

POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH MEMORY NARRATIVES FOR WOMEN SURVIVORS OF ABUSE RETURNING TO COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this self-directed learning (SDL) project for my doctoral level *Adult Learning in Social Contexts* class in the fall of 2018 was to develop an idea to use photography, music, and writing to tell a person's trauma story. Memory Narratives (MN) as a creative method for women survivors of abuse returning to college (WSARC) to choose how to talk about a painful passage in their educational and life journeys can be an effective arts-based and narrative approach in adult education. I was able to explore from both an emic and etic perspective my own positionality and subjectivity as a qualitative researcher in relationship to future research interests with both educational and therapeutic implications.

Keywords: post-traumatic growth, self-directed learning, memory narratives, women survivors of abuse returning to college, arts-based, reflexivity, positionality, subjectivity

As part of doctoral coursework and a self-directed learning (SDL) project in my *Adult Learning in Social Contexts* class in the fall of 2018, I developed an idea to use photography, music, and writing to tell a person's trauma story. I named the project *Memory Narratives Using Photography & Music* and thus the concept, process, and product of Memory Narratives (MN) was born. As a nontraditional adult learner and survivor of abuse, I returned to college in 2015 to pursue my doctoral degree. The intersections of who I am as a learner include a love and passion for writing and creative arts, extensive experience as a trauma-informed clinical mental health therapist, along with a zest for lifelong learning and a keen research interest in the lived experience of abuse. I created a MN as a prototype to learn first-hand what the experience was like from a SDL (Knowles, 1975) perspective. Linking SDL with positive psychology, post-traumatic growth, and wellness have implications for lifelong learning in education (Brockett, 1985; Knowles, 1975). As part of the reflexive process, I considered the intersections of other significant adult learning theories such as experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), Howard Barrows' problem-based learning (Walker et al., 2015), and Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1978; 1991) in relationship to my positionality and subjectivity as a researcher. I furthered the exploration by drawing on my professional journey as a mental health clinician that has spanned over twenty years and has incorporated the use of arts-based practices throughout my career across educational and mental health settings, and across populations. The use of photographs, music, visual arts, and writing to help people tell their stories of abuse, grief, loss, and trauma is well documented across disciplines that include psychology, sociology, social work, counseling, nursing, medicine, art, literature, and education for example (Hadley, 2013; Hahna, 2013; Pennebaker, 1997; 2013; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014). Art as a creative and critically reflective process connects people across cultures not only to themselves, but to others in a universal way. Of particular interest moving forward is how the use of a MN as a creative and critically reflective educational and therapeutic practice can help foster

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post-traumatic growth (PTG) and social engagement for women survivors of abuse returning to college (WSARC).

Trauma and Abuse

Literature exists across disciplines about trauma and abuse (Chang, 1996; Gelles, 1975; Hague, 1999; Resko, 2010; Thomas & Hall, 2008; Vidourek, 2017; Walker, L. 1979; 1984; 1989; 1991; 2015; 2016; Walker, M, 1999; Zink et al., 2006). The language changes depending on the context and perspective. For instance, trauma and abuse can be referred to as Domestic Violence (DV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), bullying, battering, harassment, and sexual harassment, along with variations of abuse including childhood, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, financial, and spiritual abuse. Over the past thirty years, much has been written about physical, sexual, and childhood abuse, along with trauma, PTSD, IPV (Hague, 1999; Resko, 2010), DV, Lateral Violence (LV), sex offenders, perpetrators, and abusive personality, for example. Yet, qualitatively researched narrative accounts of emotional abuse of adult women without physical, sexual, or childhood abuse is difficult to find and may not exist.

Current literature across fields on emotional abuse either links emotional abuse with the prevalence of physical and/or sexual abuse, as a pre-cursor, as part of an escalation of types of abuse, and/or with childhood abuse; however, emotional abuse can exist without these other forms of abuse. Emotional abuse is a form of psychological trauma that is underrepresented and often missed across fields and settings (Gelles, 1975; Walker, 1979). In 2015 in the *Encyclopedia of Clinical Psychology*, Walker defined battered-woman syndrome as “the psychological effects of domestic violence” on women who are the primary victims ((p. 271). Emotional abuse is just as destructive as other forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, or childhood, yet emotional abuse often is insidious in nature, embedded within the social construct of one’s cultural context, is minimized, rationalized, denied, dismissed, and often goes unnoticed and undetected. As a “little t” trauma experience emotional abuse is underrepresented in evidence-based research (Zink et al., 2006). This is in contrast to the attention in the literature and available resources in communities and at the federal level for victims of “big T” trauma to include rape, war, natural disasters, and sexual, physical, and childhood abuse, along with treatment for disorders such as PTSD.

While all forms of abuse are destructive and can have long-reaching consequences for men and women as adult learners, my overall research interest is women survivors of emotional abuse returning to college and their experiences of abuse.

Consider what was written approximately twenty-five years ago when Loring stated in 1994, “People suffering from emotional abuse seldom recognize themselves as victims; for them, emotional violence has become a way of life” (p. 8). It can take years for victims of emotional abuse to realize the reality of their situation (Walker, 1979). Victims of emotional abuse often experience shame and may feel confused, helpless, alone, and silenced (Walker, 1979). In 1996 Chang wrote:

Twenty years ago, we began hearing women telling the truth about the physical abuse they were experiencing in their lives. Ten years ago, we began hearing women telling the truth about the sexual abuse in their lives. Recently we began hearing women telling the truth about the psychological abuse in their lives. (p. 11)

DeGregori and Follingstad, cited in Chang (1996), found that “the study of psychologically abusive relationships that are not also physically abusive is still exploratory” (p. 7). Previous books written in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s began to explore psychological and emotional abuse in adult women. Yet, where are we today? In the field of adult education there is no current qualitative literature on the experience of, or the impact of emotional abuse on a female student and learning, yet the effects of emotional abuse have long consequences on a woman (Thomas & Hall, 2008). Even experienced educators, administrators, and counselors can miss or discount a woman’s experience as a victim of any form of abuse while systems perpetuate abusive patterns already in place.

Trauma and abuse can create significant problems for adult learners returning to college and impact a woman’s ability to be successful academically. A better understanding can contribute to the field of adult education to help educators, counselors, and policy makers recognize abuse, respond appropriately, and know how to effectively help to provide support, resources, and appropriate services to students. In turn, a deeper awareness of an often silent and shame-based experience can empower students to not only complete their degrees, but to take the necessary steps to change their lives in the process.

Abuse and the Intersection with Higher Education

Education creates opportunities for growth and change often through self-discovery and self-growth (Belenky, 1986). Education has the power to change people, and to change peoples’ lives. With education, possibilities expand. Globally, the pursuit of higher education and an advanced degree is the ultimate way a woman can improve her circumstances financially while investing in herself outside of other relational roles. In many cultures internationally today, women’s access to higher education may be different from their male counterparts (Boucouvalas, 1993; 2002; 2005). Female students may enter college juggling home, relational, work, and childcare duties along with their educational responsibilities. If a woman is also a nontraditional or marginalized student in higher education, she will bring added stressors, challenges, and demands that may affect her time, health, or ability to study and to focus. She may never let on the stress she is under or disclose experiences of abuse in her life. She may overcompensate. She may try to prove herself. She may be afraid to ask for help. Women as adult learners may also experience a lack of support of their educational pursuits by friends and family members. Their efforts to succeed may feel sabotaged by those closest to them.

Post-Traumatic Growth

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) emerged from second wave positive psychology (SWPP) (Ivtzan et al., 2015). Concepts such as wellbeing and flourishing, which came from first

wave positive psychology (PP), remained important (Ivtzan et al., 2015). Also, of interest in PP are the constructs of resilience and happiness (Ivtzan et al., 2015). Resilience arose from developmental literature and studies around protective factors for children and is important today in adult learning (Hall et al, 2009). From a SWPP framework both positive and negative attributes or dialectics contribute to a person's overall wellbeing (Ivtzan et al., 2015)). The complex process of PTG is of particular interest in PP and for the scope of this paper (Ivtzan et al., 2015).

After the Vietnam War and with the introduction of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) by the American Psychiatric Association (1980) the concept of trauma and trauma related issues began to emerge in the fields of psychology and medicine (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2015). O'Leary and Ickovics (1995) "identified four possible responses to adversity: succumbing (drastically impaired functioning); survival with impairment; resilience (returning to pre-adversity baseline levels of functioning); and thriving (people recovering to experience even higher levels of functioning than pre-adversity)" (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2015, p. 1763).

PTG is defined as a positive psychological change resulting from struggling through a significant and challenging circumstance in life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; 2004). Many studies have been conducted since the original research and emergence of concepts arose from PP and SWPP (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2015). From a SWPP framework, an important aspect of PTG is how it is dialectical in nature (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2015). This is due to how positive changes that occur as a result of PTG only occur because of a difficult situation or trauma that has occurred in one's life first (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2015). Boniwell (2012) refers to PTG as occurring after a traumatic event or negative experience when an individual grows and has gained something new. Many people emerge feeling stronger after the adversity, have more confidence in themselves and their capacities, and discover meaning and spirituality (Boniwell, 2012). From a spiritual perspective, growth can also mean that a person gains awareness of self in relationship to the world in a way in which one feels a sense of gratitude and appreciation for life in a new way (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). A transformative growth process is not easy while meaning making or cognitive restructuring is occurring to help make sense out of a trauma experience (Boniwell, 2012). PTG is fostered when a person has a support system or interpersonal support to help them get through (Boniwell, 2012). We do not live in a perfect world and there is no perfect person or relationship. Healthy adjustment is accepting that distress in one's life along with growth can co-exist (Tennen & Affleck, 2002). Even though we do not ask for bad things to happen to us, recognizing that we can grow, learn, and become wiser is an important aspect of PTG (Boniwell, 2012; Tennen & Affleck, 2002).

The focus and framework for this paper are the three aspects of PTG from the work of Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun (1998) summarized in Lambert and Lawson (2012). The first aspect looks at the self-perception of the individual and includes one's vulnerability, self-reliance, and the ability to shift from victim to survivor (Lambert & Lawson, 2012). The second aspect considers the individual's interpersonal relationships and includes emotional expressiveness, compassion, giving to others, and self-disclosure (Lambert & Lawson, 2012). The third aspect reflects one's life philosophy and includes priorities, life appreciation, existential themes, spiritual development, and meaning making (Lambert &

Lawson, 2012). Of particular interest for the scope of this article and for future research implications is how the emergence of PTG as part of PP and SWPP intersects with the trauma and abuse literature.

Transformational growth and PTG emerging from trauma, abuse, and “difficult and painful times can lead to positive transformation” (Ivtzan et al., 2015, p. 83). To better conceptualize what PTG is and link dialectically the positive with the negative, one must also consider a working definition of trauma. Ivtzan et al., (2015) acknowledge that different definitions of trauma exist in PTG research. The Shattered Assumptions Theory from the original work of Janoff-Bulman (1992) claims that trauma shatters our core sense of safety and security (Ivtzan et al, 2015). “Trauma is defined as those events that have a seismic impact on the individual’s assumptive world,” according to Calhoun and Tedeschi (2013, p. 16). Also noteworthy is Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (1996; 2004) explanation that the event is unexpected, creates a ‘before and after,’ interrupts a person’s narrative, and brings long-lasting problems (Ivtzan et al., 2015). Women, individually and collectively, can then gain insight through critical reflection making a connection to personal strength, relationship with others, reflection, changed priorities, and shifts in spirituality (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013; Hefferon et al., 2009; 2011). That one can grow and rebuild after a traumatic event takes time and a resilient soul.

Social Engagement

What is the relationship between post-traumatic growth and social engagement? A person who is socially engaged is connected to the world in which they live. When a person experiences an event in one’s life that is traumatic, or lives with relationship trauma human connection can be disrupted (Dayton, 2007). PTG and social engagement is necessary as the antithesis of what McFarlane and Van der Kolk (1996) refer to as social isolation as an effect of trauma and victimization. The experience of a traumatic event can keep a person off balance and functioning emotionally in the extremes (Dayton, 2007). With PTSD a person’s stress response is elicited even when the realized danger is not currently present keeping a person in a heightened state of fear and anxiety (McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996). Stress, trauma, and abuse effect relationships and one’s ability to connect with others in a positive way (Dayton, 2007). PTG and social engagement can be impeded if a person is not able to move on in a meaningful way from a trauma event. An inability to move forward in one’s life would also interfere with a person’s ability to grow in a transformative learning way and to experience PTG. A positive social support system including the person’s perceived connection to their family, friends, co-workers and work identity, along with engagement within one’s community can contribute to a person experiencing PTG. The seminal work of Jack Mezirow (1978, 1991), which uses disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and transformative learning theory further links and reinforces the constructs of PTG, resiliency, and social engagement together in an important way for future research in adult education to gain a better understanding of women survivors of abuse returning to college.

Arts-Based Approaches

Incorporating creative arts therapies (CATs) as a feminist pedagogy in adult learning creates opportunities for emancipatory practice (Hahna, 2013). Dominant narratives are examined through a critical theories lens and can be explored using CATs (Hadley, 2013). Through Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory model and the use of arts-based methods to connect adult learners to personal areas of grief, loss, and trauma from abuse, nontraditional and marginalized students across cultures can gain greater self-awareness. Through critical reflection and sharing personal narratives, the contextual aspect of one's life can unfold in a way in which transformational learning can occur. English and Peters (2012) assert the important role critical reflection has in transformative learning. The significance of individual narratives and stories set within one's own cultural dimension and context are factors that play a role in transformative learning (Fritson, 2008; Hall et al., 2009; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

The use of expressive arts and methods that allow space for a person to process their thoughts and feelings in nonverbal ways can create an excellent outlet for expressing and healing from painful emotions (Pennebaker, 1997; 2013; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Through Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory model, along with the use of arts-based methods adult learners can experience educational approaches that allow them to process grief, loss, and trauma from abuse. In this way both traditional and nontraditional students across cultures can gain greater self-awareness through the use of arts-based methods. Transformative learning can occur through the use of arts-based methods to share personal narratives along with critical reflection (English & Peters, 2012). English and Peters (2012) assert the important role critical reflection has in transformative learning. The significance of individual narratives and stories set within one's own cultural dimension and context are factors that play a role in transformative learning (Fritson, 2008; Hall et al., 2009; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Giving voice to silence is the work of Belenky et al. (1986). How a person makes meaning of their experience is critical to their ability to grow (Belenky et al., 1986). In this way, the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) of using arts-based methods to deconstruct trauma narratives in the lives of women survivors of abuse returning to college enables them to construct new ways of knowing. Engagement in higher education creates opportunities for transformative growth and change through self-discovery and self-growth (Belenky et al., 1986; Mezirow, 1978; 1991). Through PTG, transformative learning, and arts-based approaches meaning making, engagement with self and others, and critically reflective practice is achieved (Mezirow, 1978; 1991). Implications for students and faculty in adult education programs, as well as for practitioners, include the benefits of intersecting arts-based approaches with adult learning, adult education, and research methodology. Art is universal across time and crosses international boundaries.

With the prevalence of abuse across cultures and in the intersection of how the use of arts-based approaches can aid in the telling of one's story, it would make sense for educators to find ways to implement experiential and arts-based methods as an integral part of educational instruction (Comstock et al., 2008; Gill & Niens, 2014; Kolb, 1984). In this way, traditional and nontraditional students would have educational opportunities to express themselves creatively, giving voice to perhaps an unspoken part of who they

are as a person, which in turn can promote a more empowered self and learner. An empowered student recognizes choices otherwise not seen. In sum, a student who can make meaning out of their grief, loss, and trauma experiences can change their narrative to one of educational and personal success. In the next section the use of arts-based practice will be further explored through the construction of a MN as a creative way for women survivors of abuse to socially engage when returning to college.

Memory Narratives

The concept of a Memory Narrative (MN) was born out of my own story of abuse. I am a nontraditional first-generation female doctoral student survivor of emotional abuse. I developed the idea to use photography and music as a SDL project as a requirement in my doctoral level *Adult Learning in Social Contexts* class during the fall semester of 2018, one year after my dismissal from the Counselor Education program. After I was dismissed, I felt silenced and afraid. I had lost what felt like my whole identity as a person. During the period from the dismissal until I was admitted into the Educational Psychology & Research, Adult Learning doctoral program and began to feel valued as an adult learner, I took several creative writing courses in the English Department, which I believe to this day are what saved me along with a short list of supportive people I trusted during that devastating period. It took a very long time for me to heal and begin to slowly emerge and regain my sense of footing, identity, self, and voice.

Women Survivors of Abuse Returning to College and Subjectivity

Who are the women survivors of abuse returning to college (WSARC) and what are their stories? This is a fascinating question for me because I am one of these women. My educational journey navigating through higher education, for each of my earned degrees as a nontraditional student, has required hard work and sacrifice. All four of my grandparents were Sicilian immigrants. My father, whose mother died when he was ten, never completed high school. My mother, the youngest of six, was the only one of her siblings to graduate high school only because one of her brothers obtained permission from their father allowing her to finish school before she was required to work full-time in the family produce market. Soon after high school my mother married my father. Only when my mother was in her later years did I learn that she had wanted to be a teacher. I remember thinking, “How come I never knew that before?” Instead, it was an era in which my mother chose marriage and motherhood over education and a career. In a way, in the social and cultural context of my mother’s life, she never really had a choice. Her path had been chosen for her.

January of my senior year in high school my father died after eight years of declining health leaving our family in financial ruin. Even though I had been accepted into all four of the out-of-state colleges I had applied to, I chose not to go to college because there was no money for me to do so. By the time I would return to college to complete my undergraduate degree, a BA with Distinction in Literature-Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina after a *Summer-in-Oxford Program* at the University of Oxford in England, I was in my late twenties, had been married and divorced having attempted college unsuccessfully during those earlier turbulent years, had managed to

earn a certificate in Horticulture from a community college, and had waitressed my way through to earning a bachelor's degree working two part-time jobs while a student. When I decided to return to college to pursue a master's degree I was in my mid-thirties and in my second marriage with two young children. With the acceptance letter for graduate school that January, I was also surprised with the news that I was pregnant with my third child. I earned a Master of Science degree from the University of Tennessee in Educational Psychology with a Concentration in Community & Mental Health Counseling with three children under the age of eleven. The year my youngest child graduated from the University of Tennessee, in May of 2015, I began my doctoral journey in a program that at the time made sense after over twenty years of experience working in the field of clinical mental health. As a Licensed Professional Counselor-Mental Health Service Provider (LPC-MHSP), I had worked across agency, educational, private practice, and specialized settings with various marginalized populations and across the developmental lifespan with ages that ranged from young children to elderly adults.

In January 2017 I was selected as a Fulbright Semi-Finalist with the University of Crete, Greece, Department of Psychology for the proposal *Finding Voice and Identity Through Creative Arts in Counseling*. Not only was it shocking to learn that I had made it through to the Semi-Finalist status, but I was also beginning to realize how punitive, unsupported, and discredited I had felt in my original doctoral program. As a victim of relational trauma outside of academia the abuse I felt was not easily recognizable. It was subtle. For the first time, I began to feel old. I would observe other students and listen to their conversations in ways in which I began to feel marginalized. I often felt dismissed and discounted even scolded and reproached. I thought, "It's because it's a rigorous program." Now I think differently. Now I know I became a smaller version of who I am as a highly motivated and self-directed adult learner. My experience in the initial doctoral program was one in which I found myself lacking confidence and second guessing myself as an academic because I never truly felt supported. Upon the dismissal my GPA was a 4.8; I had successfully completed all coursework; I had been named a Fulbright Semi-Finalist; I was about to begin my dissertation, third year, and second year as a Graduate Teaching Associate; and had earned two Graduate Certificates in Grief, Loss, and Trauma, and Cultural Studies in Education. My life and identity shattered. No one in my life outside of the university and even my peers and colleagues within who were still brave enough to speak to me could understand what had happened. I remember thinking during those dark months that followed while I felt like I was living in a silent shame and fear-based abyss that it was a good thing I had never been suicidal in my thinking. I would think this when I would turn the deadbolt to my front door each night.

When I returned to college in the fall of 2015 to pursue a doctoral degree, I had left a full-time position as a trauma-informed therapist working with adults in residential treatment for substance abuse. In my very first semester I began writing, exploring, and expressing an interest in research that involved women, trauma, abuse, addiction, and creativity. I did not yet know the language and concepts I would come to know through the courses taken primarily in adult learning and cultural studies. Words like transformative learning theory, disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, marginalization, power, privilege, hegemony, reflexivity, subjectivity, positionality, and post-traumatic growth were not yet

words in my vocabulary. I came into a doctoral program as a nontraditional student, but as an experienced clinician who knew first-hand what it was like to not only work with women survivors of abuse, but to be one. I know what it is like to live with relational trauma and abuse because I have lived it. I also know what it is like to work in a toxic culture and emotionally abusive job setting waiting for the next paycheck to pay tuition for my own children. As a new doctoral student in 2015, I had not yet learned what emotional and psychological abuse in academia would look or feel like. I know now.

Self-Directed Learning Project in *Adult Learning in Social Contexts*

Linking self-directed learning (SDL) with PP, PTG, and wellness have implications for lifelong learning in education (Brockett, 1985; Knowles, 1975). The overall goal of the project was to learn how to use personal photographs set to music to make a video. The idea to create a video narrative account of people, places, and events meaningful to me and constructed as a MN became a reflexive learning process and lesson in subjectivity. Basic learning objectives included an increased skill level using my camera and computer (MacBook Pro). As a nontraditional adult learner, a non-digital native, a woman survivor of abuse returning to college, and with no special training in photography, I incorporated aspects of SDL (Knowles, 1975), experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), Howard Barrows' problem-based learning in which solving a practical problem is the educational focus (Walker et al., 2015), and Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1978; 1991). I had many questions even in how to get started. What follows is an accounting from my proposal, mid-term project report, and final reflections that will illustrate part of my process as I responded to the instructor's statements (please note the tense shifts).

Learning Objectives

(a) to learn how to use my camera and computer in synchrony with Photos, iTunes, GarageBand apps, and videography techniques on my MacBook Pro to create the MN, (b) to create one prototype example of a MN set to music. The length will be equal to one selected song to represent the theme of the MN, and (c) to critically reflect on the SDL experience of this project by keeping a field journal. Additional learning objectives were to learn how to use MN as an arts-based technique to create a MN, to gain personal insight about myself, and then to draw on my experience as a clinician to reflect on the work of women I have worked with over the years in treatment settings in which arts-based methods were used. In this way, I reflected on the process and the art created by women I have known, especially the women I worked with when I led an arts-based weekly trauma group for women in residential treatment for substance abuse. I wrote in my field journal and used critical reflection to consider the therapeutic and educational benefit of women constructing art to make sense and give meaning out of situations that make no sense to them. I have witnessed personally and professionally the powerful effect of using arts-based methods across ages and cultures in therapeutic and educational settings. In 2018 I wrote in previous arts-based autoethnographic work, "From a personal and vulnerable emic perspective, an etic point-of-view emerges to address universal issues and societal phenomenon" (Truett, 2018).

Learning Resources and Strategies

I plan to accomplish the learning objectives by reading, researching, and experiencing creating a project using photos, music, and videography techniques to tell a story. I will complete a minimum of one creative project using photographs, music, and videography this semester. Learning resources include learning applications on both my computer and camera that I already have access to but have not taken the time to learn. I will also use the library to search for articles pertaining to my SDL project. I will ask advice from others who have experience with photography, music, and videography.

Criteria for Accomplishment

I will submit a completed MN project set to music. I will use excerpts from my field journal to bring in a subjectivist perspective in adult learning. I will spend a dedicated amount of time per week in order to accomplish my goal and successfully meet the learning objectives for this SDL project. Since creative work can be difficult to predict a projected amount of time, and since I am a very busy doctoral student with many other demands, I will dedicate a minimum of 2 hours and a maximum of 6 hours per week to this project until the completed target date. Criteria for accomplishment will include the finished creative MN that will be able to be viewed on my computer and shared with others.

Bibliography

I will draw from resources that include photography, music, videography, adult learning, and SDL articles and books, and the intersections between the different domains. I will also check resources through Apple, YouTube, Pinterest, and other online sources.

How Your Project is Going. Reflect on Your Learning Resources and Strategies

My project is going very well. I have made my first MN. It took me probably six times longer than it probably will in the future because I felt like I was fumbling about trying to learn how to use the software on my computer to integrate music and photos to tell a story. I picked out a song and then learned how to manipulate the photos to be in synchrony with the music. I also wrote in my field journal during the process of learning how to make my first MN. My learning resources are my computer, photographs already taken that are stored in my computer in Photos, along with music stored in iTunes. I read from my research resources to learn how to use the program I wanted to use to create the MN. My strategy was to begin by doing a first MN as a prototype. In this way, I learned by doing. I already mentioned that this first MN took a long time because I was learning how to use the materials in conjunction with the software and my computer. In the future, as I continue to create new MN, I will learn to work more efficiently and will be able to help others construct their own MN.

Field Journal Entry from September 20, 2018

I have no idea what I am doing. I am trying to learn how to use GarageBand, iTunes, and iMovie with my photos. I am trying to figure out which application will be best to create the first Memory Narrative for my Self-Directed Learning project for my Adult

Learning in Social Contexts class. I need to check the songs I have saved through Shazam and Spotify and look at Amazon Prime music. Not sure how to get started.

What You Have Been Able to Do for Your Project so Far. Reflect on Your Project Goal

I have been able to make my first MN, which I am very proud of. I used photos from my first day on a trip to Sicily, Italy with my friend, Darlene, in May 2018. I had a lot of fun making this first MN and was excited to share it with my friend. I believe that I am on target for my project goal.

What You Have Learned So Far from Your Project

I have learned a lot so far from this SDL project. I have learned to do something that I had been wanting to learn to do for a long time. I love photography, music, and narrative, and I also love creative projects. I feel proud of myself for learning how to make my first MN. I also found that learning something new that seemed overwhelming at first instead can be a lot of fun!

What I Learned from My Project

On a surface level, my learning objectives included wanting to learn how to better use my camera and computer (MacBook Pro) to create narratives of people, events, and places using photographs, music, and videography as an experiential learner, and to use as a prototype for future research. Initial questions addressed how to begin the process to gain the necessary skills to learn how to use photographs and music to create a prototype MN. I learned how to use the applications on my computer to create the MN using photographs, music, and videography techniques. I also realized how much I enjoyed this project because I truly love photography, writing, and creative projects and how much the creative process can aid in catharsis and healing (Pennebaker, 1997; 2013). With this project I was able to incorporate my passion for the use of arts-based techniques not only to use photography and music in a creative, fun, and satisfying way, but to also reflect critically on where I am on my own transformative and healing journey. Creating a MN to commemorate a person and event with photographs and music allowed me to further engage in my own PTG process in a critically reflective manner.

Another way of framing the MN work includes autoethnographic and ethnographic ways of knowing in which I looked both inward and outward in an emic and etic way to engage in self-reflection. I was able to critically reflect on positionality and subjectivity in relationship to my work as a clinician and as a doctoral student. I considered the role of SDL in my life, as well as PTG, and my level of social engagement as a survivor of abuse. I thought about how I create levels of safety in my clinical and academic work. I also thought about how writing and the creative process for me is dialectical in how I both engage and disengage with others. In this way producing a MN was introspective and safe, yet to be authentic and honest it had to have elements of truth evident in the work. Constructing a MN as a SDL adult education project provided a vehicle for voice through an externalized product, which felt empowering.

Accomplishment of Learning Goals

I accomplished the learning goals I established for myself at the beginning of the project. I completed one prototype example of a MN and plan to make many more to commemorate people and occasions and to help others process trauma, abuse, grief, and loss feelings using arts-based and creative expression.

How I Accomplished My Learning Goals

I accomplished my goals by first engaging in reading about photography and videography in general to gain a basic understanding of photography and videography. Then I began to explore existing software on my computer to use for this creative endeavor. Once I established what tools were available to me, I studied the various applications. I used an excerpt from my field journal as part of the mid-term report to bring in a subjectivist perspective as an adult learner. I spent a dedicated amount of time per week in order to accomplish my goal and successfully met the learning objectives for this SDL project. At the outset of the project, I anticipated that creative work absorbs a lot of time and knew that in reality I could not give the project more time than I had allocated due to many other demands. I chose to dedicate approximately two hours per week on this project, yet there were weeks that I spent much more time reading before and after creating the first prototype. Throughout this project, I was mindful of time knowing that there is much more for me to learn. I stumbled through the process at first. The prototype took a lot longer than I thought it would. I will become more efficient as I make more MN. I plan to continue to learn how to use music and photography in educational, therapeutic, and creative ways to help others.

Criteria for accomplishment included the finished creative MN that was able to be viewed on my computer through iMovie. As part of the project and as a learning goal, a completed MN set to music was submitted to my instructor. I also shared the MN with my friend, Darlene, to whom I dedicated the MN because not only was our trip together healing for me as I was going through a difficult time, but it was also healing for her. In sharing the MN my own PTG process, relational connection, and social engagement with a trusted friend was increased. I felt an exhilaration and excitement in transforming a difficult personal passageway of time for each of us into a creative endeavor and project. Through our pictures and memories traveling together, and as a metaphor for our own individual journeys, using a critically reflective perspective, not only did I honor our friendship, but who we each are as women and as people on our own PTG journeys.

My Overall Experience of the Project

My overall experience of the project was very positive. I enjoyed learning how to use my computer to engage in a creative project. There is so much more that I want to learn about photography and videography and how to use arts-based methods to help others on their own PTG and social engagement journeys.

Things that Went Well in the Project

I really enjoyed the satisfaction of putting the MN together and viewing the finished product. I was also happy to share the MN with my friend, Darlene. The MN prototype made for the class project captured the first part of a trip with my friend, Darlene, to Italy. Darlene traveled with me on business to Naples, Italy in May 2018 when I was President of the European Branch of the American Counseling Association (EB-ACA). Prior to arriving in Naples, we flew from Rome to Palermo, Sicily. We spent a week driving a little 5-speed Fiat all around the island of Sicily. As a person who keeps a daily journal, and in my own ethnographic and autoethnographic way, it was important in my own healing journey for me to travel to Sicily at that time. I wanted to connect to a part of my heritage. I needed to experience, see, taste, feel, hear, and touch where I come from. Each of my four grandparents, people I never knew, immigrated from Sicily to the United States in the early part of the century. I wanted to visit Termini Imerese, the town in which my paternal grandfather was born.

Things that Needed to be Changed

I do not think anything needed to be changed necessarily, just that having more time to continue the work started and to be able to work in a consistent manner would have been nice. The semester overall was a very busy one with coursework, GRA duties, travel, and other obligations.

How I Did

From my perspective, the project went very well and was very interesting. I learned a lot about a topic that I am very interested in. I took the first steps toward accomplishing learning a skill that I had been wanting to learn for a long time. I really enjoyed engaging in a SDL activity. The project was challenging in many ways because it required me to learn how to do things with my camera and computer that I had not taken the time to learn before.

From a critically reflective perspective, I learned first-hand how to do something new and to experience using an arts-based technique in an educational way as a vehicle for my own self-reflection, growth, and learning. As a nontraditional doctoral student adult learner going through my own personal challenges, I am learning to be more resilient, intentional, and self-aware as I traverse on my own transformative learning journey.

Future Implications

As an adult learner researcher, I want to know more about how to help empower women through the use of creative expression and arts-based methods. Using creative methods to invoke voice can help women learn to express their feelings in transformational ways (Ali, 2014; Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1977; 1982; Jack, 1991). From a narrative inquiry reframe perspective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), learning to transform abuse into something new through connection with self and others, tapping into personal strength, and fostering positive and life-affirming relationships with others can contribute to PTG. This in turn leads to critical reflection, insight, growth, increased self-esteem, changed priorities, and shifts in spirituality (Tedeschi et al., 1998). An overall learning

objective moving forward is to help empower women to become advocates for themselves through arts-based methods, critical reflection, and sharing their stories and process in collaborative ways in the context of community (Dutt & Grabe, 2019; Hadley, 2013; Hahna, 2013). By using Dutt and Grabe's (2019) work to frame the micro, meso, and macro contexts to frame future research, women can shift from individual to relational to the societal contexts of one's life in the telling of their story through an arts-based MN. Women survivors of abuse returning to college who tell their stories can help deconstruct dominant culture ideology in which silence and fear reside.

Conclusion

Much work remains to be done in the field of adult education. Moving forward the use of arts-based approaches such as MN as a creative and critically reflective educational and therapeutic practice can help foster PTG and social engagement for women survivors of abuse returning to college and has the potential to contribute to the field of adult education both in teaching and in practice. In this way, a better understanding of abuse and its impact on learning can raise awareness to increase resources and support not only for women, but for everyone.

Education, awareness, and support are needed to help women move from the confusion and helplessness of a victim to a more empowered self as a survivor. College educators, administrators, and Title IX staff, counselors, physicians, nurses, police, clergy, and community agencies in which women seek support services through all need to work together collaboratively to better understand and be able to identify abuse in culturally sensitive ways to support women. Younger women need resources to see patterns in which they are vulnerable, and women of any age need to recognize long-standing patterns in which abuse exists and is cultivated.

Nontraditional and marginalized adult learners in the field of adult education, both male and female, can benefit from the use of arts-based approaches in addressing grief, loss, and trauma from abuse across cultures. Much work remains to be done on how the effects of abuse, at any point in a person's life and across relational, work, or academic settings can significantly impact education, learning, growth, and success.

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