Art-based Autoethnographic Study of a Senior Professional Woman of Color's Journey

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Becoming Visible:
Art-based Autoethnographic Study of a Senior Professional Woman of Color's Journey

By
Raceal McWhorter

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 Psychology

Dominican University of California
San Rafael, CA
2024
Abstract

This proposed dissertation study is a visual autoethnographic qualitative study of the recalled lived experiences of a senior woman of color's journey to become a spiritual art therapist professional during the 20th to 21st Century in the United States of America. This study interprets the memories of events in my lifetime, looking back through the lens of a spiritual mental health art therapist practitioner. The adverse effects of the legacy and enforcement of silence on women and black people. I hope that by describing my lived experiences and felt sense -- and illustrating my arduous journey to overcome societal racism, sexism, misogyny, violent sexual assaults, and the status quo that caused me to fear speaking up. Feelings of abandonment, depression, severe physical illnesses, helplessness, and hopelessness hindered my journey. Now, in addition to a hearing impairment, I am fighting stage four cancer in my last two semesters of doctoral studies.

Nevertheless, I did achieve my goals of becoming a Christian minister and an art therapist and completing my doctoral studies. The three major elements that helped me to survive, push through, and succeed were faith in God, family support (spiritual and natural), and the arts (visual, music, dance). These three elements brought me hope, joy, and strength. I hope that telling my story will help others to do the same and sustain me through this recently diagnosed stage four cancer battle.

Keywords: Spiritual practices, Art Therapy, Autoethnography, Racism, Gender Biases
Acknowledgments

I must first give glory, honor and praise to the Most High God who made me for His purposes and assigned me to complete my education in the Art Therapy Psychology Doctoral Program at Dominican University of California. It was more than I could do on my own, but happily, I am never alone because the Lord is with me and empowers me to accomplish what He commands. He is the potter, and I am the clay.

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Yes, it was a whole village that made the success of this journey a reality.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

As a Black professional woman, my story includes many personal experiences of divine intervention, discrimination, violence, and oppression from the dominant White Colonial culture (people who support the myth of White superiority over Black and other indigenous cultures, and seek to suppress and replace those cultures, while economically benefitting from their wisdom, wealth and creativity), other hostile ethnicities, and my own ethnic group. I primarily want to highlight how divine interventions stemming from a close personal relationship with the Creator Lord Jesus Christ, Yeshua Ha Mashiach, some of which were revealed and highlighted in my artistic practice, kept me sane and gave me strength, joy, and peace despite the hostility demonstrated towards me personally and the general chaos in the world.

Whenever I looked away from Christ, I would suffer. Similar to how in Matthew 14:28-32, Peter was able to walk on water while his eyes were fixed on Jesus but started to sink when he looked at the storm raging around him, I found that I faltered when I looked away. Peter cried out to Jesus to save him. Jesus caught him by the hand, and the wind ceased when they got into the boat.

The strong spiritual influence in my life began with the Lord taking me to heaven as a young child. I experienced the all-encompassing, golden honey, liquid Love of Christ holding me safe and secure within it. I felt absolute bliss seeing Heaven's indescribable beauty and expanse with my own eyes. We communicated telepathically, heart-to-heart, without audible words. I felt overwhelming grief when the Lord asked me to return to the world as a witness to what I experienced in Heaven. I volunteered in tears to return to earth and fulfill the mission I was asked by my maker and lover of my soul.

As a young child, I felt inadequate for the task, but the Lord informed me that I would not
always be little; some would not believe my story, but some would. He desired that every human being would come and live with Him in Heaven forever. This became the driving force of my life to this day. I would return to Heaven and bring many millions of people whose lives I touched by telling my story.

**Back in the World**

The Lord told me that the answer to how to return to Heaven was in *"The Book."* However, He did not tell me what book! Asking everyone in my family to help, I learned to read within two weeks. I felt the warm golden light come over me one morning while trying to read a children's book, "The Big Bear." Suddenly, I could read with full understanding. I was filled with joy and excitement. I shouted to everyone in the house, "I can read! I can read!" I read aloud from the Big Bear and every other book they gave me. So began my quest to find *"The Book"* to point the way back to Heaven. Unfortunately, I retained an underlying feeling of sadness being back in the world. The most beautiful natural scenes on Earth did not compare to the splendor I saw and the bliss I felt in Heaven.

In the world, I felt anger and despair about the misleading history taught in schools that eliminated, distorted, or minimized the truth about the significant contributions of Black people to society. I did extensive research during my early years in archives of the public libraries in Washington D.C., where I was born, in Chicago, near where I grew up, and in New York, where I visited. This research allowed me to become familiar with history books written in the 1800s and earlier that contained a more complete narrative. The constant fight against this miseducation in my studies left me feeling angry, exhausted, depleted, and sometimes defeated. I hope to heal from some of that traumatic history by bringing it to light in this research.

The research questions underlying the present research were created from contemplating
important influences and pivotal moments in my life. Some nearly broke me. Some lifted me. Some silenced me for a time. Some made me scream and fight back with rage and determination to overcome. I do not remember where I first heard the phrase “The best revenge is living well,” but I grabbed a tight hold of it. I made it my mantra after I survived the first gang rape at 16 and 10 days old. It became my battleship to stay afloat on the tumultuous waves of violence, ignorance, hate, opposition, neglect, being ignored, unseen, diminished, and dismissed by the prevailing authorities, institutions, power structures, and social systems. This research study attempts to enable me to speak my truth, expose my pain, tell my story, and heal through sharing my story. A further intent is to explore how age, gender, and ethnicity impacted the journey, to demonstrate how I overcame the obstacles to obtaining the desired educational and professional status, and to commemorate the trials and triumphs.

**Research Question**

The primary research question is how did art making, and spirituality support my resilience in overcoming societal resistance to women pursuing higher education and professional roles?

**Problem Statement**

Some combinations of art, crafts, and spirituality have been identified as aiding women in coping with the adversity in their lives. This has been true of women in various cultures who identify with traditional feminine roles such as homemaker and mother. I benefited from participating in quilt-making sessions with my grandmother and her friends. These were like group therapy sessions where the women discussed all their concerns while they designed and made beautiful quilts from old clothes, curtains, and scraps of old material. I felt privileged to listen to their wisdom and expressions of faith and love of family. The quilts were exhibited at
churches, sold to support church programs and missions, and given as gifts to family and friends.

There is little literature on whether professional women also benefit from arts, crafts, and spirituality. In addition, it is assumed that a significant amount of familial support is needed for women to achieve professional goals. Thus, the current investigation will examine my journey as a professional woman of color and reflect on the support and adversity I received from various sources as I pursued my career goals.

**Research Hypotheses**

Four hypotheses formed the foundation of the investigation, and these included:

1. Is creative expression a protective factor in resilience?
2. How are spiritual communities and practice a positive factor in overcoming adversity?
3. How did family support affect persistence in achieving professional goals?
4. Does telling one’s story increase self-esteem, joy, and appreciation for accomplishments?

**Participants**

In a visual autoethnographic study, I am both the principal researcher and the research subject. As I collect data from personal journals, photographs, artwork, recordings, publications, certificates, diplomas, awards, correspondence, and conversations, I will record my thoughts and feelings and make new artwork about my responses. I may ask others who were present in some of these experiences what their impressions of these events were and keep their identities as anonymous as possible unless they agree not to be anonymous. Newspaper, internet, and journal articles will be used to corroborate the cultural influences and major events in the greater society.

**Methods**

Autoethnography can be defined as academic writing about the lived experience of the
writer's exploration and understanding of personal identity, emotions, interpretation of cultural traditions, symbolism, shared values, meanings, social rules, and political standpoints (Poulos, 2021). Autoethnography is not simply a memoir, novel, or autobiography, though it involves using some of the same creative narrative elements (dialogue, action, character, setting, and plot development) to communicate the story. The researcher gathers data from conversations, artifact analysis, journal notes, observations, and reflexivity (deep and careful self-reflection) to tell the story of living life. Ellis defined autoethnography as "a study of the relationship between self and other and all of its dimensions." Ellis, together with Art Bochner and Tony Adams, further defined autoethnography as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethnos)... (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011).

Visual Autoethnography is a relatively new qualitative research method that artists can use to examine their artworks as additional sources of data to tell a living story. For example, Vera Heller detailed the story of growing up behind the Iron Curtain in Hungary and the lifelong effects of this oppression brought to the forefront of consciousness by the Covid-19 lockdown in her visual autoethnography presentation to the Dominican University of California Art Therapy Practices doctoral cohort V (Heller, 2023). Visual autoethnography is what I have done in this doctoral research study.

**Timeline Drawing**

To assist in assembling supporting data during the research, I completed a timeline drawing as a reference and an altered book as a visual record of my art responses to my recollections. The timeline aided in organizing thoughts and provided a means of visualization of important life events. The art responses went back and forth in time as the memories surfaced,
while the timeline aided in keeping events in their proper place in time. I did not include a picture of the timeline drawing created for this study because I am not ready to make public some of the events that surfaced and are written on the timeline drawing.

Creating the art responses assisted in processing and integrating experiences and placing them in their proper place in the past. When I shared my discoveries with my family and close friends, they reminded me of details and significant events I had forgotten that were notable enough for them to mention. While most of these were positive and lifted my spirits, a few required me to rethink my behavior, change my original position, and apologize.

Art builds a relationship with the sense of self and the community of others (Gilroy, Linnell, McKenna, & Westwood, 2019), with the timeline being a place of grounding and safety (Adriansen, 2012). I will then analyze the data thematically to determine how artmaking, creativity, and spirituality played a crucial role in augmenting resiliency and reaching personal goals. Alain de Botton and John Armstrong, in their book, "Art as Therapy," posited art serves seven functions: 1. Remembering, 2. Hope, 3. Sorrow, 4. Rebalancing, 5. Self-understanding, 6. Growth, and 7. Appreciation. All these are touched upon in this study.

I entered a state of “flow” while expressing myself. Flow is a mental state involving being involved in a task that matches the participant's skill level, where the feeling of being in control, a feeling of timelessness, and automatic task completion are present. Flow is connected with promoting an improved mood, superior performance, and a sense of meaningfulness (Van der Linden, Tops, & Bakker, 2020). I tend to downplay and discount my accomplishments.

Sharing my story in this visual autoethnography may bring me a sense of joy and increase my appreciation for myself and my accomplishments. Autoethnography, examining culture through the lens of personal reflective experience, seemed the appropriate method for sharing my
intense interest in studying my personal experience as a woman of color in the evolving culture to bring illumination to the journey, healing, and celebration of victories. By accepting myself and my experiences and releasing the desire to control the outside environment I have no control over, I can embrace the peace and joy present within and acknowledge that though I am imperfect, I am worthy of love, respect, and kindness, as is every other human being.

Art Therapy research is a relatively new field, and as such, it leaned heavily on quantitative research to be accepted on par with other more established social science fields. Humans are unique; many emotional and spiritual factors affect their decisions and behavior. Qualitative studies are needed to capture those influences. This qualitative research will add to the literature and experiential knowledge of the power and efficacy of sharing spiritual, art making, and caring communications to provide healing, hope, and vitality to suffering humanity. The timeline aids in recalling autobiographical memories that illuminate a sense of self across time and puts historical events in perspective in the past. The use of art with a timeline can communicate feelings and represent ways of knowing that words alone cannot (Adriansen, 2012).

This study will add to the literature about the lived experiences of a woman of color, growing up in the US in the mid-20th century, the long, challenging journey to realize my dream of becoming an art therapist in the 21st century while simultaneously recognizing the importance of the spirit in wellness. I will use a timeline drawing to aid in remembering important events and how they affected me. I will emphasize my relationship with God and the supernatural ways I was guided, provided for, comforted, and protected through the years. I hope that by completing this timeline study and altered book, I will uncover and process any hidden traumatic memories that continue to trouble me and help others who have experienced similar traumas to
know they are not alone.

Significance of the Study

This study will add to the literature about older adult professional women’s struggles and some of the tools used to overcome. It will explore how spiritual life, family life, community life, and cultural identity were negative or positive influences. I will discuss when I first became aware of my personal inherited ethnicity compared with other observed ethnicities and the perceived privilege, power, or limitation of that identity.

I discuss the legacy of silence and some of the ways it was reinforced and ruled in my life. From the culture that children are to be seen and not heard, family secrets are taken to the grave, and corporal punishment from family, social systems, and the occupying police force, silence was cultivated in my life. Resisting the status quo, protesting abuse, or exposing corruption was often met with violent beatings, sometimes ending in death, in the communities I grew up in. Staying silent and invisible was a survival tactic. My search for truth and the way to an abundant life was often done in secrecy for safety. I searched with all my heart to learn the proper way to serve and please God and stay in constant communication with Him. He taught me how to pray fervent, effective prayers that influenced civilization around the globe.

Why Silence?

My earliest memory of adopting the attitude of keeping silent and invisible was in kindergarten. A dark-skinned girl was routinely yelled at, snatched around, and called by derogative sneers instead of her name; she was shamed in front of everyone. I could not identify that anything she was doing was “wrong.” However, I knew then that being a dark-skinned, colored child was a bad thing. Because I was light-skinned, I thought I was neutral, half and half, and not subject to the harsh treatment of the darker-skinned children, but also not privy to the
preferential treatment of the white children. I became very fearful when it was explained to me that I was also a colored kid, and I feared that the harsh treatment that I had witnessed could very well happen to me. To keep myself safe, I tried to be perfect, silent, and not bring any attention to myself. I frequently received glaring glances but no derogatory insults, at least not in kindergarten.

A second memorable experience enforcing silence happened when I was twelve years old. My stepbrother, who was about seventeen at the time, had recently started a job and gotten his first paycheck. He was very proud of his earnings and wanted to treat me to a burger, fries, and a strawberry milkshake. I was very happy and excited. After we ordered, I saw my brother give the middle-aged white male cashier a twenty-dollar bill to pay for my meal. The cashier gave my brother change for a ten-dollar bill. My brother politely pointed out he was given the wrong change. I piped in, yes, I saw him give you a twenty. The cashier answered back in a loud, angry voice and accused my brother of trying to rob him. My brother also raised his voice and demanded the man check again to give him the correct change.

There were two policemen sitting nearby, and they got up from where they were seated, came over to us, and endorsed the cashier. I noticed the cashier had nodded his head to the policemen when we first walked up to the counter. The policemen began to beat my brother with their batons all over his body, even pulling off his shoes and beating him on the bottom of his feet. All the while saying things like, "Who do you think you are talking to a white man like that?" They accused him of lying and called him many derogatory terms I do not want to repeat. I was crying and begging them to stop. When they finally did stop, they were laughing. My brother had to crawl back to the car on his hands and knees because he could not stand on his swollen feet to drive home.
I believe that this was something that was planned after considering how the cashier nodded at the police when we got to the counter. Maybe they did it multiple times a day for sport. My brother, though severely beaten, escaped with his life for demanding the correct change. Many other black people lost their lives for just being black or asking for fair treatment. If you were a black person, would you be quick to speak up when treated disrespectfully?

**Brief Biography**

I was the second child born to Raceal Osborne and Dennis McWhorter. My mother was a prodigy who graduated high school at 16 and graduated from Howard University at 19 with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. My father was a pastor of a Church of God in Christ Holiness storefront church. They met and married in Washington, District of Columbia.

They both told me that the Lord announced to them I was going to be a very special child and listen to me. I was treated specially all my life with very high expectations. This caused a lot of stress trying to live up to those expectations and very little help from my parents, who expected me to already know the answers to questions I asked them, though I had the mind of a child.

My mother divorced my father when I was seven years old. By that time, they had three other children besides my older brother and me: a sister two years younger, a brother three years younger, and a newborn sister seven years younger. My mother took us all back to her hometown in Gary, Indiana, where her older sisters and brothers could help support us. She remarried, and our family incorporated three older stepbrothers from my stepfather's previous wife. They had a son and daughter born to their union. Ten children grew up together in a four-bedroom house my stepfather custom built to my mother's specifications in an integrated community in Gary. He was a small business owner of an auto body repair shop and was able to support all his children.
Most of the black people in the community were small business owners or worked in the Steel Mills. Gary, Indiana, was mostly prosperous at the time and had a large middle-class black population as well as Hispanic and White.

In our integrated neighborhood, all the black parents were respected as parents of all the children. This was long before mobile phones. Everyone knew one another and memorized phone numbers. Any black parent could correct children on the spot, and you could be certain if a neighbor saw you do something wrong, they might not just correct you; they would call your parents to update them on what happened. When you got home, you would receive a good talking to, and corporal punishment, if warranted, usually switches from the bushes you were responsible for bringing to your parents. Doors were seldom locked. Children walked in and out of the neighbor's houses like their own. By the time I was a teenager, that culture had changed due to the rising crime and abuse.

Because of the prophecy my parents received that I was a special child, my honesty and my quiet, studious behavior seemed to confirm the prophecy. I was held to a higher standard than my siblings and peers. Our parents frequently left me in charge when they left home. My four older brothers did not like this at all and would often just leave the house after our parents did. I would not lie and would report to my parents exactly what transpired in their absence. My younger siblings mostly accepted my authority. My siblings did not try to compete with me, and my peers often expected me to be the leader in most of our academic and recreational activities. I believe this bred resentment and animosity towards me from my siblings and socially isolated me from my peers.

It took the fun out of playing games, which was very stressful for me. I was usually alone at the top and did not have a feeling of belonging because of the higher standard of expectation
and responsibility. It didn't help that I was obsessed with being the best, making everyone a rival for my position in my mind. I would agonize if I got an A- on anything, and a C was worse than an F- - to me. I only remember getting one C in high school from a teacher who was getting even with me for rejecting his improper advances.

I studied day and night and recorded and listened to school lessons and the Bible while I slept. It was not until my second year of college that I realized that constant studying did not benefit me as I originally thought. I was not enjoying life, and I did not have any real friends. I stopped trying to be the best and just learned what I wanted to learn and tried unsuccessfully to make friends. Due to my previous social isolation, my interpersonal skills were nonexistent. I only knew how to study, test, draw, and lead. My sole support and comfort was creating art and my relationship with the Lord.

I studied everything I was interested in: Art, Dance, Music, Museums, Psychology, and Religion. By the time I earned my Bachelor's degree, I had more than twice as many credits as I needed from several community colleges and universities in the several cities I lived in around the country. I earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts with an emphasis in drawing, painting, and printmaking from the University of California, Santa Cruz; A Masters of Christian Counseling from Restoration Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia; A Full Credential Minister Ordination Certificate from Saints of Value Ministry in Downey, California; A Master of Arts in Psychology with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy and Art Therapy from Phillips Graduate University in Chatsworth, California; a Certificate of License and Ordination as an Elder and Evangelist for New Faith Ministries in Barstow, California, and now I am an Art Therapy Psychology Ph.D. Graduate at the Dominican University of California.

At 18 years old, I was disappointed with the Christian Church, where I seldom
encountered Christlike people. Muslims looked spiritual, so I spent 18 months living in an
Orthodox Muslim Mosque as a handmaid to one of the mothers there in order to learn Arabic and
study the Koran in Arabic. I had been studying the language for about two months, and
suddenly, a light came on in my mind like it did when I was four, and suddenly, I could read and
speak Arabic. I understood it just like it was English. The native speakers there were amazed
and said I didn’t even speak with an accent.

That language opening to me like that was one of the many miracles the Lord performed
for me during my years of seeking Him. I was 18 when the Arabic language opened to me while I
was studying the Koran. In spite of finding universal truths in the Koran, I felt it was poisoned
with glorifying death, and I concluded that this was a doctrine of demons and not the way to
worship my Lord Jesus Christ, and left that place. Unfortunately, as soon as I left the mosque,
the Arabic language left me.

Learning the various forms of spiritual expression was positive in many ways, but I knew
in my heart of hearts they were not the way for me. Something in the pit of my stomach where
my spirit lives was tight and uncomfortable. I know now that what Christ said is true: "I am the
way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes unto the Father but by me.” I used to think God
made so many varieties of people that there must be many paths back to Him. Each of our paths
to the truth will be unique, but there is only one right destination.

We are made in the image and likeness of the Creator God (Genesis 1:26). I believe there
is only one true Most High, living God, known by many names, and only one way to be
reconciled back to Him, that is through the God/man Yeshua Ha Mashiach, the Anointed One
aka Jesus Christ. There are many gods and idols people worship, but they were imagined by
man or were created by God for his purposes.
You cannot chant or meditate your way to Nirvana or oneness with God. The way is through being born of the Spirit of God, giving your life to God, Yeshua, Jesus Christ, and letting Christ live His life in you and through you. That is oneness with God. That is true life, eternal life. Please do not hesitate to give your life back to God now. Another day or hour is not promised to you. We are all human and all divine, even as Christ was, when we invite Him to live in us. I will share a few significant ways this has manifested in my life.

I am currently seventy years old and recently diagnosed with stage four cancer of the liver of unknown origin. This was a primary concern while I completed my dissertation during the final two semesters of my Art Therapy Psychology Doctoral Journey. My first response to learning my diagnosis was one of joy because I finally had an explanation for my difficulty concentrating, staying awake, and the pain I had felt increasing on my right side, just below my ribs, over the past year. Once I received the diagnosis, the pain ceased.

My second thought was, Lord, have I not gone through enough already? Nevertheless, I guess you want me to exercise my spiritual muscles to overcome this final challenge, increase my therapeutic skills, and have a fantastic testimony of your goodness and healing power! I thought I had experienced every pain and loss possible, and that helped give me genuine empathy and made me a successful therapist. But I had not experienced cancer, and more than 40% of the population of the US will experience cancer sometime in their lifetime (WebMd.com).

Although I generally feel very grateful for all the countless blessings I enjoy daily, the small routines seem very special now, like closing the blinds at night before closing my eyes to sleep and opening them to let the sun come streaming in the morning. Cleaning up after doing artwork is nearly as enjoyable as the act of creation. I am grateful for having clean sheets and
warm blankets, making the bed in the morning, and enjoying viewing the beauty and order.

I feel very content and fulfilled as an Art Therapist, Military and Family Life Counselor, and Minister of the Gospel of Christ. I want to continue to live in a coastal community like I do now in Monterey, California, so I can frequently visit the beach and watch the waves roll in, which I find very relaxing.

I dream of purchasing or building an art studio and counseling office on the ground floor and residential quarters on the second floor. I would live upstairs and commute to work by going down the elevator or stairs. I want this building and studio space to have enough space for art exhibits, small concerts, dinners, and community meetings. So far in my life, nearly every dream has come true, and I am confident this one will as well.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

Visual Autoethnography

Just as art therapy is a young profession, visual autoethnography is a recent research method in art therapy. The methodology is complicated to describe because the idea of studying the self as the research subject is controversial. Distinguishing features of autoethnography are the researcher engaging in reflexivity, systematic introspection, and personal insight into the research (Poulos, 2021). Visual Autoethnography is a relatively new qualitative research method used by artists to examine their artworks to tell the living story. For example, Vera Heller detailed the story of growing up behind the Iron Curtain in Hungary and the lifelong effects of this oppression brought to the forefront of consciousness by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown (Heller, 2023).

I relate to what Carolyn Ellis said in her interview with Marcin Kafar (2014), "It was about life in the first place" and "to focus on the individual in a social context (p.1)." Ellis defined autoethnography as "a study of the relationship between self and other and all of its dimensions (p. 1)." Ellis, together with Art Bochner and Tony Adams, further defined autoethnography as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethnos)...

(Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011)

This study adds to the literature about the lived experiences of a woman of color, growing up in the US in the mid-twentieth century to now, the long, hard journey to realize my dream of becoming an art therapist, and recognizing the importance of the spirit in wellness. I used a timeline drawing to aid in remembering important events and how they affected me, and an Altered Book to illustrate my past art created during those times and my current art response.
The altered book served to ground and comfort me as I revisited good and bad memories. I emphasized my relationship with God and the supernatural ways I was guided, provided for, comforted, and protected through the years. By completing this visual autoethnographic study, I discovered and processed hidden traumatic memories that continued to trouble me and help others who have experienced similar traumas to know they are not alone. I described the significant adverse effects that being silenced inflicted on my well-being.

**Societal Barriers**

The journey for women from student to professional and scholar is a long and arduous road, and it can be characterized by barriers of racism, sexism, gender role stereotypes, exclusion, micro-aggressions, violence, and more. Overcoming and finding a way around or through these barriers takes unity, confronting unjust laws, oppressive treatment, and unrealistic expectations. The support of the family of origin, extended family, and nuclear family is essential (Rockinson, Sosin & Spaulding, 2018). This study provides a platform to add meat to the bones of current knowledge of women’s feelings, concerns, and impact on society.

**Gender Stereotypes**

Society rewards women for staying in their place as wives, mothers, and caretakers. Sacrificing her life and putting her family and others' needs before her own is the expected norm. For women who do work outside of the home, their roles are most often relegated to serving and caring professions, such as teaching, nursing, childcare, mental health care, and secretary. These professions are usually poorly compensated because of the predominance of women in them. Fewer women than men go into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields or politics, professions dominated by men that are better paid.

Harvard and New York University professor Carol Gilligan (1982) challenged previous
theories of moral development that favored rational (male-dominated) over relational (female-dominated) thought. Women’s thoughts were considered inferior because they were emotional, and men’s superior because they were more rational. Now, we have emotional intelligence being promoted and taught. The male experience was considered the norm in prevailing research, and the female experience was deviant. Gilligan found in her research that women’s voices on morality centered on “interdependence and connectedness” (Gilligan, 1982).

Health Disparities

It is difficult for women to express their feelings and prioritize their needs when praised for always being calm, emotionally in control, and altruistic to the point of self-denial. Women’s health suffers when they suppress their feelings and neglect their needs. In a 2022 study, University of Pittsburg researchers found that women of color who strongly agreed with statements like “I rarely express my anger to those close to me” were 70% more likely to experience increased carotid atherosclerosis, a cardiovascular plaque associated with a higher risk of heart attack. Other studies have connected self-silencing with cancer, chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, HIV, and early death in women (Eyal, 2023).

Women are twice as likely to die after a heart attack, suffer anxiety, depression, and PTSD at twice the rate of men, and are at a higher risk for and account for 80% of autoimmune diseases. They have a higher risk of suffering from insomnia, migraines, chronic pain, fibromyalgia, and long COVID. Women suffer from anorexia, the deadliest mental health disorder, at a ninefold higher rate than men (Eyal, 2023). Remaining silent and not expressing their needs and desires is costing women not only their health and happiness but it is also costing women their very lives.

Gabor Mate (2020) remarked that people who have an automatically compulsive concern
for the emotional needs of others while ignoring their own often are prone to chronic illness. Many people with that “selfless” trait will become therapists, physicians, and healthcare workers. When your role becomes more important than who you are, where you believe you must justify your existence by giving and doing, you may feel devastated if you fail to help someone.

When someone suppresses their anger, their immune system is also suppressed. Your immune cells, often called the floating brain, can manufacture all the hormones the brain can manufacture. When you suppress your anger, you are turning your immune system against yourself, an autoimmune disease. Mate cautioned when your body says No, with symptoms like headache, stomachache, backache, nausea, etc., it is time to pay attention and investigate to find out what your body is saying no to in your life (Mate, 2020). Where in your life are you doing too much? When I notice these types of symptoms, it is the first indication that something is wrong in my life. Like many women, I automatically help people without considering the cost to my well-being first. Identifying the source of the discomfort and taking care of it is lifesaving.

**National Statistics**

In 1990, only 32.5 percent of households were headed by women. by 2019, households headed by women accounted for half of all households. This trend holds across all racial and ethnic groups. At 60 percent, Black households hold the highest proportion of households headed by women (Goodman, Choi, Zhu, 2021). Single mothers are forced to pursue higher education and professional careers to escape poverty and support their families.

Since the passage of Title IX in 1972, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities receiving any federal financial assistance, women have made significant gains in many academic fields. Still, women are underrepresented in academic and professional advancement in most Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)
fields (Schuller, 2016). According to the 2020 US Department of Labor statistics, women comprise 47% of the total labor force, while men comprise 53%. Of the over-55 group, women make up 23.4%, and men make up 23.6% of the total labor force. Eighteen percent of working women hold an advanced degree (master’s and above) compared to 14.8% of men. The 2020-21 Academic year, 330,700 men earned master’s degrees compared to 536,194 women.

Yet, despite the superiority in advanced education and near equal numbers in the workforce, women still earn less than men doing the same job (Women in Academia Report). Women hold more than two-thirds of the country’s $1.54-trillion student loan debt: $929 billion with less ability to pay due to the gender pay gap. More than 70% of Black students go into debt to pay for higher education as compared to 51% of white students. Buying a home, starting a business, or saving for retirement are often delayed paying off the student debt (AAUW.org).

International Statistics

The World Economic Forum (WEF) Global *Gender Gap Report 2022: Insight Report July 2022*, based on the latest statistics from international organizations and a survey of executives covering 146 countries, measured the gender gap distance towards parity on a 0 to 100 scale. The report measured gender gaps in political representation, wealth accumulation, lifelong learning and skills prioritization, and stress levels in eight regions. North America, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. Although the global gender gap closed to 68.1% in 2022 it will take 132 years to reach parity.

North America and Europe lead the way by closing 76.9% and 76.6% of the gender gap respectively, and South Asia ranked the lowest with only 62.3%. Iceland is the most gender-equal country in the world with 90.8% of the gender gap closed.
Despite some gains, women trail men in all categories except stress levels, where between 2021 and 22, women reported 4% higher stress levels, and women provided 55% of unpaid and paid care work compared to men’s 19%. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed women back due to a more significant number of women losing their jobs and assuming the majority of care for children out of school (WEF, 2022).

The scarcity of affordable and available childcare deteriorated during the pandemic. American Association for University Women (AAUW) reported research has shown that not only are managers less likely to hire mothers than women without kids, but if they do offer a mother a job, it’s at a lower salary than other women. Men not only do not suffer that penalty, but their earnings increase (AAUW, 2022). The pay gap increases as working women get older despite being better educated. Between the ages of 25 and 34, women make about 90 cents to the dollar of men the same age. At 37 to 46, women earn about 84% of men the same age. By 55-64, women earn about 79% of men the same age. This pattern has persisted for at least four decades (PEW Research Center).

**Societal Discrimination, Biases, And Persecution**

The bias against women in training opportunities and advancing to leadership roles in many corporations and institutions have spurred unsupported mid-career women to aggressively pursue other roles and start their own businesses and organizations (Duckworth, 2016; Terjesen, 2005). In addition, in two-parent heterosexual households, women are still burdened with doing the lion’s share of endless domestic tasks and the mental, physical, and psychological costs of planning and executing those tasks (Rodsky, 2022; WEF, 2022). Women pursuing fulfillment outside of the home may be chastised for not efficiently maintaining the home simultaneously, while men are not expected to do so. Men will be celebrated if they mop the floor or take out the
trash, while women will be blamed if the man does not do it and shamed if it doesn’t get done.

Women displaying the leadership qualities admired in men are considered too masculine in women (AAUW). This disparity in expectations for women is stressful and has adverse effects on their mental and physical health (Fielding, 2023). Striving to meet all these expectations may cause some women to fall into “The Superwoman Schema or Syndrome,” as posited by Dr. Cheryl Woods Giscombé, associate professor of quality of life, health promotion, and wellness at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Woods-Giscombé, 2021). Her research focuses on how stress leads to health disparities among African Americans. Black women are often praised for being “strong, calm, and nurturing while neglecting their own well-being and silencing their needs, authentic thoughts, and feelings. Dr. Woods noted that research showed that expressing emotions strengthens the immune system. How can we stop prioritizing caregiving and balance caregiving with self-care?

Dr Woods promotes coaching Black women on mindfulness, deep breathing techniques, and loving-kindness meditation to help mitigate the physiological consequences of stress, such as headaches and numbness (Woods-Giscombé, 2021). Broaching racism in the questions of all racial groups is to give participants a safe place to share their unique experiences. After suffering psychological and physical abuse, I suffered migraine headaches, numbness, and chronic pain; most of these symptoms were relieved after many years of therapy.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Health, United States, 2017) report Black women facing the stressors of misogyny, sexism, and racism have a life expectancy that is three years shorter than non-Hispanic white Women (77.9 years versus 81 years); have an infant mortality rate 2.3 higher, and maternal mortality more than two times greater than White women. Research indicates that health disparities are often a function of racial trauma, racism, and
microaggressions, not personal behavior (Hargons, 2021; Hoyert & Miniño, 2020; Pappas, 2003;). One black father reported his exceptionally healthy wife was forced to wait seven hours while she was a patient in the hospital for a doctor to treat her for hemorrhaging after childbirth. She died despite the father continuously asking for help (Atticus Investigates, 2018). This scenario is continually repeated throughout the country, resulting in countless avoidable deaths of Black women and immeasurable grief and harm to black families.

**Discounting and Exclusion**

Women who have advanced to leadership roles in industry and academia may have difficulty celebrating their success due to being perceived as a token representative of diversity and inclusion, affirmative action, and governmental policies. Their institutions and peers do not fully recognize their hard work, perseverance, innovations, and self-determination. When women speak out against these insults, they may be accused of hypersensitivity or playing the gender card (Jones, Dawkins, & McClinton, 2012; Yeh, 2018). Facing the need to debunk these socially imposed stereotypes restricts their ability to flourish and cultivate individuation. Some women may suffer from the “imposter syndrome,” experiencing self-doubt, negative self-talk, inability to internalize superior work performance, and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Hill, 2020).

Exclusion and discounting have a negative effect on stress levels and contribute to lower self-confidence and increased self-doubt (Yeh, 2018). Stereotypes of gender roles accepted for thousands of years make social injustices of sexism and poverty appear natural and normal (Robinson, Esquibel & Rich, 2013). This makes the opposing and ignoring of women’s achievements difficult to combat. Women who became successful despite these biases were found to have had strong role models and mentors in their lives (Madsen 2007). Too often, minorities and women feel pressured to conform to the dominant male culture’s ways of
knowing and being to be marginally accepted. Because women’s numbers are still so few in positions of power and authority, they often do not feel recognized or a part of the organizations they are a part of (Gerity, 2000).

**Personal Experience with Exclusion**

While working for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), I earned many monetary and service awards for sustained superior performance. We had quarterly agency-wide meetings where agency achievements and recipients of awards were recognized. Although I sat in the first row of one of these meetings, my name was not called out for the awards I received. This hurt my feelings, and after the program, I asked the Director why he did not call my name for my rewards. He said he did not see me sitting right in front of his face. However, he called out the names of others who were not present. My rewards were delivered to me through inter-office mail.

As these microaggressions added up, like celebrating everyone's birthday in our department except mine, I suffered a major depressive episode and resigned. It was two years before I recovered enough to return to work. During those two years, I was able to earn a Master of Christian Counseling degree. Perhaps that was all the Lord wanted me to accomplish.

**The Definition of Success**

The definition of success has evolved and includes social justice, personal values, and authenticity. Leaders in STEM, politics, business, education, health, and other professions and industries need to recognize the advantages of having a diverse workforce that is equitable, inclusive, collaborative, and accommodating and work to utilize the ideas, abilities, and talents of everyone as impartially as possible (Yeh, 2018).

My personal definition of success includes continually developing my natural talents
through practice, continuing education, and pursuing special interests, to help as many people as possible to obtain or restore their joy and satisfaction in life, using art making as a modality. At the same time, I want to maintain rich and rewarding relationships with as many different people of different ethnicities and interests as possible. To love and be loved in return. All these things are being fulfilled in my life now as a mother, friend, minister, military and family life counselor, and art therapist. The feedback I get from others primarily mirrors the love I give out.

**Sexual Assault Statistics**

More than two out of three sexual assaults are not reported to police, and 975 out of 1,000 perpetrators walk away free (National Sexual Violence Resource Center). Approximately 1 out of 5 women who have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime was confirmed in my graduate MFT/Art Therapy cohort; three out of the ten members reported having been raped. The top two reasons survivors chose to report were to protect the household or victim from further crimes by the offender 28%, or to stop the incident or prevent recurrence or escalation. The top two reasons victims chose not to report were 20% feared retaliation, and 13% believed the police would not do anything to help (RAINN, Rape Abuse & Incest National Network). RAINN operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800-656-HOPE, online.rainn.org, and rainn.org/es), and the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and help to prosecute perpetrators.

**Memory of Second Sexual Assault**

At 17, I was kidnapped by two men at gunpoint from a bus stop in the middle of the day. They terrorized me with constant threats while driving around drinking hard liquor until dark, to a city I was not familiar with. Sobbing, I begged and pleaded with the men, asking if they had a
mother or sister and if they would want them to go through what they were putting me through. In their conversation with each other I learned they were truck drivers from Ohio. One statement they made, "I pay taxes, I ought to be able to have a woman," made me aware they thought of women as objects, not as human beings. With the gun hidden under the jacket they pressed into my side, warning me to keep quiet while they checked into a small hotel. I was beaten and raped until I passed out.

When I came to, they were both asleep. I saw the black eye and bruises all over my body. I saw the gun on the table and wanted to pick it up and shoot them both dead. I never handled a gun before and was afraid if I shot and missed, I would be in more danger. I saw their wallets on the table and took all the cash. I got dressed and quietly left the room.

It was about two o’clock at night. I ran as fast as I could to a telephone booth to call a cab to get me home. I crouched down so as not to be seen. I did not know what city I was in. The cab driver told me to look at the street signs to see where I was. I was terrified to leave the phone booth to look in case the men woke up and came looking for me, but I did it. I stayed crouched down in the phone booth until the cab driver got there and drove me home.

When I got home, the house was filled with visiting stepsiblings who lived about four hours away. Everyone was asleep all over the house. I took a shower and put on makeup to cover the bruises on my face and neck. I learned because there were so many people in the house no one had noticed I was not there. I felt depressed, worthless, and hopeless.

There was no use telling anyone what had happened. After the first gang rape, the police warned my parents that if I went to trial, I would be subjected to being accused of it being consensual sex. They also warned that because the perpetrators were gang members, they may exact vengeance on the family as well as me. I was silent about the attack and invisible to my
family. I avoided catching buses after that. I used taxis and paid for my rides with the money I earned painting my teacher's and other's portraits. Earning money with the art gave me comfort, power and protection.

I can speak about this event now without it causing me distress because of many years of therapy with the intent to forgive the perpetrators in order to heal. It took at least twenty years to completely forgive. I was able to forgive one layer at a time through a lot of journaling, art processing, and seeing professional counselors. Volunteering to help rape victims in the Rape Crisis Center of Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, did a lot to help me to heal.

Factors Supporting Women’s Progress

Having supporting relationships with others is a necessity to deal with so many daily stressors – racism, sexism, exclusion, intimate partner violence, not being seen or heard, as well as wage disparity that are ongoing. Taking time for mindfulness, eating well, resting, exercising, and enjoying recreational activities are also important. Assessing what the current stressors are and addressing those we can with the help of others is strengthening. Having your concerns be heard and publicized can rejuvenate your motivation to go on. This study is one avenue to be heard, strengthened, and recognized.

Many studies acknowledge a supportive family is essential for women to persist in pursuing doctoral degrees (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Sosin & Spaulding, 2018). This study will examine how I navigated the challenges of balancing family and my personal development as a scholar and a professional woman and my feelings about it.

Being aware of explicit (known) and implicit (unconscious) bias may decrease its negative influence on the evaluation of female leaders (Anderson et al., 2015). Three strategies proposed by Anderson et. al. to overcome the gender stereotypes that disfavor women in
leadership positions because of gender role incongruency are structured free recall (SFR), source monitoring (SM), and error management training (EMT).

SFR instructs evaluators to recall both positive and negative behaviors. This can help mitigate the tendency to recall mostly negative behaviors if the rater holds stereotypes, implicit or explicit bias. Source monitoring (SM) instructs raters to distinguish between memories based on specific details and “know” judgments based on feelings that can be influenced by expectations of how a person is expected to act (Andersen et. al., 2015, p. 526). Error management training EMT allows trainees to make errors during training to learn from them and encourages more self-exploratory and metacognitive thinking. Posing questions such as, “What worked?” “What did not work?” causes participants to pause, think, and learn from their errors. All three strategies work best with people with low levels of explicit and implicit biases (Anderson et.al., 2015).

By giving voice to the tragedies and triumphs, challenges, and rewards experienced on my journey to personally defined success, I hope to encourage others to recognize and celebrate what they have accomplished. By giving witness to my experiences, the intent is to augment mine and other's resiliency to continue the fight to maintain and enjoy that success.

The world has become more aware of women’s lived experiences in education, politics, entertainment, and the workplace. The “#Me Too” movement, among many others, has brought the reality of women’s struggles to mainstream news and social media sites. I have also personally experienced pressure to provide sexual favors to men in employer and supervisory positions above me, sometimes even while applying for a job. This made securing a job without such a hostile environment hard to find.

To be treated fairly often requires making formal complaints through available channels.
However, when making a complaint through corporate processes, I was discouraged by arguments from officials that it would take about five years before this complaint was properly investigated and adjudicated. By that time, the perpetrator would have moved on to another job. Meanwhile, making this complaint may make things even harder for you in the present. I would still make the complaint and usually would get the promotion or concession I deserved. Having a reputation for making formal complaints reduced some of the discrimination and exclusion I was suffering. However, the microaggressions did not diminish.

Much is now being written about women and their increased leadership in business, education, and politics. This study’s purpose is to add to that knowledge of older women’s lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the impact of this visibility on their lives and ambitions. One of the best approaches to investigating lived experiences is the autoethnography method. When the researcher herself is also a participant in the investigation, then a heuristic approach adds value. Therefore, the present study will utilize an autoethnographic/heuristic approach to study my experiences as a senior professional woman of color as I journeyed through life to meet my career goals.
Chapter 3 Methods

Participants

This is a visual autoethnography composed of my recalled personal experiences, influences, feelings, and thoughts reflected in the artwork produced. I will speak to others who shared some of these experiences for validation, and their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations. I will anonymize these individuals to the fullest extent possible unless they want to be identified and give me permission.

Reflexive exploration of questions about the lived experience of a mixed-race female of color in the mid-twentieth to the first quarter of twenty-first century America. The researcher developed the questions explored to cover traditions, cultural influences, societal rules, and major events, outstanding people, topics of interest, and importance to the development of my character.

Procedure

The procedures for this autoethnography investigation were as follows: First, I conducted interviews with professional women asking them questions about their journeys to become professionals in their fields of study. I then completed a literature review exploring the factors affecting the career and life trajectories of professional women. To begin my personal research exploration, I created a draft timeline guided by sociologically significant questions that were revealed in the literature review. The research continued with my conducting a review of artwork that I made over the course of 50 years and searching for themes to characterize these works.

Finally, I created an altered book of selected significant life events suggested by my review of the artwork from my life.
Timeline and Altered Book Procedure

Timeline Questions

The questions used to guide my timeline research inquiry are below. These questions were developed through reading books, articles, and unpublished dissertations that detailed the struggles of women, and specifically women of color, who pursued higher education. One goal that the women interviewed had in common was to use their advanced education to become professional women such as scientists, doctors, and psychologists. In addition, my research questions were informed by conversations and informal interviews with professional women of color with whom I am acquainted or friends. The interviews and reading resulted in the following list of questions that guided the creation of my timeline.

1. Describe your early life in your family of origin.

2. Describe any differences you noticed about the way boys and girls were treated at home and school.

3. Describe the circumstances and your approximate age when you understood your inherited physical characteristics due to your ethnicity were distinct from other groups and influenced how you or others were treated?

4. What inspired your decision to pursue your profession?

5. What were the specific obstacles you encountered as a woman of your particular ethnic heritage?

6. How were you treated in school?

7. How were you treated in society in general?

8. How are you treated now in your profession, compared to what you observe about how men of your ethnicity or men and women of other ethnicities are
9. Tell me about any role models or mentors that contributed to your success.

10. How did the men in your business and personal life help or hinder your journey?

11. How did other women help or hinder your journey?

12. If you have children, how did having children help or hinder your journey?

13. How were your immediate and extended family supportive or opposed to your ambitions?

14. Describe how if any art making, crafts, music, writings, or spiritual practices motivated you to persist in pursuing your chosen profession?

15. What is your definition of success?

16. Describe how and why you now enjoy or do not enjoy practicing your chosen profession?

17. Describe your thoughts and feelings about what the costs to your personal and family life were to reach your current success and if you feel it was worth it?

18. Describe your experience taking part in this research study and creating the timeline drawing and altered book.

*DRAFT TIMELINE CREATION*

Because I have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depressive disorder (MDD) recurring throughout life starting before grade school (partially due to early exposure to witnessing and experiencing ongoing violence and deaths), I knew that this
autoethnographic exploration was going to be an emotional process. Therefore, I tried to use this draft timeline as an emotional protective factor to avoid triggering a depressive episode from recalling the multiple traumas that precipitated the previous PTSD and MDD diagnosis. In addition, I used (and continue to use) full-spectrum light sources to combat Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and see colors and details better. This greatly reduced my depressive SAD symptoms and prevented a current episode of either PTSD or MDD.

Making sure that I was psychologically protected, I began creating a draft timeline drawing using only pencil and writing on 12x18 inch newsprint paper. The use of small paper and a resistive medium allowed information processing to remain on the Cognitive/Symbolic level of the Expressive Therapy Continuum (ETC). Keeping the process Cognitive/Symbolic was another protective factor while I was deciding upon the most personally relevant and important events to illustrate in color for the final altered book.

The timeline creation process started with my thinking of the happiest moments I could remember. These were moments of divine interventions, positive events, celebratory milestones, and important accomplishments. These were the first focus as emotion was added to the experience in order to make the timeline a happy and safe place. I then felt safe enough to mentally encounter and add the difficult and challenging events I had to overcome to achieve success. The timeline assisted me in organizing and prioritizing the memories.

I divided the timeline pencil drawing into three sections. The first section was from thirty years to the present, the second section was from nineteen to twenty-nine, and the third section was from birth to eighteen. The three sections aided in placing major events in the life stages they occurred in. Second, favorable supernatural interventions were added, boosting strength and resilience, before placing traumatic events on the timeline.
By starting with the most recent events and accomplishments before working down to the earliest, grounding in the present was facilitated. By starting with the most recent positive outcomes and accomplishments and then traveling back in time, the strength experienced in the present made it easier to remember past positive events as well as to recognize the benefits derived from going through past adversity.

**Chemotherapy challenges**

The physical challenges of going through chemotherapy, and the endless tests, scans, and doctor visits left me extremely fatigued. In addition, it takes a lot of energy to see and hear. Very loud tinnitus, confirmed with hearing tests, makes it hard for me to hear and understand speech even with my expensive hearing aids. I was only able to work sporadically when I had energy.

**Review of Past Artwork**

I reviewed artwork created over my lifetime to assist the life review that constitutes this autoethnographic study. Months passed as I gathered old, illustrated journals, drawings, and paintings hanging on the walls, tucked away in leather portfolios, corrugated boxes, folders, and CDs. The volume of artwork was so vast that I could not review it all, so I settled on 50 artworks created over a period of 50 years: adolescence, young adulthood, midlife, and senior life. These artworks were chosen for the presence of intensity of thought, feeling, and creative expression. Looking at each image individually, I remembered my approximate age, where I lived, the circumstances, and my state of mind when creating it. The artwork not only helped structure the timeline, but also gave me inspiration for the altered book.

During the process of writing on the timeline, more memories would come up that I would add to the timeline. I began reflective sessions by engaging in emotional regulation techniques, such as deep breathing exercises, guided imagery meditation, visualizing the image,
or progressive muscle relaxation, to ground myself in the present to enhance my ability to maintain a safe place to express and contain those memories as appropriate.

I used photographs, music, recordings, and artifacts and created any art, poems, or other creative objects to enhance the experience. I stopped to ground myself or get help when I felt overwhelmed. My intent was to make this internal reflective work as pleasant and healing experience as possible while preparing to share my story. To avoid evoking too strong of an emotional response that may require psychological intervention, I focused on the positive and kept art materials available to externalize and process my emotions. Expressive activities such as drawing, crafts, music, or movement were utilized to record, process, and contain any adverse reactions to painful memories and to celebrate any positive recollections. I danced and sang to music, as well as did drawing and painting.

Realizing that humans naturally gravitate toward vividly remembering negative events while skimming over positive events (Nass & Yen, 1990). This may be due to the desire to avoid repeating painful events. Reminiscing, ruminating on, and recording my more pleasant memories and positive feelings with art making, writing, photography, or other creative expressions helped to imprint the events more deeply in my brain and body, speeding more rich recall in the future. I believe this makes painful memories easier to fully process.

Nine months passed as I gathered journals, drawings, and paintings hanging on the walls, tucked away in leather portfolios, corrugated boxes, folders, and CDs. I added to and rearranged the timeline written in pencil to incorporate the constant changes that occurred as more memories came forward during this data-gathering process. I organized the memories until I felt I had enough to represent my life. During this process, I discerned which memories needed further processing and which I felt comfortable sharing.
This fluid process sometimes brought up such a powerful emotional response that I was compelled to immediately add a page(s) to the altered book. I felt that I could not move on until the emotions and thoughts were processed visually. The altered book acted as my therapist and release valve. I would often enter into a state of flow while I created art to express what I was experiencing. I used acrylics, photographs, cut up greeting cards, and other mixed media. I photographed original artworks on premium matte paper or sticky paper and printed them to fit the size needed for the altered book composition. I used Liquitex matte gel over most of the collages to help seal them. I wanted my altered book pages to close completely for ease of reading and reproducing. Altered books with many items and textures are too stimulating for me. To keep myself regulated, I chose simple designs that kept me calm and happy.

**Heuristic process**

The volume of the data compiled was so copious that it was necessary to utilize heuristic techniques as hypothesized by Moustakas's (1990) systematic six-step approach: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.

The initial engagement was reviewing the artwork, journals, photographs, correspondence, and other memorabilia. I spent months immersing myself in this task, deeply reflecting and recording my mental and emotional responses. Incubation included taking breaks, dreaming about, and taking time away from the data to do other things to relax and let the data settle in my subconscious mind.

Illumination often would come in the period between wake and sleep, as I drifted off to sleep, and just before I fully woke up. If I woke in the middle of the night, I would get up and record my revelations in writing in the notebook I kept next to my bed. Sometimes, when I did not want to cut on the light and wake all the way up, I would record my thoughts in the voice
memo app on my iPhone and reviewed my recording after I got up in the morning.

Explication included organizing and integrating all these thoughts and emotions in the altered book's poetry, writing, and art responses. The timeline was the outline, and the altered book the illustration of the integration process. They evolved together as I went back and forth between them to maintain emotional balance.

Data Storage and Confidentiality

The recordings, artwork, and writings will be stored at home. Electronic data will be kept in an encrypted and password-protected folder on the primary researcher’s personal computer. As the identities of others will be anonymous, except for those who are dead or elect not to be, no other extraordinary efforts will be made to secure the work.

Data Analysis

The primary researcher deeply considered the data (historical memory, art responses, thoughts, feelings) and wrote about the interpretation of the phenomena from the personal internal perspective at the time of the experiences, and from the current perspective of a trained Art Therapist and Christian minister. The differences in the perspectives were closely examined and expounded upon. Previous and current biases were examined and elucidated in light of the intrafamilial and spiritual traditions, rules, and norms, as well as the external social climate of the United States and the world. Narrative storytelling, complete with internal and external dialogue with self and others, will be employed to illustrate how my worldview developed in light of my experiences.
Reducing Threats to the Validity of the Data and Ensuring Trustworthiness

I understand from personal experience that biographical memory can be unreliable due to many factors, such as protecting oneself from reliving the pain of trauma. Before I was first gang-raped at 16, I enjoyed a photographic memory. After that traumatic experience I consciously tried so hard to forget it that my photographic memory departed never to return.

I shared my perspective of memories with others who are still living and have lived through some of the stories to get their interpretations of the data to validate the truth of what I report in this ethnography. I researched publicly available data sources, newspaper and magazine articles, books, videos, and audio recordings to augment my narrative. I shared this with my dissertation committee and doctoral cohort to identify any apparent biases to consider.

Bracketing

I bracketed known biases to assist with making my writing as close to commonly recognized reality as possible. Known biases include assuming all professional women suffer opposition from society, family, or both. I felt a little resentful when talking to a white professional woman who was able to share her story with nearly all positive events in her family and professional life, void of the near-constant discrimination I experienced.

A second known bias is because of a personal history of observing that many Christian leaders do not follow Christ but use the Bible as a tool to exploit people and exercise power over them; I looked at nearly everyone who had to call themselves a Christian with skepticism. Real Christians do not have to tell you they are a Christian. You know them by their fruit: love, peace, joy, gentleness, self-control, generosity, and service to others.

A third known bias is that because I have experienced so many negative personal relationships with men, I am skeptical about taking their initial kindness or generosity as
genuine.

I am open and willing to receive and carefully consider constructive criticism because I have a deep love of learning and a desire to constantly improve myself to enjoy life and love people to the fullest extent.
Chapter Four Results

Background

I started this journey with conversations with my family, friends, colleagues, and peers. My family and friends brought up many events I had forgotten or downplayed but were significant enough to them that they remembered and thought should be recorded. I originally wanted to use interviews with other senior professional women for this endeavor and received an enthusiastic response. Every woman I asked wanted to share their story, and many began sharing their experiences immediately during the initial contact. I was encouraged by their responses but realized that it was necessary for me to get through the whole process before I involved others in it. After this process is complete, I hope to duplicate the process with other interested women.

Physical and Mental Challenges

Starting the process made me aware that it would take much longer than I anticipated. The range and intensity of emotions stimulated were surprising and taxing. Making decisions about what to share or not to share was difficult. Keeping a journal of my feelings and creating art responses when motivated was rewarding, challenging, and exhausting, especially with the added physical battle with cancer.

Many days, I was too exhausted to get out of bed due to the side effects of chemotherapy. Taking lots of breaks, controlled breathing, meditation, and processing with professionals and caring peers helped me keep moving forward, one paragraph at a time. With the special support of my doctoral cohort, I maintained a positive, hopeful attitude, leaning on my faith and creating art to heal. Some days, I felt great and was able to get work done. However, I noticed my processing time and reflexes were slower, handling small objects was difficult, and I would drop things often, making art more difficult.
Altered Book Art Responses

I began the altered book before I knew about the cancer. The first pages I created illustrated a conversation I had with God during one of our daily lunches together. This memory came up during the literature review. I was whining to the Lord about how bad my husband was treating me. The Lord said to me, "I am sick and tired of hearing you whining and complaining. You want to know how I feel about your feelings?" "Yes," I answered meekly. Then, He showed me a picture of my feelings of self-pity, being swept up with a broom into a dustpan and thrown in the trash. He commanded, "Read Micah 5:7-9." "Yes sir," I replied, and immediately looked up Micah:7-9 and read it. I felt empowered after reading those scriptures. "You are a descendant of Judah," The Lord informed me. I began researching my ancestry and historical literature and verified that I was indeed a Hebrew of the tribe of Judah. The first pages of the altered book shown below, illustrate that encounter with the Lord.

Figure 1 Altered Book pages 1-2. Lion of Judah
After I got the shocking diagnosis of stage 4 cancer, I created a 4-page spread art response in my altered book about that revelation illustrated in figure 2. On the bright red and pink Orchid, I wrote this poem with gold letter

**Curse or Cure**

*Curse the evil.*  
*Bless the Cure.*  
*Douse the Darkness.*  
*Love makes all things pure.*  
*The Light extinguishes darkness and brings relief.*  
*I rest in Yah's Love & rejoice Yahweh is Chief!*

![Image of altered book page with art and text](image-url)

**Figure 2 Altered Book. pp.15-16. Curse or Cure.**

After meditating on that for a week or two and letting it sink in, I began to create a two-page spread art response about what I heard from the Lord. The Lord gave me three primary scriptures to meditate upon during this crisis.

1. "Shall we indeed accept only good from God? Shall we not
also accept adversity and disaster?" Job 2:10, NKJV.

2. "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

   James 1: 2-4." NKJV.

3. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.”

   Romans 8: 26. N KJV.

Indeed, I have unfailingly been full of the joy of the Lord and peace that passes understanding. I could manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, peace, joy, kindness, faithfulness, patience, self-control, gentleness, and goodness dependably. The pain I felt on my right side that caused me to go to the hospital in the first place went away after I heard the diagnosis. Pain, the body's warning system that something is wrong, relaxed after I knew what was wrong and began to address it. Fear never entered the picture.

Finally, I made an art response with the get-well cards while thinking about the flowers, food, and gifts from those who loved me, which enhanced the peace and joy I was accepting from God. How grateful I am that I am alive to see the incredible support from others and know that just being myself and giving the unconditional love that is constantly flowing through me from God to others is not in vain. The attacks of the enemy are fruitless. You cannot beat God giving as he works through people to bless you.
Now that I am calm with the diagnosis, I am confident that I will be healed in due time. I began to remember other times The Lord walked through hardships with me, and the end was that I became stronger, more stable, and better able to navigate through hardships. I learned to enjoy the times of refreshing, rest, and recreation to a higher degree than before. I am able to return my focus more quickly to The Lord when I look away to examine the problem, which can swiftly cause me to sink Like Peter, who successfully walked on the water in a storm as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus walking toward him. Graciously, the Lord caught him when Peter cried out, "Lord save me!" The Lord asked him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Matthew 14: 29 -32 KJV.
**It's not about you**

As I look back on my life, I am grateful that the tremendous stress that I felt regarding completing this dissertation was relieved when the Lord said to me, "Remember. It's not about you, it is about Me." I felt so much better. The Lord reminded me it was his idea for me to enroll in the Art Therapy Psychology PhD program at the Dominican University of California, not mine. I even tried to talk The Lord out of it. I really did not see any great benefit from spending all that money, studying hard, writing papers, and creating artwork, all while working full-time. It was too much stress. I was perfectly content being a Master level art therapist.

The Lord chastised me by asking, "Who was in charge? Are you my servant or not? Am I not the creator and owner of all the world? Is anything too hard for me?" I quickly completed my application, was accepted, and began the doctoral Art Therapy Psychology Program.

It felt like a great weight had lifted from me when He reminded me it was about Him, not me. So, this autoethnography study will focus on The Lord and His influence on my life and how the gift of creating art helped me to make it through and help others.

The bottom line is when I disobeyed The Lord or hesitated to obey him, disaster often resulted. But when I obeyed him right away and kept my focus on Him and my assignment, I was filled with peace, joy, and satisfaction, and the assignment would be completed successfully. Knowing that the Lord is the one who will complete the assignment through me, I can relax and get the job done.

Knowing that The Lord is completing this assignment through me is very helpful. However, it is very easy to forget that when I am working. Too often, I fall back into that feeling of being stressed out. Looking at the problem, working full-time, going to graduate school full-time, and now, stage four cancer in addition to my hearing disability, it appeared to be an
impossible task. In fact, it seemed to be an impossible task even before I learned I had stage 4 cancer. Learning it was actually a relief. Knowing why, I would suddenly feel like it was an emergency to go to bed to rest, and my life was in danger if I didn't.

In my journey through my lifetime, I feel like I have literally died many times and been born again a brand new person many times. In fact, every day I wake up a new person with an unlimited future. Therefore, I may occasionally refer to my earlier self in the second person as a child, adolescent, young adult, and even middle-aged adult, as she. To acknowledge the fact that I am no longer that person who passed away the day before. I am a new person every morning.

Establishing my personal identity

My late mother and I had the same first name, Raceal. As a school-age child, I hated it when people called me "Little Raceal." I felt like I was a unique person, not a little anyone else. I vividly remember the day when the house was full of extended family, and I stood up with cliched fists and in a loud voice and proclaimed, 'I am not a little Raceal!' I am unique! Call me by my middle name, Denise!" They laughed and agreed, "Okay, Denise, it is." From that moment on, as long as I lived in Gary, Indiana, from elementary school through college at Indiana University, I went by Denise Raceal McWhorter. I felt safe and confident to demand to be called by my middle name among my extended family.

When I moved to California to attend the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), I began to use my first name, Raceal, exclusively. I actually loved the unique name "Raceal," and just had to teach nearly everyone the correct pronunciation and spelling. The way the name is pronounced Raziel is of Hebrew origin, meaning "God's Secret or Mystery." In Jewish mysticism, Raziel is considered an archangel known as the "Keeper of Secrets" and is associated with divine wisdom and knowledge. As therapists, we are the keepers of our patients' secrets.
This study visually explores creating my authentic identity as Raceal Denise McWhorter, reverend, counselor, and art therapist and healing any hidden issues. I am so full of love, joy, and peace that I have an overwhelming desire to help everyone who comes to me for help. The federal program Aid to Dependent Children helped support my son and me while I attended UCSC, and the Employment Development Department (EDD) helped support me while I completed my Master of Arts in Psychology with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy/Art Therapy. I am grateful for those government programs that helped to make higher education possible for me.

However, there were serious problems with these programs. The Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), later changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), was Title IV of the Social Security Act of 1935. The program was voluntary with the states and meant to offer aid to poor families, usually mothers without husbands, so they could stay home and care for their children. Unfortunately, a provision in the law allowed case workers to investigate clients and cut off unsuitable families and those who violated their myriad regulations. This resulted in inhibiting coverage of "illegitimate" children and children of color. Mothers who cohabitated with a man were dropped from AFDC (Gordon & Batlan, 2011).

For black families whose men were excluded from good-paying jobs, refused business or education loans, and relegated to low-paying menial jobs inadequate to take care of a family, this was the equivalent of slavery practices where enslaved men were taken from their families, sold as breeders to impregnate as many enslaved women as possible to increase the owners' wealth with more slaves born to them. This incredibly painful separation of fathers from their families was institutionalized in the AFDC. The result is children raised without a father and research shows how damaging that is for children's development and negatively impacts their future. The
young boys grew up feeling it is the mother's and the government's responsibility to raise their children, and they have children with multiple women. That is all they saw, and all they knew.

In the 1960s, the trade schools were closed in Gary, Indiana. Previously, these schools provided students the opportunity to learn a trade such as carpentry, electronics, or plumbing before graduating high school. This contributed to the prosperity of the city where men were able to support their families with small businesses, and women could stay home and care for the children. At the same time, the trade schools were closed, the steel mills were closed, and drugs were flooded into the city. Selling and using drugs were the main ways to escape the misery of poverty or sell drugs to profit from it. As a result, addiction, murder, and incarceration were increased. This scenario played out across the country to the detriment of all. Because my son was a product of a rape, there was no possibility of me having a relationship with his father, and until I was healed from those multiple rapes, no possibility of having a healthy relationship with another man.

**Why Mental Health as my Profession of Choice?**

After observing my older brother and first boyfriend return home from Vietnam with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), I vowed to one day be able to help service members and veterans heal from PTSD, war wounds, and the substance abuse that often follows. I am overjoyed that my job as a Military and Family Life Counselor helps me to fulfill that desire and get paid well for it. I feel safe working on military bases with guarded entries. I started my college career as a pre-med student, thinking I would become an Obstetrician. This was a response to being treated roughly by male Obstetricians, who appeared to dominate the profession. I soon realized that I was not cut out for touching strange sick people and had an aversion to seeing blood. This also ruled out my second choice, becoming a medical illustrator.
Combining Art and Psychology as an Art Therapist was the best choice. I could help hurting people without necessarily touching them.

**Artwork Choices**

Aside from conversations and personal correspondence, the data involved in the analysis were 50 artworks created over a period of 50 years: adolescence, young adulthood, midlife, and senior life. These artworks were chosen for the presence of intensity of thought, feeling, and creative expression. Looking at each image individually, I remembered my approximate age, where I was living, the circumstances, and my state of mind while I was creating it. Saturating myself in the data, it was necessary to step away to allow the data to incubate in me.

**Self-Silence**

One of the first things I noticed was my own efforts to self-silence. I removed my website from the internet. I informed my family I would not be on Facebook, so do not take offense when I did not respond to their posts. I eliminated all other social media. This stemmed from my adverse childhood experience in kindergarten and a desire to be invisible to avoid the harsh criticism, violence and ridicule for sharing my thoughts, feelings, and faith, which are counter to the current culture's celebrating immoral, exploitive practices, and devaluing human life, especially women and children.

I refrained from entering contests to avoid what happened to some black people whose awards they earned were taken back when it was revealed they were black. I was also motivated by instances of fraud, someone posing as me on Facebook, and not wanting to be contacted during my doctoral education process. Despite the violence happening today with the cancel culture, I hope to feel confident enough to resume an online presence after completing this study. I prefer to share with individuals and small groups face-to-face.
Themes

When reviewing the data, major themes identified were Religion, Love, Music, Family, Anxiety/Depression, Politics, and Nature. I very often painted when I was anxious or depressed with the intention of elevating my mood. The artwork that successfully lifted my mood after its creation also consistently lifts my mood whenever I see it in the present. I remember the depressing situations that motivated me to respond creatively, but the feeling of triumphing over the situations prevailed.

I limited my analysis to drawings, paintings, etchings, monoprints, and linocuts and excluded nature photographs because there were too many, and it would skew the results towards nature. I did use my nature photographs as the background in many pages in the altered book.

Besides photography of family and social events, my photographs mainly included nature scenes that inspired, calmed, and comforted me. I would often go to the beach or hiking trails when I was feeling angry, anxious, or depressed. Spending time in nature soothed me so that I was better able to create art to solidify my healing process. I chose artworks that elicited an emotional response and represented stages in my life and thinking.

In my early years of painting, I reverenced nature so much that I felt like it was sacrilege to draw or paint it. How could I match the splendid beauty nature embodied? The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork (Psalms 19:1, NKJV). I felt it was irreverent to try to depict that glory with the earthly mediums of oils, pastels, or other mediums.

I had no problem with painting portraits of people who were mortals like me. I tried to paint them as their perfect spiritual body. Everyone seemed to like their enhanced appearance. After I turned 30 and enjoyed many years viewing the landscape paintings of other artists, I felt
more comfortable doing an interpretation of the beauty and grandeur of nature and noticed the same feelings of awe, soothing reverence, joy, and peace when I was creating the images and later intensely viewing the images I created in reverence of God's presence and glory.

The artworks hanging on the walls at home and in my office represent what is most inspiring and important to me. At home, my daughter and I would rearrange the art on the walls when our moods changed or we redecorated. We would dialogue and negotiate until we agreed on what would stay, where to put it, and what to rotate into storage. These were the principal artworks I chose to analyze in this study. Drawings and writings in my journals were also included. A total of 50 artworks were selected and are listed in chronological order and analyzed in Table 1.

True to my nature, nearly every artwork analyzed was inspired by love, 29.6%, followed by family, 24.3%. Religion was next at 17.6%. Anxiety/Depression and Nature followed at 16.8% and 12.0%, and Politics at 6.4% of the analyzed artworks. I did not add another column for other motivations because I did not uncover any in my reflections except maybe amusement. The mediums used in this selection included Oils, Acrylics, Etchings, Linocuts, Oil Pastels, hard and soft Pastels, Charcoals, Pen & Ink, and Pencils. I used mostly oils in the early days until I became allergic to oils. I moved on to acrylics because they were similar in texture to oils. I went through stages of each of the different types of medium, and it was my favorite for a time.

All the identified themes were interrelated in many ways. For instance, the theme of love includes the love of God, the love of family, romantic love, the love of nature, the love of music, the love of my ethnicity, and the love of all other ethnicities. Music celebrates and influences politics, romantic love, family, nature, and so on. This type of interaction is represented in the Heptagon by the arrows pointing from each identified theme to each of the others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Anxiety/Depression</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Religion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1972 Carambali</td>
<td>Pen &amp; Ink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1972 Woman waiting</td>
<td>Pencil</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1972 Conception</td>
<td>Pen &amp; Ink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1973 Drummer</td>
<td>Pen &amp; Ink</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1973 Wedding</td>
<td>Pen &amp; Ink</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1976 Pharoah Sanders</td>
<td>Oil</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1976 Mother</td>
<td>exacto knife</td>
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<td>When will Tomorrow Come</td>
<td>Oil</td>
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<td>1977 African Gold Miners</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>1981 Porgy &amp; Bess</td>
<td>Etching</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>1981 Mother &amp; Child on Beach</td>
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<td>1982 We Three Queens</td>
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<td>Pen &amp; Ink</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Love Moon Dance Fire</td>
<td>Monoprint</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>1983 Baby Ainjoy</td>
<td>Pastels</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>1983 Eternity in an Hour Heaven in a Wildflower</td>
<td>Linocut</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1983 View of Bay</td>
<td>Pastels</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1983 Ainjoy infant</td>
<td>Etching</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1984 Married to Art</td>
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When I thought about how all these themes overlap and fit together, I played around with different ways to portray those relations and came up with the heptagon. Love is at the top because it is the most powerful force on earth and can help heal whatever is in disharmony if heeded. Religion is at the bottom because it is the foundation that gives me direction and support. Those things that are most often positive influences are on the right: family, music, and nature. Those that are most often challenging and a source of discomfort and division are on the left: anxiety/depression and politics. Nevertheless, all experiences have the benefit of teaching me patience and resilience, which leads back to love, joy, peace, and wisdom. The arrows symbolize how the themes interact back and forth. Every theme is connected to and influences one another.

Figure 4 Themes Heptagon
An example of love and family is the etching of Porgy and Bess. I found a little 1"x2" picture in an old newspaper and was greatly moved by the image because I saw the 1950's Black Opera. Porgy was a disabled man who took in a woman who was ostracized because of her drug addiction, and the two of them adopted the baby of the woman who died by suicide going into the stormy sea after her husband, a fisherman, who drowned during the storm. I worked on this image for 36 hours straight, not eating, drinking water, and only taking short naps, while I thought about what part of the image to protect with resin and what part to immerse into the acid again until the image was satisfying. I was mesmerized by creating this image and capturing the spirit of the characters. I sold copies of this image many times in several colors.

Figure 5 13"x17". Etching. Porgy and Bess.
Representing music is Pharoah Sanders, a remarkable saxophonist and spiritual Jazz artist, that was the soundscape of my life. I played his music nearly always while drawing, painting, or doing other creative works. I often did interpretive dancing to his music, and saw him perform in person whenever he was playing near where I lived or in my travels. In contrast to taking 36 hours straight on Porgy and Bess, not counting the many times beyond that I tweaked the image. It took only two hours to complete his portrait using fresh black and white oil paint and mostly new brushes after I made the graph to draw his portrait on a 24' x 24" stretched canvas and a personally built frame. His music was playing in the background while I was painting in a state of flow. I was totally satisfied with the results and knew it was finished. I felt such joy that I had captured the essence of my favorite musician, who I reverenced to a fault. I did not sell this canvas. My daughter has it displayed in her bedroom now. He recently replaced John Coltrane as her favorite Jazz Artist. She often remarks about how happy she is for growing up hearing the spiritual music I played that helped to make her the remarkable musician she is.

Figure 6 24"x24" oil. Pharoah Sanders.
Representing both music and politics for me is another vocal artist, Bob Marley. He was a great visionary Reggae Artist who boldly spoke out against injustice around the world in his lyrics. His music and lyrics inspired me to dance as well as encouraged me to do what I could through art to bring awareness and stand up for social injustice. I had just bought one of his albums and was listening to his lyrics as I did the pastel painting of him performing. Yes, I entered into a state of flow, unaware of time passing, and totally immersed in completing this image. I was going to donate the original for auction to benefit the Helen Rucker Center for Black Excellence at California State University Monterey when my daughter took it out of my hands and hung it back up in her bedroom. I made a giclée print of the painting and donated that instead.

*Figure 7 27"x21". Pastel. Bob Marley.*
Representing Nature and Religion is this acrylic painting Torchbearer. Around this time, the Lord told me my new name was Torchbearer because I was to share the truth of the word of God, represented by me holding the sword of the Spirit in my right hand and the fiery Torch of the Holy Spirit in my left hand. Protecting my back, I painted a three-headed angel representing the four beasts that surround the Throne Of God. One had the head of a man, one a head like a lion, one like an eagle, and one like an ox not shown (Revelation 4:6-7, KJV), while I hold back the waves of the Sea, standing on the rock representing Christ. I was talking to my estranged husband, trying to talk me out of divorce, while I painted this image. Painting this image strengthened my resolve to free myself from the miserable marriage, that I realized was not God's will for me.

I later used this painting as a self-care image and added affirmations to it. I regularly stand before this image, which is part of my self-care altar, and read the affirmations, building myself up to face the daily challenges of living as an art therapist and mental health care worker. I have made copies of this painting with the affirmations and gave them away as gifts to those who want it to also strengthen their mental health. I encourage my friends, colleagues, and art therapy clients to make their own personalized affirmation images with the affirmations they aspire to.

I noticed that I drew or painted more portraits of my son and daughter when I missed them, especially after they were grown and left home. My daughter went to Santa Monica Community College at 17 to study music, and my son left our home in Stone Mountain, Georgia, at 18 to return to Gary, Indiana, where there was lots of extended family. My son briefly returned home to ask me how to start a business. I had a "How to Start a Business" kit from the Small Business Administration I gave him. He returned to Gary and promptly started a business, "Car
and Audio Concepts," where he sold car alarms, sound systems, fancy car rims, and beepers. At such a young age, he secured contracts with car dealers to install car alarms. By the age of twenty, he was a respected member of the business community and an admired and loved leader among his peers. This was short-lived due to his untimely death.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 8 24"x36". Acrylic. Torchbearer.*

**Altered Book**

I had a difficult time choosing a book to alter. I started by looking at my collection of books at home. I attached a lot of value to the books I purchased; many of them felt sacred to me. My collection includes many different translations of the Bible, illustrated Art History books, and a preponderance of books on art therapy and psychology. Fortunately, I found the perfect book in a bin of free books at the Dominican University of California.

I needed a large book, at least 8.5 x 11, because it is difficult for me to work small. I also
wanted to use copies of my artwork and it is easier to see details in a larger scale. I wanted this altered book to be comforting and soothing to me, so I covered it with a soft blanket material in a light tan color. I titled the book *Friendly Fire*, to symbolize though some of the content may be tough (fire), it is meant to enlighten, strengthen, and grow my spirit as well as the viewers. My intent was for the viewer to experience the wonder and comfort I experienced creating it.

I added to it sporadically as I reflected on my data (artwork, poetry, journal writing, correspondence, and conversations) when I felt strongly about what I was reflecting upon or felt it was important to share. I wanted the altered book to be beautiful, exciting, relaxing, and inspire deep thought and feelings. Most of all, I want it to reflect my journey and identity as an artist, minister, therapist, and woman of color. I included a few illustrations of some of the pages of the altered book throughout this study.

To assist in planning a follow-up study of other professional women, I briefly answered the study questions, recorded my answers, and recorded them. The edited transcript follows:

1. *Describe your early life in your family of origin.* My early life in my family of origin was difficult. My parents treated me as the favorite because of a prophecy before I was born that I was a special child. I was parentified and even given authority over my older brothers when my parents were not home. This caused resentment from my siblings and violent confrontations against me when my parents were absent.

2. *Describe any differences you noticed about the way boys and girls were treated at home and school.* The major thing I noticed at home was the boys were allowed to go out at night and were not told to protect girls and not have sex with girls. Girls were told not to have sex and were called derogatory names if they gave in to the
boy's demands, while boys were celebrated if they violated girls, even when they did so by force. The victim was often condemned for putting themselves in a compromising position or dressing provocatively.

3. Describe the circumstances and your approximate age when you understood your inherited physical characteristics due to your ethnicity were distinct from other groups and influenced how you or others were treated. In kindergarten, I observed how white children were favored over children of color.

4. What inspired your decision to pursue your profession? When my brother and boyfriend returned from Vietnam and were suffering from PTSD, I wanted to be able to help them and other veterans and active duty service members as a mental health professional. The positive effect the art therapy mission trip to Uganda to develop hope in the former child soldiers had on them also motivated me. I also wanted to heal myself.

5. What were the specific obstacles you encountered as a woman of your particular ethnic heritage? I suffered discrimination, sexism, sexual assault, exclusion, misogyny and the like.

6. How were you treated in school? I was treated well in a primarily black elementary school. I suffered unprovoked attacks and dismissive attitudes by some White teachers for doing good work in integrated schools. Some white teachers were supportive and denounced the negative acts by others, and helped me to get the grades I deserved. I was accused of plagiarism because it was difficult for teachers to believe I wrote as well as I did.

7. How were you treated in society in general? I suffered from discrimination and
exclusion. For example, I applied for a credit card in a predominantly black neighborhood and was denied credit. I drove to a White neighborhood approximately 30 minutes away. I was granted credit. The same information, the same store, 30 minutes later in the predominantly White neighborhood.

8. *How are you treated now in your profession, compared to what you observe about how men of your ethnicity or men and women of other ethnicities are treated?*

Currently, I don't notice a big difference in how men and women are treated in the Art Therapy Profession, which is predominantly White females. I still notice some exclusion in how people of color are sometimes ignored despite the emphasis on cultural humility. Though the process is slow and painful, I am happy for this new emphasis in Cultural Humility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) that opens the door for meaningful discussions. I experienced a welcome change at Phillips Graduate University, the first educational institution I did not experience any discrimination (just some disbelief about what I had experienced at other educational institutions). Each of the exemplary professors at the Dominican University of California, adjunct professors, and visiting practicing art therapists were serious about social justice and DEI. Their leadership example, patience teaching, and support were priceless.

9. *How did the men in your business and personal life help or hinder your journey?*

In my business life I had men who affirmed me and supported me, as well as some who ignored my contributions or took credit for them. In my personal life most of my experiences with men were negative. I'm grateful for the few men in my personal life who were honest men of integrity.
10. *How did other women help or hinder your journey?* My experiences with women were primarily positive and supportive. A few women, primarily in high school and college, were jealous and hostile toward me.

11. If you have children, how did having children help or hinder your journey?

Having children definitely helped my journey. Their innocence and honesty were helpful in seeing who I was, as their play mimicked my behavior. When I was thinking about and attempted suicide as a teenager and suffered despair as a young adult, having children gave me a sense of purpose and great joy. I spent lots of time talking to God about what to do and say as they grew up. He instructed me that while they were under my roof and authority, “Teach them to know and love me.”

12. *How were your immediate and extended family supportive or opposed to your ambitions?* My mother and grandmother were my primary support. My siblings were proud of some of my accomplishments because it gave them bragging rights with their friends and associates, but they were usually not willing to listen if I wanted to share something I was struggling with. They brought their problems to me, not the other way around. When my mother transitioned to heaven and my grandmother a year later, I felt untethered. I had to depend on the Lord more than ever.

13. Describe how any artmaking, crafts, music, writings, or spiritual practices motivated you to persist in pursuing your chosen profession. Since I was a child, I was acutely aware of how drawing, painting, sculpting, and exploring other art mediums made me feel calm and happy. When I was angry, putting that anger on
paper with crayons or paint or pounding on clay, soothed my soul. Music could have a profound effect on my mood, helping me to go to sleep, wake up, and focus on my artmaking or studies. Saxophonist Pharoah Sanders helped me with painting. Stevie Wonder helped lift my mood and make me want to dance. Bob Marley, Marvin Gaye, and others influenced my thinking politically. Attending church regularly, attending Seminary School, and sharing messages from the Lord in sermons and writing helped me overcome adversity and despair. The positive writings, prayers, songs, and praises helped me rise above earthly concerns and meditate on the glorious, eternal future in heaven. The community of believers provided support, security, and fellowship, all of which helped build and maintain the strength needed to persevere.

14. What is your definition of success? My definition of success is pleasing God. When I obey his commandments and follow His direction, I experience joy, peace, security, love, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and power, regardless of what the outward circumstances are. I have learned over the years to live in love and unconditional positive regard. I am blessed to see people come to my office broken, crying out in despair, and walk out smiling, with their heads held high again. I can't think of anything better than that.

15. Describe your thoughts and feelings about what the costs to your personal and family life were to reach your current success and if you feel it was worth it. The cost to my personal and family life to become a Christian Minister and Art Therapist was minimal. I would have gone through most of the suffering I did whether I was striving to achieve my goals or not. All my life I was preparing for
this. I feel happy, satisfied, and fulfilled. It was certainly worth it for me.

16. Describe your experience taking part in this research study and creating the timeline drawing and altered book. My experience creating the timeline drawing, the altered book, and writing this dissertation was a wild ride. I experienced anxiety, joy, sadness, a little anger, surprise, pleasure, healing, and illumination. My relationship with God and myself was enhanced. I feel like a stronger, more stable person.

Stories that arose during data analysis

While reviewing the data, I uncovered many stories that I wrote about in separate files from the draft dissertation document to decide later whether they should be included in this research study document. After deliberation, the following stories were included.

Divine Direction

While looking for a place for my daughter to live while she was in community college in Santa Monica, CA, she found several places near Venice Beach. Visiting these places, I found they were small and very expensive, and the neighborhood was full of people openly doing drugs and other dangerous practices. I prayed with my daughter for the Holy Spirit to lead us to where she should live while in school. Immediately the Holy Spirit told me to get back on the highway going back the way we came. I was told what exit to take and each turn to make until I was told to park and that the building was right across the street from where we parked.

We were in a very quiet, clean, and beautiful predominately Jewish neighborhood. There were no signs saying vacancy or for rent. We walked over to the building, and the entrance was open. We heard construction noises coming from an apartment near the entrance, and the door to the apartment was open. We walked inside and asked the man working in the apartment if he
knew if it was for rent. He told us the apartment had not been listed as available for rent because he was still renovating it. He allowed us to look around, showed us around the building and gave us the contact information for the owners.

We were delighted because the studio apartment was beautiful and spacious, with a full size kitchen and bath. The building was secure, with secure underground parking. We immediately contacted the owners and arranged to meet with them to fill out an application. The owner was moved to accept our application and never bothered to list the place to consider other tenants. We were led supernaturally to the perfect place for my daughter near the campus, where we felt safe.

**Short Painless births**

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy conception; in pain thou shalt bring forth children:" Genesis 3:16, ASV

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,

Whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy:" Psalm 107:2, KJV

*Figure 9 9"x13". Acrylic. I Am Redeemed.*
I am redeemed from the curse so I believed that the curse put on women in Genesis to multiply pain in childbirth did not apply to me because I am redeemed from the curse. Therefore, I did not fear childbirth. Three days before my son's birth I was sitting up in the bed with my husband and saw his name coming down out of heaven with lights *Abdu Ra-Om McWhorter* and exclaimed with joy. I know his name! I know his name!” Abdu is Swahili for worshiper of God, Servant of the Lord, Ra means light, and Om is the divine eternal vibration of the universe.

While I was carrying him I walked five miles nearly every day so that my muscles would be strong for childbirth. The day before his due date, I walked up and down the stairs, mopped the floors, and did other vigorous housework. I drank about a quarter cup of cod liver oil to lubricate my internal organs. Sure enough, I went into labor on his due date. I was only in labor for four hours with very minimal pain. I smiled the whole time I was in labor. I imagined I was in a boat riding the waves of the contractions. The only thing they gave me was oxygen. After he was delivered, I exclaimed, "I can do this again!"

During this labor experience I felt one with all of creation. It seemed like I was intimately aware of every leaf of every tree and life in every mountain, rock, and grain of sand around the earth. I felt like I knew the names and purposes of every bird and creature on earth, as well as the vigor of sea creatures. It was a blissful and sublime experience close to the intensity of my experience visiting heaven, but more powerful because I was an adult with understanding. The intensity of this experience took months to fade. Even today I recall this with wonder.

I was only nineteen when I conceived Abdu, and twenty at his birth. It was mostly fun to carry him, partly because I did not look pregnant. Morning sickness ceased after eight weeks. My womb was tilted backward towards my spine. Even when the nurse examined me at the hospital and pressed on my abdomen, they said, "Where is the baby?"
After his birth, people did not believe he was my child because I never appeared pregnant, and I did not talk about it. The first few days he looked like his father and I did not want to look at or care for him, remembering the rape. But after about a week, he began looking like me, and my love for him soared. Then, I was reluctant for anyone else to hold him, afraid he might be stolen from me.

We were living in Hawthorne, California, when my son turned thirteen. He asked if I would agree to allow him to change his first name to Michael on his school records because he was being teased about his first name Abdu. I agreed, and his first name officially became Michael. At thirteen years old, he looked like a grown man, and nearly every time I looked at him, I burst out in tears for hours. The pain of his conception came to the surface, and I felt he was now a man and should be out on his own. I knew it was irrational, but I could not control crying when I looked at him. I can't imagine the pain he felt when I did this.

**Harassment**

Michael was also regularly harassed by the police while walking to and from middle school, and pressured to join a gang. In tears, he said to me, "What is a man? I don't know what it means to be a man." He knew his father had raped me. When he was seven, his father called and said to him, "I'm sorry I raped your mother." Abdu replied, "I forgive you because I am here, but if I had been there, I would have killed you." He coped by telling people his father was dead.

With the police and gang harassment, I feared for his life and sent him to Illinois to live with his uncle. This brought me some relief for a time. I was able to bring him back after my boyfriend at the time assured me he would take care of him and teach him how to be a man. My boyfriend was a veteran, radar engineer, and worked at Boeing. He drove a black Porsche and was harassed daily by the police when he was driving his Porsche. Even though the police knew
who he was and where he worked after so many stops by the same officers, they would still accuse him of being a drug dealer. Finally, he sold his Porsche and bought a Lincoln, and the harassment stopped.

**Pregnancy and Birth of Ainjoy**

Carrying my daughter was a different story. I had morning sickness every day the entire nine months. I could feel her pushing against the walls of the womb, and she was very visible. The doctor would exclaim each time he examined us, "This is a big baby!" I admit this caused me some apprehension because she had to come out. I did daily squats to dilate my cervix and walked back and forth to classes at UCSC. I could not run because my belly sticking out so far unbalanced my weight toward the front and would cause me to fall forward.

I knew I was pregnant when I was walking to class one day and heard the Lord say the name "Nathan." I looked up the name Nathan and learned it is of Hebrew origin and means gift of God. The feminine version of Nathan is Natalie. I knew I was carrying a girl because of my prayers for a girl. My son and I named her Ainjoy, a combination of Angel, which he wanted to name her and Joy, which I wanted to name her, because of the great joy I felt. Natalie is her middle name. My water broke a month before her due date, and my contractions were immediately three minutes apart. She was born 45 minutes after my water broke, virtually no pain. She was seven pounds, 15 ounces, certainly ready to be born at 33 weeks. I thank God she didn't wait another month to be born as fast as she was growing.

I had been praying for a daughter for nearly ten years after I lost Rasheeda. Rasheeda is a Swahili name of Arabic origin and means "Rightly Guided." I went into labor at 24 weeks after an argument with my husband. She lived for four days and died of a cerebral hemorrhage. I got to hold her, and I was able to pump my breast milk that the nurses fed to her in the incubator. I
grieved for nearly ten years for her loss. The doctor said I could never carry a child full-term because of the damage to my cervix. Nearly every time I saw a little girl, I would cry while thinking about Rasheeda. Ainjoy was not full-term but fully ready to be born.

**Remembering my birth**

I believe I remember my birth. I was born with a photographic memory, so it is possible. One day, when I was about ten, I told my mother what I remembered. I remember shooting out of her womb and just lying there quietly between her legs, still in the dark, not quite as warm as before. When suddenly, the cover was lifted off, and there was light and a scream. Then I started crying a little bit, but was too curious looking all around to protest too much.

My mother confirmed my memory. She reported that her water broke and she went to the hospital with mild contractions. The nurse settled her in the hospital bed, prepped her and measured her cervix opening at 8 cm. The nurse informed my mother, "It will be a few hours before you dilate to 10 and your child will be born." The nurse covered her with a warm blanket and she went to sleep. When the nurse returned and lifted the blanket to examine my mother, there I was, lying quietly between my mother's legs. The nurse screamed, and I started crying. The first painless birth was my mother's birthing me. This helped me to believe the birth of my children would also be painless.

**Weather miracles**

I was reminded by my daughter about one of the dramatic changes in weather I was granted after asking God to change the weather for my benefit. One of the events she witnessed was when we left Atlanta, Georgia, for Gary, Indiana, to coordinate my son's funeral. I prayed to the Lord to make it 72 degrees and sunny while I was there. Cold weather is depressing to me, and I was going through enough mourning the loss of my only son. This is the story of his death.
I was aroused from my sleep by a 2:00 AM phone call from my niece in Gary, Indiana, on January 13, 1995. I was living in College Park, Georgia. I had moved there just two weeks earlier with my 11-year-old daughter to live with a friend temporarily after leaving my abusive husband. Alarmed at receiving a phone call in the middle of the night, I listened anxiously and was stunned by the news. "Michael has been shot, and he didn't make it," she announced.

The profound sense of solid peace I had lived in the past two weeks shook a bit and settled thick around me. Inside that envelope of peace, I cried out to God with profound grief and tears, "You said nothing would come upon me unawares!" Confident in my close, intimate relationship with the Lord, I automatically thought about demanding Him to return my son back to life, but I remembered my trip to heaven as a child and how I did not want to return to earth. I knew my son was there now, and I would not ask him to come back here.

The Lord gently said, "I have prepared you for this moment." He reminded me about asking me to write an article for my company newsletter three months earlier, "How to Become Whole Again:" It was about what to do when you are a victim of crime. The Lord said to get that article out, read it, and really get it into my spirit the day before. The gist of the article was 1) forgive the perpetrator, 2) take account of what you have left and offer thanks, and 3) Make future goals and go after them.

He also appeared to me about three weeks earlier, while I was at work, and asked me to give Him my son. I saw a flash of my son on a slab in the hospital. I knew in my spirit he had been shot and was dead, but at that moment, I believed he would recover. I agreed to put my son in His hands and His hands alone. The Lord had also moved me out of the abusive home to my friend's home, and I experienced peace that passes understanding. I understood this did not come upon me unawares, but the Lord had lovingly prepared me.
Back Story of my son, Michael Abdu Ra-Om McWhorter

My son was the product of an acquaintance rape. He was conceived in violence and died in violence. He was trying to help a cousin who was addicted to crack cocaine stop using by keeping his cousin with him at all times so that he could not access any drugs. I warned him that his cousin was an addict and could not be trusted. In tears, he replied to me, "I can't let him go down like that, Ma."

One day, my son left his cousin in his car while he stopped by his girlfriend’s house to tell her he was moving that day and could not be reached at his business, where he had been staying. All his belongings were in his brand new 2-week-old car, equipped with a high-end sound system and expensive wheels to advertise what he sold at his business.

The cousin took off in his car and drove straight to a crack house to get drugs. Since he did not have any money, he gave the drug dealer my son's car in exchange for drugs. When my son exited his girlfriend's house, his car and cousin were gone. My son called his business partner to pick him up, and they drove around Gary looking for his car. When they found the car, they cut in front of it and stopped, blocking the vehicle.

My son got out of his friend's car and demanded his car back, thinking his cousin was driving it. However, the drug dealer got out with a gun and announced, "It's not your car anymore." Two girls who were in my son's car with the drug dealer got out of the car and ran away. When my son saw the gun, he said, "Alright, man," and turned to go back to get back in his partner's car. The drug dealer shot my son in the back as he was walking away. These facts were brought out in the murder trial of the drug dealer I attended months later. The murderer was convicted of manslaughter and went to prison.

The police informed me that the drug dealer had killed multiple people before and killed
all the witnesses, making it impossible to convict him. One of the girls who ran away from the scene was captured by the police and was kept in jail until the trial. This preserved her life, and her testimony matched my son's business partner and helped the drug dealer finally be convicted.

**Hidden in Christ**

The snow melted and it was sunny and 72 degrees the two weeks I was in Gary for my son's funeral. I felt like the Lord carried me in his arms, and my feet did not touch the ground. I allowed the Lord to completely take over and use my body and my mouth to minister to others. Christ is the Prince of Peace, and His peace that covered me, comforted others who were drawn to that peace. At his funeral, many people remarked about the peace they felt. Twenty-one young people gave their lives to Christ, testifying of recently narrowly escaping death by various means. I rejoiced that Michael's death was not in vain. Some of these people still correspond with me today. The cold and snow returned as I entered the plane to return to Atlanta. Reflecting on this episode moved me to complete two pages of my children in the altered book.

**Weather Story Two**

There were many other instances the Lord changed the weather for my benefit after prayer. One of the most notable was in Thousand Oaks, California. I participated in the Walk to End Genocide with a Messianic Jewish group to increase awareness about ongoing genocide around the world in May 2017. It was cold and rainy that morning, and it was predicted to rain all day. After asking the Lord if He would change the weather so it would be warm and sunny for the duration of the walk and hearing his consent, I prayed out loud so all those nearby could hear me call on the Lord to stop the rain.

I wanted to glorify His Name and publish His goodness with these people, many of whom were Jewish and did not believe in miracles. Within minutes, the sun came out, and the
rain stopped. Coats and umbrellas were shed. It was sunny and warm for the three hours we
marched, holding banners and singing chants and songs, some of which I led. When the walk was
over and everyone returned to the park where we started, the rain returned and continued the rest
of the day as forecasted.

Murder Two

Three years after my son was murdered, my daughter's father, Richard Jarvis, was also
murdered at Lake Hartwell, that borders South Carolina and Georgia. The loss of her brother and
father left us with only each other. Richard and a friend were fishing on the lake in his boat. A
large motorboat sped close by them, and the wake from its passage caused her father's boat to
overturn. He only had one life vest that he let his friend use because he was a good swimmer. He
managed to swim back to the wharf but got caught in the cables from the boats docked there and
could not untangle himself.

There was a fully equipped White state diver positioned at the wharf who refused to dive
in to help him. He said that protocol required that there be two divers to go in and he had to wait
for another diver to come before he could dive in to help. Some witnesses on the wharf dived in
to help him but were unable to lose him from the cables. After another diver got to the wharf,
they both dived in and retrieved his body. The White diver just stood on the wharf and watched
Richard struggle and drown. Would he have just stood there if that was a white man drowning?

A Warning Vision

Look at them ruining their lives on drugs! When I was about 12 years old, I was riding
in the back seat of my parent’s car. We were on our way to visit relatives in Chicago. During the
journey, I was caught up in a vision. Some young people who appeared to be in their early
twenties were sitting around in a room. I was sitting in the room with them. There was one healthy-looking, dark-skinned girl, two light-skinned handsome men, and another average-looking, red-skinned man. They were all looking at me and laughing at me. “You can’t be that naïve,” the girl told me. I heard a voice saying, “Look at them, ruining their life on dope.” The scene lasted for some time. I really looked hard at their faces. I wanted to remember them.

I didn’t know what dope was, and I was trying to figure out what I was doing there and why they thought I had to be pretending not to know something that was obvious to them. The vision faded, but not that feeling of uneasiness. I was ignorant of what dope was, how they could be ruining their lives, and how I came to be with them.

I met those people in my first year of college. I met the girl first. She was a sophomore, and I was a freshman. She introduced me to a man she knew, Michael Brown, at his prompting. He was with a group of guys who were musicians scoping the campus for girls. She convinced me to go with them to a nightclub where they were playing. I was 18 and ignorant. This went on every weekend and sometimes during the week for a month or two.

One evening we went together to a nightclub in Memphis, Tennessee. When we got there a tall, fair-skin, beautiful man, with dark curly hair was playing a saxophone, clarinet and a flute all at once. The music was mystical and enchanting. I fell deep in love at the sight of him, and his music completely captivated me. If at that moment he asked me to walk into the sea and not stop, I would do it, knowing I would drown.

His name was Leon, the brother of Michael (not their real names). Now, Michael had chosen me to be his girlfriend, and I went along with it dispassionately. At the first sight of his brother, I was no longer aware of Michael’s existence. Leon would come to pick me up from school nearly every day and take me everywhere with him. He ran a daycare center during the
day, and played in nightclubs at night. We had passionate conversations about spiritual things.

Between his music, his conversation, and all the attention he gave me, I was in heaven. Except for one thing: though he hugged me often, he never tried to kiss me. One day, the scene that I saw years ago happened just like I remembered it. My girlfriend and other friends, including Michael, laughed at me and said I was wasting my time. I had to know that nothing would ever happen between Leon and me; I couldn’t be so naive. I did not understand what they were talking about because Leon spent so much time with me and was so kind and considerate, but I was very troubled. Now I knew what dope was, and they did spend a lot of time smoking pot and hashish. I knew in my heart I needed to stop spending time with these people. It would only lead to my harm.

There came a time when Leon left town for a while. One of those evenings, I went to a party on campus. One of the varsity football players very politely asked me if I would like to go to another party he was hosting, with good food and soft drinks, not quite as noisy as the one we were at. He assured me that I would be safe; there would be no alcohol or drugs. I went with him to another dorm room. There were only a few people there. He asked me if I wanted any Kool-Aid, and I accepted. A few more people came, but I noticed I was the only woman. Alarmed I got up to go. I was encouraged to stay a little longer for more women to come. I was beginning to feel a little funny, afraid that Kool-Aid was spiked with LSD, and they were patiently waiting for the effects to kick in to rape me. I rushed out of the door. Thankfully, no one tried to stop me.

My dorm building was very nearby. By the time I got to my building, I knew for sure that something was in that Kool-Aid. I fought the hallucinogenic effects with all my might, pacing back and forth, repeating my name, address, and social security number to stay anchored in the
present reality. I don’t remember sleeping at all that night.

The next morning, I got dressed to go to the mall across the street to buy some gloves. I put on my beautiful lamb coat, diamond watch, diamond ring, and ski boots and walked across the street to the mall. I had money in my wallet, but I was tired because I had not slept and still felt some of the effects of the drug. I walked across the street to the mall and entered a woman’s clothing store to find some gloves. I chose a pair of gloves and left the store to walk back home.

As I was leaving the mall, two large white policemen came up behind me. “What’s your name gal?” they asked me. Still tired, not alert to my circumstances, I answered, “None of your damn business.” I immediately regretted how I responded, but it was too late. They picked me up, one grabbing each arm right below the shoulder, marched me out of the mall, handcuffed me, and violently threw me into the back of the police car. It was hard plastic back there without seats.

After arriving at the police station, they proceeded to interrogate me. I was careful to tell them the truth about who I was, gave correct phone numbers and addresses, but they would slap me after nearly every answer and say “You’re lying! You’re lying!” Fortunately, there was a Black policeman on the other side of the room. Although he acted like he was not paying any attention, he wrote down everything I said. I asked to make a phone call. I was laughed at, but no one let me make a call. I was terrified. I knew that black people were found dead nearly every day in Cincinnati. I was warned by Black students not to be caught in a white neighborhood after 6 pm, because I might be found dead in the morning.

I was begging for mercy and praying to the Lord for help. They took my wallet, watch, and ring, but they let me keep my coat. It was cold there. They put me in a holding cell alone, with no toilet or sink. After a couple of hours, I called for permission to use the restroom. A
white policeman came to the cell and opened it, “No problem, I’ll show you where the restroom is.” When I got to the door, he hit me so hard on the side of my head that I flew all the way back against the wall of the cell and hit the ground. Laughing, he locked the cell door and left. I had to squat and use the drain hole in the middle of the cell.

I could feel the prayers of my ancestors and saw them as memorials before the throne of God. I could even hear some of the prayers, “Lord protect my children’s, children’s, children.” I felt uplifted and safe because of those prayers and believed I would survive this ordeal. Hungry, cold, and exhausted, I finally slept. Around midnight, they returned, handcuffed me again, and put me back into the back of the police car. Although I asked, they did not return my diamond ring or watch. They drove me to the middle of the White neighborhood, removed the handcuffs, threw me out of the car onto the pavement, and drove away.

This was the first time I had been away from campus. I could see the lights from the downtown area, and I could see a bridge leading that way. Grateful to be released, fearful for being in a neighborhood I didn’t know, a long way from campus, I just believed angels would protect me, and I began to walk towards the bridge toward downtown. When I got to the bridge a car pulled over to the side and lowered the window, a woman called my name, "Raceal?" I looked into the car, and there was the den mother of my dorm! I felt so happy and relieved. I got into the car and slept while she drove me back to campus. She told me the Black policeman had called her; he also called my parents and gave her an idea of what they might do to me.

My mother and Daddy Bob came to pick me up from campus the next afternoon. I withdrew from classes. They drove me back to Indiana and took me to the doctor. The doctor said I was totally physically and mentally exhausted and I was hospitalized. I was hospitalized two months to regain my strength, detox from whatever drugs I was given in the Kool-Aid at the
party, and recover from the major depressive episode.

While hospitalized, I called Leon and told him I loved him and wanted to have his babies. He harshly told me to "Get down off that soapbox." I was devastated. I could not stop crying. I called one of his friends whose phone number I had, and he told me, “Leon is a notorious fag well known in three states. He was using you to get men.” Laughing, he went on, “He would pick off the weak ones hanging around you. You had to have known. Everyone told you.” But I didn’t know. I was a stupid young girl blinded by my first love. My world was shattered again. Stunned and numb, I continued crying for weeks. Immersing myself in painting, weaving, and other artwork helped me to heal enough to stop crying outwardly and finally be discharged from the hospital.

The most valuable thing that happened in this episode was the fact that I no longer hated White people. When those police were abusing me, I remembered when Christ was being beaten, mocked, and disfigured on his way to the crucifixion, and he said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."(Luke 23:34, NKJV). I understood deep in my spirit what he meant and was able to forgive those policemen, and a great love birthed in me for them and all White people in place of the hate and desire for revenge I previously felt. This was a great spiritual freedom I still enjoy today.

**Power of Prayer**

Another story my daughter reminded me of was the dramatic change in Peachtree Avenue in Atlanta while I was working there. My cousin and I both worked at the Resolution and Trust Corporation (RTC) part of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). We would walk together on lunch hour. I was grieved every time we passed a business advertising topless dancing girls. I prayed fervently in tears for the salvation of the young women being
sexually exploited there. In less than two months, the business was closed! And just about four months later, a health food restaurant was opened in its place. I was no longer grieved on our lunch walks, and I had a place to get healthy sandwiches and drinks. Prayer is powerful!

**Divine Provision**

I was accepted to the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) and was anxiously waiting to receive my financial aid offer in the mail. The deadline to accept my financial aid to attend was only days away, and I hadn't received my offer. These were the days before the internet and email. Snail mail, faxes, and landline phones were the only way to correspond. The UCSC financial aid office assured me they had mailed my offer, but my verbally accepting it over the phone was not sufficient.

I went to church that evening, and a traveling evangelist and his wife were speaking. I was very impressed with their presentation and knew in my spirit they were true servants of the Lord. They prayed for me that I would receive all I needed to be able to travel to California and attend classes. I heard the Lord say to me to give them all the money I had. Though I didn't know how I would meet my financial obligations, I knew you can't beat God giving, so I wrote a check to them for all the money I had. I was excited to see what God would do. The next day, the financial aid letter was delivered. It was released from the Postal Service Lost Mail Office where it was held for weeks. Why was it held up, and why was it released after I gave the offering? The financial aid offer was ten times what I gave to the well-deserving evangelists, and I was able to travel to California and start classes on time.

**Divine Protection**

When I was fourteen years old in middle school, I missed the school bus to go home. It was fall when the sun sets around 5:00 pm. I lived more than two miles away and knew it would
be dark before I reached home. While I was only a few blocks from the school the hair stood up on the back of my neck because I felt there was something malicious coming up behind me. I turned around and looked intently at a man with an evil look on his face quickly advancing toward me. Suddenly, something invisible picked up the man and threw him like a softball about two blocks away from me. After he landed, he stood up, looked at me, and ran as fast as he could away from me. I felt happy, safe, and secure that my guardian angels were protecting me. I walked the rest of the way home confidently singing praises to the LORD out loud.

**Unseen Unheard**

Another example of being exploited and not being heard. I was the liaison for the Real Estate Owned (REO) Management Department of the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC) of the (FDIC) Regional and National Office, financial institutions, and contractors for implementation and management of the REO Management Systems of Records (REOMS). I was part of the team that designed the REO mainframe database. I designed, analyzed, and verified periodic financial and inventory status reports for a ten-state area of the eastern United States. Developed training courses from start to finish and conducted training sessions for bank officials, contractors, agency management specialists, and support personnel in the use of REOMS reporting and documentation policies and procedures. In addition, I conducted research and prepared written correspondence, graphic presentations, and ad hoc reports for senior management, Congress, other government agencies, and public requests.

I completed a labor/time analysis with job descriptions and determined it would take 100 people working 40 hours a week to complete all the work I was expected to do alone. I showed management the lined-up boxes of incomplete work. I presented the report to my local managers to get qualified help, and they claimed they could not understand my report and did nothing.
Headquarters in Washington, D.C. was cc'd on that report.

My personnel records listed me as white, so at headquarters, they did not know I was a mixed-race woman of color, as the local management could see. Headquarters came down hard on the local management about why they hadn't moved on my labor/time analysis report and hired more people. Would they have moved on my report if they knew I was a woman of color?

After turning in the report, which was ignored by local management, I felt disappointed and hopeless. One day, I showed up at work so exhausted I could not make myself take the elevator to my office. I had been working 12 hours a day, six days a week for 18 months. I turned around and went back home. I took two weeks off and completed the painting "We'll Understand it Better By and By." I felt refreshed and ready to go back to work.

When I returned to work, they hired a company with 100 specialists to fulfill my labor time analysis report. They asked me to train the new hires, but I refused. I had written the training manuals, the people hired were professionals, and I had trained enough people to do the training in my stead. I simply acted as a consultant and concentrated on ad-hoc reports alone.
Researching this episode led me to look at past performance appraisals to remember my job requirements and to know how I was perceived by others. My heart was warmed and encouraged when I read the glowing statements about my job performance and the numerous monetary rewards I received. But I was also reminded that despite having such superior performance statements, in some cases, I would still be marked with a 2 (Meets Expectations) rather than a three (Exceeds Expectations). In discussions, I would occasionally be able to convince supervisors to give me the three I deserved. But more often, I would hear, "If I give you threes across the board, it may not be seen as credible," despite the fact that I deserved threes. This made superior performance disappear from the official record, becoming invisible.

Art Voice

I have much of the artwork that helped me through hard times and good times through the
years displayed around my home and packed in portfolios and boxes. Most of the artwork was done to cope with times I was in great distress. Having them around makes me smile and relax because they are examples of working through painful and difficult times into a place of peace and joy. I pause, take a deep breath, and internalize new strength. I like sharing these images, hoping the viewer will also feel relief from pain and stress.

In the seventies, I did a lot of black and white oils, charcoal drawings, etchings, and monoprints. The most frequent subject was apartheid in South Africa in an attempt to bring awareness to the plight of blacks in South Africa to audiences here in America that did not know about it. I was appalled when I realized how ignorant many of us were of the South African Indigenous people's suffering. Most of that artwork sold as fast as I could produce it.

Although I asked purchasers to allow me to exhibit their purchase if the occasion arose and included it in purchase agreements, no one would allow me to temporarily remove their artwork from their homes or businesses for exhibits. This was before the days of digital records. I started to take pictures of my artwork and kept them in a large photo album at my art studio.

To keep myself safe because I was usually there alone, I required customers to provide two character references before I would allow someone to make an appointment, and I checked those references. Coming to my studio was by appointment only. My doors were always locked. Once when there was an open house festival in my business neighborhood with all the businesses participating. I left my door unlocked. A man came in and stole my photo album. Heartbroken, I finally learned to keep the originals and sell giclée prints instead when possible, so I would have originals to exhibit. When apartheid finally fell in the early 1990s, I felt like I had a part in it. I had a silent voice that was heard and made visible through my art.
Journals: My journals were the second things I pulled out to look at. In them, I found sketches, poetry, prayers, photographs of artwork, and other notes. I felt nostalgia, sadness, and
compassion for my younger self, who made many decisions contrary to my values. Yet I felt so strongly then that I could not help doing them. I learned I had to include God and solicit His help in prayer to live righteously. The majority of my writings were conversations, prayers, and expressions of thanksgiving and praises to God. There is also much poetry and drawings about my thoughts and feelings. Looking back at those things from the present is humbling. A selection of those images were put in the altered book.

Figure 13 12x18, Pastel. Ugandan Youth Studying

**Sketchbooks:** Looking through my sketchbooks, I came across a pastel drawing of one of the Ugandan students intensely studying after class with some of the younger students looking through the window I caught on camera. This drawing moved me so much, not only did I immediately put it in the altered book, I went to Michael's and bought a frame for it.
After I put the frame together, I hung it on the wall above my art workspace. This gave me a lot of pleasure.

![Pastel. Getting My Wings. Inspired by a Journal pen and ink drawing](image)

**Figure 14** Pastel. Getting My Wings. Inspired by a Journal pen and ink drawing

**Art Therapy Mission Trip to Uganda**

After thirty years of age, one of the most significant events that took place in February 2010 was my mission trip to Uganda to bring hope to former child soldiers using art therapy. I heard the Lord say to me while I was working with the children there, "This is why you were born." I had a profound feeling of deep joy and purpose when I heard those words. Not only did this trip prompt me to go back to school to obtain a Master of Psychology degree with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy / Art Therapy, but it also helped to prepare me for my current job as a Military and Family Life Counselor and part of the reason my job is so fulfilling.
My Master Thesis title was "Developing Hope Using Art Therapy With Rescued Child Soldiers at the Laroo Boarding School in Gulu, Uganda."

I learned of the plight of child soldiers in Uganda after watching a stage play in Los Angeles, "Butterflies of Uganda: Memories of a Child Soldier," the memoir of a former child soldier, Mary, telling the story to her daughter of who her father was. Mary was abducted at 12 years old, forced to kill her parents with a machete, and given as a wife to the second in command of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army LRA).

She was repeatedly raped by him and other officers she was given to. She managed to escape at 14, was pregnant, and went to a rehabilitation center. She and her baby survived a suicide attempt with the support of the workers at the rehabilitation center. Because former child soldiers are rejected from returning to society, she made up a story that she was the widow of a Ugandan soldier and was able to obtain an education and raise her child. I was moved to tears and so outraged by the story that I vowed to do something to help. I believed with all my heart this was an assignment from Almighty God.

I had been curating the art exhibit portion of the annual Santa Barbara African Heritage Film Series during February, Black History Month, for several years. I had not decided what my theme for that year would be. I decided to do my best to include the plight of the Ugandan Child Soldiers in that year's art exhibit. After my decision to obey the Lord and work towards helping the Child Soldiers, things began to fall into place quickly.

While having a massage, I spoke to my massage therapist about my desire to do research in order to include the Ugandan child soldiers in my exhibit that year. She informed me that she was also a photographer for the National Geographic Magazine, and she had recently visited Uganda and had the contact information for an art therapist minister who worked with the child
soldiers. I was astonished that this excellent massage therapist had done such an exciting job in addition to being an actress. She gave me the contact information, and I immediately began actively communicating with the young man.

I learned of his work with the child soldiers and his education as an art therapist and Christian minister. He agreed to ship artwork done by himself and the child soldiers to be exhibited in Santa Barbara and sold that year, 2008. The proceeds less the expenses to ship and exhibit the work was returned to help support the child soldiers. I did this for two years, and in the third year, I was invited to come to Uganda and meet the former child soldiers and see what the money was used for.

I was very happy to accept the invitation. Six members of the Santa Barbara African Heritage Film Series board also volunteered to go to Uganda and we began fundraising to pay for the trip to Uganda. As the time drew near to travel, everyone except me had dropped out because we had not raised enough money, and many were afraid to meet the child soldiers who had so many mental health problems and violent acting-out behavior against teachers. I had no fear and was determined to obey God and minister to the children with the truth of God's forgiveness and love with art therapy interventions.

Standing in faith at the last minute, one member of the board decided to come so I would not travel alone, and the remaining travel money came in. When we got to Uganda, we bought art materials, and our sponsoring minister located two local art therapists to accompany us to the Laroo Boarding Primary School for War Affected Children in Gulu, Uganda to act as interpreters and assist with the art therapy program. Talking to the headteacher to explain the art interventions we planned, I learned that the school was built on land that was once a LRA stronghold before the Uganda Army drove him out. I asked her when this happened, and she said,
"When you started praying."

I only had three days to work with the children at the Laroo Boarding School. On the first day, we gave the children individual canvases, paint, and brushes to paint whatever they wanted. I was astonished at the high skill level they exhibited with no prior art training. I lightly drew an outline of the theme given me the night before in a dream on the seven-canvas mural, "Love and Peace Equal Joy and Power," inspired by the Lord. I informed the children I wanted to bring their art back to the United States to educate people about their situation. They all printed their name, age, and district to agree to me telling their story and exhibiting their work. Because they were all minors, the head teacher signed the agreement as their guardian. I spoke to them through the art therapist interpreters before we got started and sang the praise song "Lord We Lift Your Name on High."

These children appeared very depressed and ashamed of the atrocities they had been forced to engage in for years after being abducted (burning down villages, including their own, raping, murdering, and kidnapping other children). These children lost their parents in the war; some were forced to kill their own parents with machetes, were child parents, and suffered serious psychological and medical problems, including PTSD, war wounds, wounds from rape, HIV, and other diseases.

When I left, the children were smiling and hopeful. It was amazing how completing their own art and collectively completing the "talking mural" changed their countenance. I encouraged them to put their name next to what they painted on the mural. As impactful as this experience was for me, each day I continue practicing art therapy and sharing God's love, brings me joy and satisfaction.
Figure 15 Seven canvases 27"x 35", Acrylic. Love and Peace Equal Joy and Power

Figure 16 Some of the Child Soldier Artists with the Head Teacher and Me standing in front of the completed mural. The yellow banners on top and at the bottom of the canvases are from Revelation 21:24 and 27. 24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. 27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles or causes an abomination or lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. NKJV
Figure 17 Girls painting on mural

Figure 18 Children listening to instructions.
Chapter 5 Summary

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, 
But the Lord delivers him out of them all. 
Psalms 34:19, NKJV

Hypotheses

This study confirmed all four hypotheses through the rich experience of immersing myself in the data, the conversations with others involved, and the positive feedback from family, friends, and professional women of color, and other ethnicities. Most of all, by feeling more affirmed, grounded, whole, and free. Creative expression was a protective factor in resiliency by offering a way to externalize, process, and integrate both negative and positive experiences. Spiritual community was an important factor in procuring support to overcome adversity. The pep talks and high expectations of some family members inspired persistence in achieving my professional goals. Telling my story increased my self-esteem, joy, and appreciation for accomplishments I did not fully acknowledge before.

I believe other art therapists will benefit from honoring their thoughts and feelings by doing response art along with their patients and not brushing their feelings off as unimportant. At the minimum, they should do a response art image at the end of the day. This is good self-care, placing themselves as worthy of their love, time, and attention.

The Ways I Was Silenced

Family: Completing this art-based autoethnography brought to my consciousness the ways I was silenced and my self-silencing in an attempt to stay safe. I was silenced in my family because of the special treatment I received. My siblings were resentful. I was mostly silent and did not speak unless I was asked a direct question. I made hide-outs in the woods near our home, digging a hole in the ground, using old rugs and other materials as walls, and covered the
entrances with branches and leaves, where I could hide, read, and draw in peace. My stepbrothers would periodically comb the woods and destroy my hide-a-ways if they found them. I then made a tree-house place to hide. They did not look up to find me there.

When our parents left the home, I sometimes had to physically defend myself against a couple of my older stepbrothers. I sustained a broken tailbone in one of those fights. I would literally try to kill them with frying pans, irons, and other household items used as weapons. I knew I would not succeed at killing them, but my ferocity kept those physical attacks at a minimum. When I told my parents I was in danger when they left, they did not believe me and did nothing to protect me. Though I spoke up, I was not heard.

**Elementary School:** I was silenced by witnessing the humiliating treatment of colored children in integrated schools. I received hostile looks when I turned in excellent work. One White teacher even said, "You are not supposed to do better than the White kids." When I moved to a predominately Black School, my art talent and scholarship were recognized and supported.

**High School:** I was inappropriately touched and propositioned by three teachers, two black and one white. When I reported them to the principal, nothing was done. Nothing was being done not only in high school but in the courts where the victims were on trial and blamed for their own rapes (wearing tight jeans, consenting to be alone with the perpetrator) and encouraged not to press charges to avoid having their reputations tarnished on trial. Experiencing this was a blow to my self-worth. Any man could harass and rape me and other women without consequences. There was no use in complaining and pressing charges if nothing would be done.

**College:** My first year of College at the University of Cincinnati, a young White male art teacher was infuriated when I showed him my first drawing in the figure drawing class. He got in my face and yelled, "My life purpose is to discourage you!" I was an eighteen-year-old colored
girl he never met before. How could his life purpose be to discourage me? I was frightened, and realized that I was given a full scholarship for the school to get federal scholarship and grant money. But most of the leadership and staff did everything in their power to force us Black students to drop out. Then they could say, "See, they couldn't cut it; they don't belong in higher education." Our individual complaints were disregarded, and many black students dropped out to escape the hostile, oppressive environment. Fortunately, a few Black students did make it despite the campaign to force us out by making our stay nearly unbearable. The Black Student Union and Black Greek organizations gave us a place to share our battles and fight against discrimination together. There were a few white professors and administrators who listened and assisted me to get the grades I deserved. However, the overall atmosphere was hostile and dangerous.

**Graduate School:** Graduate School at Phillips Graduate University was the first time in my life I felt like I was treated equally. I was surprised and relieved I did not have to fight to get the grades I deserved. I was heard and treated with respect. Though many did not believe what I had gone through in other educational institutions, I flourished there and received a good education in the Marriage and Family Therapy/Art Therapy Master of Arts in Psychology Degree program. When I went out to practice, I was well prepared.

**Workplace:** I was excluded from important meetings unless I complained and threatened legal action. My ideas were ignored when I voiced them, but when paraphrased by a white man, they were applauded in those same meetings. My sustained superior performance and accomplishments were not recognized publicly along with white employees. I received my awards through interoffice mail. My performance appraisals would describe above and beyond standard expectations, but instead of receiving ratings that exceed expectations, I would receive
ratings that meet expectations. Although the reports I designed were adopted as the national model, I received only an interoffice letter to acknowledge those facts.

I was overworked and exploited. I received some relief only after National Headquarters, who did not know I was black, ordered the local office to implement my work skill levels and hours required plan. Headquarters also took action on my anonymous sitewide EEO evaluation survey and removed two egregious supervisors and began training and promoting Black employees and others who were denied those benefits for decades, due to racism, sexism, and nepotism.

I learned that you can get anything done that you want if you are willing to let someone else take the credit. I would preface the ideas I wanted to implement with "don't you think" to the people with the power to approve my ideas. Giving them credit for the idea at the beginning. With that attitude I was able to organize the first Multi-Cultural Celebration at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), now the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The atmosphere at the INS was dark and oppressive, with the highest suicide rate of any federal agency, including the military. There were many nationalities working there but people did not look at or speak to one another in the halls or going up and down the stairs. Ethnicities only talked to people of their own ethnicities. The workload was much greater than the number of people employed could possibly accomplish. Applications for asylum were five years behind. There were boxes piled up for the Immigration Officers to adjudicate, and the knowledge that many people would die before their cases would be considered may have been one of the reasons the suicide rate was so high. An agent that sat across from my desk died of suicide.

With about 12 other employees we started meeting regularly for prayer to improve the oppressive atmosphere. We called it a support group to avoid any government backlash.
became the Equal Employment Opportunity Special Emphasis Program Manager. In that capacity, I influenced Managers to allow their employees to take time off to participate in a first annual Multicultural Program and had them sign a written agreement. With a committee of volunteers armed with the written manager's approval, we convinced participation from all the different ethnicities in the Ziggurat federal office building, Laguna Niguel, California. The Social Security, IRS, and the Natural Archives and Records Administration were also housed there.

The First Annual Multicultural Event *It's a Small World*, was a roaring success. I designed the program and was the master of ceremonies. Over two hundred people attended. Each of the Ethnicities dressed in their traditional attire, exhibited ethnic artwork, danced traditional dances, and served authentic ethnic dishes. The EEO National Director attended and remarked it was the best Multicultural Event she had ever seen. The best outcome of all was that the atmosphere in the building was greatly improved. Everyone smiled and greeted others in the halls and stairways. Appreciation and respect for other nationalities was achieved.

**The Ways I Found a Voice Through Art**

During high school, I was allowed to paint murals throughout the school rather than attend classes in which I successfully completed all the assigned work well ahead of time or was considered a disturbance because I would spontaneously answer all the teacher's questions, not giving the other students a chance, and or correcting the teacher whenever I heard them make a mistake. I also painted murals of black positive role models from the past and present in homes and local businesses. This put money in my pocket, enhanced my self-esteem, and gave me a silent yet visual and impactful voice.

The artwork I completed to bring awareness to apartheid in South Africa was rewarding
as people became aware and started protesting Apartheid. Curating Art Exhibits of my work and other artists in the community who were Black or whose artwork was about the plight of Black People in America and around the world amplified my voice.

I used art to illustrate and externalize the pain I experienced as a mixed-race woman of color, not accepted by some White people and Black People. I managed to earn money designing storefront displays by going door to door and offering my service. One Asian shop owner that I felt was treating me disrespectfully in her shop, which I politely pointed out to her, remarked, holding her nose up, looking down at me, "At least I am not Black. Blacks are at the bottom of the social order. We are one step above you in the United States." Indeed, banks were quick to approve business and home loans to Asian people while continuing to deny most Black people that privilege. Although conditions have slightly improved in some places sometimes, Black people are routinely treated disrespectfully wherever they go.

**The Altered Book**

The altered book was an enlightening experience for me. While immersing myself in the data, when emotionally charged memories surfaced, I was able to process and record them in the altered book. It began as art responses to the literature review and expanded as art responses to the timeline events. Being able to process emotionally charged memories of events in the altered book was cathartic. Placing the events on the timeline helped to integrate the memories, reduce their emotional charge, and place them firmly in the past, thereby freeing me from their intruding inappropriately in present functioning. Additionally, the altered book appeared to positively inspire the friends, family, and colleagues who viewed it, as evidenced by their enthusiastic, loving, and warm comments.

**How Art and Spirituality Support Resilience**
As a young child, I was cognizant of how my mood improved when I was in a state of flow, drawing, coloring, or making mud pies. I enjoyed getting my hands dirty and imagining a world full of dialog, and sensory stimulation. After the transcendent visit to Heaven in the arms of Jesus, I was intensely aware of the spiritual world and the great love of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for His creation. The splendor of Heaven cannot be described in words and I wanted to stay in that world and not return to this baser earth. No matter the difficulty I endure on earth, knowing I will spend eternity in Heaven with Jesus makes it all worth it. Living conscious of eternity is the light at the end of every dark tunnel. It gives me strength to endure.

Expressing my faith, thoughts, and feelings with art is exhilarating, comforting, and empowers me to process and ascend above any trauma and intensify the pleasure of good times. It provides a written record with poetry, and a visual record with art making that can be reviewed for years to come to relive those experiences. It can externalize the pain of trauma and diminish its impact so that it's no longer oppressive in the present. Art making is healing and promotes resilience.

**Strengths of the Study**

Strength of the study is the detailed, honest record of a single woman of color's journey to become a spiritual practicing Art Therapist and Christian Minister. She navigated society’s opposition to her family, education, and employment path to becoming a professional Art Therapist and Christian Minister. Details of her experience with racism, sexism, misogyny, exclusion, sexual assaults, community violence, and more, and her persistence to successfully overcome those never-ending obstacles to attain her goals. This candor may help other women and women of color persist in reaching their dreams.

It is important to note how very difficult circumstances were managed and overcome by
processing through arts and crafts. This self-care coping strategy was the key to staying the course and meeting goal milestones. The creative effort serves as a permanent record of victories that can be reviewed and assists in overcoming current battles.

Many art therapists I interviewed for this study complained they were not doing personal artwork because they were so busy in their practice with clients' artwork. I strongly recommend that art therapists complete their own art reflections while their clients are doing theirs. At the very least, they should do an art response at the end of the day to process their thoughts and feelings from throughout the day. This may help to avoid burnout and secondary trauma.

I found that some clients are more willing to do artwork when you do it along with them. It helps them feel validated and normalizes using artwork to expose and explore deeply buried feelings that may be the source of current troubles, bringing them to therapy.

**Limitations of the Study**

Every person's journey is unique, though members of the same ethnic groups share the commonality of perception and treatment by other more powerful or less powerful groups. This study is about a single woman of color's unique journey from the mid-twentieth century to the first quarter of the twenty-first century, and it may not be generalizable to other ethnicities, including some Indigenous people. Even among black people, there is diversity of skin color, regions of the country, and immigration status that will affect their treatment due to skin color, class, and place of origin.

**Directions for Future Research**

It is recommended that similar visual autoethnographic studies be done by other ethnicities, and a meta-study comparing similarities and differences of their experiences. My first idea for this dissertation was to interview women of various ethnicities and study the differences
in treatment. I started asking women to participate as co-researchers and most agreed with enthusiasm. I soon realized when I answered the structured interview questions that the time it would take was beyond the scope of this dissertation and that I must use myself as the sole participant to measure the time it would take to manage the emotional highs and lows of looking at past experiences that had not been fully processed.

**Summary**

I achieved my goal of uncovering and healing some of the lingering pain from unforgiveness and trauma through the careful review and analysis of past artwork, journal entries, correspondence, music choices, conversations, and writing. My procedure of starting with a pencil timeline to organize my experiences and remain on the cognitive symbolic level of the Expressive Therapy Continuum to avoid triggering a depressive episode was successful. Starting in the present, a place of success, emphasizing spiritual strength, and working back through the years helped to keep past experiences in their proper place in the past. Expressing myself in the present with art responses to my observations, emotions, and thoughts was cathartic and strengthening.

**Conclusions**

I feel my purpose in completing this visual autoethnography was achieved. This study affirmed the four hypotheses that informed the investigation's foundation. Creative expression was a protective factor in resilience. Spiritual community and practice were positive factors in overcoming adversity. Family support affected persistence in achieving professional goals through high expectations and pride in accomplishments. Telling my story increased my self-esteem, joy, and appreciation for my accomplishments. I believe that other art therapists will also enjoy these benefits by going through a similar process as outlined in this study.
To be in the world, yet not of the world. That is my dilemma.  

Whether it is better to suffer the pains and rewards of earthly entanglements,  
or enjoy the unspeakable joy of spiritual freedom apart from earthly commitments.  

Quelle Choix.

Written on the Getting My Wings pastel painting in August 2002.
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