desired outcome.

   This is an example of my statement of a failure I experienced:

   “I awoke to heavy brown smoke cloaking the sky with ash. Another wildfire......
   I hope everyone is OK. I know that everyone will be OK..... Diverting into a flurry of action, reaching out to students and families and ensuring they have a connection to basic needs and safety..... I can’t believe this is happening again.... I feel so selfish...... but my heart breaks as I realize that my dissertation research will be set aside again. I was poised to start our groups in the coming week. Maybe this time the fires will be contained quickly...... In my heart I know that this is not predictable...... I will have to start again...... How ironic that the power of natural forces have continued to impact my research on nature-based art therapy...... wildfires, flooding, and the economic fallout have caused continued version of failures.”

   (Mastie 2022)
Watch Excerpt from *Rivers and Tides* (Link included)

Following writing your narrative, watch the excerpt from *River and Tides*, a documentary on the work of Andy Goldsworthy provided in the link Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy

Creation of your nature art piece

Focusing on your experience of failure, create an art piece within nature without the use of additional tools, materials, or adhesives. Your piece should be created outside and left outside. Take a photo or series of up to 3 photos that captures your art process and email these photos to the researcher.
Complete a written dialogue with your piece

Complete a written dialogue with your art piece. Document this dialogue without filtering your responses. Create this narrative that captures your thoughts, feelings, and ideas as they arise. The writing should not be censored and can include dialogue with the image, descriptions, reactions, and free association. It is important that all reactions are recorded positive and negative.

Send the images, words, and narrative responses to the researcher.

View the online gallery

The Researcher will create an online gallery of the deidentified images and narratives. You will be sent a link to the gallery. View the gallery of images and narratives and identify themes, patterns, and unique experiences through the stages of heuristic inquiry. Capture those themes, patterns, and unique experiences in a written document and send this to the researcher through email.
Heuristic Inquiry

Step 1. Is to allow yourself to engage with the images and written narratives in the gallery.
Step 2. Is to allow yourself to be fully immersed in the images and narratives and open to all of the thoughts and ideas that are connected to the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
Step 3. Is to allow yourself to step away for an hour or more from the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
Step 4. Is to highlight themes, unique outcomes and patterns that you notice that have helped you come to an understanding of the experience.
Step 5. Is to share your new knowledge in form of free association.

Medical Resources

If you are experiencing a life threatening situation call 911.
If you encounter an injury that necessitates first aid contact your health provider for medical support or utilize the wilderness first aid guide that is provided here.
Gallery of artwork and narratives
Appendix H

Participant Heuristic Inquiry Directions
Step 1. Is to allow yourself to engage with the images and written narratives in the gallery.

Step 2. Is to allow yourself to be fully immersed in the images and narratives and open to all of the thoughts and idea that are connected to the overall experience of the images and the narratives.

Step 3. Is to allow yourself to step away for an hour or more from the overall experience of the images and the narratives.

Step 4. Is to highlight themes, unique outcomes and patterns that you notice that have helped you come to an understanding of the experience.

Step 5 Is to share your new knowledge in form of free association in three words or phrases.
Appendix J

Researcher Protocol for Heuristic inquiry
1. Throughout the entire research process the researcher will engage in a heuristic investigation. This investigation will involve experiencing and reflecting upon the art process and narrative responses focusing on the experience of failure during the process of creating a dissertation and synthesizing the findings.

2. The researcher will review literature related to the experience of failure and use this as a foundation to explore the tacit knowledge that emerges from the research data.

3. The student researcher will engage in the six-part process of Heuristic inquiry:

   **Engagement** In a state of contemplation, the researcher will experience each art piece and read the connected narratives several times, immersing themselves in the data. The researcher will follow the same process for the images and narratives as a group within the online gallery.

   **Incubation** The researcher will allow herself to be fully immersed in the images and narratives and open to all of the thoughts and ideas that are connected to the overall experience of the images and the narratives

   **Illumination** The researcher will allow herself to step away from the overall immersive experience of the images and the narratives

   **Explication** The researcher will highlight themes, unique outcomes and patterns that she notices that have helped her come to an understanding of the experience.

   **Creative Synthesis** The researcher will share her new knowledge in form of reflective art and written synthesis

   **Validation of Research** The researcher will compile the finding in the format of a dissertation
Appendix K

Medical Resources
Medical Resources

If you are experiencing a life threatening situation call 911.

If you encounter an injury that necessitates first aid contact your health provider for medical support or utilize the wilderness first aid guide that is provided here.
Appendix L

Online Gallery
Gallery of artwork and narratives

Participant 1
Participant 1
Failure Narrative
I awoke to hazy brown purple skies heavy with smoke and ash. Another wildfire....
I hope everyone is OK, I know that everyone will not be OK ....Diving into a flurry of action, reaching out to
students and families and ensuring they have a connection to basic needs and safety.... I can't believe this is
happening again.... I feel so selfish.... but my heart breaks as I realize that my dissertation research will be set
aside again. I was poised to start our groups in the coming week. Maybe this time the fires will be contained
quickly .... In my heart I know that this is not probable..... I will have to start again.... How ironic that the power
of natural forces have continued to impact my research on nature based art therapy....wildfires, flooding, and the
economic fallout have caused continual waves of failures"

Art Dialogue
Layers left behind.... shedded.... I gathered them up.... so difficult to leave behind....maybe they can envelope
me and nurture me then I will not have to let go.... a nest .... no a tangled abyss...
Starting again ... the pieces lead and are left behind.... Through the wet and soft grass ... fragile and strong ..... 
they are seen and unseen....held by the enduring community of fennel stalks that shelters and beckons.... perched
exposed to the elements .... a sphere that holds nothing and everything... it lets go ... and leads you away

Participant 2
Participant 2

Failure Narrative

My dissertation lasted approximately five years with four different IRB’s and I even moved to Canada to find a new population. At the beginning I was two weeks into my dissertation study after collecting 40 volunteers in a prison when I received news to put my study on hold. That day changed everything because a custody officer filed a complaint stating that research is not part of his contracted work duty. The next year I completed all tasks that were asked by IRBs but then one day I received a letter in the mail stating the research was not accepted. To this day I still don’t know why… I completed everything they asked such as driving to Sacramento to stand in front of a committee for the protection of human rights and they even approved my research. After four years working with death row and trying to complete my dissertation at San Quentin State Prison I found myself realizing that in order to finish my doctorate I would need to find another prison…. I would need to move. At the time, my mother mailed me a newspaper article which shared that inmates in Canada were looking for services. I packed up and drove as far north as I could to Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories Canada where my sister lives. In 2018 I found a job and then submitted a proposal to the prison. My application was received and approved in one month. The red tape and political boundaries are far less in Canada than America.

My application was received and approved in one month. The red tape and political boundaries are far less in Canada than America. I completed a ten week study on the effects of art therapy on depression and suicide ideation. Although we graduated in 2016, the failures and challenges after to complete my dissertation went on for years. Their were days that I questioned if I was brave enough to collect volunteers, stand in front of committees, pack up my life and drive for days, live in a winter that reaches -40 Celsius weather, walk into another prison and then write a dissertation. The dark days were stressful but my passion and belief for the work I do always kept me focused and in 2019 my degree showed up in the mail! It was all worth it. Looking back I could give any advice for someone writing a dissertation it would be to ‘be brave’.

Art Dialogue

Today I work as an art therapist at Atascadero State Hospital and I’m working on my second doctorate to be a Psychologist while living in Pismo Beach, CA. I enjoying hiking at Pismo Preserve which is where I made my art piece. By using rocks and twigs, I created the word ‘brave’ which is something I try to be as I continue my work.

Participant 3
Participant 3

Failure Narrative:

I experienced perceived failure early on in the process... feeling like I had many missed opportunities and 'could have been' thoughts bubbling up to the surface. Doubting the choices I had made up until that point. Wondering if I had painted myself into a corner. Doubting whether the dissertation process was going to result in any meaningful change in my life, the field, or the future.

I spent a long time doubting myself.

Prior to starting, I imagined myself charging forward with so much confidence. Instead, I experienced all the old doubts. Intensified because so much was at stake.

That confidence—failure also resulted in downplaying my entire graduation. I witnessed and continue to witness other people's processes of attaining the PhD and I felt like they had trumpets blaring while I had a small circle, blowing kazoo.

The lyrics to this kazoo fanfare seem to be "No big deal."

Art Dialogue

The first thing that comes to mind when I look at the piece is it seems to be going somewhere it seems to be going in a direction I'm actually not sure if it's going forward or if it's going backward meaning is it going to the left calmly or is it going to the right in a spiky, aggressive manner.

I noticed the edge of the leaves and I notice where the leaves are worn from the wind I think about how worn I feel right now.

Reflecting on the frustration of never feeling like enough—I finished my dissertation, I finished my research, I went on to do so many other things and yet I still feel like it's no big deal.

And when I went out to create today, I thought "oh I'll build something" and then this is what I built. It is simple which is interesting because that's the theme the major emergent theme in my research was simplicity.
So maybe that is always the answer maybe that's what this piece is saying to me: "It's simple, you either go one direction or you go the other. You either go calmly or you are going with aggression." Maybe it's not aggression maybe it is necessary protection in that other direction. I'm not sure.

I think if this piece could speak to working on the dissertation self, it would say, "Keep going, be gentle because this is a gentle process to build this piece. Select the right materials like the Dougal Cedar needles had to be just right they had to be dry so they could poke through the leaf, but they couldn't be so dry that they broken apart and they couldn't be too dry enough because then they would poke through once but not thread back through.

I kind of love this piece I wonder where it went and that's why one of the phases is blurry because it is starting to blow away and I didn't want to grab it.

I like this process I would like to repeat it.

I'd like to experiment with it more.

I am feeling a little bit sad right now reflecting on failure and that failure comes in a lot of different sizes.

And has different duration.

I think that's a good thing to say the duration of failure doesn't diminish the emotional experience.
Participant 4
Failure Narrative

I can remember this day in vivid detail. I'm on a well-known trail, hiking furiously. In this moment I'm considering dropping out of my doctoral program because after months of brainstorming, dialogueing, reading books and articles, and writing the first three chapters of my dissertation, my advisor strongly recommended that I change my area of focus and start over. I'm frustrated and filled with resentment--at my advisor, my classmates, my university, myself, and the world. I'm having my party and quitting seems to be the only reasonable option. I will not start over. I don't have another year in me, I told myself.

After meeting with my advisor that morning, I went for bike to try to move the energy out of my body. I talked to friends and family, anyone I could get on the phone, and eventually called out enough to think things through logically. I was excited about my research topic, but if I'm honest with myself, what brought me the most joy was the idea of moving forward with an idea. Any idea. I had been interested in so many ideas that narrowing it down to one research question had been the most daunting part of the process. I had spent the first year of my doctoral program making flow charts, paintings, lists, diagrams, and journaling late at night about the various ideas I wanted to explore. Choosing one topic meant letting go of countless others, and that was difficult for me. I put a lot of pressure on myself as I envisioned speaking about this topic for the rest of my life--in job interviews, at conferences, maybe even writing articles and books about it. It felt like I would become known for this one thing, this one idea. Changing my focus meant going back to the drawing board, to the idea of ideas vying for my attention. My original research topic was exciting, but it wasn't well-defined, and I couldn't articulate how it would contribute to the field. I wasn't sure how I would gather data and much of my plan seemed more like a dream than something I could describe as a realistic plan.

It was incredibly challenging, but I decided to follow my advisor's guidance. I started over. It took much of my energy, and I lost a lot of sleep. In the end, I believe this was the best direction my advisor could have given me. Nine years later I can't imagine how my original idea would have turned out. I'm no longer interested in that area of research and looking back, I'm grateful that this isn't the topic I find myself discussing with colleagues, employers, and students. My second idea, the one that became my final dissertation research, has contributed tremendously to my professional and personal growth. I was even able to complete my dissertation about three months past schedule, rather than extending the process by years as I had originally anticipated. At the time, starting over felt like a failure. When I look back, it feels as if this experience pushed me to an edge and allowed me to grow in ways that were completely unexpected. It also prepared me for many failures to come, which is an inevitable part of living and working as a therapist.

Participant 4
Art Dialogue

Although the failure I experienced in the early stages of my dissertation was four years ago, I find myself experiencing another perceived failure in my personal life as I'm writing this art piece. I realized I've been trying to relieve this from a failure as an obstacle on a much larger path, once the growth and learning that occurred from these experiences has been extraordinary.

Me: tree, what do you represent?

Tree: I'm a strong, rooted, immovable force that is beyond your control. You cannot go through me, over me, or just walk around me. I'm a barrier that's in your way. You have no choice but to stop and reflect and breathe.

Me: What does it mean that I crossed my path when I encountered you?

Tree: Your path didn't end here. You weren't broken and you didn't die, though I know you thought about it. Sometimes you need to change course. Or slow down. Or stop altogether. It doesn't have to be black or white, right or wrong. You can choose to see me as an adversary or a teacher.

Me: Rocks, what do you represent?

Rocks: I'm each of the steps you've taken. Some are tiny pebbles; others are great leaps forward. They are each equally important and there are so many more that you can't yet see.

Me: What if I get too far off course and can't make my way back?

Rocks: That's not possible. It's your path.

Me: Twigs, what do you represent?

Twigs: I'm the momentum of your forward motion. The thread that connects each step you take. In the moment it might feel like a chaotic dance of tangling. It's only when you look back that you can see the threads leading it all together. Looking back on the failures you've experienced during your dissertation research, you can see why it had to happen the way it did. In this moment, you can't see ahead, it just feels like chaos, be patient. Let go of control. All you can see in this moment is a giant tree that's in your way. You can't see around it and you won't be able to until you arrive at your next destination.

Me: Thank you.
Participant 5

Failure Narrative
The power of failure, I remember presenting my dissertation to my committee at the final stage, so much on the line, my father dying of cancer, will he get to see me graduate; can I withstand the sting of this being rejected after so much work, oh no, they do not pass me, instead it is deemed "conditional"...it's not over...I have to find a way...

My Chair says "it's okay, only a few edits and improvements to completion"...but I can not internalize it...I can only feel discouraged and disheartened and remain disappointed that it's still not over, there is so much work left to do...

But I have to continue no matter what the cost...This Ph.D. is my last gift to my father before he passes away...It will stand as a marker to let him know I made it safely and made good on his lesson, that education is everything and no one can ever take it away...it's meant to share with others to nurture hearts along the way. I feel like an exhausted failure but I have to get up, grow wings and once again find a way...

Art Dialogue
Oh, how the wind blew and threatened to take you away...it was unpredictable...just like the dissertation process held in the shadow of your father's impending death...Oh, how you hung on to build the pieces and to hold on to what you had, only to have the wind taunt you and test you and remind you...you were losing your Dad.

The storms came repeatedly and you struggled to find the faith and strength to face each day...knowing his time on earth was ending along the way.

I remember the music you used to keep you going...to keep writing, to keep believing, to keep creating...always headed north into a place of freedom, where you could find the sanctuary of eternal abiding love, how you held it together so delicately by the creativity you gave to each new day.

Hold on to the necks, let them remind you to remain strong, and to let the rivers of change flow over you removing what is no longer needed so that you have less to carry along the way...remain enchanted by the changing of the seasons reflected in the beauty of the colorful leaves...hold on to the center of the memories where love met you in the valley of your grief.

Remember how the Divine helped you to water and grow flowers from your tears and the pain, the ashes and stones can no longer hurt you when you love yourself enough to keep believing...the sanctuary you are searching for, you already carry in the loving rooms of your heart a few miles beyond the grief...there resides your father's legacy, breathe, believe, and receive...
Participant 6

Participant 6
Participant 6

Art Dialogue

The word failure stands out to me constantly.

Is it really the right word choice for you?

I never considered any of the process during the dissertation to be a failure, of course there may have been a moment of confusion, anxiety, feeling of fear. There were moments of joy, excitement, and gratitude... all these mixed feelings and thoughts... in one circle.

When I look at you, I feel peace, promise, and my cycle of life. My confusion, anxiety, feeling of joy and fear are all balanced in a circle of my life cycle.

For this, I thank you for knowing that I am in this cycle of process, I am safe in the unknown space.
Participant 6

Failure Narrative

I am in the final year of my art therapy doctorate program, and meeting older adults to implement my research study has engendered mixed feelings inside me. Despite building excitement and eagerness, I am anxious about the escalating responsibility. This creates doubts in my mind. As much as I feel that what I am doing is an important contribution to the art therapy field and to myself as an art therapist, deep in my heart, I question: Is my research really for older adults? Who am I to older adults at this stage of their lives? Will older adults understand how participating in this art therapy research will be meaningful for them? What do they want at this time in their lives? These random thoughts have given me pause and hindered my progress since I began my doctoral research journey.

Adding to these questionings and doubts, I was informed by the therapeutic director at the residential site where I would collect research data, that the residents’ status was unfavourable. I initially planned to invite older adults in the onset and the median stages of dementia to my art therapy experimental and control groups, but most of the residents of the center are at the end-of-life stage. According to the director, the older adults life expectancy is sadly less than a year in the most cases at this time. Compounding this unexpected situation, COVID-19 complicated many items on my detailed plan. For instance, the study will now have to be conducted one-on-one rather than in groups because the center is taking additional precautions against spreading the virus.

This has caused a huge change by extending the time period needed to implement the study. Although I still trust I will get to the end point of my study, these unexpected changes are causing confusion and anxiety as I rapidly approach the time for implementation.

Participant 7
Participant 7
Failure Narrative (Continued)

There are two generations of ‘Dr. Sharpe’ in my family. My grandfather, Russell, got his PhD in education; he refused to go for an EdD. My dad, Bill, has a PhD in economics (and won a Nobel prize for his research...but that is a conversation for another day), and his sister, Saxon, my aunt, has her PhD in paleontology. I would be generation three. When my students call me ‘Dr. Sharpe,’ I feel that twinge of shame again. I am not a doctor...yet? Tick, tick, tick...

Some folks say, “Don’t make it so hard.” “Just do it.” “A good dissertation is a done dissertation.” They mean well, I’m sure, but it just empowers the shame to mark me as a failure. I am trying to depersonalize it. I am not a failure; I am experiencing failure.

Sometimes that helps, but the clock keeps tick, tick, ticking on...

I have been making progress, of late. My early fears of “what if” focused on whether anyone would respond to my online survey and/or agree to be interviewed. (“Without data, I have nothing!”) After a month, I have online surveys coming in and many friends, colleagues and strangers signing up for interviews. I feel loved and supported by an amazing community. If that were the key, I guess I would be done by now. But, in the end, it is me at my computer, writing. Failure still looms in my brain. “What if I can’t do it?” In the end, it is just me and my laptop riding the waves of fear and agreeing to write anyway. It’s the writing that scares me always. I know I am a good, solid writer, but somehow, I don’t really believe my own reassurance. It’s been an accident before, or good luck.

The Blob has had some air taken out of it but it is still there, looking and leering at me. Will I be able to write it...the ‘Big D’?...

Participant 7
Art Dialogue

April 29th

I guess the fact that I am not satisfied with my first art piece might say something about my relationship with what I perceive as failure. I made my initial attempt in my garden, using a dried up, leafless SCOBY as the center of a mandala of radiating brugia, nasturtium and trumpet vine blossoms. “Keep it simple. It doesn’t have to be showy,” I told myself. Still, I was unsatisfied with the results and decided to leave it for awhile to see what happened. I came back a couple of hours later. The ‘early bugs’ and ants were crawling around on and under the flowers were kind of interesting, but overall, I was still underwhelmed with my creation. Several hours later, some of the flowers and a few leaves had drifted away. Blah! Uninteresting. I feel no connection to this piece. I can do better. We are going to New Zealand! I should create a piece there. But I don’t want to keep Lisa waiting. Just finish and get it sent.

May 3rd

I still haven’t completed the dialogue with my garden art. We are going on a roadtrip today. Maybe I still create something in NZ! We have too many sights scheduled. Our first stop is Hot Water Beach. We have given ourselves fifteen minutes. While Liam and Bill head towards the water, I gather tiny shells and delicate seaweed. I have no idea what I am going to do with them. As my hat blows off my head, I tip it upside down and use it as a basket to hold my materials. There’s a large stone shelf, embedded in the sand. I kneel down and deposit my shells, driftwood and seaweed on and around the stone. A man walks by. “What are you looking for?” “Oh,” I reply, “I am making some eco art.” “That’s great,” he says and walks on down the beach.

With the short time we have at this beach I know I won’t have time to check back in with my artwork. I decide to draw a circle around the stone. Somehow, making actual marks in the sand seems important, rather than merely arranging natural objects on another natural object. Putting on my Andy Goldsworthy hat, I examine my relationship with this piece I have created. I am intrigued by the little white spiral shells. What creature lived in these?
Participant 7

Art Dialogue (Continued)

“How long will you stay the same?” “When will the tide come in and wash away my marks and scatter the small objects I collected here?”

Art: “You can’t alter the impermanence of all things.”

“My artwork seems so puny and insignificant. I am not sure I have even completed the directive correctly. Have I learned anything about failure from this exercise? What do I have to say, anyway?”

The most enjoyable part of this activity ended up being my attempts to photograph my piece. Because it was afternoon, the angle of the sun created shadows that were difficult to avoid. I allowed that I was part of the piece by photographing my shadow cast over my piece and then photographed the piece from different angles. I ended up with a feeling of affection for this piece that I created in a few minutes and would never see again. It is true, I cannot alter the impermanence of things.

Participant 7

Failure Narrative

My experience of failure with the dissertation began before it even started. “Can I really do this?” I asked myself. “I’m not sure I can do this!” I started sabotaging my confidence and motivation from the get-go. I avoided, procrastinated and down-prioritized my research. Sitting in class when Richard or Amy would say, “Here’s your chance to get feedback on your proposal, your study.” I would step back and let others step forward. After the commencement ceremony in spring 2018 had faded into an indistinct memory, I realized I was alone with my dissertation. I had passed up all the chances to share my ideas and get feedback from my cohort. Then, all my attempts to set up opportunities to work on it in a community setting failed. Two weekend writing workshops came and went and I wrote nothing. The clock ticked on.

In February 2020, a week before the first COVID lockdown, at a Mind Valley conference in L.A., I attended an all-day workshop with inspirational speaker, Lisa Nichols. I was blown away by her story and her captivating, charismatic speaking. I decided to sign up for one of her year-long programs in the hopes of breaking through my logjam of resistance. Well, now I’m a third-year veteran...

Every time a friend, neighbor or colleague asks, “How’s the dissertation going? Have you finished yet?” I feel my heart sink into my gut in shame. “No, not yet, but soon I’ll be starting soon.” Instead, I played the “Once I finish X I’ll work on my dissertation.” The project morphed into the Yish in my imagination. I couldn’t see into, over, under or around my dissertation. It became the ‘Big D’ in the meantime, the clock ticks...

In March 2021, I heard about a coaching program with weekly live Zoom calls and a community network for posting and commenting. I decided to enroll. I have been very consistent in attending the weekly calls but have stepped back again from posting much. “Let others have the podium.” I thought. I have joined a Power of Eight group after a 5-week training with Lynne McTaggart. I have certification as a Holobody coach and am currently pursuing a certificate in Life Coaching. I’ve laid down thousands of dollars like Tarot cards or lottery tickets to give me an edge over the odds. I meditate every morning, go to yoga two times a week, practice breathing and intention-setting, and visualize and Feng Shui, astral projection, space-bending, in an attempt to clear the energy path towards starting, writing, and completing the ‘Big D.’ And still the clock ticks on.
Please follow the heuristic inquiry instructions listed below

**Step 1.** Is to allow yourself to engage with the images and written narratives in the gallery.
**Step 2.** Is to allow yourself to be fully immersed in the images and narratives and open to all of the thoughts and ideas that are connected to the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
**Step 3.** Is to allow yourself to step away for an hour or more from the overall experience of the images and the narratives.
**Step 4.** Is to highlight themes, unique outcomes and patterns that you notice that have helped you come to an understanding of the experience.
**Step 5.** Is to share your new knowledge in form of free association, emailing it to the researcher lisa.nathe@dominican.edu

Thank You
Appendix M

Researcher Heuristic Inquiry
Artwork

**Participant 1**

**Piece 1**

Hole nest pieces shedded falling in going inward void encompassing drowning sinkhole wound scar

**Piece 2**

Pathway leading impermanence tumbleweed pile coming apart perched could blow away fragile pieces void holding space magical

**Piece 3**

The pieces become the path that becomes the whole, both coming together and coming apart holding nothing and holding everything suspended likely to fall away or be taken by the wind, impermanence

**Participant 2**

**Piece 1**

Forefront brave is temporary could fly away the elements could effect this hard to see your eye is drawn away from the piece to the what is in the future expansive temporal brave is made of sticks that are broken hard work went into the bravery yet it remains unseen what is in the future Message word to viewer

**Participant 3**

**Piece 1**

Green and new with vibrant energy going through the veins Sticks broken and stitched through the growth pierced growth detached form source scar wound

**Piece 2**

Shadows of the sticks moving towards the future it could float like a boat stitched with broken brown brittle pieces moving

**Piece 3**

Undulating pattern, folds looks like it moving towards the future like an insect maybe a caterpillar crawling glowing green with growth simple what will it become?
Participant 4
Intricate pattern repetition, stones and twigs moving together strength and fragility path moving towards a tree encircling and moving beyond the path is not always clear and visible temporary methodical planned meditative I could follow this

Piece 2
Straight path that takes an abrupt turn camouflaged shedded leaves may cover it up patterned intentional meditative where does it go?
Small in relation to the tree

Piece 3
Snake like movement-traveling path like Australian Song lines

Participant 5

Piece 1
Mandala whole rocks and leaves seed pods in the center of Vibrant green growth colorful reds and greens orange yellow tan white grey pink brown and grey rhythmic meditative sacred holding twigs rhythmic pattern intention temporary ritual

Piece 2
Lotus leaf green boat holding seedpods, what will become the mandala is a flower growth and metaphoric moving out from the center centered powerful draws you in

Piece 3
Placed on stone slabs reflective cold will this be stepped on fragile intentional temporal

Participant 6

Piece 1
Whole beautiful tender temporary ethereal empty vibrant green and pink contrast opposites fleeting holding petals pieces will they fly away? Did they drop or were they picked could I come inside? Green soft grass compassionate ritual

Piece 2
Encircled holding temporary pink and fuchsia growth and pulled apart taken placed meditative soft to touch flesh like

Piece 3
Green expansiveness looking to wards the future impermanent circle of pink petals taken and placed are close I could touch it and it might bruise there is more beyond the circle softness a place to land receptive 

**Participant 7**

**Piece 1**

The shadow is prominent obscuring and changing the piece center drawn in sand clear path to a whole center intentional sacred place holding gathered collaged rocks sticks and stones temporary reflective will it be washed away? Female symbol large and powerful ritual

**Piece 2**

Rock is centered and buried was it already buried jagged jutting up central womb like primitive connected aboriginal spiritual meditative

**Piece 3**

Creatures? Growing lichen? Barnacles? Things holding on was this submerged and is now emerging? Second sculpture looks like a meditation bell long and carefully placed composed wet sand receptive vulnerable

**Art Dialogue**

**Participant 1**

Those things that you shed you can hold onto and wear in comfort. They need to also lead you and this process will create holding and movement. This experience of holding and movement will be supported by the strength of others if you allow the vulnerability to be completely felt.

**Participant 2**

Bravery was an important part of the process with failure and needs to be cultivated and seen even when fragile

**Participant 3**

The process is moving and goes in both directions it is simple and required patience it
was emotional evoking sadness. It emerged out of never feeling like enough.

**Participant 4**
The process involved acknowledging the obstacles and working around it with intention. It required letting go of control and knowing at the same time that I am in control and that there was learning and reason that came from this as well as frustrations.

**Participant 5**
The process was unpredictable and at the center a loss of control and a loss. There was a connection to the elements and loss of a parent, a spiritual connection that allowed a sense of purpose.

**Participant 6**
The piece reflects safety and holding in a process of uncertainty that may feel unsafe.

**Participant 7**
The process reflected feeling of insignificance and self-doubt and acknowledgement of the presence of the shadow and things that are alive and unseen central to the process. There is a questioning of impermanence and meaning.