



MONASH University

AUDACIOUS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: EPIPHANY AS METHOD

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Abstract

The term epiphany conjures up ideas of imagination, invention and discovery. It is a moment when a light of awareness springs into the psyche and is transformative in its veracity. This autoethnographic study contains five articles that incorporate vignettes from my life of unrelated, but interconnected experiences of sexual abuse, which profoundly affected me through moments of trauma but also epiphanous transformation. Writing audaciously about the violence and abuse during my life was an act of apostasy, as I chose to abandon any constraint I felt about remaining silent. Instead, I have boldly laid myself naked as research to be examined, dissected and hopefully understood.

The topic of childhood sexual abuse remains a prevalent global issue and despite the best efforts of governments and welfare organisations, it would seem we are no closer to a resolution. This study provides an insider's account of the effects of childhood sexual abuse both during childhood and adulthood. I offer my stories as a body of evidence as to the value of storytelling, but also of epiphany. Writing facilitated a safe space for the stories to fall, but also for the epiphanies to be illuminated. This process can be a model for future autoethnographic works.

The autoethnography is a potent methodological tool which can be a channel for facilitating poignant data discovered via the epiphany. The epiphany as method is a way of extrapolating data when utilising the art of autoethnographic storytelling, where epiphanic revelations are uncovered during the writing. The dynamic co-mingled experience of writing (by the author) and reading (by the audience) results in the author and reader co-creating and experiencing the epiphanic inkling together.

Thesis including published works declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis includes five original papers published, accepted or under review in peer reviewed journals. One article has been published, one accepted for publication and the other three articles are currently under review. The core theme of the thesis is the power of the epiphanous nature of change leading me to be an advocate for change in the life of self and others. The ideas, development and writing up of all the papers in the thesis were the principal responsibility of myself, the candidate, working within the Faculty of Education under the supervision of Associate Professor Jane Southcott and Dr Penny Round.

One article included Associate Professor Jane Southcott as co-author; the other four articles were solo projects. There are only five articles because each article has a word average between 8-11,000 words.

The contribution to the work involved, acknowledging collaboration, is as follows:

Thesis Chapter	Publication Title	Status (published, in press, accepted or in narrative, under review)	Nature and % of student contribution	Co-author name(s) Nature and % of Co-author's contribution*	Co-author(s), Monash student Y/N*
3	Understanding the epiphany in autoethnography: A historical and personal context	Narrative: Paper submitted & accepted for review. <i>Journal of Autoethnography</i>	100% Concept, collecting data, analysis and writing.		No
4	Life is like a box of Derwents - An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse	Accepted, <i>The Qualitative Report</i> – published Feb, 2020	100% Concept, collecting data, analysis and writing.		No
5	Finding a good book to live in: A reflective autoethnography on childhood sexual abuse, literature and the epiphany	In Press, <i>The Qualitative Report</i> – to be published in Feb, 2020	100% Concept, collecting data, analysis and writing.		No
6	Peering over the fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and 'others'	Narrative: Paper accepted for review Submitted, <i>Journal of Autoethnography</i>	100% Concept, collecting data, analysis and writing.		No
7	Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher's Autoethnography	Published, <i>The Qualitative Report</i> in Oct, 2019	95% Concept, collecting data, analysis and writing.	Supervisor Jane Southcott: input into manuscript <5%	No

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I would also like to thank the many members of the Monash Library team, in particular, Tracey Whyte for her ongoing support, advice and guidance. Her patience in assisting me to track down obscure texts and resources was boundless. I am grateful for the assistance and would have often been lost without this service.

To my children, Kayla, Bryce, Sian and Hayden (and their respective partners) and my grandchildren, Indigo and Ahnika. You are the reason I strive so hard to attain the greatest version of myself. You have been infinitely understanding and tolerant of your Mum always having her head in a book or prattling away on her laptop. You have also been gracious by allowing me to tell my stories, which indirectly reflect your own stories. I am also appreciative of your advice and editing suggestions. I am forever proud and grateful. I love you all deeply.

Writing a thesis in your fifties may seem like a crazy undertaking to put yourself through, but I can honestly attest that the writing of my stories has been a profound, enlightening and epiphanous journey. Finally, I am thankful to young Karen for allowing the adult Karen to excavate the pain and trauma of our childhood to examine under a microscope for the world to view. Your bravery and resilience has sustained me but also motivated me to fight fiercely for the future of other children who face/d the same kind of childhood we did.

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Table of Abbreviations

Name	Abbreviation
Australian Bureau of Statistics	ABS
Australian Institute of Family Studies	AIFS
Childhood Sexual Abuse	CSA
Confirmation Panel	CP
Department of Human Services	DHS
Professional Development	PD
Sexual Abuse	SA
<i>The Qualitative Report</i>	TQR
<i>Journal of Autoethnography</i>	JOA

Prefatory Comment

After much consideration and feedback from two panels, I chose to write this entire thesis document as an Autoethnography. This Doctoral Study was undertaken as a thesis by publication, therefore when compiling the document into one whole, I considered it more applicable to write everything from an autoethnographical stance. Consequently, all elements are written using first person narrative style, including the introduction, methodology, adjoining pieces, discussion and conclusion.

It is also important to note, that I have not included a Literature Review since each article has an extensive review of the literature in the various themes (according to each article), so it seemed redundant to include one here. I have instead focused broadly on the Methodology section, as it is here that I arrived at most of the decisions for this study. Throughout this section are extensive references to various literature on Autoethnography, Narrative Research and related topics. There may be some overlap within the Methods section within each article. This thesis consists of published and submitted manuscripts under review. While the author has made every effort to avoid any unnecessary repetition, there are instances where this was unavoidable, such as providing definitions of autoethnography, autoethnographical writing, epiphanies, as well as the details about the methodology of each study.

I chose to write the entire thesis including each article using UK spelling and in autoethnographical style. Some journals ask for US spelling, but I added a clause in each article to allow for UK spelling. Each of the autoethnographies describe a different perspective of my life growing up in Australia, therefore it would be disingenuous to use US spelling. The entirety of this document is written using UK spelling and the APA6 referencing format. The new *Journal of Autoethnography* asked for US spelling and Chicago Manual of Style. I sought to have two articles submitted to this new journal as I believed it would be a valuable inclusion, therefore I altered my articles to cater to their requests. This Journal does not start publication until 2020. I submitted the remaining three articles to *The Qualitative Report* (TQR) which have all been accepted for publication - one was published in October, one is due to be published in February, 2020 and the last article was resubmitted with requested edits – there is no publication date as of the submission of this thesis.

Using this style, I utilised first person language and the use of “I” throughout the entire thesis. The references for each manuscript (published and pre-publication) are included with each paper in the required style for the particular journal, and all references used within the entire manuscript placed at the end of the thesis document.

Chapter One - Exegesis

This is an autoethnography where my story cannot be your story, and where your story cannot be mine.
(Gannon, 2018, p. 21)

Overview: A different PhD model

I stared at the mind map that outlined my PhD. It was a few weeks into the beginning of the school year, which in Australia occurs in the new year. My outline was perfectly colour coded and in my head, I was able to identify the final product that could be my PhD but I was meandering around the details. I have always been a big picture thinker and visualising the ‘grand plan’ is easy for me to do. What isn’t easy for me, is articulating the junctures from start to finish. This is because while I can see a ‘big picture’ I work more effectively with organic and evolving steps to the finish line. This fact was not as cogent when I embarked upon my PhD but the steps became epiphanic in nature and I found myself guided by the discoveries. Oftentimes I would go to sleep mulling over a particular step only to awaken with an answer, a word, a spark of an idea. One might find this disconcerting because of the seeming lack of plan or structure but I would argue that a PhD that has its underpinnings in epiphany and epiphanous moments should endorse the epiphany as a method for explicating data.

I had been sitting on the fence with my research. I devised what seemed to be a perfect outline but I felt a nagging discontent and an irrepressible desire to follow the path of the epiphany and write my stories autoethnographically. It showed in my presentation to the Confirmation Panel (CP). What I had presented was a plan that was dichotomous and in essence inferred two disunified paths. During the question and answer part of the procedure, I

articulated my desire to research the concept of the epiphany by exploring the impact of the epiphany during experiences of trauma and how this affected my life choices. The CP connected with my rambling concept and ratified my way forward by encouraging me to be bold and audacious with my ideas and research. My life and especially my childhood had been peppered with interconnected experiences of family violence, alcoholism and emotional and sexual abuse. I found writing, literature and the epiphany as forces that helped me to forge my way forward despite these experiences. Using autoethnographical methods allowed me to examine the profundity of the epiphany in a child's life, as the child Karen navigated her way through the pain and turmoil of those experiences. I felt compelled to reimagine the methodology of this study as I found myself inspired by other autoethnographies leading to the epiphany (described in more detail below) to write my entire PhD as a series of autoethnographic studies. I welcomed the encouragement from the CP and emerged from the presentation with a twinge of excitement contemplating the possibilities. The assurance instilled by their comments and direction emboldened me to explore my studies from a more meaningful and audacious perspective. I wrote my second autoethnography in the space of a month. I discarded all other methods and resolved to write the entire thesis autoethnographically, including the exegesis, methodology, the conjunctions, discussion and conclusion.

It has been vital to present this work with verisimilitude, so much so that it would leave you no doubt about its veracity. Ostensibly, this enabled me to write with passion and emotion, which ordinarily would not be elements one would find in academic writing. Choosing the methodology of autoethnography has facilitated a space for the senses to be ignited. My intention is for the reader to feel something because I believe the topic of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and the epiphany warrants an investment of emotivity and

audacity. This is a burning need in me because without emotion it would be difficult (as the reader) to understand or appreciate the call to action.

Choice of Journals

I have chosen to undertake this PhD by completing a variety of articles suitable for publication. The topic of this PhD thesis is extremely sensitive so I had to consider carefully which journals might be appropriate for the subject of CSA, but also would accept and appreciate the methodological approach of autoethnography. My Supervisor, Jane Southcott suggested that I submit the first article, 'Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher's Autoethnography' to *The Qualitative Report* (TQR). They were supportive and positive with my initial article; hence, I felt less vulnerable and was buoyed by their acceptance of my work. I have since explored many articles from TQR and will attend their Annual Conference in January 2020; being that my first impressions were confirmed. As I cemented my research plan, especially my 'big idea' to do all the articles as an autoethnography on the topic of CSA, my largest concern was "how would this be received?" This is where TQR's philosophy and "appreciation of important ideas and experiences" (Chenail et al., 2007, p. 70) was appealing to me as autoethnographical researcher. Negotiating with the editors of TQR for my first article gave me the confidence to send two further articles to them. These autoethnographies would prove to be more challenging as I delved headlong into the topic of CSA in depth and detail, so it was vital to feel safe with my choices about who would read my work. I also admit to feeling apprehensive, as I am new to the publication arena, so it was important to feel nurtured in the work and TQR certainly offered encouragement and emboldened me to continue the direction I was heading (Chenail et al., 2007).

The second publication I chose was the new *Journal of Autoethnography*. This is an obvious choice because of my chosen path to use the methodology of autoethnography for the entire thesis. They do not start publishing until 2020 so I am still navigating how this journal will appreciate my work.

The Story of Karen

It is onerous for me to find a single word to describe what I experienced during my lifetime. Society uses terminology such as victim, survivor, abused, violated, sufferer, casualty; yet all of these descriptors seem cliché and generic and are grossly inadequate for the actual experience/s. By using just one word, the ongoing trauma of CSA seems vague and trivialised; can the experience of CSA be minimised to just one lexeme? I prefer NOT to use any of the abovementioned words and will address this further in this section.

I would be lying if said I intended for my life stories to be displayed in such a public arena. Yet they bubbled out of me; the groanings and rumblings of my past ruminated until I could deny them no longer. Prior to what would be the final eruption (see below) I had been working on the annals of my teaching career – and considering how the epiphany had shaped my professional career. I examined the stories of other researchers, wondering how I could integrate other research into my work and contemplated a safe but well considered PhD. I sought to explore the intricacies of the epiphany and its effect on the life and practice of an educator. I wrote an autoethnographical piece on [‘Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher’s autoethnography’](#) (Barley & Southcott, 2019) as a way of exploring what led me to develop a greater awareness of students of diversity and how I was able to change my teaching practice. After writing the first autoethnography, I felt a level of freedom. The writing process was both enlivening and exciting as I embraced the storytelling

nature of the methodology because it gelled with my long-held love of writing. After [‘Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher’s autoethnography’](#) was completed I returned to the perfectly designed mind map of my thesis and found myself directionless and unable to navigate its terrain. I had lost the drive to continue with my original plan. I revisited my reams of research and found myself in what I call the ‘research cave’ – reading multiple theories, analysing many methodologies, yet still feeling lost. Finally, after the above-mentioned CP I came full circle, staring at autoethnographical works and the book that had profoundly inspired me, Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis’ *Evocative Autoethnography* (2016). The notion that the stories found inside research could be evocative and profound provided me the light that led to the exit from the cave. The epiphany!

As I explain in [‘Life is like a box of Derwents: An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse’](#) (Barley, 2020b) I awoke days after that initial insight with the words in my head “I’ve always invested in colour”, and those words pounded away as I thoughtfully explored what that sentence meant to me. The epiphany, was that I should write the story of me: the moments of my deepest vulnerability including snapshots of my life when I was affected by CSA – as a small child, as a teenager and later as a mother to my own children who were also abused. The first autoethnography on [‘Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher’s autoethnography’](#) was well written; it was honest and revealing and would eventually be accepted for publication. BUT, I knew I had more in me. That study had not painted the entire picture (an analogy, I will return to) and was just the first layer upon the Karen canvas and storied the later stages of my vocational career. What was missing was the beginning of the story of Karen! One’s personal history doesn’t have to contain every moment of our lives (Denzin, 2014), yet it felt important for my story/ies to contain some “temporal ordering of events” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 88) and therefore, my

life could be placed in the context of a whole life. I am fifty-eight years old so age has an advantage here, where I am able to reflect upon numerous milestones and life stages.

I sat at my laptop and these new vignettes erupted out of me piece by piece; layer by layer and it was just like painting a picture. I added detail, context, light and shade and finishing touches to the canvas of my life. What started as one autoethnography became five. With each layer, I became more audacious and determined to reveal what lay beneath. I chose to write honestly and evocatively (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), while shining a spotlight into the corners of my life. I did not want to shroud any elements of the stories with innuendos or vague suppositions, so the audacious layer became intrinsic and vital. I painted sequential canvases of a world – Karen’s world, that unfolded uniquely, but provided depth and detail. In the early stages, I ignored what is ordinarily sought in research, such as “familiar concepts, scientific theories, and logical laws” (Bernet, 2012, p. 567) and I allowed the writing to speak to the omission of orthodox procedures. Karen’s world was depicted with rawness as I meant for the scenes to be painful, hard hitting and shocking. I was deliberate in my intent to chip back the paint and reveal what lay underneath. I was purposeful in allowing the reader into my world to empathise with what it is like to experience a life drenched in CSA. Bochner and Ellis elucidate that the “challenge is to artfully arrange life in ways that enable readers to enter into dialogue with our lives as well as with their understanding of their own” (2016, p. 80) and indeed this was a challenge I accepted. Except I wanted to be more evocative and so the audacious autoethnography term was coined.

Denzin (2014) refers to using a performative style of autoethnography; or to articulate an artistic term, to create a pentimento where when you scrape off the top layer the visible trace of an earlier painting is revealed (I will discuss this in more depth later). The final layer which became the last autoethnography (final autoethnography written), [‘Peering over the](#)

[fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and 'others'](#) was that pentimento - the revelation of the heart and soul of she, who is Karen.

Childhood Sexual Abuse is a subject that should not be watered down, yet society infamously likes to play with words on this topic. We call it sexual abuse or sexual assault but by no means do we want to imagine what that actually means. This is because we do not want the imagery of what adults do in their bedroom to be the same image of what occurs to children when they are being 'abused'. I am not sorry that my words sound angry and forthright as I feel a desperate need to wake society up from this slumber. I want to stress that 'abuse' is not an adequate description for such heinous actions and is therefore grossly insufficient. What happens to children at the behest of adults is sexual violence and the rape of the soul. It causes irreparable psychological and emotional damage throughout that child's life; it strips away the innocence and purity of childhood and tortures the mind for life (Draucker, Martsolf, Roller, Knapik, Ross & Stidham, 2011; Gray & Rarick, 2018; Greydanus & Merrick, 2017; Shapiro, Kaplow, Amaya-Jackson & Dodge, 2012). One may physically survive but the psyche may be forever damaged by these experiences. The writing in this PhD is a proclamation that I will no longer whitewash my own experiences, nor the experiences of others. I seek to tell stories that have muscles, blood and guts (Denzin, 2014; Moreira, 2012), conjugated with intensity, acrimony and umbrage and as the arbitrator of my presence within the world I inhabited I intend to have a last word on this issue (Denzin, 2014).

Writing this PhD has been iterative and organic. The first layer laid the foundations; the background revealed a naked and barren vista. The next layer provided an outline divulging the composition of the scene. Clarifying the image came next, the filling in of colour and the abstracted design. Finally the illustration is completed with added highlights

and shading articulating the scene so that all is exposed. I want you, the audience to feel with me the emotions of each performance but at the same time, I want to divulge the edification of the little girl. What did she feel? What did she become? How did she overcome? Did she at all? These are all questions you can answer – or you cannot. Victim I am not, survivor I am not, indeed I am the artist of my own life. I paint my own picture and my own story. I determine where the brushstrokes go, what colours to use and ultimately how the image will appear. I am the designer of whomever I want to be – the achiever, the conqueror and the warrior. I don't want to be called courageous; I want to be emboldened, audacious and triumphant. And the final image – the product of this toil and artistry – is the me I was always meant to be.

The Vital Ingredient of Epiphany

All you really need is one person to show you the epiphany of your own power and you're off.
Aimee Mullins (TED, 2010)

The value of the epiphany in this thesis warrants the devotion of a significant part of these interconnected studies. There are three distinct reasons for this decision: 1/ the epiphany is a fundamental ingredient of an autoethnography. The epiphany is explored and constructed with the reader as an 'aha' moment that causes life-changing transformation to the author's life; and provides a mechanism to evoke an epiphany within the mind of the audience. 2/ the epiphany has been invaluable to my life experiences. In retrospect this was a profound tool that empowered me to get past my own trauma. 3/ the epiphany can be determined as method - the epiphany in the autoethnography is a quintessential component of the data that is intrinsic to the study. The writer of an autoethnography must skilfully relate the epiphanic moments to the reader. The epiphany in a study like this can be constructed or organic. There is the obvious epiphany where the author recalls the occasion when transformation occurred –

that ‘aha’ moment. There is also the epiphany that is discovered from the momentous brought to clarity during the writing of an autoethnographical piece. There is one other epiphany and this is the one that I believe is most valuable. This is the groundbreaking juncture, when the epiphany; the ‘aha’ inkling hits you midstream within a sentence, which explodes into the illumination of a hidden truth, proclaiming the newly known to both writer and reader. This excites me because it is when writing within the autoethnography becomes like digging for treasure. In research, we might call it data, but the method of the epiphany is the search for the revelatory unknown, that discovery of a truth elucidating a moral or message to the story. It settles onto the psyche and once known cannot be unknown.

Originally the epiphany co-existed with the manifestation of God or a divine entity; or the epiphany can be “revelatory of the inner nature of God or the divine that can be miraculous, wonderfilled and awe inspiring” (Kellenberger, 2017, p. 9). The epiphany of the divine has been connected to each and all religious traditions from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and many more. These events are supernatural in nature producing “a sense of awe, shock and wonderment” (Kellenberger, 2017, p. 9). Writers began to use the literary epiphany as “moments of perceptual intensity and profundity” (Bauer, 2001, p. 1) causing a flash of insight into the true reality of the self or the world. Creating magic with words can convey a “variety of meanings and interpretations of a single moment in time” (Adame, Leitner & Knudson, 2011, p. 373). The author can take the reader on an imagery filled and metaphoric journey that expands their perception of the world (Adame et al., 2011). Literature and writing became the media I used to escape the despotism of my childhood and family and writing became my way of explaining the impact of these experiences. Fry (1980, pp. 2-3) describes literature as a “pleasant art of illusion” and poetry as “verbal magic”, which is a perfect and delightful description as I have always found magic in words and

literature. I have vivid recall of being enraptured by the stories of my childhood, writers such as Roald Dahl, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Dickens, Emily Bronte and many more. I fell in love with the intricate and powerful stories of Tim Winton and dreamed of being the redolent writer he was. It was easy for me to get lost inside a book (Barley, 2020a) as being immersed inside the world of a novel, magically aroused feelings of delight, joy, rapture and transported me to another world.

The magic and illusory nature of words also has the power to precipitate and invoke transformative breakthroughs that can transcend any moment. James (1985) refers to memorable scripts of literature as moving and powerful passages transporting us through “irrational doorways” that can be mysterious and thrilling (p. 3014). Literature has the power to be graphic and induce epiphanies that can transform lives and provide insight and illumination (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Stories and poetic expression elevates “the sensory and perceptual experience to unprecedented heights” (Bauer, 2001, p. 4) which elucidates a powerful connection for the reader into the author’s depiction of their reminiscence (Bauer, 2001). The writer provides a panoramic lens that filters the vista that they want you to view. The epiphanic is the vital ingredient of the ‘escape’ component of the written work. The literary techniques and skill of the writer can make “the sense of ‘escape’ possible, but the real escape is perhaps one of slipping the leash of the habitual and becoming new again in our own, and consequently, others’ stories” (Williamson & Wright, 2018, p. 117).

As mentioned above, when writing an autoethnography, one of the essential implements is the use of the epiphany as a way of 1/developing the story; 2/ highlighting and illuminating the powerful moments within the story utilising the method of epiphany; and 3/ relating the epiphany to a larger picture that can be transferable to the wider community or society. Denzin (2016) explores the epiphany as poignant moments that make a mark on an

individual's life, which can occur during a period of crisis, and the effects can be positive or negative. Bochner and Ellis (2016) describe the epiphany as a pivotal point "in which we may feel as if we're standing on a sheer existential cliff" (p. 68). Writing an autoethnography can be utilised by the author to illuminate the positive meanings in an individual's darkest experiences and the author's search for purpose and how they reached that epiphany can be imparted to others (Bochner, 2016b; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Denzin, 2016).

The epiphany became my survival and coping mechanism. I became alert to the epiphanic at an early age as my life was truncated by trauma and epiphanic moments. I sought the epiphany and devoured its meaning as it became the energy to survive; the igniting of awareness and transformation was the oxygen that I inhaled, only to seek the next breath. During the writing of this thesis, the epiphany became a prudent and potent tool that could reveal a moment of elucidation, revelation and change. As described above, the epiphany/ies occurred during the writing of each stage of my thesis and would reveal themselves by osmosis. As I wrote and rewrote, suddenly realisation would hit me that would solidify knowledge and meaning (McDonald, 2008). This moment is tethered to a life changing truth; but also steers the receiver in the direction of new and uncharted territory. The epiphany is the 'aha' of a story; it is the 'OMG' of a moment; and it is the pinnacle of the life affirming change that the instigator of the phenomenon must employ. The epiphany can be viewed as a potent tool and as a significant method in research. Without the epiphany, there would not be invention, discovery, evolutionary change or transformation. The epiphany may be a nebulous concept because it has so many definitions, yet most of us can testify to when that 'light bulb' went on... we remember when we thought 'ahhh yes'... we felt the shift occur because it is impossible to un-know the epiphany. The flash of insight serves a purpose to relocate us from previously held positions, or to illuminate a completely new way of looking

at something, or to provide us with insight into a darkness we thought we'd never escape. The epiphany is understated as to its value to human growth, research and progressive moves into the unknown. I maintain that any good story inside research should unify author and reader emanating from a simultaneous epiphanic moment.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

Close your eyes and visualise this image. If we are to accept the conservative estimate (given that many children do not report their abuse) that approximately one in three girls and one in eight boys will be sexually abused before the age of eighteen, then think about it this way - most Australian classrooms are an average size of twenty-five children. That means at the very least, four children within that classroom are possibly experiencing or will experience some form of sexual abuse during their childhood. At least two children in an average classroom are currently exposed to sexual abuse by someone they know. Let's go one step further and look at an entire Primary School of three hundred students; twelve classrooms of twenty-five students is equal to approximately twenty-four children in every school across Australia. Does that give you pause? It is hard to fathom, I know, but without a reality check, nothing will change.

I need to resort to the factual at this point to illustrate the epidemic that is CSA, consequently this section will combine statistical research and autoethnographical commentary. This preparatory information is valuable in order to comprehend the issue within our community, which will be extrapolated in the discussion.

There is considerable difference in the way that CSA is described, so for the purposes of this study, CSA is any sexual act involving an adult and any child under the age of fifteen or any child under the age of eighteen and an adult in a position of power or authority (ABS, 2016b, ABS, 2016c). Sexually abusive behaviour and activity includes fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism and exposing or involving children in pornography (ABS, 2016c, Boxall, Tomison, Hulme, 2014; Butchart, Phinney Harvey, Kahane, Mian & Furniss, 2006; Quadara, 2017). I would also consider CSA to consist of verbal comments, such as making inappropriate sexualised comments, innuendos or jokes and exposing a child to sexual acts (even subtly) by adults.

If children come to school with visible bruises or scars, this would be hard to ignore. Yet, in Australia (and worldwide) we continue to ignore the ongoing crisis that is CSA. I want to provide you with another analogy. Imagine for a moment, the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), which is one of the biggest and most well-known sporting stadiums in Australia. According to the MCG website, the ground has a capacity of 100,000 people (MCG, 2019). As reported by Gilmore (2017), there were approximately 5.7 million children in 2016 (ABS, 2016a) and best estimates are that there are 5% of boys and 11% of girls who have experienced CSA before the age of 15 (ABS, 2016b; Bravehearts, 2018). We could fill the MCG at least eight times over with children who have been violated by CSA (ABS, 2016b, Bravehearts, 2018; Gilmore, 2017). This is a startling revelation and should be the cause of outrage yet, according to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS, 2017) Australia is one of the only developed countries that has not employed rigorous and systematic studies into the prevalence of CSA as well as other incidences of child abuse and neglect (Matthews et al., 2016; Quadara, 2017). The AIFS (2017) analysed ten contemporary

Australian studies and determined that the prevalence rates of CSA for males is 1.4-7.5% for penetrative abuse and 5.2-12% for non-penetrative abuse. Prevalence rates experienced by females is 4.0-12.0% for penetrative abuse and 12-26.8% for non-penetrative abuse (Matthews et al., 2016; Quadara, 2017). It needs to be pointed out that CSA is one of the most underreported crimes and the available “studies from a broad spectrum of service providers highlight that these figures are a ‘drop in the ocean’” because many of the statistics don’t separate childhood and adult sexual assault (Bateman & Henderson, 2010, p. 5). It is also vital to note that a scoping study on the prevalence of CSA in Australia indicated a lack of statistical data in this area and that “there are significant gaps in Australian research into the prevalence, nature and context of all forms of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and in particular child sexual abuse in an institutional context” (Matthew et al., 2016, p. 10). There needs to be significant focus applied by various Australian Government organisations and departments to employ funding and resources for further research into this perilous and rampant issue in society. I will be returning to this analysis within the discussion section of this thesis.

Cultivating Culture around Childhood Sexual Assault

Gathered from the wealth of autoethnographies with either CSA or sexual abuse (SA) as a theme, I discovered that there are similarities and themes that flow through each manuscript. All relate stories of pain and struggle, shame and guilt, hiding self, questioning self, keeping secrets, resilience, empowerment, or finding voice. The emergence of the #MeToo movement and the various women’s marches across the globe was a significant uniting of voices into a culture of women vocalising the crimes committed against exclaiming, “This happened to me” (#MeToo)! Whether you reside in Australia, or New York, Paris, or London, Cape Town, or Mumbai, there was an estimate of five million women who marched across the

globe, united in the culture of #MeToo (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017; MacKinnon, 2019a). Story after story, from women (and even some men) from around the globe resonated with a familiar message. What happened to you, happened to me.

The world's first mass movement against sexual abuse, #MeToo took off from the law of sexual harassment, quickly overtook it, and is shifting cultures everywhere, electrifyingly demonstrating butterfly politics in action. (MacKinnon, 2019a, para. 5)

Autoethnographies that derive from this genre are cultivating a culture, rather than a theory. This culture is defiant, unforgiving, resilient and unified in a voice of 'no longer'; no longer will we be silent, meek, shamed, ridiculed, or questioned about the violence we experienced. This culture is audacious! I am not convinced the paradigm shift of culture has triumphed yet but I do believe it is emerging. I share my stories in this study because I felt stirred by the shift of momentum, which mobilised me to declare #MeToo. From the time of writing this thesis, I can only examine this topic microscopically, rather than holistically "because the subject is vast and complex" (Chang, 2016, p. 62). Zooming in on my own life is achievable but leaves the door open for a wider examination in the future since "culture is a web of self and others, [and] autoethnography is not a study simply of self alone" (Chang, 2016, p. 65). In the article ['Finding a good book to live in: A reflective autoethnography on childhood sexual abuse, literature and the epiphany'](#) (Barley, 2020a) there is a small literature review on a number of articles that are written autoethnographically based on experiences of sexual abuse. I contend this is where researchers could be encouraged to write their stories and

expand the field of data. This would set the tone to take the #MeToo exclamation and memorialise the humanity of experience into the context of written culture.

Books and literature have certainly been formidable establishments of culture in the past and stories with the pain, trauma and the epiphany, resilience and audaciousness of survivors can be heroic and inspirational (Coles, 1989).

Contentions

- The epiphanic discoveries of autoethnographical studies are pivotal to this research method. What can be extrapolated as data, cannot only transform the life of the author, but can also speak to the wider community.
- Understanding the value of the epiphany as method has implications for autoethnographic writing establishing this as valuable and credible choices in phenomenological research.
- Storytelling as performance can be utilised within an autoethnographic study and is a legitimate tool for extracting the epiphany in life and within the storytelling.

Vital aspects of this study are:

- This phenomenological study examines and dissects various junctures of this researcher's lived experience. Each article flows into the next, and may in places overlap, so they are interconnected stories.
 - How did the epiphany as method direct this journey?
 - The adoption of the research tool of autoethnography for the entire PhD project.
- Having written four autoethnographies and one other article that is part narrative and part autoethnography, I decided that doing the entire PhD as an autoethnography would be consistent and fluid.

- Revelation that utilising autoethnography can be a powerful tool of social research.

The stories I have written are not just a bunch of memories, instead I infer my life stories are microcosmic studies that have implications for the wider community.

- This is not an exhaustive study, because there are many aspects of my life still not examined, such as: why children do not report their abuse; motherhood as one who has been a victim of CSA; sibling relationships; sexual relationships for an individual with CSA history; my quest for spiritual understanding; weight and obesity as a way of seeking comfort and protection.

The driving question of the study was:

- How did the epiphanous nature of change lead me to be an advocate for change in the lives of self and others?

Other important questions are:

- How does the epiphany function as method in the writing of an autoethnographic study?
- How does storytelling support the exploration of epiphany in autoethnographic writing?

As explained in the exegesis, all the included journal articles were written in autoethnographic style and I continued this style throughout the discussion for continuity, flow and substance. Chapters three to seven include an individual study that has a number of vignettes. The stories are a revealing and honest glimpse into my life from childhood to adulthood as I navigated the systematic but separate incidences of childhood sexual abuse and other abuses. There was not a deliberate attempt to create studies that flow into one another but I believe they do converge despite dealing with differing themes; I argue that the

five studies examine the difficult subject of CSA and my attempt to navigate that terrain throughout my life. Hiking that long and sometimes difficult path, provided awareness of those pivotal, epiphanic moments that yielded guidance and wisdom, whilst my love of literature and writing became a form of escape, self-therapy and survival. These moments moulded me into the individual I would become both personally and professionally. I became deeply connected to the critical role that the epiphany played in this series of autoethnographies; so much so that the epiphany became the method integral to the stories. The abuse I suffered was a driving force in my life and underpins my values and beliefs around equality, diversity and inclusion. However, it is and was the epiphany that transformed my experiences and life and strengthened and emboldened my resolve to overcome my childhood trauma. This would in turn shape my role and practice as an educator in all settings I have worked within. I am now a passionate advocate for children's rights and share my discoveries with students in a university setting and teachers in professional development courses that I have created.

Chapter Overviews

[Chapter 3 - Understanding the epiphany in autoethnography: A historical and personal context](#) places the epiphany in a historical and cultural context. This article explored the known origins of the epiphany, usually connected to the meeting with a deity, angel or other supernatural figure; the epiphany found in literature and the science epiphany. I have had experiences of all three types of epiphanies, but I feel a synergetic connection to the literary epiphany.

[Chapter 4 - Life is like a box of Derwents: An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse](#) is an evocative autoethnography that integrates a number of vignettes that relate

my experiences of sexual abuse that I suffered throughout my life and that would later draw me to a man who would abuse my children. It is hoped that the reader might share the journey, not to experience pain but to understand the complexities of CSA and the impact on one who has endured such devastating travesties upon their life.

Chapter 5 - Finding a good book to live in: A reflective autoethnography on childhood sexual

abuse, literature and the epiphany extrapolates upon my own experiences of CSA and examines how I utilised my love of literature and then writing to create a haven to retreat to and hide. I lived in my books and eventually would write my own worlds where I could leap into the pages when the real world of trauma and abuse became too much. These vignettes were written audaciously and authentically so that the reader could correlate when those moments of epiphanies occurred.

Chapter 6 - 'Peering over the fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and

'others' is the most daring of the studies. These painful tales poured out of me and I constructed the text as a performance that connected myself as the author to the reader. I was aware of the brutal and graphic nature of the writing, but I had to paint the most vivid picture possible, so that the audience could feel with me; would gasp and maybe even cry with me. An insipid telling would have lacked verisimilitude. Simultaneously, I invited the audience to feel the warmth and care from those who intervened in my life and offered me kindness. I beseeched the reader to feel my anguish at not being able to tell them what was really happening to me. This writing was performative where the subconscious Karen spoke through the fourth wall explaining the scene in more detail and revealed what the child, Karen wished she could have said.

Chapter 7 - *Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher's Autoethnography* is

where the story comes full circle. There are many in-betweens that I am sure I will write in the future, but these stories capture the epiphany of my vocation. I became a teacher almost by accident and I have allowed reflective practices and the epiphany to guide me throughout my career. I drew on my own experiences by way of sharing vignettes that stemmed from my life and teaching experiences to expand on some of these ideas.

These five autoethnographies blend cohesively to provide a wider narrative. They overlap in a way, not to be repetitive but more to embellish the life of Karen. I wrote Chapter seven first, but Chapters three to six are the prequels that add substance and provide clarity to the series. Each article contained within the chapter overlays another dimension of the life of Karen, but also provides a panoramic view of the complexities of CSA upon children and the community. These studies also delve deeply into the purpose and value of the epiphany in autoethnographic writing and makes a substantive argument for the use of autoethnography in subjects as tenuous as CSA.

Chapter Two: Research Process

Research Design

I admit my original research design has been nebulous at times but by travelling the phenomenological pathway logically, I endorsed an organic process for conducting this PhD. In other words, whilst I developed guidelines and objectives I allowed room for the investigation to navigate roads that were unexpected, ensuring that the research holistically drives the development of methods and design fostering a creative and innovative approach (Preissle & Roulston, 2019). By doing autoethnography, the research and writing of the topic stems from the perspective of self. This type of study can be intensely intimate where you bear your soul during research producing work that is vulnerable and revealing where individuals demonstrate through human consciousness how they deal with life's greatest challenges (Bochner, 2016b; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 1999). This requires practice to construct insight and knowledge that is aesthetically honest and engaging but is also ethical and responsible as "we look inward – into our identities, thoughts, feelings and experiences – and outward – into our relationships, communities and cultures" (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 46).

I hold firm to the conviction that writing each piece utilising the tool of autoethnography was suitable to achieve my goals but accorded the researcher (me) to be guided by the breadcrumbs of data. Therefore, I wasn't necessarily constructing the data but was gathering each piece from the recesses of my memory, past and present; including the imagination, ideas and notions stemming from the epiphanies that drove this study. Each discovery of a clue would instruct the orchestration of the next stage. I am acutely aware that 'following breadcrumbs' may seem unorthodox but when I think about research, it seems to

me that the process is about discovery, following clues, finding answers and so on. Given the phenomenological nature of autoethnography I was drawn to this method as the most organic way to exemplify the ‘lived experience’ that has been my life (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Denzin, 2014; Denzin, 2016; Ellis, 1999). Doing autoethnography can be a vulnerable and courageous enterprise that belies “etiquette and protocol” and is ultimately a human triumph because when completed, you feel “free to be [yourself] and to sing out loud with a voice that speaks to the shadow and invokes the light” (Custer, 2014, p. 4).

Ethnography has its roots in the field study of cultures and groups of people. This type of study describes and interprets the culture of any community, its people and/or environment and is based in anthropology which explores individuals, customs, beliefs, practices, institutions, or environment as they depict a human or lived experience (Bresler, 1995). By extension the autoethnography is the study of self in the wider macrocosm of one’s microcosmic existence. Dwight Conquergood, a pioneer in performance studies regarded ethnography as a “distinctive research method [and] participant-observation fieldwork [that] privileges the body as a site of knowing” (1991, p. 180). The autoethnography shifts the focus of study from others to self, making this methodology innately intimate and verisimilar. Autoethnography adds the ‘I’ in ethnography, in that it requires a rite-of-passage requiring the researcher to be immersed in the field in order to participate in related culture, however in this instance, the field is themselves. Conquergood refers to ethnography as “embodied practice... an intensely sensuous way of knowing” (1991, p. 180) which augurs the autoethnography as a deeply personal and revelatory expose of the writer’s embodied life.

Social reality is created and experienced in a human context and the goal of the researcher is to explain how this social reality is perceived and illuminate how social phenomena

occurs (Basit, 2010). Basit extrapolates this idea by suggesting that one “[endeavours] to understand the social world as it is experienced, lived or felt by the researcher and participants” (2010, p. 16). I seek to understand the world around me, but equally endeavour to understand myself (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Denzin, 2014). The trauma in my life, especially experiences of CSA places me in a unique and qualified position to provide a first-hand account of sexual violence upon a child and now as an adult and researcher, I am able to provide a perspective that calibrates the topic. This study exemplifies my inclination to write and a desire to understand the world in which I lived. My intention is not to just be graphic or shocking, but to share how my experiences could speak to the wider community (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Denzin, 2016; Ellis & Adams, 2014). This ensures that autoethnography is more than introspection but grows from the meaning we find for ourselves articulated as data and interpretation. Bochner and Ellis (2016, p. 76) state that “we depend on stories almost as much as we depend on the air we breathe. Air keeps us alive; stories give meaning to our existence” and as an author, my stories feel as if my life depends upon them being told. For without telling these truths, the weight of secrets remain buried amidst the rubble of untouched sorrow. Truths eventually have to be told, because as a woman in my late fifties, they were hidden inside my psyche. Telling...revelation...the audacity that this takes has distilled my sorrow into constructivity. Doing this study has been quintessentially ‘real’ and that ‘realness’ is translated into as authentic an account that I could achieve.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative practice viewed through a holistic lens strives for knowledge building and creation by utilising reflexive and process driven theory and methods. This provides an exciting interdisciplinary landscape to provoke the construction of knowledge and meaning from the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Under the constructivist umbrella, the researcher is not separate from the research, in that the researcher can be informative and mutually shape influences and value patterns (Bresler, 1995). Paired with the interpretivist paradigm, individuals seek to understand the world where they live and work but inquirers also seek to “generate or inductively develop a theory pattern of meaning” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 7-8). Thus, this research addresses the processes of interaction among individuals, their specific environmental context and how these backgrounds shape the interpretation of their experiences and events. Interwoven amid interpretation is the researcher’s own personal, cultural and historical perspective where “the researcher's intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meaning others have about the world” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 7-8).

Qualitative researchers endeavour to build and analyse meaning stemming from the themes and categories via the data gathered and as such “qualitative researchers do not just use theory, they also create it” (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 17). In essence, this work surpasses an interpretivist view to embodying post qualitative inquiry, where one reimagines data from coding and categorising to a creative and transformational process (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Le Grange, 2018). Le Grange extrapolates that “we can choose methods which are transformative – methods that make possible the transformation of the world... where the methods of (post) qualitative research unfold through intra-actions with the world” (2018, p. 8). Undertaking this work felt like I was on the ground, getting dirty in the mud as I wrote and rewrote the vignettes, stories and other sections of this PhD. By allowing my authentic voice and artistry to flow, the study unfolded organically “[inspiring] change, transformation, and revolution [by offering] multiple ways of seeing the world” (Custer, 2014, p. 7). St. Pierre argues strongly for a post qualitative approach that “is radical, unconventional, and exciting” (2011, p. 613) and later describes post qualitative research as a

form of trailblazing the new; where creating and inventing are part of the research process (St. Pierre, 1997). She declares that “post qualitative inquiry does not exist prior to its arrival; it must be created, [and] invented anew each time” (2019, p. 9). Similarly, Franklin-Phipps (2017) states that “post qualitative research inclines... toward less direct routes, entanglements, and assemblages—toward experimentation and exploration” (p. 18) and this was the process I undertook. Once I let go of the shackles of my own design, I allowed the research and my stories to guide me, as it was this inquiry method that enabled and encouraged me to be inventive, exploratory and radical in my approach (Custer, 2014; Franklin-Phipps, 2017; St. Pierre, 1997).

Epistemology, as the theory of knowledge is embedded in a theoretical perspective where this knowledge building process (one’s epistemological position) offers a foundation for the conscious and unconscious questions, assumptions and beliefs (Creswell, 2003; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). From an interpretive and hermeneutic perspective, this study attempts to understand the lived experience of the author and determines the value of the epiphanous moments. How did they occur and how did the epiphany shape or inform the author’s life? I seek to correlate my own epistemological position with others on this topic, even though “the value of the research is not based on whether it is replicable, but rather on how it adds to our substantive knowledge” (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 17). This is especially explored in the third autoethnography, [‘Finding a good book to live in: A reflective autoethnography on childhood sexual abuse, literature and the epiphany’](#) (Barley, 2020a), where I examine the use of autoethnography when sharing experiences of sexual abuse. Delineating common themes around this topic was valuable to the overall analysis.

Van Manen considers the doing of writing in a qualitative study and states “the more human science becomes qualitative, the more [we need] to ask what is required of writing and

language” (2014, p. 18). Understanding human experience using qualitative writing addresses the phenomenality of the phenomena of one’s everyday life (van Manen, 2014). When writing the phenomenality of my life, I wasn’t concerned with writing choices, the pragmatics of text, or even creativity. I was more concerned with providing a connection between myself, as author to the audience. Writing research can be methodical and systematic but writing phenomenologically requires a different literary approach where “to write is to reflect; to write is to research [and] in writing we may deepen and change ourselves in ways we cannot predict” (van Manen, 2014, p. 18).

The Phenomenological Position

If I put my head down, will you pretend not to notice me?
If I don’t look you in the eyes, will you know that it’s because
I don’t want you to see what’s inside... me?
Are you using kind words? Because I don’t understand them
Was that a warm touch? Or a touch up?
I can barely stand the kindness, it is just too painful
So, I keep my head down pretending I don’t notice you.
— Karen Barley, 2019

Phenomenology is where the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals highlighting a phenomenon from the viewpoint of this particular group and the “phenomenological method is driven by a pathos: being swept up in a spell of wonder about phenomena as they appear, show, present, or give themselves to us” (van Manen, 2014, p. 23). Phenomenologists explore the intricacies of those lived experiences and seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon by identifying shared patterns of behaviour (of self and others) over time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An ethnography is research stemming “from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviours, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting for a

prolonged period of time” (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 13) and the autoethnography is an extension of the ethnography written from the first person or self. This genre of narrative writing is where “many species of autobiographical narrative and self-ethnography could fall” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 54) and what drew me to autoethnography was that this methodology allowed me to combine research with creative, authentic writing.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the tenet that an individual’s most fundamental and basic experience of our world is inherently full of meaning (van Manen, 1990; van Manen, 2014). Our lives are enmeshed and integrated with the lives of others, interconnected with histories, cultures and identities; and that as meaning making creatures we are continually trying to make sense of our world and/or explain it (Goble & Yin, 2014). The prime purpose of this research, “is to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of this basic experience” (Goble & Yin, 2014, para. 2). An important distinction in hermeneutic phenomenology is that the description comes before the “researchers [attempt] to describe phenomena... *before* they have been theorized, interpreted, explained, and otherwise abstracted, while knowing that any attempt to do this is always tentative, contingent, and never complete” (Goble & Yin, 2014, para. 2). What this means for me is that I allowed the depiction of my experiences to flow upon the page before I attempted to make any sense of these events. It was only after they settled as story/ies, that I reflected back to extrapolate any meaning or to isolate any wider cultural understanding.

I undertook a phenomenological position that focused upon pivotal moments and experiences of my life, as well as an investigation of the integral individuals who had a direct influence upon my life. Accentuating my personal evolution enabled me to be microscopic about how I experienced change and transformation, informed by the

illumination of the epiphany. Whilst these series of happenstances are unique and life changing for me as an individual, the emphasis on what was unique raises the issue of applicability to others (Bresler, 1995). I examined what was significant about my recounts but then explored how these experiences could inform others in the field. The autoethnography was a natural choice for making my stories credible and engaging and they fit snugly within the phenomenology paradigm. As a writer, I was able to integrate researcher with storyteller, since “the phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow [capture] a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive” (van Manen, 1990, p. 42).

Phenomenologists ostensibly do not set out to explain, interpret or theorise (Bernet, 2012; van Manen, 2017) and do not need a theory to drive the research, but may use a theory to interpret during this inductive process. What’s more, is that by engaging in autoethnography, this “opens space for the reader to see the intentions – and not just the theories and methodologies – of the researcher” (Dauphinee, 2010, p. 813). Van Manen explains phenomenology as the study of what appears in consciousness; or what shows itself as phenomena in lived experience; “or the quest for originary understandings and insights into the phenomenality of human experience” (2017, p. 775). He also proposes that sharing the lived experience should evoke some kind of visceral reaction, being “the breathing of meaning”, where the “reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). Using text and semiotics to apply the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is novel where “research and writing are seen to be closely related, and practically inseparable pedagogical activities” (van Manen, 1990, p. 4). Phenomenology and hermeneutics are distinct from one another insofar as phenomenology as research is the

description of lived experiences, whereas hermeneutics is the use of text to interpret experience (van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen's view of phenomenology is a compelling argument for the use of autoethnography. Within this work, I have described my lived experiences using narrative and storytelling as research. My text tells illuminating and reflexive stories, which can be examined under the umbrella of the larger cultural context of childhood violence. My intention both personally and professionally embodies a quest to make sense of the world on particularly complex and troubling events that inextricably transformed my humanness and humanity. Using this method is most apposite, steeped in the preface that people are sense-making creatures finding meaning of their lived experience. The author's interpretation is representative and revelatory intended to connect to an audience (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The writing and reading comeingle, creating a shared experience delineating the process of autoethnography as a "transformative research method because it changes time, requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honors subjectivity, and provides therapeutic benefits" (Custer, 2014, p. 11).

Methodology

Autoethnographic studies are organic methodologies that complement a phenomenological style of study. This inquiry describes my lived experience/s by distilling the essence of life event/s into an aggregated phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flower & Larkin, 2012). There may be small sections that are not autoethnographic, especially the introduction and discussion on CSA, as I considered it important to include some historical and statistical context.

This idiographic approach focuses on individual insights and feelings by collecting qualitative data to gain in-depth and unique details about an individual rather than numerical data (Finlay, 2009). In the beginning, I sought to examine teacher's attitudes and beliefs towards the inclusion of diverse children in mainstream classrooms. Inside the autoethnography, ['Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher's autoethnography'](#) (Barley & Southcott, 2019) I found myself not only drawing upon my own experiences as a teacher, but on myself as a person. Eventually what became obvious was a need to exemplify and analyse my own transformation as an educator and human being by way of self-examination and reflection. In doing so as a researcher, I was able to identify my "personally unique perspective on [my] relationship to, or involvement in [this] phenomena of interest" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012, p. 29). I found the story was bigger than just looking at 'inclusive attitudes and beliefs'; and by delving deeper into my past, I discovered the story/ies were really examining the evolution and transformation of Karen. Who I became as an educator was only part of the equation, who I was as a person became more significant and intrinsic to the study.

As previously discussed, the most comfortable fit for this style of research was utilising the methodology of autoethnography. Autoethnographies and biographies are conventionalized, narrative expressions of life experiences that provide reflections on pivotal moments that cause disruption and transformation by way of epiphanous change (Denzin, 2014). I resonated with storytelling as a way to delineate and understand research where I experienced more of a simpatico relationship with this process (Ellis & Adams, 2014; Nash, 2004). Since much of this research focused upon an exploration of epiphanies, using a methodology that seemed perfectly designed for my study was a natural choice. What eventuated was that during writing (especially the autoethnographies), I allowed myself as the researcher to follow the epiphanies as they occurred and so the story/ies morphed into the "re-presentation...torn out of its contexts and

recontextualized in the spaces and understandings of the story” (Denzin, 2014, p. 23). I was guided by the epiphanies and allowed them to orchestrate the data; I explored my memories, but through the epiphany, I revisited the moments through a different lens where the optic was familiar but also re-known.

Autoethnography is a research approach that consists of an autobiographical personal narrative that explores the author’s experience of life (Mallet, 2001). This methodological approach places a value on the awareness of a person’s understanding of his or her identity and background with a particular context in mind (Antikainen, Houtsonen, Huotelin & Kauppila, 1996). In my case, the autoethnography provides not only an autobiographical landscape, but explores the context of my early life and evolution as an educator. There are “innumerable ways one’s personal identity and experience can influence the foundation of the research process” (Adams, Ellis & Bochner, 2011, p. 275), but as an autoethnographer it was also important to view how others had used this process as research. In contrast with interviews and questionnaires that rely upon what people say, an autoethnography shines a spotlight on what people do (Pabian, 2014). Moreover, as this approach can be intensive and prolonged over time and “can lead to insights that can hardly be gained by other research approaches” (Pabian, 2014, p. 14). The transcendence of the epiphany and “how it is experienced, how it is defined, and how it is woven through the multiple strands of a person's life, constitutes the focus of critical interpretive inquiry” (Denzin, 2001, p. 28). I will discuss the value and purpose of the epiphany in a separate section below.

It was vital that I present writing on the topic of CSA that is credible, authentic and unbiased or as Krefting explains, “the researcher must continuously reflect on his or her own characteristics and examine how they influence data gathering and analysis” (1991, p. 218). Writing autoethnographically allows the researcher to inject authenticity, heart and even

humanity when describing the epiphanies derived from their lived experiences and this awareness can be hypothesised to the researcher's extended world (Reed-Danahay, 1997; van Manen, 1990). The value of autoethnography in the field of research is that the writer can place the story of their life within a social context by "[transcending] everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 4).

Autoethnographic Method

Storytellers tell stories to remind those who share their form of life what it is they share; people's sense of being together is enriched within the storytelling relationship. Storytellers also offer those who do not share their form of life a glimpse of what it means to live informed by such values, meanings, relationships, and commitments. (Frank, 2000, p. 361)

I have written stories since I was eight years old and the stories I wrote have a strain of my DNA connected to them. Stories was where I could camouflage the truth, but it was the 'writing' that provided escape and comfort to the wounded child. As a researcher, the method of autoethnography was a perfect fit for my literary skills. Using this tool, I wrote tales of discovery and hope where I could write myself as the explorer and the survivor of the story/ies I had lived (Ellis, 2016).

I connected to this methodology in a profound way, as I released the inner writer in me. Autoethnography allowed me to share my life and love of education, as well as my personal epiphanies that evolved with potency during this study. I invite the reader to be a co-researcher to understand how my childhood experiences intersect with the larger cultural context (Adams et al., 2011). Consequently, the story becomes a shared journey of knowledge and understanding as the storyteller reveals 'the voice of the insider' through the stories that are told (Dyson, 2007; Nash, 2004).

I examined many variations in autoethnographic inquiry such as autoethnographic I; evocative autoethnography; betweener autoethnography, performative autoethnography and many others. I connect to all of them in some way, but none felt perfect. I contend that writing text utilising profound, visceral and sensorily provocative tones is required for a topic as emotionally charged as CSA. Frankly, we need more of it; and with the rise of the #MeToo movement, it is evident that individuals from all walks of life are demanding that their stories be heard (Lee, 2018; Zacharek, Dockterman, & Sweetland-Edwards, 2018). Therefore, an autoethnography intentionally invites the reader to ‘feel’ the journey with the author. Ellis comes close with her explanation of the ‘evocative autoethnography’ but I felt like what I wrote is more than evocative (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). I want to call it audacious, brazen, or valiant; or perhaps it is all three. What I believe is that the typology of this autoethnography is confronting and courageous and the accompanying epiphanies are transformative and shattering. Ellis and Bochner (2017, p. vii) contend that autoethnographers “integrate emotional, spiritual, and moral parts of themselves with the intellectual and analytical” which connect and inspire the stories in the first place.

Chang explores autoethnography as a self-reflective examination of self and culture which can be self-healing, with a “self-transformative potential” (2016, p. 54) and Berry and Patti (2015, p. 266) infer that autoethnographic storytelling evolves from and “can instigate moments of personal change”. They further explain that, “autoethnographers vulnerably lay [themselves] bare and at the service of something bigger—unique and often overlooked understanding concerning the complex problems that riddle communicative worlds” (Berry & Patti, 2015, p. 266). Quotoshi expounds an autoethnography that “raises awareness, develops consciousness and improves capacities [which] ultimately alters our way of seeing and being in the world [causing] a paradigm shift in [our] self/others” (2015, p. 161-2). It was the work

of Rambo-Ronai (1995; 2005) who detailed her childhood experiences of paternal sexual abuse and growing up with an emotionally abusive grandmother respectively who blew me away with her brutal honesty and vivid storytelling. Reading *Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An argument for a Layered Account* (1995) shook me to the core because much of her story was similar to mine. I sobbed while reading the robust and poignant depictions of the CSA that she experienced. I felt moved, shaken, astounded. I was compelled to elevate my work to this standard. I returned to the autoethnography I was writing ['Life is like a box of Derwents: An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse'](#) and rewrote huge chunks of each vignette, embellishing with subaqueous and veracious descriptions of events that profoundly impacted my life. I wrote my pain, my sorrow, but also my pride, resilience and triumph (Ellis, 1999; Finlay, 2012).

Finally, autoethnographic writing seeks to be interventionist by providing a bridge between the narrative and “those who may otherwise not be allowed to tell their story or who are denied a voice to speak” (Denzin, 2014, p. 6). All of these views form a conglomerate of what I set out to achieve, which is to connect the storyteller and the reader providing impetus for others to tell their stories. The stories in this series of autoethnographies are an examination of the life of one who experienced CSA throughout their childhood. They were expunged from the very belly of my soul and burgeoned from one to five studies specific to this topic. Once I started, I was unable to stop; the need was so great to purge the rancid memories that had sat rotting inside of me. Like all great autoethnographies, an epiphany sprang from these words that no matter how long ago, or how deeply buried, until purged the effect of CSA can have long standing ramifications for the individual, but when the secret is revealed, the relief is palpable. Revelation is vital and I use the word vital deliberately: vital

signs of life; revelation is vital to life, vital to wellbeing, vital to fulfilling potential. I will explore this further in the discussion section of this thesis.

Performative Aspect of Autoethnography

What would you consider audacious after all?
That I share the ‘during’ of that which plagues me,
Or that I reveal its underbelly?
Is it because I use profanity as a part of the story?
Or is it that the profane is the story?
Is it bold to take the chisel, and scrape back the veneer?
Did the pentimento reveal... it all?
Are the words tangible; can you touch them, feel them, drown...
In them?
It was not brave to shield you from the depravity of past,
I felt like a perpetual coward.
I walked amongst you NOT me, not even a version of me
I recognised.
It is so strange to be born on the outside of the egg...
Tapping, cracking to be let in.
Invited, integrated, whole.
— Karen Barley, 2019

I consider writing to be performative art. We value painting and drawing as performative; drama and acting as performative; dance and movement as performative - so it fits that writing also fits under the umbrella as a performative act (Denzin, 2014; Kirschner, 2018). Spry states that performative autoethnographies are a “vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured [her] identity personally and professionally” (2001, p. 708). I underwent a transformation writing the stories of my past. I expunged my experiences onto the page and revisited the memories in a way that I had not done before. The actual act of ‘doing’ the writing sometimes felt like I was wrestling with words, phrases and sentences; willing myself to allow the reader into my memories. The jostling was robust and visceral, as I ventured back through time to extract vital pieces of recollected data; I tossed and turned in my mind how revelatory I should be; and finally I removed every layer

of masking to be patent and plausible. Denzin refers to this as “the sting of memory” that when located “the moment is dramatically described, fashioned into a text to be performed” (2016, p. 128). I wrote to perform - my sorrow, my pain, but also my discoveries, my overcoming and of course my epiphanies. I have been writing about my life since I was a child, but I had not examined my experiences in the context of others and the wider community and hence considered how my story was indicative of other stories of CSA (if at all). I had to write stories that were daring and revelatory, that peeled back the layers of self to expose the truth of past and present. I needed the experience of reading to be visceral and shocking so that the reader felt a part of the experience. I performed junctures of my life, in the hope that you (the audience) would be moved and compelled by the telling. Denzin describes the performance discourse as active in that “it shows. It does not tell. Less is more. It is not infatuated with theory. It uses few concepts. It is performative” (2018, p. 5). Ultimately, I sought to uplift and celebrate the triumph of a child who came out from underneath the rubble of childhood sexual abuse.

Performing One’s Life

The writer is both an insider and an outsider, commenting on her own performances, as she performs (and writes) them. In showing how people enact cultural meanings in their daily lives, the focus is on how these meanings and performances shape experiences of injustice, prejudice and stereotype.
(Denzin, 2018, p. 5)

As an autoethnographic author, one has to take into consideration the context of a story. It may seem simple to write a story but writing a good piece of research requires artful construction (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Autoethnographic writers have to make many decisions, such as:

- the words and language we choose

- sentence flow, structure and syntax
- genre and thematic style
- how we use words to evoke and instil emotion; synaesthesia and kinaesthesia (Ellis, 1999).
- grammar, prose, poetry, rhyme
- elements such as punctuation can make a statement about how text should be read (Chang, 2016; Muncey, 2005).
- Context – What are the stories about and why do they matter? There are many contexts that can be written using an autoethnographical style - history, culture, religion, politics, socio-economic status, education, societies/communities, families, relationships, self and identity (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Denzin, 2014).
- Emotional context – writing about joy, pain, grief, illness, break-ups, death, birth, parenting, abuse, crime, violence, sexuality, gender and so on (Ellis, 1999).

Language is nothing more than water leaking through the fingers of our cupped hands and nothing less than the best way to hold what we value...that language carefully and aesthetically articulated is evocative... as a tactic for material change in ongoing social practices; and that to make words perform is an invitational call inviting performative acts. (Pelias, 2013, pp. 400-401)

As I was involved in the process of writing about self, identity and my evolution personally and professionally, I was aware that the text was manifestly performative. Kirschner (2018) elucidates how she views writing as a performance act where she leaves trails of writing on sticky notes to remind her of her thoughts and ideas. She declares, “I write to remember for myself and others. I feel that autoethnography is more of the ethno

rather than simply auto. I am not myself in isolation, I only know who I am through you and our mutual storytelling” (Kirschner, 2018, p. 94). She explains how recording her life is a way of validating the experiences of her life and announced “I recreate my childhood to stay connected to the girl with the big dreams. She is me, and I am her. I remember her better in the stories I tell; she is curious and optimistic” (p. 95). I too recreated the childhood of Karen to provide an illustration of her identity. She was first and foremost a dreamer. She loved to sing, draw, read and write. She devoured literature, art, music and the magic and mystery of language and text. She was enraptured and enamoured by stories, poems, tales and anecdotes exploring all types of media. From text to film to music, music to spoken word, young Karen dreamed she would write the novel of the century. The Karen of now writes retrospectively about this child because her bravery was greater than any hero she could have dreamed up. Her resilience had more gusto and her passion for life is the treasure I dig for when I can no longer find purpose. Maybe, you could call this the excavation of the young Karen, which is quintessentially the ‘performance’; by bringing her to the surface, the Karen of today has been able to blend her into the now (Shoemaker, 2016). When I began writing, I viewed her as a separate entity; I feel she has integrated into me.

Data Collection: Writing My Life

The autoethnographical story requires us to “rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be” (Ellis, 2016, p. 10). An autoethnography should not be mistaken for a variation of the autobiography because, as Coia and Taylor (2005) explain, while the autobiography focuses simply on self, the autoethnography brings forward the shifting aspects of self and elucidates experiences described in a broader social context. In this respect, the autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture; which is “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of

consciousness” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). This approach also identifies and integrates subjectivity, emotionality and accommodates the researcher’s influence on the research, rather than assuming it does not exist (Ellis, et al, 2011; Ellis & Adams, 2014).

During my life, I have been considering the applicability of what I have learned via self-reflection, and then communicated this to others. Whenever I have had a life changing moment, or experienced some new epiphany, my first inclination is to share and ‘teach’ what I have learned. For the past fifteen years I have focused on professional writing by way of professional development for Online Course Delivery; blogs, articles and online forums on teaching ideas and strategies; and academic writing and research. I have integrated stories, case studies and teachable moments into my presentations and I weave anecdotes into my lessons as a fundamental element of my teaching style. According to Bresler (1995), the researcher’s qualification, background and expertise are important factors in shaping research, but integrating part of yourself into this process is also a vital ingredient. Indeed, by recognising how your past experiences shape your interpretation accentuates the need to position yourself in the study but at the same time, acknowledges your personal, cultural, and historical viewpoint (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Memory is vital to the autoethnographical process and I have had to rely upon memory to construct some sections of the vignettes. I have written many versions of my autobiography over the years, so I have been able to glean details from past manuscripts, poetry and diary entries and integrate them into this thesis. There are events in my life that are seared into my memory therefore, the “significance of memory in the process of ethnography [is] acknowledged” (Wall, 2008, p. 45) and the use of memory is a legitimate aspect of writing an autoethnography (Denzin, 2014; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, et al., 2015). I sought

to be as honest as possible because the facts were important to me but “writing selves are performing new writing practices, blurring fact and fiction” (Denzin, 2016; p. 126), so while I feel the burden of being faithful to the truth, there can be a blur between memory, time and the storytelling itself. There is a certain level of complexity in relaying how it made me feel then and how it makes me feel now as “the truth of autoethnographies can never be a stable truth because memory is active, dynamic, and ever changing” (Bochner, 2013, p. 54).

By writing five autoethnographies that correlated to my childhood and experiences of sexual abuse, I considered that each autoethnography would support and scaffold one another. Each article is a separate and individual piece of research, but have common themes running through them. They also contain facts that stem from my life, with some overlap within the stories, especially on the topic of CSA and epiphanies. I would argue that this cohesively connects the parts and provides veracity to the accounts.

Ethics in Autoethnography

When autoethnographers think about ethical considerations, they should address the “process [of] consent, an ethics of consequences and protecting the privacy and identities of participants” (Adams, et al., 2015, p. 57).

There are two types of ethics to consider in qualitative research, procedural and situational:

- Procedural ethics relates to issues of informed consent, confidentiality, rights to privacy, deception and protection from harm (Ellis, 2007).

- Situational ethics occur in the moment, such as a participant who “discloses something harmful, asks for help, or voices discomfort with a question or her or his own response?” (Ellis, 2007, p. 4)

Within autoethnography, institutional standard ethics may not be adequate, which is why we need to consider relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). Relational ethics references intimate others and is what Ellis calls the quagmire in autoethnographical research (1995; 2007). She asks researchers to consider their responsibility to intimate others, especially if they are individuals or characters involved in their stories (Ellis, 1995; Ellis, 2007). It is important to have value and respect for any individuals who may be included in our stories, but this questioning and reflecting on the ethical decisions made is an ongoing process (Ellis, 2007; Lapadat, 2017).

When considering consent there may be individuals in the researcher’s life who may be affected by the revelation of such personal stories. My stories include particular individuals and students. I have been careful not to identify specific geographical locations where I taught and all students (including childhood friends) were written as composites to avoid any identification. Both of my parents have passed away, so I personally felt ‘safe’ writing stories involving them; it would have been difficult to be so brutally honest whilst they were still alive. Second, I have spoken to each of my four children individually and sought their permission for sharing any stories that might involve them (directly or indirectly) and they all agreed that the stories were important to tell. This is explained in more detail inside each article. My children do not share my surname, so this grants them further anonymity.

There are other people in my family whom I did not confer with about my research. I felt completely comfortable that my stories were true to my history and what happened to me. I chose not to ask others to validate my stories because this was exactly what was robbed from me as a child. This is my story and I do not need anyone's permission to tell it. Memory can be fluid and fallible, so it is vital that "we must, to the best of our ability, create probable, trustworthy, and resonant autoethnographic tales" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 96). Also, when considering relational ethics in writing, as an author we avoid being self-indulgent, incriminating, boastful and self-righteous. If anything, I have possibly underplayed my stories in relationship to my parents. Perhaps an outsider might view them more harshly. This is an ethical consideration in itself; as to how the truth of terrifying and taboo experiences can be relayed authentically when we remain concerned about those who may find the reading uncomfortable (Adams, et al., 2015; Ellis, 1995). Ultimately, the responsibility of the author is to themselves because by "having the courage to make the private visible, autoethnographers embrace personal vulnerability" (Lapadet, 2017, p. 594) and this should be an act of audacity without limitations or barriers.

Autoethnographers must be aware of protective devices but also ensure that the integrity of their research is maintained when interpreted and understood (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis, 1995). I have thought and agonised over this, which somewhat takes me back to my experiences as a little girl who was sexually abused by her stepfather. In the past, the silence has been cavernous; the jostling and bursting of the truth sat waiting to be unencumbered; therefore honesty can be viewed as far more ethical than imbued discomfort. Using this genre, authors write through silence, breaking through subjugation and reclaim themselves (Adams et al., 2015). Indeed, I believe this study will be a full stop to this jostling for myself and those who choose to piggyback on this journey with me. Carol Rambo Ronai (1995, 2005) describes with harrowing detail the abuse by her father and I found her work

aspirational and I greatly honour her courage. Reading her work provided me with the impetus that strengthened my own autoethnographical studies. Jones et al., (2015, p. 34) describes Rambo's work where "she writes to illustrate the personal, often hidden nuances of such traumatic experiences" and I felt obliged to do the same. It was clear to me that I was duty-bound to write with unapologetic abandon about my childhood and the sexual abuse I endured. I had previously felt contrite about my past, as if being abused was my fault. At my age, I am past caring about what others think of me or my past. Who I am is not tethered to the sexual violence of my childhood. Doing this PhD is the gift I have given to myself via the candour and reflexivity of this autoethnographical work. Finally, I am grateful that writing the words within this study has provided some resolution to my own history.

The Autoethnographies in this Thesis

"In order to take the leap into creating an autoethnography one has first to recognise that there is no distinction between doing research and living a life"
(Muncey, 2010, p. 3).

Carolyn Ellis (1999), in *Heartful Autoethnographer* describes how to engage in the writing process to one of her students. Her student comments that the methodology seems easy. Ellis exclaims, "Oh, it's amazingly difficult. It is certainly not something that most people can do well" (Ellis, 1999, p. 671). Tessa Muncey (2010) in her book, *Creating Autoethnographies* shares about the difficulty of finding your own writing style and formula for creating unique and individual autoethnographies. She states that "finding a style and a voice of your own, which silences the critics in your head is an important aspect of autoethnography" (Muncey, 2010, p. 56). Finding and selecting unique topics and methods for creating autoethnographies is essential to positioning one's voice in this ever-expanding field of research. Fortunately (or unfortunately), I have a wealth of life experiences that I can draw upon.

As I explain within the included autoethnographies, I consider myself a natural writer. I wrote stories as a little girl as a way to survive the CSA I was experiencing (Barley, 2020a; Barley, 2020b; Barley, Under Review a); I have written a reflective journal on and off for most of my life; and I have favoured writing as my preferred artistic outlet. Without sounding boastful, or egotistical, writing has been the easiest part of this process for me; my biggest challenge was being cohesive, integrating research and ensuring that the autoethnography is academically acceptable. The autoethnography can be creative and academic at the same time because no matter how “creatively presented, [an] autoethnography involves more than the presentation of problems” (Chang, 2016, p. 148). Undertaking this method examines and interprets the autobiographical data in context with the larger social issue and is predicated on the ability and skill of the researcher/writer to invite their audience into the lived experience with them (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). As indicated in previous sections of this thesis, I wanted to write evocatively (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), but also audaciously. An autoethnography can break the rules and cross boundaries and at the same time, the ability to write or do an autoethnography enables transcending self and the extended society (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This occurs because the power of the native voice is being authentic and privileged in the space that is being examined (Denzin, 2014; Reed- Danahay, 1997). The evocative and audacious autoethnography deliberately avoids the safety of academia and steadfastly engages in writing texts that touch the heart and soul of their audience (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). It is understood that this style of research focuses “on human longing, pleasure, pain, loss, grief, suffering, or joy” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 55) that allows the author to be vulnerable, reflexive and places themselves at the centre of topic (Ellis & Adams, 2014).

Undertaking this research has been cathartic, but also epiphanic; it has been exhausting, but empowering; and it has been painful, but deeply passionate. My five autoethnographies can be grouped into common themes (Denzin, 2016); behaving like acts in a play, separate entities, but united by the same integrated story. The performance of writing is making choices about using text and language conventions to present the audience with a visceral and somatic experience. It is also the unveiling of self as the performer. So much of our life is on display now through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (Denzin, 2018). I have never liked photos of myself, but in this online culture, I have more photos of myself than during my previous fifty years. Yet no matter how much of our life is on display, or how much we ‘perform’ our life experiences, the underbelly of self is rarely revealed. Performance is ostensibly a way of doing and in the doing, I am endeavouring to understand how human beings (especially self) “fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world” (Madison & Hamera, 2006, p. xii). My story/ies are reflective of other’s stories and the bifurcation of CSA on the life of an individual. Now in my late fifties, I have a lifetime of history to retell, but also to examine. The ramifications of CSA on my life, my partner choices, my children, and my career are resounding. Albeit, I am astutely aware that CSA also moulded me, emboldened me and empowered me. I found the warrior inside of me and survived.

Reflexivity

My own writing bullies me
Into attempting a back somersault
Lands me on my back
It looks dynamic, flying through the air
But you’ve got to score the landing
(Speedy, 2015)

Like Speedy (2015) in his autoethnographic enquiry, *Staring at the Park* my process was to write the narratives first. I had goals delineating how each autoethnography would be interpreted, but it was simpler for me to separate the process into two distinct periods of writing. Each study originated with the vignettes. I began writing without being encumbered by grammar, sentence structure, or citing references; instead I allowed the words to spill upon the page. The writing evolved fluidly and organically, allowing the narrative to be authentic and honest. I added notes as I wrote alongside paragraphs that I wasn't satisfied with, so that I could revisit those sections during a second sitting. I used a reflexive approach to revise the stories, where I added, took away and flourished the piece (Etherington, 2004; Etherington, 2007). I found that rewriting and reworking the text provided additional "insight and consolidation" of the work (Bolton, 1999, p. 120). There were occasions when my memory was stirred, when I contemplated adding more details within the story. Facts are important and I aimed for as an honest an account as possible, "but facts don't tell you what they mean or how they may make you feel, [so by making] meaning of all the stuff of memory and experience [explores] how it felt then and how it feels now" (Bochner, 2016, p. 54). I also revisited particular narratives during the editing process using a critical lens to either add more detail or write another vignette. Just like using a zoom lens, reflexivity is a process of zooming into narrow focus and then zooming back out to view the image "to make sense of who we are in the context of cultural communities" (Boylorn, 2014, p. 17). Shoemaker (2016) suggests that an autoethnography (especially a performative autoethnography) demands a self-reflexive process. She explains that this requires an "uncomfortable commitment to dialogue and deep listening in order to understand and traverse in/visible borders, discover buried histories... evoke revelations... and excavate meaningful gaps in personal and cultural knowledge" (p. 526). I utilised a reflexive process at a conscious level, as I explored what was clear in my mind (Etherington, 2004; Etherington, 2007). I then

integrated a subconscious reflection by rereading the stories allowing them to wash over me. I was able to open my mind to “create new meanings and gain new understandings through the process of writing and reflection” (Etherington, 2004, p. 28). This was where the epiphanies manifested and were distilled as new knowledge.

An example of reflexivity in this thesis was when I wrote [‘Peering over the fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and ‘others’](#) - I first wrote the vignettes recording the bones of the story. Thinking about the performative aspect of these vignettes, I conceived of using a subconscious voice to speak to the scene, where the voice represented the conscience of Karen, but glimpsed at her wider environment as well. It spoke to the anomaly that even though I may have had opportunities to report the abuse that I was experiencing, for partly obvious and partly obscure reasons I did not (dichotomous I know, but I explain this in more detail inside the study). Second, when I read the completed vignettes, I felt that there was a missing piece. As per my process, I slept on this missing piece and woke with the idea to add the Epilogue, which relates the death of my stepfather (Barley, Under Review a). The wider view of this experience was despite the torture I had endured by my stepfather’s hands I sat with him until he died and forgave him. I am unsure if that reveals my cowardice or humanity.

When I was ultimately happy with the editing process, I examined the vignettes as one whole and illuminated underlying themes, arguments, and overall discussion points, including relevant research. I would argue that the performative piece, [‘Peering over the fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and ‘others’](#) is the most revelatory as it is the most raw and poignant. I have stripped the experiences bare, wrestled with the memories, but also released the voice of the subconscious Karen. It was the subconscious

voice in these stories where I felt the most naked as “it is often dirty work, this digging into the rich soil of humanity... [that] we cannot keep the soil out from under our nails, the clay off our faces, and the sand away from the folds of our skin” (Pelias, 2013, p. 387).

Selection of Stories/Autoethnographies

Woven through each autoethnographic article are themes relating to my childhood; my professional life as an educator; the purpose and value of storytelling and stories in my life; and an exploration of how I was guided by the epiphany as a way to seek solace, wisdom and direction whilst navigating the various traumas I faced. I provide an overview of each article at the beginning of each chapter. The common thread in each article is epiphany and moments of epiphanous change. As each story evolved, I became curious about this occasion I was calling the epiphany.

Chapter Three

Understanding the epiphany in autoethnography: A historical and personal context (Author: Karen Barley. Under Review by the Journal of Autoethnography).

This chapter contains the first of five individual autoethnographical studies written for this thesis by publication. This study was completed last, but for clarity I ordered this the first article inside this document. As explained in the exegesis, it was not in my original plan to do each article as an autoethnography but this methodology became the most logical process to take. It also meant that the studies were not written in any kind of order. Once I completed all the articles, the sequence became clear.

This article comprises part narrative and part autoethnography on the epiphany from a historical and personal context. This is significant because of the pivotal role of the epiphany in an autoethnographic study and in my thesis. The narrative/autoethnographical study became a vital part of this thesis as I sought to understand the role of the epiphany in autoethnographic writing and my life. It was essential to explore how the epiphany evolved over time, having unique significance in different contexts, which segued to exploring how the historical perspective influenced the wider context of the epiphany in everyday life. This study examines the value of the epiphanic moment and delves into the history of the phenomenon where I explore the epiphany in religion, poetry and science. This understanding assisted me in contextualising my relationship to the epiphany when writing an autoethnography. There are a number of studies on autoethnography, which reference the epiphany, but my focus has been on the impact of the epiphany in life, both personally and professionally, especially when examining the role of the epiphany in transformative life change/s. I also sought to establish the value of the epiphany to the autoethnographic process. Other researchers have explored its use inside an autoethnographic study but I set out to

establish what makes the epiphany a vital ingredient to this writing process and one that separates the autoethnography from storytelling or narrative writing.

(The referencing for this article is Chicago Manual Style as per the submitted journal's requirements).

Understanding the epiphany in autoethnography: A historical and personal context

Abstract

The epiphany conjures up ideas of imagination, invention and discovery. Throughout history, it has been called the 'aha' or 'eureka' moment, transformation, insight and quantum change. The epiphany has also had distinct connotations reflective of genre and history where the meaning is rediscovered and reimagined. There are many articles written on autoethnography as methodology, which discuss the value of the epiphany to narrative writing, but there are minimal studies that focus on the epiphany itself. Understanding the pivotal nature of the epiphany in history, its evolution throughout many genres and quintessential nature to autoethnographic writing is vital to anyone attempting this research method. This narrative intertwines a synopsis of the epiphany and vignettes that reflect upon the value of the epiphany in the life of the researcher.

Keywords

Autoethnography, history, epiphany, storytelling

Epiphany as a Pivotal Point to the Researcher and Research

One of my closest friends Garry stopped by my office and declared, “I can’t stay, it’s a beautiful day and I’m going to go for a walk in the sunshine. Do you want to come for afternoon tea tomorrow, I have had an epiphany and I’m dying to tell you about it?” I was busy, so I called out, “yes, see you then, can’t wait”.

Garry was my gorgeous friend, ebullient and romantic; deep and insightful. I loved him and treasured our connection and tête-à-têtes. Afternoon tea was an intricate affair laden with delicate, Royal Daulton china, ‘real’ English Breakfast tea from a matching teapot and homemade cakes and biscuits. I looked forward to the awaiting chat and culinary surprises.

Later that evening, I received a call from mutual friends. Garry was at their house. Distressed and hysterical, they told me paramedics were trying to revive my beautiful friend. He’d collapsed... I told them I’d be there as fast as I could. I was only twenty minutes away...praying, please be ok, please be ok. By the time I arrived it was too late. Garry had died of a massive stroke. I sat upon his deathbed, peering at his lifeless face. Looking dishevelled and exposed, I thought to myself... *he would hate anyone seeing him like this...* I covered him up and cried. Just like that, gone.

As I drove home I recalled our last conversation. I said out aloud “Garry, how bloody rude to die without telling me what your epiphany was.” I hate intrigue and surprises so this was the ultimate gag. I smile as I write this, because it’s hilarious and just like Garry to keep me wondering.

This story is pivotal because Garry was so keen to tell me about his epiphany because we’d been discussing the value of the epiphany in the evolution of self. McDonald describes the epiphany as “sudden and abrupt insights...that transform the individual’s concept of self and identity through the creation of new meaning in the individual’s life” (2008, p. 90). I have been noticing those ‘aha’ moments for all of my life and the messages have rarely been lost on me. Epiphanies have been poignant and profound and directed my life’s trajectory by providing experiences of transcendence that effects change and transformation (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; McDonald, 2008). Undertaking historical research on the epiphany is valuable to the subsequent work utilising autoethnographical studies “to engage with and challenge [my] assumptions about the nature of being, the nature of knowledge, and what can

be known” (Rapley, 2018, p.185) on the topic. Epiphanies are an integral by product of autoethnographic research and understanding the nature of the phenomenon necessary.

I am also attempting to isolate when and how these moments occur and how one can make the most of these occasions. In my experience epiphanies materialise instantly and randomly and serve as powerful life lessons. These episodes can eventuate during moments of crisis, or exhilaration; when vivid enlightenment occurs; which leads to a deep and profound transformation to one aspect or all of your life (Miller, 2004). Whatever the experience of the epiphany, life is destined to never be the same (Hogan, 2004; McDonald, 2008; Miller & C’de Baca, 2001).

McDonald (2008, p. 93) explores the epiphanic experience in a comprehensive study and identifies six epiphanic characteristics: antecedent state, suddenness, personal transformation, illumination/insight, meaning making and enduring nature. Explained further the *antecedent state* is the state before the epiphany occurs where you may be depressed, anxious or in crisis. The epiphany usually occurs with *suddenness*, which explains that aha moment, or abrupt realisation. An epiphany can be conflated with personal transformation where one may experience an “experience of profound change and transformation in self-identity” (McDonald, 2008, p. 93). This also connects to a period of *illumination/insight* where the ‘light bulb’ literally comes on, shining light on some new awareness. Finally, the epiphany is transformative to the individual and has an *enduring nature* to the life-changing event. Miller and C’de Baca (2001) call this all-encompassing, permanent change to the individual’s identity, the phenomenon of quantum change. The following story exemplifies McDonald’s idea of the epiphany:

At the age of twenty-four, I was pregnant with my first baby. The relationship I was in was not working and I felt concerned about how I was going to support myself and a baby. I hadn’t set out to be a single mother and the future was daunting. Before I fell pregnant, I had secured a job at my local

school as a teacher's aide which I hoped to return to after my baby was born. As part of my work at the school I was often asked to take small groups and a number of teachers had suggested that I should become a teacher. The more I thought about it, the more I wondered if it was something I could achieve. A few months later, after I had given birth to my beautiful daughter, I visited an old teacher who had stayed in touch with me. I did really well academically during my Higher School Certificate despite many family problems and a number of teachers helped me during this time. They allowed me to study at their kitchen table and made sure I could get to school and attend my exams. Due to my family environment I did not pursue further study. I told Mrs Jess about my concerns for the future and she said "Karen, go be a teacher, you can do it". I don't know why but her validation of my dream was like a lightbulb (Barley, Under Review a). "Maybe, I can do this?" I asked myself.

The visit with Mrs Jess coincided with the deadline for when Universities accepted applications for the following year. I told my Mother that I would apply to the closest campus, to one course (Primary Education) and if I got in, I would do it, if I didn't so be it. Fast forward a few months and I received a letter accepting my application. I read the letter and exclaimed to my mother, "Fuck, I have to do it now!" Somehow the universe had conspired to create the epiphany of possibility. I took my five month old to lectures with me and gained consistent high grades and three years later, I achieved a teaching degree. My life took a turn that would totally change my future. It might sound short sighted and hard to believe but I had no idea how much I wanted to be a teacher until I received that letter. The light bulb stayed on and I knew I would dedicate my life to this career.

Another way of looking at the epiphany is the idea of quantum change, delineated by Miller (2004) as profound, enduring change that has the following similarities:

distinctiveness, surprise, benevolence and permanence. When considering the above story this tale contains all of those elements. The situation was distinctive, surprising and out of the ordinary and I felt compelled to act. Despite the events surrounding this period, I felt relief in the awareness of what I should do. Finally, the results were permanent. With a new baby in tow my determination to succeed kicked in and I was an impassioned and excellent student. This awakening brought out a personal truth and the effect was "accompanied by intense emotion and a cathartic, even ecstatic sense of relief and release" (Miller, 2004, p. 457). No matter what a teaching degree would be something I could and would always fall back on.

The epiphany is pivotal to me as a researcher as its catalytic nature that has directed, defined and transformed my life. In essence, study and the other accompanying autoethnographies tell the stories of my transformation. The epiphany has been my way of self-reflection and therapeutic self-discovery. Miller defines this a form of insight beyond psychotherapy that transmutes into self-actualisation (2004). Life changes, the importance of what matters changes, relationships change, core values change and finally the self changes. The challenges in my life have been the impetus to search for answers and it was the epiphany that irrevocably transformed those experiences. Birthed from the heartache and pain of my past was resilience and resolve and discovering the epiphany was the catalyst for redemption. I was not aware of the power of the epiphany in my life until I started doing my PhD and I wrote my first autoethnography. As I put pen to paper, each story culminated into the next driven by a series of consecutive epiphanies. The epiphany became my guide. Each crossroad I faced the next idea would form and I allowed myself to be led by “something bigger, unique and [an] often overlooked understanding concerning the complex problems that riddle communicative worlds” (Berry & Patti, 2015, p. 266).

Methodology

A phenomenological and idiographic exploration suited my quest to examine how epiphanous change is important to my personal and professional growth. Phenomenology is a philosophy which describes phenomena “in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer” (Moran, 2000, p. 4). Phenomenology is what matters to us in regards to the lived experience and from a psychological lens, how “phenomenological philosophy... [provide] us with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 11). Simply stated, phenomenology revives “our living contact with reality” (Moran, 2000, p.5). As a researcher I am not separate from the research because

the research I conduct can be informative and mutually shape the influences and value patterns of self and others (Bresler, 1995). Distilling the research phenomenologically made sense to me as an organic process. Whilst I had guidelines and objectives to follow I allowed room for the investigation to navigate roads that were unexpected. Hence, the research could evolve holistically facilitating the development of design and methods utilising a creative and innovative approach (Preissle & Roulston, 2019). This organic method led me to the epiphany as vital to my personal and professional life so much so I felt persuaded to examine the history of the epiphany within this study.

As an educator, I enjoy telling stories and anecdotes and my students report that the stories make the class interesting; stories act to solidify the theoretical elements with realism and authenticity. Phenomenology and autoethnography allow the researcher to open a door to personal experiences and meanings where one can be sensitive to the language and the social and cultural world of the participant (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Todorova, 2011). I have been on a lifelong quest to make sense of the world, especially on issues and topics that have influenced or affected me (Barley & Southcott, 2019; Barley, 2020b). Hence using this method is most apposite as it is based on the preface that people are sense-making creatures finding meaning of the lived experience and the interpretation by the author is representative of the experience itself (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Memories via storytelling poured upon the page while I reflexively examined the recollections (Etherington, 2004). Reflexivity occurs when we examine an event and consider feelings, emotions and reactions and the influence this had on future decisions and actions (Brand, 2015; Etherington, 2004).

The autoethnography allows the researcher to inflect heart and humanity into the illumination of lived experiences that provides ethical quality with a deeper and more reflective examination (Smith et al., 2009) and in this way the data can then be viewed under a microscope that affords many layers and interpretations (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Utilising

reflection as a tool ensures that the researcher is continuously examining how they may be influencing the data (Krefting, 1991).

Autoethnographic Study

Autoethnography brought heightened attention to human suffering, injustice, trauma, subjectivity, feeling, and loss; encouraged the development of reflexive and creative methodologies through which to navigate the landscape of lived experience; and legitimated unconventional forms of documenting and expressing personal experience in literary, lyrical, poetic, and performative ways. That's the positive.

(Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 45)

Autoethnography is a research approach that consists of an autobiographical personal narrative, which explores the author's experience of life (Mallet, 2001). This methodological approach places value on the awareness of a person's understanding of his or her identity and background with a particular context in mind (Antikainen, Houtsonen, Huotelin & Kauppila, 1996; Berry & Patti, 2015). The autoethnography not only provides an autobiographical landscape but also explores the poignant junctures in life that transformed my future self and career (Barley, 2020a; Barley, 2020b; Barley, Under Review a; Barley & Southcott, 2019). There are "innumerable ways one's personal identity and experience can influence the foundation of the research process" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 275) and utilising an autoethnographical approach has been integral to examining the insights, revelations and life changes of the writer. Central to this examination is the epiphany; "how it is experienced, how it is defined, and how it is woven through the multiple strands of a person's life, constitutes the focus of critical interpretive inquiry" (Denzin, 2001, p. 28).

I have written stories since I was eight years old and my stories are honest and raw reflections on various junctures and experiences during my lifetime. My means of escaping the

childhood abuse I experienced was writing as a way to express my despair and pain so I quickly found the skill to shroud the truth inside the words. Every inch of my life was scrutinised by my stepfather, so I could not risk him reading my work and knowing I was writing about him (Barley, 2020a; Barley, 2020b; Barley, Under Review a). Words became the cave I crawled into; stories became the camouflage and sometimes the cry for help; writing was my haven, my joy, my place of serenity (Barley, 2020a).

For my thirteenth birthday my Nana gave me a mini binder with A5 lined paper. In the seventies there wasn't the cornucopia of children's stationery there is today so in my hands was a rare treasure. This thing delighted me and I carried it everywhere. I began writing fantasy stories, stories of escape, stories of survival all wrapped in code for "please... someone help me." The characters were feisty; embattled but fearless. The writing became a way for me to embody the epiphanies of hope. If the protagonist could survive, then I could too. As each champion survived their perilous surroundings, the imagined epiphany paved the way for me to grow stronger. As I wrote the stories I grew stronger, tougher, emboldened. The heroes in my stories illuminated a way for me to escape. They were the 'superhumans' who defeated the common enemy.

Using this research tool I have been able to write stories that are hopeful, where I could write myself as the explorer and the survivor of the story I was living (Ellis, 2016). There are also stories that are tragic, sad, poignant crying out for rescue as the autoethnographical story "asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be" (Ellis, 2016, p. 10).

The epiphany is a vital ingredient of the autoethnography. The epiphany is that crucial moment of illumination and awareness that transforms and transcends. They are manifested from the "sting of memory" (Denzin, 2016, p. 125) where the "memories are experienced moments of epiphany which are repeated over and over again" (Denzin, 2014, p. 5). The epiphany is when we are "standing on a sheer existential cliff" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 68) wondering how we will survive the chaos and confusion. Even at the tender age of thirteen, I had the awareness that through writing I could "shine a ray of hope through the boundless

darkness to find positive meanings in [my] gloomiest experiences” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 68).

We depend on stories almost as much as we depend on the air we breathe. Air keeps us alive; stories give meaning to our existence. One of the main goals of autoethnography is to put meanings into motion, and the best way to do that is to tell stories. (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 76)

Autoethnographical writing about the personal and its relationship to culture is “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). This study asks the reader to think about the epiphany and its place in lived experiences. Do we grasp these periods of insight and make the most of the inspiration, or do we let them pass us by? This autoethnographic approach identifies and integrates subjectivity, emotionality and accommodates the researcher’s influence on the research, rather than assuming that it does not exist (Ellis et al., 2011). The autoethnography provided a forum for me to share my life and love of education; as well as personal epiphanies of human endurance. I am able to invite the reader to co-experience, as a co-researcher “to understand self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 279). The story becomes a shared journey of knowledge and understanding as the storyteller reveals ‘the voice of the insider’ (Berry & Patti, 2015; Dyson, 2007). As a phenomenological and autoethnographical researcher I am able to dissect these moments reflecting upon the “embodied, experiential meanings [of those events] aiming for a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p. 6).

History and Story

If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.

— Rudyard Kipling, *The Collected Works*, 2007

Whilst considering the impact of the epiphany and its value to autoethnographic writing practice, it seemed vital to retrace the evolution of this happenstance in the context of history. History is an exploration and historians “hold a mental magnifying glass over individuals, societies, organisations and global structures, and specialise in recording and passing on what they observe upon close examination” (Johanson, 2018, p. 292). History often interweaves fact and fiction. Storytelling is perhaps as old as time and integrated into stories an aphorism via the ‘moral of the story’ (Chang, 2016). This could be interpreted as the ‘epiphany’ of the story. Imagine indigenous clans sitting around the campfire on a starry night listening to their elder’s history and tales. I recall vividly sitting with my grandparents, eager to hear their stories of yesteryear with a sense of wonder and awe. I’m now in the privileged position where I share stories with my grandbabies. Stories are naturally derived from “the autobiographical components of storytellers especially when the stories feature the storytellers’ ancestors, families, relatives, neighbours or communities” (Chang, 2016, p. 31). Written narratives are the by-product of this kind of autobiographical storytelling (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Chang, 2016).

My stepfather was not well educated and I was brought up believing that Australia was for Australians, and white was for white. The only religion my stepfather understood was beer and Australian Rules Football (in equal measure). I am not sure how (at eight years old), but I knew his bigoted views were wrong. I could not connect to his espoused values and went in search for my own truth. This is a time in my life where books saved me (Barley, 2020a; Barley & Southcott, 2019) and I was already a voracious and accomplished reader. I unearthed history, via the library and I read stories of slavery, the holocaust, war and religious conflict. I formed my own values and beliefs and of course they were a far cry from those of my family. These were little pieces of revelation that I discovered as I devoured the past and put the pieces together to encapsulate my new sensibility and values. I would pretend that I was adopted as I couldn’t comprehend how I was a part of the family of my stepfather. As it turns out, I was technically adopted. My mother was my ‘real’ mother but she had me out of wedlock and met my stepfather when I was eighteen months old. All I could remember was my Mum and Dad together.

I grew up never knowing my stepfather was not my ‘real’ father. When I was twenty one, I accidentally fell pregnant but had a miscarriage. I discovered I had O negative blood and that I needed an injection due to the Rhesus factor in future pregnancies. Curious, I asked my mother if she had to have this injection, she said “no, she was O positive”. I reply, “Is Dad O negative?” She says, “No, he’s positive too”. Hmm. About a week later I couldn’t get this conversation out of my mind. I’m not a scientist but it didn’t make sense that I had neither parent’s blood type. I asked a cousin and he said, “Karen, you’re smart and it sounds to me like you’ve already figured this out.” I stayed awake all night. What? All this time... All the things that didn’t add up suddenly did. My stepfather always telling my Mum “she’s your daughter”. His refusal to give a speech at my 21st birthday? My relatives giving me the pitying nod and with whispered tones, saying “Don’t worry about him.” That I never felt connected to him, that I never felt like I belonged. Talk about having a rug pulled out from underneath my life. I was stunned, but I was also relieved. My life finally fell apart but also fell into place... my life made sense. Epiphany! I was nothing like him... thank God.

To understand the epiphany in the twenty-first century and its impact on the researcher requires reflecting on how the concept of epiphany evolved. Historically the meaning of the epiphany has a different connotation depending upon the situation and environment (Petridou, 2016). An exploration of the history and genre of epiphanies is a necessary study which lays the foundation for future studies. Most importantly I contend that it is via storytelling that the epiphany has the potential to manifest. Quintessentially the epiphany is critical to the success of the autoethnographic study as it serves two functions: to elucidate the author, and enlighten the reader (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Bochner & Rigg, 2014; Denzin, 2014; Douglas & Carless, 2016). As an author, there are moments when an epiphany was constructed where I consciously wrote them into my story but there were other occasions when the epiphany popped up onto the page, sparkling and twinkling, catching my mind’s eye.

Epiphany Across History and Genre

The Middle English *epiphanie* is suggested to be from the Anglo-French and Late Latin *epiphania* and from the Late Greek plural, which is probably an alteration of the Greek

epiphaneia - appearance, manifestation; from *epiphainein* to manifest, from *epi-* + *phainein* to show (Etymonline, 2019b). Nichols (1987, p. 5) states the word “epiphany” derives from the Greek *phainein* meaning, “to show.” Petridou (2016, p. 3) expands upon this definition and explains the Greek verb as φαίνω: “to show, to make visible, bring to light, or make known”. It derives from the root *φᾱ, meaning, “to shine, to radiate, to startle, to sparkle, or to glow”. “Light, then, is not only a conspicuous semeion of divine presence...; it is inextricably intertwined with divine epiphany; it lies at the very heart of the notion” (p.3).

In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2019b), the most complete definition offers the following ideas:

- A usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something
- An intuitive grasp of reality through something usually simple and striking
- An illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure

As I explored far and wide the topography of epiphany, I discovered there are many crossroads, detours and cul-de-sacs. Each genre has a plethora of perspectives and understandings to examine, so much so that I had to narrow the parameters of this study. The religious epiphany spans across many cultural and spiritual domains (Kellenberger, 2017) but I have chosen to focus on the Judeo Christian religion primarily because this is the religion that was predominant in my life experiences. Similarly, the poetic epiphany has a multitude of examples; in both author and text, consequently I have relied on those illustrated in the research I discovered. Finally, the scientific epiphany has depth and breadth ranging from the streams of physics, chemistry, biology, as well as medical, psychological and psychiatry (Miller, 2004). The focus for this analysis is how the scientific epiphany informs qualitative research, especially research using autoethnography as method.

According to Kellenberger (2017, p. 9) “a religious epiphany is the appearance or manifestation of God, a god or goddess, or the divine or religious reality as received in human experience.” Langbaum (1957) suggests that poetry as utilised by Joyce, Yeats and Wordsworth was characterised by the ‘poetry of experience’, which relies on the human experience for its values and creates a new mythos out of imaginative insights into the enduring nature of things (Nichols, 1987). The scientific epiphany however can be viewed as the discovery of a solution to a problem, which can inexplicably transform lives in an instant. In that moment a person is so deeply changed that he or she can no longer be the same (Miller & C’de Baca, 2001). Exploring this notion further Grierson (2015) suggests that the epiphany occurs when an individual is under severe psychological pressure; when the bubble is about to burst and something must change before it does.

Epiphanies have been attributed to changing educational paradigms with a view to induce better practices and pedagogy that embraces the shifts in societal and global evolution. The phenomenon can provide “unexpected and unforced shifts in our understanding of ourselves, and of humankind’s common lot” (Hogan, 2004, p. 77). Understanding the role of the epiphany can influence the way that we educate current and future teachers. When considering writing autoethnographies as an educator and influencer “the experience of teaching and learning epiphanies may enable us to identify with and share in aspects of a cultural inheritance that previously seemed remote, forbidding or irrelevant” (Hogan, 2004, p. 77). Sharing the ‘aha’ moment brings legitimacy to the anecdotes that we tell.

Appreciating the historical evolution of the epiphany is vital to this discussion and will become clearer throughout the remainder of this article. I will first discuss the religious epiphany, as this is where I traced the origins of epiphany. It is possible the epiphany occurred before its religion but I chose to make this juncture the starting point of this study.

Religious Epiphanies

I'm not religious; I'm studying the road to holiness to see if it might also be possible to drive a car on it! (Musil, 1997, p. 815)

Petridou explains that the Greek religious origins relate to the manifestation or disappearance of a deity hence the concept of the epiphany was inextricably tied to enlightenment upon meeting a spiritual entity or deity. In Christian mythology, Kellenberger (2017) describes the religious epiphany as “the appearance or manifestation of God, a god or goddess, or the divine or religious reality, as received in human experience” (p. 9). This can be expressed via a visual apparition or as hearing the voice of ‘God’, or likewise the felt presence of an entity revealed through angels, spirits, embodiments or other transcendent beings. This throws one off their axis which produces a sense of awe, wonderment and the revelatory nature of God, the miraculous or divine. Miller (2004, p. 458) extrapolates that those who underwent “a mystical type of quantum change, experienced themselves momentarily in the presence of a transcendent Other” and when providing a description gave strikingly similar descriptions of the nature of the Other.

There are many religious epiphanies as described in the Bible. Moses’ encounter with God in Exodus (3:2-6). God appeared to Moses firstly on Mount Horeb as a burning bush and revealed who he was (Yahweh). “There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush” (Exodus 3:2). God commanded that he return to Egypt and bring his chosen people (Israel) out of bondage and into the Promised Land. Moses obeyed and led the Israelites to Mount Sinai where the revelation of the Ten Commandments was proclaimed as “the Lord spoke to [him] face to face out of the fire on the mountain” (Deuteronomy 5:4).

The noetic epiphany utilizing metaphors of light and supernatural visions permeate the bible and provide evidence of powerful and transformative encounters (Kellenberger, 2017). As described in Luke (2:8-15) an angel appears to the three wise men and guides them

via a heavenly light towards the stable to bear witness to the birth of the son of God. This event is significant on the Eastern Orthodox Church's calendar, known as the Christian feast of Epiphany (January 6th) and "celebrates the revelation of God in human form (Jesus Christ) to the Gentiles represented by the Magi, a meaning that is echoed and invoked in every 'grain of sand'" (van Itersen, Clegg & Carlsen, 2017, p. 224).

Paul experiences an epiphanic conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22) which transformed him from persecutor to believer. As Saul of Tarsus, he was an opponent and incarcerator of Christians in Jerusalem but one day on his way to the city Saul is confronted by a light from heaven that shined upon and around him. He heard a voice, asking him why he was persecuting him. Saul asked whom the voice was and what he was to do. "I am Jesus...Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:5-6). Instantaneously Saul was converted; he changed his name to Paul and proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God. It was not the appearance of God, or Paul hearing God that evoked the epiphany, but was the "supernatural in the phenomenal content of the 'light from heaven' which literally [made] him fall to the ground" (Kellenberger, 2017, p. 12).

A seminal researcher in this field, Starbuck (1901) referred to the conversion experience where there is a commitment to a higher power (God). In current day, this could be interpreted as an 'epiphany'. He stated "the term Conversion is used...in a very general way to stand for the whole series of manifestations just preceding, accompanying, and immediately following the apparently sudden changes of character involved". Starbuck (1901) connected the altered state of 'consciousness' to a conversion to religion, but also examined the psychological effects to one's character and stated that "these antecedents to change are numerous and various [and] are [a] determination to yield, longing, effort, performance of some act, serious thought, and the like" (p. 107). The bulk of his comprehensive study researched the evangelical reconnection with religion causing the

individual to examine their character, but he dedicated Chapter XI to Conversion as a Normal Human Experience (Starbuck, 1901, p. 135) to the natural (or non-religious) phenomena comparable to a religious event. He likened the experience of the epiphany as “sudden and apparently unaccountable awakenings of power and insight [that] are analogous to the larger spiritual awakenings” (Starbuck, 1901, p. 137). Starbuck described a number of instances when these events may occur such as depression and joy; sudden awakenings; sudden changes to emotional attitude; and breaking of habits. He conceded that any of these experiences can occur without a ‘conversion’ but can be considered a factor of natural brain function, declaring, “however inexplicable, the facts of conversion are manifestations of natural processes” (Starbuck, 1901, p. 143). Kellenberger also referred to epiphanies that are not noetic in nature, such as unconscious epiphanies that are “in a sense epiphanies without God, in that though they are experiences of God, the God that is being experienced is not realized” (2017, p. 140). Despite the absence of a theistic encounter the impact is just as powerful where there is “transcendent impersonal, or non-personal, religious reality” (James, 1985, p. 302). James goes on to describe this as having a noetic quality that “feels like a state of knowledge; a revelation of truth, yet cannot be expressed in words...its impact is superior to that of any merely verbal formulation” (1985, p. 302). Significantly, this work contends that the epiphany is not dependent on a meeting with a spiritual entity, which then opens up the field to examination in other areas.

Poetic Epiphany

'twas a moment's pause -
All that took place within me came and went
As in a moment, yet with Time it dwells
And grateful memory, as a thing divine.
— William Wordsworth, The Prelude, 1805

The poetic or literary epiphany has evolved from the concept of transformation that was previously viewed through the lens of inspiration. Northrop Frye (1957), well known theorist on literary criticism described the epiphany as an actual event, brought into contact with the creative imagination, but is a phenomenon that becomes actual in its own terms. He goes on to state that epiphanies are valuable to modern literature because of their ability to produce an association between the random and the oracular. The literary epiphany is one where the mind half perceives and half creates; where the epiphany occurs in the mind of the poet and the poem; emphasizing the ability of the mind to assign significance to particular events (Nichols, 1987, rephrased). Also importantly, the epiphany can be individual and singular and radiates significance distinctly from one reader to the next.

The images and metaphors contained inside poetry can “convey a variety of meanings and interpretations of a single moment in time” (Adame, Leitner & Knudson, 2011, p. 373). Just like the motor-sensory experience of listening to music “poetry is one such expression that is able to communicate an experience beyond the words on the page” (Adame, et al., 2011, p. 375). Experiencing a literary epiphany can be like “moments of perceptual intensity and profundity...instances when it seems we can peer into the true reality behind the self or the world” (Bauer, 2001, p. 1). Representations in the poetic asks the reader to relate to words through vision and imagination, where our perceptions of the world expand and evolve. This is how poetry can illustrate and extrapolate on the particulars of lived experience provoking personal transformation (Kirmayer, 2000).

Robert Langbaum, English literature educator and critic from the 1950s explored Nietzsche’s Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy of poetry as meaning, or poetry of experience (Langbaum, 1957; Golomb, 1990). The reader understands and identifies with the poetic through a conduit of illuminated sympathy and judgement and connection to their own life and life experience.

...a poetry of experience which is at the same time both subjective and objective in that the poet talks about himself and other things, finding his meaning in neither but evolving it through an interchange and final fusion between the two. The lyric and the drama fuse into the single Dionysian genre in the same sense of the poetry of experience. (Langbaum, 1957, p. 232)

Langbaum (1957) explains further that poetry as utilised by the likes of Joyce, Yeats and Wordsworth was characterised by the poetry of experience; this poetry relies on the structure of human experience for its values and creates a new mythos out of imaginative insights into the enduring nature of things. Essentially this is viewed as a transformation of what was known previously as forms of inspiration. Nichols (1987, p. 4) argues, “the modern literary epiphany offers a new form of meaning in which the moment of inspiration is absolute and determinate while the significance provided by the epiphany is relative and indeterminate”. The important role of the literature epiphany is that by utilising the power of words, an author can invite the reader to “realize [the author’s] epiphanies as expressions of real moments of truth in [their] lives” (Bauer, 2001, p. 3).

The literary epiphany evolved from the nineteenth century into formal techniques in modern poetry. During this time, poems and poetry of the Victorian and Romantic eras contained an element of the epiphany that stemmed from divine inspiration, religious conversion or mystical vision, intertwined with romantic notions. Whilst the idea of the poetic epiphany became more prevalent in the Romantic Era, this is not to say that poets from previous eras did not use epiphanic devices. Poets such as Milton, Donne and Vaughan integrated the notion of the divine epiphany into their verse encapsulated by themes of Christianity and religion. By the twentieth century originating with Wordsworth and evolving over the next century, many poets and writers used the epiphany as a literary tool. The poetic epiphany is one Joyce defined as the combination of the imagination and literary techniques

that “[manifests] in and through the visible world of an invisible” but tangible awakening (Langbaum, 1957, p. 2).

Revelation in poetry evolved from the notion of ‘inspired by God’ to that derived from the human feelings, sensations and romantic experience (Poulet, 1956). Stemming from ‘romantic’ epiphany was the concept of kairos time (Nichols, 1987). Instead of chronological time, kairos time was where time exists at any point in the imagination. A moment in time can then “possess more than normal significance because of the powerful feelings with which they are invested” (Nichols, 1987, p. 26-7). As an example Keats, in the poem *Endymion* explores immortality in a way where “ordinary perceptions are transformed into archetypes of everlastingness”. The experience of love and romance is condensed to a single epiphany where one might feel like they would live forever.

O what a wild and harmonized tune
My spirit struct from all the beautiful!
On some bright essence could I lean, and
lull
Myself to immortality.
— John Keats, *Endymion*, 1818

Literature has the power to be evocative and induce epiphanies (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Stories and poetic expression has the ability to “elevate the sensory and perceptual experience to unprecedented heights” (Bauer, 2001, p. 4), which can provide a powerful insight into the authors and by osmosis the reader’s life (Bauer, 2001).

Most of us can remember the strangely moving power of passages in certain poems read when we were young, irrational doorways as they were through which the mystery of fact, and the wildness and the pang of life, stole into our hearts and thrilled them. (James, 1985, p. 3014)

As I embarked upon the composition of the autoethnography, my love of writing came back to me as flooded memory. I had stopped writing for pleasure some time ago, hence the epiphany of this project was rediscovering writing; but now I could integrate my joy of research, integrating personal stories and exploring the transformation of the epiphany within the stories.

Science Epiphany

When we think of the epiphany in science, it is easy to draw on historical references to inventors and innovators who have been wrapped in mythology and legend. Human achievement and scientific epiphanies usually relate to innovation and happy accidents leading to breakthrough and discovery (Austin, Devin & Sullivan, 2012). Many tales may be considered apocryphal, but the ‘eureka moment’ of discovery has been entrenched in the scientific community.

The word *eureka* is attributed to Archimedes when he stepped into a bath and noticed the rise of the water level (Austin et al., 2012; Golden, 1996). This discovery attributed to the understanding of displacement and Archimedes' principle of the physical law of buoyancy (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2019c) cites: Eureka (noun) is “used to express triumph on a discovery” and as an adjective denotes as “marked by sudden triumphant discovery”. The word stems from the Greek *heurēka*, meaning, “I have found, from *heuriskein* to find” (Merriam-Webster, 2019c; Oxford, 2019). The ‘eureka moment’ refers to an “instant in which a scientific discovery is made or breakthrough occurs; a moment of inspiration; [or] an exciting or significant experience” (Merriam-Webster, 2019c; Oxford, 2019).

The ‘eureka moment’ can also be called the ‘aha’ moment which can be described as an “expression of surprise or delighted discovery” derived from ah + ha combined (Etymonline, 2019a). The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2019a) expands this

definition to “a moment of sudden realization, inspiration, insight, recognition, or comprehension.” I contend that both definitions correlate and can be attributed to the science epiphany. Alan Hirshfield (2009) in his biography of Archimedes, *Eureka Man* describes the moment when water splashed over the rim as Archimedes immersed himself inside the bath as a time when “the mundane had become momentous” (p. 4). The ‘eureka’ expletive can then be described as a joyous eruption when “an experiment yields a sublime result or disparate ideas cohere into a beautiful theory” (Hirshfield, 2009, p. 4).

What is in some debate is how the science epiphany occurs. Is the science epiphany a point of breakthrough, or ‘insight’ where the “‘Aha!’ phenomenon, is indispensable to discovery and invention in science and the arts” (Golden, 1996, p. 1)? Or, does the ‘eureka moment’ occur after months and even years of trial and error (Weightman, 2015; Weinberg, 2003)? I contend that both are equally valid. The epiphany of insight stems from the mulling of a problem or issue for a period of time. Performing science by way of invention and design can involve arduous quests for discovery, where eventually a ‘eureka moment’ occurs when a new technology works for the first time, or when the researcher discovers a fortuitous breakthrough in the scientific domain that leads to either a new creation or advancement (Weinberg, 2003; Weightman, 2015). Generally, these breakthroughs are a springboard for future proliferation in the field that impacts future generations. Oftentimes the discovery can occur as a result of an accident or a discovery can also be overlooked and it is not until later that the value of the breakthrough is realised (Garwin & Lincoln, 2003). Unlike the religious epiphany that occurs supernaturally and instantaneously and the artistic epiphany which is likened to a rush of inspiration, Weinberg (2003, p. ix) states that “science, unlike theology or the arts, is a cumulative enterprise”. One may argue over the exact process but “most scientists now agree that insight is a special ability to see an old problem in a new way, often triggered by a chance sensation or encounter” (Golden, 1996, p. 1). What drives inventors is

the quest to find the possibility in the impossible. Their success is often “dependent on a great many earlier inventions as well as on the ingenuity of scientists and philosophers” who preceded them (Weightman, 2015, p. 28).

It is impossible within this discussion to do a complete history of the science epiphany, which is why I have chosen two exemplars to illustrate the impact of the epiphany in science research: the Wright Brothers and Marie Curie. The historical and future ramifications of their inventions and discoveries are pivotal and both stories exemplify the persistence required to achieve the ‘eureka’ moment. Their breakthroughs occurred after years of painstaking experimentation and seemingly against all odds (Weightman, 2018). These scientist/inventors inspire me: the Wright brothers, for their sheer bravery, as they literally risked their lives for their ‘eureka moment’ and Marie Curie, renowned as one of the first female scientists. She also had to persevere in a male dominated world to be recognised for her breakthroughs and “was one of the first to face the issues that continue to challenge women in medicine and science today: gender discrimination, work life balance issues, [and] the challenge of being a single parent” (Spalluto, 2017, p. 46).

The Wright Brothers spent their lifetime trying to discover the secret to flying. They were not the only scientists on this quest but after years of studying the wingspan and flight pattern of birds, while working through many failures, they made their dream a reality. I can only imagine the exhilaration of the Wright Brothers when they daringly corralled their aircraft on the beaches of Kittyhawk, North Carolina on December 17, 1903. They embarked on four flights, the most successful, flown by Wilbur flew for 59 seconds before crashing but their triumph was their ‘eureka moment’. After labelled as crazy and reckless, they had proved the impossible (Jakab, 1990; Weightman, 2018). When observing the history of invention, "there is a tendency to focus on the triumphant moment of success, the so-called eureka moment, when, in a flash of insight or with ground-breaking creative act, a new

discovery of invention is born" (Jakab, 1990, p. xiii). It is equally important to acknowledge how the brothers were able to solve a range of technical puzzles that baffled many before them and were able to conceive solutions by visualizing the abstract of how flight could be made manifest (Jakab, 1990; Weightman, 2018).

Marie Skłodowska-Curie as of the turn of the twentieth century was the world's most famous scientist. She won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903 (in partnership with her husband and Henri Becquerel) and later individually in chemistry in 1911 for her discovery of radium and polonium, which would prove vital to the future of cancer research. She is one of four people who have won the Nobel Prize twice (Sanz, 2015). She also revealed to the science world the concept of radioactivity and "proved that the atom was not inert, indivisible, or solid" (McGrane, 1998, p. 11).

Marie discovered that ionization, the phenomenon of where the element uranium can blacken photographic images and that the air around uranium could conduct electricity. She felt an inkling that further research on the elements could produce important discoveries and she was right. She discovered that another element, thorium produces the same powerful effects of uranium (Gasinska, 2016; McGrane, 1998) and discovered a "simple, but totally unexpected phenomenon: the strength of radiation depends on the amount of uranium or thorium in the compound" (McGrane, 1998, p. 21). Vitally, she deduced that radioactivity does not depend on how atoms are arranged into molecules, but that it must come from the atom itself. Ultimately, Marie and her husband Pierre discovered two new elements - polonium and radium. They also coined the term radioactivity (Gasinska, 2016; McGrane, 1998; Spalluto, 2017). These discoveries were breakthroughs in the scientific community in that Marie Skłodowska-Curie demanded attention to "the invisible world inside the atom" (McGrane, 1998).

Pierre Curie, to his credit fought for Marie's achievements and lobbied for Marie to receive the Nobel, but Marie Skłodowska-Curie paved the way for women in science and her imagination led to ground-breaking work in cancer treatment, x ray equipment and so much more. She paid the ultimate sacrifice because sadly, this work cost Marie her life. She died in 1934 from leukaemia that she had acquired due to her long term exposure to radioactive materials. She left an enduring legacy that set an example for future female researchers and scientists; she demanded to be respected as a peer in a male dominated world; and proved that she could be a mother and a scientist. She also pioneered the value of relating science to people (Spalluto, 2017). I would love to ask Marie Skłodowska-Curie about how she followed her instincts and what epiphanies lead to her discoveries.

Discussion

A memory can be sprung loose by an encounter with quite another world.

(Coles, 1989, p. 191)

Epiphanies are complicated, often intangible and not always immediately recognisable but when they are, they affect transformative change to an individual's life, beliefs and attitudes and life trajectory. The autoethnography is the perfect vehicle for delivering an epiphany by way of illustration of how one's story has been shaped and shifted by that epiphanous moment of awareness and clarity (Bochner & Rigg, 2014). This makes for a profound and compelling research tool.

This article has traced three types of epiphany in history that are equally as relevant today:

- The religious or intuitive epiphany. This epiphany occurs in connection with a spiritual experience or connection. Today, it does not have to relate to a religious experience (although it can) but is a potent jolt of intuition, knowledge or awareness.

- The poetic or literary epiphany. This epiphany emanates from an experience with literature (poetry, novels, films, art) and via that relationship, life changing knowledge or wisdom is acquired either by the author or the audience. This is particularly crucial to the autoethnographic process, where the author and audience co-create symbiotically through engaging with the narrative.
- The scientific epiphany can eventuate as a breakthrough or aha moment, but more than likely scientific epiphanies can take years and years of preceding research and labour. What is unique about the science epiphany is that the phenomenon can be cumulative, linked to create one breakthrough. This is in essence the nature of research, but the value of the slow burn epiphany is often forgotten.

The autoethnographic epiphany can be a combination of all three abovementioned epiphanies. I made a deliberate attempt when writing my stories to allow them to flow onto the page organically. I did not want to be tied down to grammar, spelling, punctuation, so in the first stage wrote without inhibitions (Barley, 2020b; Barley, Under Review a). This meant that I used my intuition to guide me and if I was ever stuck, I would wait until the epiphany of the next piece came to my mind. My epiphanies were both inspirational and literary in that I allowed my memory to crawl back into time to reveal the moment of transformational change and writing these as autoethnography was a space to share them with the audience.

During a second stage of writing, I flourished the written work and used literary techniques to articulate the epiphany with the goal to take the reader on the journey with me. This process was reflexive and also purposeful (Etherington, 2004). At junctures of profundity, it was integral to find language that united author and reader. I had to ask myself, is this epiphany one that can be shared? What will we learn from being engaged in this collaborative enterprise? I sometimes wrestled with this process, as like Etherington “I [felt] encouraged to use my self as a powerful tool in my research, but on the other hand, I was still

concerned that others would not consider my personal experience to be a legitimate source of knowledge” (2004, p. 19).

Writing an autoethnography can also produce augmented epiphanies where they emerge from the process of ‘doing’ the autoethnography (Bochner & Rigg, 2014). The literary epiphany is constructed and conscious, (as the writer you write them deliberately and you know what they mean); the unexpected epiphany explodes from within the page. These are not planned, but accidental and in the true sense a breakthrough epiphany. Emerging from the rubble is knowledge you didn’t know before but transmutes your knowledge to something new.

Pioneers in the field of autoethnography, such as Denzin (2014) and Bochner and Ellis (2016) instil the idea of the epiphany being integral to autoethnographical writing. This study endorses this valued element but it became clear it was necessary to illuminate the epiphany purposefully. Without the epiphany in autoethnography, we have just a good story. I contend that the epiphany legitimises this methodology, but more importantly elevates the process as an invaluable research tool when studying self and others.

Limitations

As a historical and autoethnographical examination on epiphany, this study is not exhaustive. A comprehensive study of the epiphany in history would require an entire book to be written on the subject. The choice to include the religious, poetic/literature and scientific epiphany was subjective in that those genres aligned with the autoethnographic epiphany. I have endeavoured to be as thorough as possible, but there is room for future studies to examine the role of the epiphany in autoethnographic writing.

Conclusion

The epiphany in an autoethnographic study is pivotal to its standing as a significant research methodology. The epiphany is what makes the work stand out from just storytelling or narrative. It is the crux of the epiphany and its relevance to the overall study that: 1) connects the story to a wider communal audience and 2) unites the writer and the author on a collaborative journey. The writer of an autoethnography uses literary tools and techniques to invite the audience to navigate their way throughout the tale to ultimately reach co-constructed breakthroughs in awareness, knowledge and transformation. Sometimes those epiphanies are purposefully inserted into the study for the reader to find, but sometimes the epiphany can emerge from the experience of the ‘doing’ of the autoethnography. These are unexpected but mostly welcomed triggers for change. Understanding the historical context of the epiphany in religiosity, literature and science provides a foundation for examination, but also transcends how we view the epiphany moving forward.

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Chapter Four

[Life is like a box of Derwents - An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse](#) (Author: Karen Barley. Published by The Qualitative Report)

As I contemplated the phenomena that is the epiphany, it was impossible to ignore the impact that the epiphany has had upon my life. I wrestled with these thoughts grappling with the value of epiphany as research until I awoke with a burning desire to write my stories with more verisimilitude. It wasn't that I had not been honest previously, but that I had just skimmed the 'honesty' surface. Up until this moment, I had prepared a thesis that drip-fed the authentic me. This autoethnographic study literally scoops from the guts of my life... it reveals the grungy reality of a childhood that was pitted against CSA and the ramifications for one's childhood and entire life. The vignettes in this autoethnography ruminated from my history as I dug deep into my childhood to reveal snapshots of unrelated but interconnected experiences of sexual abuse. I chose to write about interconnected but unrelated personal experience of Childhood Sexual Abuse. The first story stemmed from the abuse I suffered at the hands of my stepfather during my childhood. The second vignette is based on an experience of sexual assault and kidnapping by a stranger when I was a teenager. The final vignette tells the story of betrayal by my ex-husband when he sexually assaulted my children. I endeavoured to write rich, potent stories that were candid and raw. I utilised the medium of colour to share the intimacy and pain of the topic. These momentous occasions throughout my life led to experiences of profound epiphanous transformation. The epiphanous sting afforded me the courage and resilience to endure these various events and simultaneously discover what I had in the depths of myself to survive and overcome.

Life is like a box of Derwents –
An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse

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Abstract

This autoethnographic study contains vignettes from my life of unrelated but interconnected experiences of sexual abuse which profoundly impacted my life through moments of epiphanous transformation. I am using my voice as the researcher and researched to write more authentically and evocatively as a way of truth telling about a difficult subject. This autoethnography invites you to walk in the shoes of myself as the storyteller and for that reason the vignettes are deliberately honest and expose aspects of my life that have previously been hidden. The vignettes weave together stories that have had a profound impact on me which eventually led me to a career in education. I contend that the experiences laid the foundations for what kind of educator I would become. The vignettes provide the foundation for a phenomenological study in which one teacher's life experiences are explored using autoethnographical stories reflexivity. The study is narrative in style and uses an evocative autoethnographic approach which compels the reader to take a walk into my past.

Keywords

Autoethnography, evocative autoethnography, phenomenology, reflexivity, sexual abuse, childhood sexual abuse

Introduction

Without possibility, I am drowning. I cannot breathe. For me, there is possibility in writing... finger stumbling blindly across the keyboard, tears streaming down my cheeks, engulfed in wonder, searching for sense in a senseless world. In my writing, in autoethnography, I seek to bring together the fragments of my experience.

(Poulos, 2014, p. 344)

I have always integrated colour into my life. No matter what I was doing or where or how, I invested in colour. Writing could not be black upon white; headings never plain but etched with every shade I had inside my pencil case; every few weeks, a different lacquer on my nails; and now I am older, variegates of colour in my hair. I would never choose plain stationery; instead, I searched for binders, folders and books that had hues that reflected my

personality. I did not want white walls when I bought my first home. Much to my Dad's horror, I insisted he paint each room a different colour: grey and burgundy for the lounge, blue for my bedroom, pink for my daughter's room, and apricot for the bathroom. Not a speck of white to be seen. Filling my exterior with colour was a way to increase the endorphins in my life so that the struggles didn't seem so bleak. To this day a rainbow will cause me to gasp with glee, for I believe Mother Nature just sent me a symbol of hope.

Since embarking on my doctoral studies, it's fitting that I found a way to add colour to my research via storytelling. Discovering the methodology of autoethnography brightened up my research life because I'll be frank, I found traditional research somewhat beige. Integrating storytelling using the methodological genre of autoethnography is tantamount to adding splashes of paint to the pages of my thesis. Some in academia may believe this borders on sacrilege but for me this meant that my thesis could be a way to creatively portray my true self upon the page. Autoethnography became the vehicle where my voice could be expressed artistically and imaginatively evoking an emotional response from the reader (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

I have a different reason for doing a PhD than most. Whilst I am competitive, my goal is not to garner an academic career; nor to achieve recognition in research, although this would be an added bonus. My ultimate objective is to share my journey through life, both personally and academically by conducting research that focuses on human longing, pleasure, pain, loss, grief, suffering, or joy (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2004). This is an enormously vulnerable and honest undertaking where I had to dig deep to find the courage to divulge a layer of myself that is normally hidden from view. However, I find myself as mature student, on the precipice where the poignancy of my story is bursting to be told and examined at the same time; where "the *mystory* is simultaneously a personal mythology, a public story, a

personal narrative, and a performance that critiques... taken [directly from my] personal history” (Denzin, 2014, p. 60).

I have grown up navigating a difficult childhood, traversing the tragic teens and wrestled inside my twenties, collapsed into thirty and forty and emerged fervently into my fifties. I have borne four children, had three failed marriages, and now I am a reinvigorated “Grandy” to beautiful grandbabies. I worked as a teacher for over thirty years in various locations and settings and I’ve also built my own business. I’ve travelled. I have loved, I’ve lived and learned. Having submerged myself into this academic endeavour, I am still seeking a way to colour and even as I write this, a sense of reality melds, as my perspective perpetually changes and transforms to illustrate both the human and educator in me (Rickard, 2014).

After reading the seminal text, *Evocative Autoethnography* by Bochner and Ellis (2016) which comprehensively substantiates the autoethnography as legitimate research methodology, it dawned on me that my first autoethnography (Barley & Southcott, 2019) was neither perfect nor resolved. I had hardly been bold enough, for in that piece I had white washed my life. Revealing more would require courage, as well as augmenting with depth and dimension. As a little girl, I had a friend who owned a pack of Derwent coloured pencils (Derwent pencils are one of the oldest brand of coloured pencils and originate from England). All of those pigments sat neatly in two trays; seventy-two fabulous, rich, potent colours. My cheaply bought pencils were opaque in comparison. I was jealous of the colour and still am, which provokes me to deliver a resolution to my story. My first piece (Barley & Southcott, 2019) feels pale and insipid, so this instalment must be vibrant and evocative so that that I can “make people feel deep in their guts and in their bones, using... literary artfulness and storytelling” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 63) as the reader becomes a voyeur to the story. My intention with this work, is to be redolent, but also authentic so as to provoke a reaction from

the reader. I do not make any apology for this, as it has taken sheer determination to write and may take courage to read.

As I continued to read Bochner and Ellis (2016), I was struck by an epiphany: more of me to reveal, more secrets to be told, more of Karen to lay bare upon the pages. How extraordinary, since I had spent the last four months reading about the history of epiphanies, moments in time, aha moments and transformations. I had set out to discover the value of the epiphany in shifting the values and beliefs of current educators and I am, in this moment shifting mine about myself. My autoethnographic stories have prompted me to reflexively examine myself and life, by allowing the storytelling to emerge from within, instigating “moments of personal change and insight” (Berry & Patti, 2015, p. 266).

I grappled with the idea of the personal story, my story being too self-indulgent for this PhD process. How does this become a piece of research? This can be addressed with the explanation that an “autoethnography is to recreate the researcher’s experience in a reflexive way, aiming at making a connection to the reader which can help him or her to think and reflect about his or her own experiences” Méndez (2013, p. 284). These are questions that have been posed before. Manning (2007) questions the self-indulgence of her research until she recognises herself as “a powerful participant in the research process [and] not a passive, objective investigator” (pp. 5-6). More importantly, the “value of her role in the research process” is acknowledged (p. 6). Sparkes (2002) also comes to terms with the self-indulgent nature of the autoethnography when challenged by his colleagues. He was accused of being narcissistic and this struck a raw note. He also came to the conclusion that an autoethnography can encourage writing that is empathetic, in a way that potently extends beyond the self. These stories can also “contribute to sociological understanding in ways that . . . are self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, and self-luminous” (p. 222).

The perfect analogy describing my life written into autoethnography is that “stories are like pictures that have been painted over, and when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible” (Denzin, 2014, p. 1). It certainly feels like I am undergoing a revelational metamorphosis doing this study. Another question popped out from the previous, asking ‘how can my stories be research’? That question was, ‘what was the purpose of this research’? I mean, REALLY: What did it matter? What was the point? The answer came as I felt the dawning realisation that writing manifests itself as a reflection of the real via the writer’s thoughts and feelings (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 2004). I can’t do anything passionately unless it has a gripping reality attached to it; unless, it has some colour. In a way my life has been an exemplification of an epiphany, if there is such a thing. I believe there is, such a thing I mean, so, it would be remiss of me to neglect, NO omit the most excruciating details of my life. The illuminating fact is, that telling this part of my story is why I was constantly down the metaphorical research rabbit hole. I couldn’t batten down what I was trying to achieve as I dug deeper and deeper into the layers, but the answer was in the rawness of telling. “A-ha, the light bulb just went on” I say to myself. What is valuable, is how my own personal experience/s can illustrate facets of a cultural and human experience (Ellis et al., 2011) and within this work elucidate the impact of these events on one’s career. I would not be the individual, nor the educator I am today without the experiences I am about to divulge. Without the realness, this would be a monochromatic sepia instalment. I’d rather be true to myself and give you the technicolour version.

So, we arrive—at the truth. Even as I write this, I am aware that the cocoon has burst and the butterflies spread their wings within my gut, the nagging, physical manifestation of what is veritable. I am a child who was sexually abused for almost all of my childhood. I was exploited by some and molested by many. As a young adult, I then sought more abuse by way of comfort, as it was the only satisfaction I knew. Then unwittingly and yes unthinkably,

I opened the door to a child abuser when I married the man who would go on to sexually assault my beautiful children.

This particular piece is not designed to be a narrative of emotional healing (although via the writing this could potentially occur). I seek to discover what is the impact of my childhood experiences on the individual I am today? Why has colour always been so present and sentient? What is the purpose of the epiphanies I experienced throughout my life? Perhaps more importantly, I am seeking to discover myself and that discovery should enlighten both the writer and reader as to how a life can be profoundly and positively changed by trauma. Writing became invaluable to this process because when you have been trapped in the confines of childhood abuse, “finding words for what you [have experienced] is a powerful part of healing. Write them and colour outside of the lines. Express them. In safe places, with safe people” (McElvaney, 2013, Kindle, p. 13).

Methodology

Why are these stories relevant? And how are they important? Within the autoethnography (Barley & Southcott, 2019) I shared vignettes that reflected upon my life with a focus on my teaching career. Barley and Southcott (2019) state that “borne out of empathy and compassion for others was an interest in educational minorities and ultimately a quest to find or invent innovative practices that addressed these problems” (p. 3). The writing of that narrative has been impactful and prompted more self-reflection, leading to a deeper examination of what I really wanted this study to capture; by using my love of writing to reflexively and honestly communicate in a way that ‘gets to’ the reader (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). I am by nature an open book. It feels disingenuous to avoid the darker stories of my life and I pondered on this thought for months. I couldn’t shake the idea in my mind, that my truth could be a potent piece of phenomenological research told through the lens of lived

experience. I woke one morning with the words, ‘I’ve always invested in colour’, sat at my desk, and wrote the first two vignettes in two hours.

Many of us are drawn to a life of research by our lived experiences of emotional epiphanies that changed or deeply affected us (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) and this was definitely my experience. The events in my life are worthy of observation, examination and reflection, as well as an analysis of how they influenced my perceptions and interpretations of other people’s lives. The traumatic events in my life have moulded and shaped me but I rarely (if ever) make those events known. Using the methodology of autoethnography was useful “in helping [to] make sense of [my] individual experiences and how they [related] to larger collective challenges, particularly around sexual trauma and sexual assault” (Qambela, 2016, p. 197).

My approach was to write the vignettes with complete abandon. I allowed the words to pour onto the page without being encumbered by grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. I wanted the memories to flow as they came to my mind. Employing a reflexive approach, I was able to return to my experiences and relationships within the stories and dissect my memories of the events ensuring the stories had depth and veracity (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015; Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Autoethnographies are usually done at a distance, creating a space between the event and the emotiveness of the experiences; so while the memories remained clear in my mind, they were far enough in the past from which I could reflect upon them logically. Studying the lived experience via recollections and storytelling adds a layer of authenticity and empathy (Fox, 1996) because via the stories I could take the audience on a journey back into time with me. Creating evocative accounts can direct the readers’ orientations to the given topic and what I (as the author) presumed to be true and important about the issue (Berry, 2016; Rambo-Ronai, 1995). It was a challenge to be brutally candid when writing my stories and there were many times I wondered how deep I

should delve. This was especially true when I wrote the third vignette, ‘Big Yellow Taxi’. Whilst editing the text, the words seemed benign upon the page. I realised I had skimmed on the details because this vignette was the most painful to write. This kind of autoethnographic exploration generates fear, self-doubt, as well as emotional pain and “just when you think you can’t stand the pain anymore, well that’s when the real work has only begun” (Ellis, 1999, p. 672). Ellis was right, for when I revisited the story, I was compelled to add further intimate details. I was able to provide a deeper, private explication of the recount revealing “epiphanies of self. . . and many underground impossibly expressive feelings, beliefs, perceptions, perspectives and events of [my] life” (Qutoshi, 2015, p. 177). It was in this version, I felt more generous with my reminiscence and emotions where I was able to take the reader to the depths of my despair, and in doing so I wrote, edited and interacted with myself, “I wrote by objectifying it, judging it, and rewriting it in response” (Rambo-Ronai, 1995, p. 399). It would have felt dishonest to write the recollection in any other way, but I admit to feeling somewhat naked by the revelation.

Vignette 1: A Whiter Shade of Pale

There’s a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always *knew* it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.
— Sylvia Plath, Daddy, 1965

It would take too long to explain my birth and early childhood but suffice to say that my Mother had me out of wedlock during the very early sixties, which was a challenging time to be a single mother. Her family was not terribly understanding nor forgiving, although eventually they would all fall in love with me, which meant that vicariously, through me, they forgave my mother. My earliest memories are of being loved by my mother’s family. The

earliest must have been when I was about eighteen months old. I know it had to be then, because it involves my Uncle Stephen who was hit by a drunk driver and killed before I turned two. I was running around my Grandparents backyard, playing and singing gleefully without a care in the world. Their garden was like paradise to me; it was full of beautiful flowers, rich with colour and fresh fragrant odours. My Grandfather loved birds, so he had an aviary attached to his shed. You could walk into the birdcage, as it had a door inside the shed that seemed like a secret passage. The volary was filled with budgerigars and canaries of many colours: blue, green, white and yellow. The blue birds were always my favourite. My grandfather would teach them how to talk, so they'd call out 'G'day mate' or 'What ya doin?' as you came near. Anyway, this particular day, I heard my name being called, "Kazzzz...Kazzzz". I scampered around the garden, giggling and squealing, looking in every corner to find the voice.

"Kazzzz Kazzzz".

I knew, from familiar tones that it was my Uncle Stephen, so excitedly, I continued to search. I loved my Uncle and he loved me. We had a special bond that would sadly be devastated by the abovementioned tragedy. Finally, he called, "I'm up here" and I peered up to the top of the house to find him chuckling and jumping on the roof of the house. If I had wings, I would have flown up to him for one of his famous cuddles. In the background, I could hear my Nana call from the kitchen, "Stevie, are you on that bloody roof again"? Stephen, motioned for me to be silent, as he pursed his index finger to his mouth, with a whispered *shhhh* and he climbed down the piping of the house and yelled back, "No, Mummm."

Seeking love and acceptance by society, Mum sought love from men. She met my stepfather when I was two and my happy life was irrevocably changed. She moved from the State where her family lived to different State, leaving behind my security and comfort. The

rest of my childhood was fraught with fear and terror. Sitting inside the fear and terror was a deep sense of hatred and disdain for those who shattered my childhood. The recollections ebb from my mind like snapshots that captures glimpses and glances; evoking sounds and smells; and stirs a violent, somatic reaction that I have to quickly quell. I can visualise the outside laundry, my step grandmother, then my bedroom, my step father, the purple walls in my bedroom, breathing, burning, seething anger and wanting to die.

My step grandmother was quintessentially evil. She looked at me with hatred and rage, which felt foreign as I had come from another world where everyone loved the little blonde three-year-old me. As far as she was concerned, an illegitimate child was the devil's spawn. Her cruelty was cunning and inconspicuous where she'd scowl at me, call me the child slut (words of course, I didn't understand) and 'accidentally' lock me in the outside laundry. On one occasion, or at least one I can remember, she towered over me, her presence pushing me back towards the inside of the laundry. As I stepped back, I fell and as I fell backwards, dress up and legs splayed, she pushed the edge of a broom handle in between my legs. I cannot say whether this was a deliberate sexual violation but a violation it was, made worse by the ambient darkness and cold. Then by some cosmic joke, a mouse ran over the top of me, increasing my terror further. The laundry had lots of mice and it seemed such a fucking bold act for that mouse to run over me at a time of my most extreme vulnerability. To this day I have an extreme mouse phobia.

I am completely detached from that little girl.

I had more of a connection to her before she was invaded in the dark,

By a desolate woman who had no soul.

— Karen Barley, *Detached*, 2019

My stepfather visited my room in the dark of the night, yet the memories are full of colour. Colour that is scarred with pain and horror. Blood red, a sad turmeric yellow, ice cold

blue, and a vomiting green all saturated with the murkiness that is sexual abuse. My stepfather on a day-to-day basis treated me with consistent disdain. Every time he looked at me, my presence offended him. Yet, at night I woke unable to breathe, hysterical and my stepfather softly consoling me. “Take deep breaths,” he would whisper. I used to believe I’d had a nightmare and he had come to soothe my fear, but for my lingering questions. “Why was he here? Where was my mother? Why was I on my knees before him”? Uncomfortable questions, yet I did not dare answer truthfully until I was much older. Hard to fathom, but it took until I was in my thirties for the realisation to hit me. Epiphanies often come out of the blue and this one certainly did. I was struggling within my second marriage and my mental health was deteriorating. I was not functioning with day-to-day activities and couldn’t remember what I was doing from one moment to the next. I was experiencing all sorts of flashbacks from my childhood, fragments of memories and pain within my body. My parents visited one weekend and I felt myself sitting on the outside of my body, avoiding any conversation with my stepfather, feeling uncomfortable by his presence and escaping any kind of touch from him. It must have been obvious because my mother asked me why I was behaving the way I was towards him. I did not answer, I never did. After they left, I slept for a very long time. I arose the following morning and went to the bathroom. It was there that the epiphany occurred. As cliché as it sounds, it was a literal lightning bolt of awareness. “Omg! My stepfather had sexually abused me.” I argued with my own thoughts. “It can’t be, can it”? The truth was I didn’t want it to be, because I was fully aware what the ramifications would be but I could not live with the lie and pretence any longer. I whispered to myself, “What I had believed was a childhood nightmare was actually reality.” The epiphany exploded and imploded from within and the shattering was almost satisfying. All the pieces fell together and finally my life made sense. My aching need to fix everything and everyone, my fight for justice until death, being drawn to the discriminated and the underdog. It was

almost pathological but in one second I understood and in that moment I would never be the same again! And I wasn't. All the time leading up to that moment was heavy with mental instability, anxiety, insomnia, panic, and yet as soon as I remembered, an inner strength kicked in and I knew I couldn't tolerate what was occurring in my life (these details could lead to another whole study). I left my second marriage very soon after, went back to my teaching career, completed my Masters in Education, which would eventually lead to my work with children of diversity.

Vignette 2: I See a Red Door and I want it Painted Black

The journey into yourself!
And like a mine of rubies
receive the sunbeams' print!
Out of yourself – such a journey
will lead you to your self,
It leads to transformation
of dust into pure gold!
— Rumi, *If a Tree could Wander*, (1996)

There is a period of my life where I felt as if I was sitting inside a nebulous and dark cloud that I call the 'in between'; a timeframe betwixt childhood and adulthood. I look back and hardly know this girl, for she is foreign to me (although she vaguely resembles the girl who emerged from the mouse story). I was filled with fear, hostility, anger, pain and sadness. Trepidation was painted across my existence with dark greys, blues and black. The paradox was, for a time, I lived in the tropical state of the Northern Territory and whilst I was afraid of adventure, I constantly put myself in danger. I was using drugs at the age of thirteen, I experimented with sex and formed an extremely dangerous habit of sneaking out of my parent's home in the middle of the night to walk the streets of Darwin. I rarely slept and the night had become a time that I found sleeping made me feel vulnerable. (We were in Darwin

after Cyclone Tracy as my stepfather had a contract to do the electrical work for the city rebuild. He was rarely home, which meant there was very little abuse from him during this time). I also loved the dark and the quiet of the nocturnal skies which enveloped me into a false sense of security. When you are an abused child, there is an essence of victimology that is instilled in you. It becomes a part of your identity and research evidence identifies that the likelihood of experiencing abuse at various times throughout one's life is a common occurrence (Fargo, 2009; Gray & Rarick, 2018).

Sometimes I feel like the black sheep, the odd one out
Until I realise that I come from a whole herd of black sheep
You see, I find it remarkable,
When people say they haven't experienced sexual violence
When it is literally the bathwater in which I was steeped
(Anonymous, Generations, 2017, p. 15)

I allowed myself to be drawn into numerous experiences in which sexual abuse occurred. Mostly, these were during dates and because the word 'no' had been stripped from my vocabulary, I could never use it. So it felt easier to just allow the thing to happen. I almost cannot blame the abuser because I can't be sure they knew I was saying no by my actions as I did not vocalise my resistance. But then, some would say that is blaming the victim. Am I still? The lines feel blurred, because when abuse is part of your DNA, it is difficult to find anyone else accountable.

I believe my inability to say no may have saved my life during one particular brutal and terrifying encounter. My family moved to Darwin after the 1974 cyclone as my stepdad was involved in the reconstruction of the devastated city. I was almost fourteen and walking along the highway during one of my night-time sojourns. A man stopped his car and asked me if I wanted to go to town. I initially resisted, but eventually (and I can't tell you why), I

got into the car. It was all so fucking congenial at first. I shared about my difficulties with my stepfather and he shared about his marriage breakdown. In my inimitable style, I offered him advice and solace. He was drinking beer and said he wanted to purchase more. The red flags started to flap.

“I think I’ll set off home,” I say.

“No, I like the company. I’ll buy you a drink, a soft drink of course,” he commanded. The red flags flap furiously with the bloody irony of him not wanting to give me alcohol. I submit, of course. He bought the drinks and handed me a coke.

“I need petrol,” he stated. Fear rises.

“Just drop me here and I’ll find my way back,” a distinct shrill in my voice.

“No, don’t worry. I’ll drive you back,” he replied. I concede. My mind frantically analysed the situation. I can’t jump out, he’s going too fast. If I continue to insist, he might know I am afraid—that won’t be good. Back and forth, I continued to think, consider and throw out every scenario.

I thought, “I’ll jump out of the car at the service station.”

In Darwin, there is one road in and out of the city and the all night petrol station is on the highway that leads out of Darwin. I felt devastated when he parked at the furthest pump and there was only one person at the service station. I didn’t think I could risk it. What could I do? I slumped back and accepted that I was trapped and I would have to trust his word, even though I knew I could not.

He drove out of the petrol station and headed the opposite direction from Darwin. I asked him, “Where are you going?” my anxiety increased. He replied that he was going to

turn around. The red flag waved furiously now and I knew I was in serious trouble. He didn't turn around.

He stated, "I want to have a swim. It's warm."

Trying to contain myself so that my voice or actions did not betray my real emotions, I said nothing. I did not want this man to know or sense that I was scared.

"C'mon and have a swim with me, you'll love it!" He acted as if this was the most normal thing in the world. It was not. I knew it was not worth resisting and intuitively felt any panic from me would make this awful situation worse. I scanned the car for a weapon. But then what?

Thirty kilometres out of Darwin, he turned down a dirt, desolate road and travelled some distance. Escalating fear, but I was powerless to do anything. I was in the Northern Territory. In the outback: snakes, spiders, crocodiles. Pitch black! Alone. I did not know how I would survive in this environment. I made a decision to 'stay with the devil I knew' and relied upon myself. After about ten minutes, he stopped the car. He leapt out, insistent he was going to have a swim. I walked with him to the water hole but I refused to swim with him. He disappeared into the bushes. The tension in my stomach warned me that I was in a really bad predicament but I didn't know what to do. I stood in the darkness waiting for him to return. I could have escaped, but where to? He came back and I strangely felt relieved and we walked back to the car. I felt a little lighter, maybe this was an innocent jaunt after all. This proved premature as I stepped towards the door of the car, he grabbed me and tried to kiss me. I tried to stop him and he continued his attack. Eventually he dragged me to the back of the car. He had hold of my arm tightly and I was begging him to let me go. As he pushed me to the back of the car, internally I panicked but externally my head 'kicked in.' I started to talk.

(Somewhere I had heard if you keep talking it turns a man off sex. At thirteen, I barely knew anything about such things, but I was willing to try anything if it meant saving my life).

He kissed and groped at me and tried to make me touch him. I rambled, “Why do you want to do this? Surely this is not something you want to do with your life? Is this something you would tell your children?” He persevered groping and slobbering over me as I persistently talked. After what seemed an extraordinarily long time, he stopped and said, “Ok I will take you back.” My heart and head did a collective sigh and I felt a glimmer of hope. Back to the front of the car. Mentally I urged him to turn on the car and get me out of there. Such a diabolical thing to want your abuser to be your rescuer. He did not start the car, instead turned towards me in tears. Crazy. Bizarre. He told me how sorry he was and begged me to forgive him. He told me how beautiful I was (as if I believed him) and how I had a gorgeous body and that he was really trying to help me.

“Please tell me you forgive me and that you love me.” he whimpered.

As sickening as it was, I spoke the words, “I forgive you and love you.” He wanted me to kiss him, so I did what I had to do. He turned away to start the car and I imagined I was home free and just as I felt the breath of relief on my lips, he turned back and pounced. I endured this man’s insanity for another round. Every time he would attack me, the ritual was the same: aggressive attack, fending him off with my words, pause, apologetic, submission, sickening. After enduring this ritual four more times, he drove further and headed ever so slowly out to the main road. I can still envisage the brightness of the highway lights and the blue and gold of my favourite dress.

Heading home was when the worst assault occurred. It is hard to imagine what could be worse than what had just happened, but strangely it was his words that internalised the

terror. Telling me how lucky I was, my abuser explained that his intention was to help me by teaching me a very important lesson.

“You know,” he said. “It could have been someone else. They could have tied you to a tree, raped you and then chopped you into little pieces.” I felt myself fade.

He insisted I sit close to him chanting, “You are so pretty. I needed to teach you this lesson. I wouldn’t have wanted anything to happen to you. You’re so beautiful though.” Blah bloody blah blah; he talked and talked, but I just wanted him to fucking shut up and get me home.

“Tell me that you like me. Aren’t you glad you met me?” he implored.

I told him everything he wanted to hear, did every damn thing he asked of me. I did it so I could live. For all his proclamations of my beauty, I would never feel pretty again.

At last, we arrived on the outskirts of my neighbourhood. Of course, I did not want him to know where I lived. He stopped the car and I got out quickly. He called to me and I cautiously turned around, wondering, “What now”?

He said, “This is my number in case you ever want to have dinner with me.” He then recited his number (which I could recall without effort for about ten years afterwards).

I thought, “You crazy maniac, are you fucking kidding me? Why in God’s name would I want to have dinner with you”? I did not say the words that screamed from within. I turned and tentatively said, “Oh sure, thanks.” I ran as fast as I could and hid behind one of the houses that had been cyclone ravaged and abandoned. Not totally unlike how I felt in that moment and the analogy wasn’t lost on me. Finally home and I snuck through the door. I sat on the edge of my bed and thought about what had just happened to me. I should have felt hysterical? Shocked? I should have felt something, shouldn’t I? There was nothing! I couldn’t wake my parents and tell them because I would have had to explain that I had snuck out. I

couldn't go to the police as I believed that they would blame me for wandering Darwin so late at night. There wasn't anyone I could tell. I knew this idiot's name. I knew what kind of car he had and I even had his bloody phone number. I wholeheartedly regret the decision I made because I will never know if this guy ever did this thing again. Did he try to rape another girl and was he successful? Did he perhaps kill someone? I will never know.

I did not immediately comprehend the impact this event had on me. Any good I felt about myself disintegrated that night, which lead me further down a road of self-destruction. A year later, during an insomniac night I couldn't get the words he had spoken out of my head. They circled around and round in my memory and without warning, the sheer magnitude of the event hit me. Shaking, I recreated all the scenarios and nightmarish possibilities, which I imagined in vivid colour. I could have been tortured and killed and left in the bush to rot. I may never have been found. The scenes continued to roll, just like a movie reel and as they did, the terror amplified and I was overcome with the horror of it all. Jesus, I fucking survived this! The epiphany! The flickering of the celluloid, turning from black and white to horrific colour. I wish I could say, the epiphany lead to a richly, fulfilling life but I cannot. It took years (too many) for the impact of the childhood abuse and this event to be transformative in any way.

Vignette 3: Big Yellow Taxi

Never give all the heart, for love
Will hardly seem worth thinking of
To passionate women if it seem
Certain, and they never dream
That it fades out from kiss to kiss

— William Butler Yeats, *Never Give All the Heart*, 1904

It was a rare day off and I was home, still in my pyjamas at two o'clock in the afternoon. I call them 'dedicated jammie days.' I was settling on the couch, getting ready to watch a

movie I had recorded when there was a knock at the door. I opened the door and there stood two policemen and two other women who told me they were from Child Protective Services (CPS). My knees went to jelly, and I felt the immediate palpitation of my heart beating against my chest. They were asking about my children. Fade out. Black.

I would have said my third husband was the ‘love of my life.’ It feels like betrayal to say this now. I cannot lie. After having four children, and two failed marriages, he splashed colour into my mid-life. I felt awakened with him both emotionally and sexually and he is the only person (outside of my family) whom I knew that I loved. I used to think I loved others but this love was that deep inside knowing kind of love. He was not particularly attractive, but he was intellectually deep and for me that was enormously stimulating. My existence felt joyous and satisfying for a time. Five years into this marriage he seemed to love my children and fitted into the role of step father to them. We did normal things and the children did not appear to be concerned about his presence. If anything, the kids seemed to gravitate to him for assistance and advice. People say, “How can the other parent not know?” I can say, with one hundred percent honesty (and even on reflection) that I had no awareness of anything that was happening underneath my very nose.

Fade in. The police at the door tell me that there has been a report of sexual abuse of my children. They also inform me they believe the perpetrator is my husband. I am in complete shock, my legs buckled underneath and my mind raced. They must have it wrong. Wrong family? Wrong information? In barely a minute, every thought raced in and out of my mind as the police continued to talk. I don’t recall their words but my immediate reaction was to say that I felt it was impossible. I exclaim, “He loves the children and would never hurt them. I don’t understand. Where did this information come from”? One of the CPS women told me the information came from one of my children and as soon as I heard that, despite my emotions I knew it had to be true. Notwithstanding my disbelief at the situation, I did not

even, for one minute doubt my child's veracity. I knew who they were and knew that they would not make such a claim if it had not been true. My world fell into the deepest, darkest tunnel and I have to be honest and say I am not sure how I came out of the other side. Fade out.

The agonizing darkness enveloped me and I was drained from colour. The blackness remained for a long time. Blinded by the love I had felt for my husband I was ignorant to what he was doing. He had been craven and dastardly in his grooming of me and the children. Each time that bastard abused my children, he had the gall to look me in the eye. Looking back, I wonder if his constant asking me if I wanted a cup of tea was a distraction for his own guilt and shame. It sounds so devastatingly trite when you think about it.

The pain, the betrayal; the agony I felt for my children. How had I allowed what happened to me, to happen to them? That was the hardest question of them all. I had vowed, that I would be super careful as a parent; I would be vigilant; no-one would get past my watchful eye. Unfortunately, I was wrong. If anything parents who have been abused themselves are often the most blind. Children who are sexually abused are confused and experience long term effects from their abuse; indeed child sex abuse establishes a warped sense of relationship between the victim and society (Rambo-Ronai, 1995). A number of studies indicate a correlation between parenting efficacy, the selection of adult partners and intergenerational incidences of childhood sexual abuse and a history of childhood sexual abuse (Barrett, 2010; DiLillo & Damashek, 2003; Jaffe, Cranston & Shadlow, 2012). Many years have passed since, and I have agonizingly searched and trailed my memories for clues, anything that I could have missed. There is nothing, except for the naiveté of my deep investment of love for one so utterly unworthy.

There were times when I wished that my husband would just have a heart attack or a stroke. Sounds awful to say out aloud, doesn't it? Somehow, I believed his death would have been easier to deal with than living through the hell that was enduring the aftermath of your children's abuse. One often hears others say that they would kill the person who abused their children and I almost wished I had those feelings, but I was bereft of any kind of anger or rage. I was torn between pain and love and then pity. Even in the most heinous of times, love does not instantly die. I also felt deeply sorry for my husband and I am aware that this was the same sentiment I felt for my stepfather. The same emotion I felt for the abuser in Darwin. I am struck by the profundity. Is it more potent to feel pity than hate?

The last time I saw him, I can still see that one tear that hung below his eye. To this day that image distracts me, for it is the only clear memory I have of him. Such a pathetic figure. He was in jail for the crimes that he had committed against my children and I went to visit him in one final bid to ask for the truth. I am aware now in the writing of this piece that perhaps I wanted him to provide an explanation for all the abuse that had occurred in my life. Why, is such a simple three-letter word that requires so much complexity. The ridiculousness of this awareness hits with me a sudden jolt. Of course, no answers to the 'why' questions were forthcoming. It was a futile visit, by except being there my resolve kicked in. In truth, I also felt like a pathetic creature and in some sick way felt complicit and bizarrely aligned to him. Yet, I intellectually knew I did nothing wrong. I was not responsible for what happened, or for him. Perhaps that is why I felt the urgency to hear him say the words I am responsible. Instead, he said, "I know I must have done it, but I can't remember anything that happened." His words slapped me across the face as the colour of rage filled me. Finally, the anger combusted and I raised my voice. He tried to shhh me. The red cascaded over me at this point and I refused to be silenced. I stood with one final question, "So you're telling me, you can't remember using my children for your sexual pleasure"? As he continued to try to quieten

me, his face displayed shock and fear. He didn't expect that question. I watched him visibly slump.

"You are never going to come back again, are you"? he whimpered.

"No," I declared. If I could have, I would have screamed; instead, I turned and walked out of that god-awful prison. With every step, I felt energised and not once did I look back. Strident, finally seeing with clarity, I could, maybe see my world in colour again, even if it was in a washed out Polaroid tone.

Vignette 4: Silence is Golden

And every friend that I know has a story like mine
And the world tells me we should take it as a compliment
But then heroes like Ashley and Simone and Gabby, McKayla and Gaga, Rosario, Aly
Remind me this is the beginning, it is not the finale

(Halsey, A story like mine, Women's March, 2018, NYC)

During the formulating of this study was a time, when as a society we were inundated with an influx from the media of shocking recounts of sexual abuse by well-known people. The year 2017, also bore witness to the rise of the #MeToo movement after the Harvey Weinstein allegations made by many women in Hollywood, where the hashtag #MeToo "provided an umbrella of solidarity for millions of people to come forward with their stories" (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Haley, 2018, para. 7). Throughout the years of 2017-18 was an extremely confronting period for me, because everywhere I looked and everywhere I turned was story after story, interview after interview, outrage and more outrage and then the endless bloody debate. This issue was blasted across the news, in social media, on television and the internet; there was literally no escaping the narrative and the endless diatribes, discussions, and dialogues (Lee, 2018; Zacharek, et al., 2018). And the incessant questions asked:

Why did they wait so long to tell?

Why tell now?

They must want money.

They want their five minutes of fame.

I found myself glued to YouTube (YT), Facebook (FB) and Twitter and even though I knew it was causing me pain, I could not turn away. And all I wanted to do was scream “me fucking too,” but I restrained and silenced myself. Again. Still.

The final straw was watching Dr Christine Blasey Ford during the recount of her story in front of the world. Dr Blasey Ford sat before a US Senate committee hearing that was held to examine her charge that Brett Kavanaugh, nominated for a lifetime appointment to the US Supreme Court, attempted to sexually assault her at a party when they were in high school (MacKinnon, 2019b). I felt resounding empathy with her. I watched her face and I had no doubt that she was telling the truth, because she was me, or just another version of me. Leading to more endless commentary from within the media and ridiculous politicians sprouting questions, asking why didn’t she report this earlier? The scream boiled within me. We don’t tell for this very reason, because what is the incentive? No one will believe us. It is shameful, embarrassing, disgusting and the reward is ridicule, outrage and cynicism. The chorus decries, “She must have an ulterior motive.”

I push down the scream and heave a resigned and elongated “Sighhhhhhh.” AND I wasn’t alone! So many of my friends were struggling during this time and were sharing on FB, Instagram, or Twitter the cry of #MeToo. Also there were the celebrities: Ellen, Reece Witherspoon, Ashley Judd, Gwyneth Paltrow and so many more all proclaiming #MeToo. Women from every country or culture joined in the chorus and for a moment in time; in one epiphanic moment of solidarity it didn’t matter who you were, or what privilege you may

have had - the #MeToo was every woman. My sigh grew into a raging roar, I felt sickened and enraged!

Back to Dr Blasey Ford—as I watched her testimony, I squirmed with her, cried with her and then revolted against what they did to her. Many women did! We tell when we tell because we cannot keep it in any longer. Or, you feel triggered by the outside flurry and you cannot hold the fury down. No amount of money could recompense the agony of laying your soul out on the table for all to dissect; and seriously, who wants to be famous for confessing to being poked, prodded, or fucked by an unwanted someone in your past? Arrrghhh, the ongoing conversations bombarded my senses and I could no longer contain the scream. The epiphany hit me! It was not over for me. I have done a really good job of putting my life into all sorts of passions, study and work. I appear on the outside mostly put together. I stand in front of students and confidently teach. I am diligent and hardworking but deep down there is still an irritating blot upon my psyche screaming, “Me too.” And maybe, just maybe if you look hard enough at me, you might be able to tell, but I feel that the collective #MeToo finally has given me a platform to speak.

What all the different stories shared was a sense of revelatory negotiation with the self and the world: an ongoing demarcation, women drawing their own lines to proclaim to a hostile world and sometimes even to themselves, this happened, this was not my fault.

Kon-yu, Nieman, Scott & Sved, 2019 (Kindle, Introduction, para. 7)

Discussion

All the Colours I am

My skin is kind of sort of brownish

Pinkish yellowish white.

My eyes are greyish blueish green,
 But I'm told they look orange in the night.
 My hair is reddish blondish brown,
 But it's silver when it's wet.
 And all the [colours] I am inside
 Have not been invented yet.
 (Shel Silverstein, *Colors*, 1974)

When I began this autoethnography, I did not intend for this to be a study of colour but it is pertinent to reflect on the impact and reference to colour in this piece because the words sprung in my mind as an epiphany. As mentioned above when I was thinking about writing this, I woke with the words pounding on repeat in my mind, “I’ve always invested in colour.” I felt the urgency of the words and sat before my laptop and the first vignette tumbled onto the screen. The colour theme occurred vicariously and evolved from the epiphany that sprung and precipitated this autoethnographical piece. Colour “introduces both the subjective element in visual experience, and the objective, quantifiable stimuli which produce that experience” and in my story, provided another layer of nuance to the written discourse (Gage, 1999, p. 11).

It is important to note that my intent is not to draw on colour theory, though it is important to provide some context. What is the value of colour in my life and how is colour pivotal to this narration? I grew up in Australia and this has influenced my view of colour based on my exposure to art, culture and the environment within my life and education (Gage, 1999). My first notion of colour came from my understanding (in early education) of the three primary colours and then being taught in art classes about Charles Hayter’s *colour circle* and reference to the tone and climate of colour (Gage, 1999; Hayter, 1815). The wheel above is

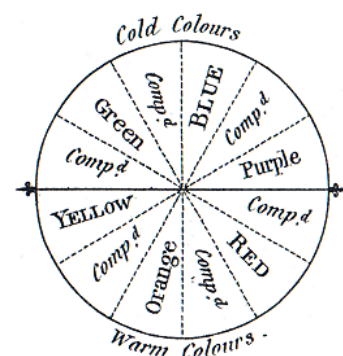


Figure 1 (Hayter, 1815) p. 161 –
 (Plate XVII Figure 4)

the ‘painter’s compass’ which is a practical resource for painters and divides colours into cold colours and warm colours. “The greatest warmth. . .will always be found on the illuminated side of the object, and. . .in views of natural scenery, you will find that when looking *towards the light*,. . .the distance, and sky, will possess most of the gaiety and warmth of your pallet, with all the light possible; and the fore-ground will be cool and sedate” (Hayter, 1815, p. 167).

Colour is a powerful communication tool and can be used to denote action, influence emotions and even physiological reactions (Mollard-Desfour & Spinney, 2007). Colour is an impression, or a sensation transmitted using symbols and “colour words, perhaps more than any others, reflect a society: its values, its practices, its history” (Mollard-Desfour & Spinney, 2007, p. 44). I have had a particular interest in colour in literature, especially poetry. Being influenced by poets such as Eliot, Plath, Blake and Yeats, as a teenager I began writing poetry that was rich with colour as a way of arousing emotion and mood. Attaching a ‘feeling’ to colour by way of synesthesia, which is a perceptual condition of mixed sensations, that is a stimulus in one sensory modality (e.g., hearing) that involuntarily elicits a sensation/experience in another modality (e.g., vision) was a way to arouse the senses in this piece (Cazeaux, 2005). In synesthesia, being multi- sensory, is where colour can be attributed as the ‘added value’ of vision and awareness, so that using colour inside the story can make it more real (Cazeaux, 2005; Kemp & Blakemore, 2006).

The evocation of colour throughout the narrative is my way of inviting the audience to be a passenger on this journey via the stories (Flemons & Green, 2002). The allusion to colour intends for the story to be sensory and feeling in nature, so that the reader is an active participant in the autoethnographic tale; and where they are also able to share the insights and epiphanous moments that occur in the writer’s life. Colour, then is like an epiphany made manifest out of the darkness when illuminated. Aristotle believed that colour becomes visible

when light is present and that it is difficult to see colour if light is not present (Miller, 2002; Sugiyama, 2009). Elucidating the past using anecdotes has been my way of retouching the life experiences of Karen, bringing us to the heart of the matter and “creating a world” via colour perception (Miller, 2002, p. 94). Adding tints, shading and highlights with literary brushstrokes, portrays a life that is accented, depicting a “phenomenology of color [that] brings us to the colors of the world that bind us together as social creatures” (Miller, 2002, pp. 93-94). Adams, Jones and Ellis (2015) refer to this as impressionist autoethnographies, where instead of using paint and a paintbrush, the author utilises words, rhythm, and silence to create an image that catapults the reader “into the sights, smells, tastes, and movements of a place, space or context” (p. 86). The impact of this concocted vision is to “engage readers emotionally and explore the meanings of the storyteller’s identities, challenges, joys, and epiphanies” (p. 87).

Keeping Secrets (The Role of the Epiphany)

The quiet was part of the meaning, part of the mind;

The access of perfection to the page.

— Wallace Stevens, *The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm*, 1954

The more I have pondered on the concept of epiphanies and epiphanous change, the more deeply I needed to dig. What transformations occurred in my life and did they occur by osmosis, or were they precipitated by my own phenomenology (lived experience)? Essential to the autoethnographical genre, epiphanies are interactional moments and experiences which impact a person’s life; so much so they explore and examine fundamental meaning structures in their life. This shapes an individual’s character and provides meaning to their noteworthy lived experience (Denzin, 2014).

There are numerous definitions of the word, epiphany, from other researchers, but it feels more organic to provide my own. First, a definition from an online dictionary suggests

that an epiphany is “a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience” (Dictionary.com, 2019). I would like to extend this description. An epiphany is a light bulb realisation, occurring ‘out of the blue,’ providing profound and life changing insight and revelation. What you thought previously has been inexplicably altered and a newfound awareness emerges, which forever changes a thought, way of existence, or even one’s life.

I don’t want to sound trite, or diminish the impact of my experiences of sexual abuse but I do not like to use the words, victim, or survivor. Both words seem generic to me and really do not represent my personal experiences. My life has been full of rugged terrain and for me, that’s okay. Without them, I am not sure I would be where I am today; Bochner and Ellis (2016) state that “these moments leave their mark on us. You could say that our bodies are tattooed by them, though not by choice” (p. 68).

That’s why epiphanies often bring us to a decisive moment... How do we survive the chaos and confusion? What can we do to shine a ray of hope through the boundless darkness to find positive meanings in even our gloomiest experiences? (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 68)

Autoethnography is the perfect vehicle for the exploration of personal epiphanies, as writing is a tool to explore trauma, sadness, love and life experience. As writers dissect their personal experiences, they are, at the same time, offering “complex, insider accounts of sense-making” (Adams, et al., 2015, p. 27) demonstrating how a particular event impacted their sense of self and life. More importantly, this dissection can demonstrate what transformational experience, (i.e., epiphany) occurred that in some way validates the events in the first place. Throughout the four vignettes, I offer numerous epiphanous moments,

sparkling further introspection. The ultimate epiphany has stemmed from writing this piece, as I now understand why I felt compelled to write these stories. I needed to lay to bed any sense of shame or guilt I have felt because these things happened to me. By exposing them to myself and to the reader, they are no longer hidden in the dark.

Limitations and Ethics

I don't want a day to celebrate.
I want a life to celebrate each day with every fibre of my body;
That screams
That shout
That feels
That makes me more humane towards perspective.
Towards change
Towards voice
Towards life.
Let me be me.
(Ritz, Let me be me, 2019)

In retrospect, this study has become the pivotal one. This story is the prelude as it is the most representative of myself as the researcher and without this study, any future work would lack sense and poignancy. This autoethnography is a presentation of the real Karen exposed, where I invite you to be a companion to this process (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 1999). Part of what seeps through is the researcher revealing herself as someone who is passionate, and compulsively seeks equality for all, as if her life depended upon it. Because it does, and whilst that sounds somewhat dramatic and self-indulgent, without verisimilitude, all other ventures and pursuits are insignificant. I have come to understand my experiences of sexual abuse through the medium of writing, as a stage of the research process of interpretation and participation (Méndez, 2013). It would be erroneous to retell such catastrophic events from

one's life from the view of an outsider, which is why the autoethnography is a potent tool "when it is evocative, emotionally compelling, and when readers can feel their lives deeply touched by the stories that they read" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 75).

This vignette also presented some ethical challenges as one of the vignettes involved members of my family, in particular, my children. I consulted with an experienced member of the university ethics committee who in turn consulted her colleagues. They advised me that as I was not collecting data from my family ethical oversight was not required. I believed that my story should be told and when I discussed this with my children, they agreed. As a collective and family, we believe remaining quiet perpetuates sexual abuse. We don't want to be shaped by shame and whatever views society might have for us because we have been through these experiences. Each member of the family has worked through their challenges individually, had extensive mental health intervention and we have remained strong and united as a family. To deny my story, would feel like denying their own. I asked each of my children individually how they felt about this study and allowed them to read the work. Without equivocation, they gave me a resounding yes and green light to go ahead. It is also important to note that none of my children share my surname, so this provides them with some anonymity. This resolved any questions I had about revealing anything about them within this study.

I thought long and hard about my position as the author of autoethnography and the fact that by revealing my identity this would be implicitly identifiable. When I look back at each of the vignettes my children are not the focus of my work as I have only discussed my relationship to the abuser. This work concerns me primarily and the only person that I'm putting at risk is me. My stepfather the main perpetrator of my abuse is dead (as is my mother).

The larger concern I faced was how much was I willing to reveal? At what point did the comfort of the writer and the audience cease? Sexual abuse is a murky subject area that is rarely discussed in public (Greydanus & Merrick, 2017; Zacharek et al., 2018). It is still considered one of those taboo subjects as “children and adults everywhere are shamed into staying silent about their abuse because our culture does not have a way to comfortably frame the experience” (Rambo-Ronai, 1995, p. 412). The years between 2017-8 seemed to be a time when there was a public awakening, or a societal epiphany (as it were); but what was more significant was that there was a shift in the societal framing of victimology. Zacharek et al., (2018) state the “silence breakers have started a revolution of refusal [and] this reckoning appears to have sprung up overnight, [but] it has actually been simmering for years, decades, centuries” (para. 8). There was a real movement that seemed to snowball. One heartbreaking story after another emerged. One celebrity after another facing accusations and women around the world felt emboldened by a united front that epitomised a revolt against victimhood. The first #MeToo women’s march was witness to women across sixty seven countries galvanised proclaiming the #MeToo chorus. This provided me with the impetus and courage to tell my own story because my #MeToo was a reflection of the stream of global stories being told, but also a declaration of “enough is enough”! To dilute my history would also dilute the data because for the first time I felt united in a common cause and culture where the shame and guilt of being sexually abused no longer belonged to the victims.

I was faced with a dilemma which was ensuring that this autoethnographical study was provocative and authentic, but at the same time remain mindful of the propensity for the subject to cause stress in others (Méndez, 2013). I concede that some aspects of the vignettes might cause others to feel squeamish, but I feel comfortable enough not to sacrifice the power of the story. A good story, should be gripping, confronting, requiring soul searching, by causing the reader to feel, care and respond to what is written (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Ellis,

2004). I am personally fascinated by what precipitates transformation and epiphanous moments of change and I am not deterred by what lies in subconscious difficult and self-denying moments in one's life. As a result, articulating these events using autoethnographical writing can evoke emancipation and emotional transformation for the researcher and the reader (Qutoshi, 2015).

Another limitation to consider was opening up my feelings and thoughts necessitating an open and honest dialogue of self-disclosure (Méndez, 2013). This exposes me to scrutiny, both personally and professionally and in essence, possibly affects my reputation and ability to transform how I am perceived in the future (Flemons & Green, 2002). I am mindful that my story is difficult to digest, but to retain silence would perpetuate the age-old problem of keeping the secret. Do I keep the secret because it may change the reader's view of me because it makes them feel uncomfortable? Or does that guarantee complicity in my own abuse? I feel this is the foundation of the original problem because what I am not the perpetrator.

She is disgusting, other, alien-a threat to decent society. She would contaminate all the nice people with her bizarre thoughts and feelings. Only silence can conceal her contamination. The silence is so dense that the very motions of living are labored. In an ecstasy of mute rage, she pounds desperately on the wall, rattling it, warping it, hating it and herself. (Rambo-Ronai, 1995, p. 397)

Carol Rambo-Ronai (1995) also wrestled with this question and it was suggested by well-meaning colleagues that she should hide her stories inside interview data and not self-disclose. She was informed that she should consider her professional reputation and it was inferred that by revealing her abuse that her work may not be taken seriously in the future. She rightly asks the question: "Does this imply that there is something inherently wrong with

me because I have been through this experience?” (Rambo-Ronai, 1995, p. 402) My answer (on hers and my behalf) is that we are in the era of the #MeToo movement, so I am saying a resounding “no”! to silence. I refuse to do it for another millisecond. Our stories are invaluable because as survivors “we put enormous faith in our stories. . .not only can we be transparent to ourselves, but that our stories will peel away untruths and obfuscations to uncomplicatedly convey some bedrock layer of truth to others” (Kenny, 2019, chapter 2, para. 11).

Conclusion

Memories of yesteryou
They just keep swarming back
Now your life is drenched in colour
Instead of white and black
(Anonymous, Yesteryou, 2018)

What can we learn from the revelations inside this autoethnographical study? The most poignant aspect of writing these stories is to provide a resolution to a life, spattered with incidental and interconnected experiences of sexual abuse. I don’t want to be viewed through the veil of pity, or sadness, or even pain. What is more important is that the reader appreciates the complexities of these experiences upon an individual’s life and sense of self. As I have borne witness to my own light bulb moments, my hope is that you will have your own moment of illumination. It is not for myself (as the author) to dictate what that might be, but my investment in this process is that it will be consummate and life altering. I do not wish to normalise sexual abuse, but what I do want to do is normalise the discussion, so that in the future, a child like me chooses revelation rather than silence and that as a society we comprehend the prevalence and danger of childhood sexual abuse for our children and unite as a community to implement appropriate strategies to address the problem.

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Chapter Five

Without the quest, there can be no epiphany.

— Constantine E. Scaros

Finding a good book to live in: A reflective autoethnography on childhood sexual abuse, literature and the epiphany (Author: Karen Barley. Published by The Qualitative Report)

After I wrote the previous autoethnography, it felt as if I had released the floodgates. I had this existential craving to write, cobbled with the need to purge the past. This autoethnographical study delves deeper into the experience of CSA that occurred during my childhood and the mechanisms I used to escape and endure the violence and abuse from my stepfather. Literature and writing became both apparatus and haven in that I loved to find ‘good books to live in’. Stories became sustenance, comfort and inspiration as I invested in each quest illustrated upon the pages. I ached with the protagonist and championed their survival. I united with their crusade as I leapt inside their adventure, collaborating on the journey. Reading the works of Tolkien and others inspired me to experiment as a writer. I became enamoured with poetry and explored the use of literary devices, becoming more experimental so that I could shroud my secrets and feelings inside my text. I became simpatico with this methodology as I extricated data from my past, sharing first-hand knowledge of a complex and taboo topic that is often difficult to research. The verisimilitude of this data is profound because the information stems from first-hand accounts. As the researcher and researched leading, I invited the reader to jump inside my story - the world of Karen.

I integrated selected stories to punctuate the use of storytelling and writing as a way of escape and healing. Poetry and literature were pivotal places of escape for me and the epiphanies I found in literature inspired me to write more creatively and more deliberately. I

became cognizant to literature and writing as being a place to hide my thoughts and secrets and this place became a vital place of survival in an environment that was abusive and sexually violent.

Finding a good book to live in: A reflective autoethnography on childhood sexual abuse, literature and the epiphany

Karen D. Barley

Abstract

The topic of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) remains a prevalent issue globally and despite the best efforts of welfare organisations, it would seem that as a society we are no closer to a resolution. CSA is a topic that is discussed in vague terms, but the real impact of CSA on the child is rarely divulged, except behind closed doors. This autoethnographic study traces the life and experiences of CSA of the author and how she used literature and writing as a coping mechanism. Using this powerful methodological tool, the author has been able to expose the implications of the sexual abuse and the use of writing as a place to hide and feel safe. The value of autoethnography is illuminated by demonstrating that poignant and potent data can be collected and then shared in a way that has more impact than other research methods. Second, the value of the researcher as the researched can be viewed as an authentic way of analysing difficult and taboo societal issues such as CSA, where hopefully the results can lead to more insightful and honest discussions about how to confront this problem.

Keywords: Autoethnography, evocative autoethnography, reflexivity, childhood sexual abuse, coping mechanism, literature, poetry, epiphany

Autoethnography

I wish I could find a good book to live in, wish I could find a good book. If I could find a real, good book, I'd never have to come out and look at...what they've done to my song. —Melanie Safka, Look what they've done to my song, ma?

Let's be real for one moment. Writing about experiences of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is not easy, not comfortable, and not generally a topic that one wants to read about. We can beat about the bush and pretend, but CSA is still as rampant as it is has ever been. According to Gray and Rarick (2018) CSA is a “worldwide phenomenon that crosses all cultural and socioeconomic status boundaries and continues to impact children on a daily basis” (p. 571). If someone hit you in the face, you would have no hesitation in reporting the offence, or instructing your child to report it however, most still feel uncomfortable reporting CSA and for good reason.

Children are often not believed, and the non-offending parent has difficulty accepting the reality (Katz & Barnett, 2014; McAlinden, 2006, 2012). So children often hear responses such as: “Ohh, maybe you misunderstood”. Or, “are you sure?” Or “it couldn't have been Uncle Dan? He loves children.” Most children who are victims of CSA are sworn to silence by the perpetrator, and the non-offending parent has difficulty in accepting that someone they know and love could be responsible (Greydanus & Merrick, 2017; McAlinden, 2006, 2012).

Society dictates that CSA is considered craven behaviour, yet I remain cynical about the way we perceive this issue and the subsequent treatment of victims. Shifting cultural attitudes and subconsciously held beliefs will do a lot to dispel the misinformation around CSA. As a community, we need to be more open to discussion on this topic and “demythologize sexual offending and work together with all groups in the community to achieve a more effective, safer way of protecting children and of reducing the offender's opportunity to abuse” (McAlinden, 2006, p. 354). Children who are abused find all sorts of

ways to survive the perpetual onslaught upon their bodies. Some escape into behaviours, some into substances and others into fantasy. I chose fantasy, or more to the point, I found a way to escape into more palatable realities (Fargo, 2009; Greydanus & Merrick, 2017; Gray & Rarick, 2018; McAlinden, 2012). I found alternative realities in books, literature and poetry and I also discovered that using writing was a way that I could escape, but also write myself into my own made up narrative (Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018). I was able to use writing and literary techniques as a way to shroud and mask my experience/s in poetry, metaphor and similes. I resonated with the lyrics of Melanie Safka's *Look what they've done to my song, Ma* and would sing the words with gusto because the lyrics were about my life (Barley & Southcott, 2019) as I literally searched for the perfect book to live in.

Writing narratives using an autoethnographic style can be emotive and evocative. These stories deal with “real people leading actual lives, deal with social, ethical, and moral issues, and work on behalf of social justice” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 10). Given that I have always been drawn to stories and storytelling, it has been no surprise that I have gravitated to the methodology of autoethnographic writing. I find the approach courageous and honest, and it has allowed me to “write stories with raw and naked emotion that investigate life’s messiness, including twists of fate and chance” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 10). As I was constructing this study, I didn’t want the ‘telling’ to be pale and insipid, but a bold, personal tale that punched you in the guts (Barley, 2020). It could be argued that this approach is ‘too much’ or too aggressive, but I argue that it is the only approach that may compel society to be less apathetic. I get it. It’s confrontational and most don’t want to think about the sexual abuse of children, but the not wanting to know perpetuates the problem. So if this autoethnography achieves anything, I hope it will have you asking questions about the children you teach or are responsible for. Am I vigilante enough? Do I take enough notice of the signs? Am I brave enough to make a report when I see a problem?

I also hope that this study will provide a path for those still wrestling with their own abuse so that these “accounts not only serve as sources of social scientific knowledge but also as aids to understanding how others make sense of their own lives” (Philaretou & Allen, 2006, p. 65). I am not suggesting that my work is a beacon for the suffering; instead, I hope it is a catalyst for discovery. Finding a really good book to live in is all very well, but coming out from under the covers leads to freedom from the tyranny of the past. I don’t want to be victim, or survivor (Barley, 2020b), I want to be transformative and evocative and kick the shit out of the secrecy that makes us recoil into the shell of a victim or survivor. In this way, writing about sensitive topics can be gritty and even daring (Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018; Philaretou & Allen, 2006; Rambo-Ronai, 1995). Being transformative is being renewed, revived, and regenerated in a way that is not only more honest and real, but also translucent. Writing self reflectively has the ability to be therapeutic, as the narrative stories “enable [us] to retell, relive, and reconstruct [our] subjugated stories, thereby empowering [the writer] for positive change” (Philaretou & Allen, 2006, pp. 65-66).

A close friend’s father killed himself. I spoke to my friend before the funeral and something she said caused a lightbulb to go on inside my mind. Sounds almost cliché... all the same, I was stunned by the revelation. My friend lived in another State but I felt a desperate need to attend the funeral and speak to her. I organised the flight, told my husband (at the time), I was going, leaving him at home with my four children. At the same time, I was reconciling my childhood abuse and struggling with my mental health...erratic, darkness, suicidal ideation. As you can imagine, my marriage was in tatters. I arrived at my friend’s house and she was inconsolable. Her entire family was. We hugged and then she asked if we could go to another room to talk. The butterflies raged in the pit of my stomach. I already knew what she was going to tell me. I had wanted this exposé; in some way, it would validate my own, but now I was here, it would have been easier to run.

She said, “Dad killed himself because” I stopped her and continued the sentence... “He sexually molested you”.

She looked at me aghast, “how did you know?”

I replied, “I think I’ve always known and because it happened to me... my stepfather had sexually abused me for almost all of my childhood and into

my teens.” She didn’t look shocked when I told her, instead displayed a glimpse of resignation.

We talked all night. All the pieces fell into place. The weird way her father would kiss her, his possessiveness, her mood when he showed attention to me; like tiny jigsaw shapes, they all merged into one another to form one truth. In that epiphanous instant everything changed for me. It felt like I was sitting on the outside looking in (another cliché) but I knew in order to survive I had to leave my marriage. I had married another version of my stepfather and I had been trying to be the person he wanted me to be and this woman who looked at me in the mirror wasn’t remotely me. I cannot blame my ex-husband, as it wasn’t really his fault. It wasn’t even mine. What I also knew with certainty was that the sexual abuse... I imagined... that caused frequent nightmares... that I was wrestling with... that I could barely speak into existence... that I didn’t want to admit to... WAS TRUE.

It is true and that makes me true... now you know me, truly know me like you never knew me before.

Writing a layered account that reflexively examines my experiences enables me (as the author) to collect and analyse the data at the same time. This also provides an opportunity to explore the relevant literature on the topic (Adams, Ellis & Bochner, 2011; Etherington, 2004). When writing the above vignette, I had to consider many factors, including plausibility, context and the jostling for the truth in the scenario. This process of reflexive writing requires self-awareness as a “dynamic process of interaction within and between our selves and our participants, and the data that inform decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages of research” (Etherington, 2004, p. 36). Whilst I shared my own truth, I deliberately left open-ended questions, with no specific answers, in the hope that such questions will encourage self-examination by the reader.

Autoethnography & Stories of Sexual Abuse

There are a number of autoethnographic studies that describe the impact of sexual abuse on the lives of the researchers and the ramifications for the society they lived in. The impact upon an individual’s life, both personally and professionally, is profound and life changing

(McAlinden, 2006, 2012). Those who do well despite their experiences, do so because of the need to maintain an “integrity of the self” (Di Palma, 1994, p. 87) where they were able to use fantasy and projection to put themselves mentally in a safer place. This could be achieved by any means, but art, drama and especially writing are recognised as having therapeutic benefits for survivors (Speedy, 2004; Williamson & Wright, 2018).

The use of the methodology of autoethnography is pertinent as the author (who assumes the role of the researcher in the research) can explore areas that can be sensitive and difficult to tackle. As the researched, they can provide invaluable insight that may not be “accessible from mainstream research methods whereby subjects may be unwilling or afraid to disclose sensitive personal information” (Philaretou & Allen, 2006, p. 2). The data collected stems from the life of a “flesh and blood person who is alive, active, and feeling” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 60). These revelations from each author’s lives enable us, as the readers, to feel their vulnerability; weep with them during their most painful life moments; and share their insights and personal reckonings that percolates from their experiences (Berry & Patti, 2015). As such, the following stories are unique but similarly powerful exemplars.

Carol Rambo-Ronai (1995) boldly describes the ongoing sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her father. I found her autoethnography incredibly raw and in some ways jarring as she describes in vivid detail the memories and feelings she has during her most vulnerable moments. Her work is extremely evocative and potent, but reading her study forced me to revisit the tame version of my own story. If I was going to be truly honest, I had to be as vulnerable as Carol Rambo-Ronai. Writing about such hideous things in one’s life shouldn’t be something to feel ashamed about and the fact that I still feel some shame tells me there is more work to be done. Rambo-Ronai (1995) examines this phenomenon in her history, as she continued to feel tainted by the ongoing rapes she experienced by her father. She sought to write about her experience and integrate her story into her research and was questioned by

her peers. Would revealing so much about her life reflect on her professional career? Her courage in this early autoethnography should be viewed with the respect it deserves. Yet, the question remains... why do we still feel ashamed?

Kwon (2016) grew up in a Chinese culture and writes as a way of “witnessing” her experience of sexual assault during her childhood. She also writes the stories of her grandmother and “comfort woman” (p. 9), Kang, during the Sino-Japanese war where they both were violated and continually raped by soldiers. Using performative autoethnography enabled her to find the strength to write her own story of sexual abuse. She states, “despite this internal crisis, my artistic and performative examination of this trauma enabled my transformation from a victim of sexual assault into a subject of sexual trauma” (Kwon, 2016, p. 8). Kwon equates the writing of her stories was a way of integrating the abuse into her identity and how this became a positive in her life.

Qambela’s painfully written autoethnography examines the seldom discussed issue of male rape of boys and men “who do not fit the hegemonic moulds of idealised masculinity, boyhood and manhood” (Qambela, 2016, p. 179) in post-apartheid South Africa. Qambela, like Rambo-Ronai, questioned how much he should share and asks if he had divulged too much. They both came to the conclusion that the benefit was palpable. Qambela believes the writing of his experience was more cathartic than he expected it to be, but was valuable to the overall “[contribution] to knowledge on [the] understanding of masculinities and sexual violence against men” (Qambela, 2016, p. 197). The openness and bravery of this work propelled me to dig deeper into my own history and allowed for a more honest account.

Chubin (2014) recounts what she calls ‘sexual harassment’ experienced by women on a daily basis on the streets of Iran. After reading her autoethnography, I was quick to realise that what she termed ‘harassment’ was actually sexual abuse and violence against women.

She identifies the paradox of Iranian females who were expected to be “an honorable woman [who] is so solemn that she discourages male strangers... [and] protective of her modesty by wearing clothing with styles and colors that do not stimulate the eye” (Chubin, 2014, p. 181); yet at the same time if she was a victim of any kind of assault, she should feel shame and responsibility (Chubin, 2014). She states that “it is by examining Iranian women’s personal troubles and through disclosing these experiences as lived that I explore social and political processes that create and perpetuate the experiences of street sexual harassment” (Chubin, 2014, p. 178). What Chubin makes clear is that secrecy and shame are prevalent everywhere and each culture experiences its own way of dealing with the problem, but ostensibly, all cultures have a problem of sexual abuse that permeates and is minimised in every society.

Spry (2001) utilises performative autoethnography where she writes and articulates her own poetry as a way to perform her experiences of sexual abuse. She suggests that the autoethnographical process has “emancipatory potential” as an engaging “emotional texturing of... a live participative embodied researcher” (p. 709). Furthermore, “the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (p. 711). Under examination, Spry attempts to make critical, political and personal sense of the sexual assault that she experienced. Employing the tool of writing, she was able to “rewrite that experience as a woman with strength and agency rather than accepting the victimage discourse of sexual assault” (p. 712). I felt a strong connection to this author, as my intention is also to make this my primary goal in developing this and other autoethnographies as a way of transformation and epiphanous change. I am using my ability to write as a way of performing my stories. Especially in the autoethnography, ‘Life is a box of Derwents: An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse’ (Barley, 2020b), this story, my story unfolded like a stream of consciousness as the words spilled upon the page. I deliberately didn’t edit the poetic in the writing, instead allowed the metaphors, similes and

alliteration to remain as an integral element of the story writing. The words became the performance, with a deliberate intent to provoke emotion in the witness/es; the story was intended to be imagined, felt and experienced (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

The common thread that weaves throughout all of these studies is: the profundity of emotion attached to the experiences; the questioning and reluctance associated with victimhood and shame; the aching need to somehow “perform” the work; whether that be through art, writing, or poetry; the efficacious and evocative rendering of the story; and the catharsis that coincides with the resolution of the study. Kwon (2016) describes this as reviewing and revising his “eyewitness testimony of shattered images of repeated trauma. [He decries that he] was not secondarily victimized or traumatized by it, but instead convinced to see, understand, and feel my trauma that cannot be seen with my own eyes” (p. 16).

Why is the Epiphany so Important in this Context?

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise
Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these sunken eyes and learn to see
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to be free
—The Beatles, Blackbird

The epiphany is an inherent by-product of autoethnographic writing. This genre of writing can be multilayered connecting, consciousness, the personal and cultural experiences of the author (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The autoethnographer pans inward and outward, as they

examine their lived experience through a narrow lens, but in context of the wider cultural experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). These accounts are usually “written [using] first-person voice... [and] are featured in relational, family, institutional, and community stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Writing about poignant and intimate experiences “situate people in predicaments in which they must deal with and/or solve problems in order to find and/or create some emotional truth out of experiences they’ve lived through” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 85). The epiphany emerges from the struggle and is like “turning on a new light in a new room” (Douglas & Carless, 2016, p. 92). The autoethnography as a research tool in this context has the potential to be inspirational and transformative.

I have written in a deliberate attempt to provoke the audience's imagination to live the experience with me and in doing so the reader will “not have to struggle endlessly to understand and relate” to my story. As the writer, my “challenge is to artfully arrange” the portrayal, narrative and memory of my life where the audience feels like they have been co-opted in the same book (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 79). The following narrative elucidates this by taking you to the environment of my childhood:

Across the road from my house there was a block of flats. The flats were housing commissioned and oozed impoverishment and decay. I often played in the playground of the flats and part of the play was running up and down four flights of stairs. One day, when I was about ten, I ran to the very top story. At the top was a laundry, clotheslines and hard, white concrete that us kids would run around and play hide and seek. The night before, I had experienced another visit from my stepfather. I can't recall the inbetweens, but the before and after was filled with dread and then pain respectively. As well as the nightly visits of terror, was the daily turmoil and abuse. I wish I could say that there was love from my Mother, there was not. She was so busy having babies, and trying to hold onto a man who was a drunken abuser, that she had forgotten about me.

I arrived at the top of the stairs, then walked to the protective wall. Someone had left a table that must have used for a party, so I climbed up onto it and peered over the edge. I teetered for a long time and wondered about jumping off the ledge. Maybe I would fly... maybe not. Would it hurt? Would I feel anything going down? Would that unknown be preferable to the known that I was enduring? Then, the strangest thing happened... I thought I heard a voice in the wind, "It's not time to fly yet." There was a time when I would have told you that I believed the voice was that of an angel and they carried me off the table... now I don't know. Whatever the explanation, the epiphany was clear... I had to hang in there. Which is of course, what I did. The next day (perhaps by coincidence, perhaps by design), there were evangelical singers in the park. I felt drawn to their songs and their energy. I still remember the book they gave me; it was a wordless book with five colours, black, red, white, gold, green representing aspects of Jesus. When they invited me to Sunday school, I was rapt. I gladly went, as this meant I could escape my family for half of each Sunday. Also, I got to see other families who were loving and met people who were kind. I can't say I have retained any kind of Christian faith, but I am eternally grateful for the love and generosity the congregation demonstrated to a little girl who was profoundly lost.

This story is illustrative of a ten year old's crossroad. I was becoming more and more alert to the fact that my family life was different to others. There was also an awareness that I had to survive my childhood and this would demonstrate more courage than jumping off a building. Despite the *noetic* quality of this epiphany, it was not any kind of belief or experience with some kind of deity that propelled me to alter my trajectory. The kindness of strangers gave me hope there was more to humanity than I experienced in my home; so in parallel, reading and writing took on more meaning. I began noticing everything around me as signs and symbols, which meant the books I read and music I listened to were like roadmaps. I could no longer rely upon my family as a moral compass; I could only be guided by myself and the stories I lived in.

My Relationship to the Epiphany

‘My dear young fellow,’ the Old-Green-Grasshopper said gently, ‘there are a whole lot of things in this world of ours you haven't started wondering about yet.’ —Roald Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*

As a child, I only knew the emotions of fear or freedom. Fear when my stepfather came home. And freedom, when he was not. We had a strangely shaped house, with a huge bluestone, cobbled backyard. The yard used to be a stable. At the side of the house, was a driveway and every day when my stepfather arrived home, he would toot the horn of the car. The ceremonial announcement that the ruler was here! We had to open the gate for him, so he could drive through. As soon as I heard that loud horn, the dread punched me in the stomach. That feeling would gouge and gnaw until he was gone again. It was only then that I could take a breath.

Growing up in an environment of domestic abuse, books and literature became a pathway to escape and fantasy. Reading Enid Blyton, Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Chauncey Woolsey and other acceptable girl's fiction was a first step along this route. There was a detour to Lewis Carroll, Roald Dahl and then the ultimate literary adventure, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1997). The creative and symbolic style, interwoven with allegory and metaphors piqued my imagination and stirred the inner burgeoning author. Reading and writing became a quintessential part of me. Pen and paper became the tool of my first language, being the solitary companion and form of expression for an otherwise silent girl.

Reading *The Hobbit* for the first time, I experienced my earliest literary epiphany. The illumination being that writing could be more than just prose and could entail all sorts of hidden meanings and intentions. I am not sure I could have survived without being able to write and equally; I am not sure I could have survived without the epiphany. The epiphany became the way I came to understand the world, and to know myself within that world. It was the way I could accept the events that occurred in my life and to use those events to grow myself. Petridou (2016) suggests that the epiphany doesn't cause the connection...the connection causes the epiphany, insofar that those epiphanic moments are waiting to be allowed to pop and provide access. It was a way in which I could develop my own

understandings and feelings about my childhood experiences, where the “shift in the quality of experience that [resulted] in a heightened sense of the presence of something precious” (Mason, 2007, p. 353).

Now it is a strange thing, but things that are good to have and days that are good to spend are soon told about, and not much to listen to; while things that are uncomfortable, palpitating, and even gruesome, may make a good tale, and take a deal of telling anyway.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

To escape the toxicity of my family situation, writing also became a “coping mechanism” that kept me from being “overwhelmed with complicated, scary, threatening, or traumatic memories or thoughts” (Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018, p. 60). Writing was how I survived the abuse, but was also how I expressed what was happening to me. I discovered that excelling in everything I did (especially academically) was an act of rebellion (Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018). I would often hear my stepfather tell my Mother that “I was never going to amount to anything” so I intended to succeed brilliantly just to spite him. My private jottings were also a silent demonstration against his oppression AND, what was even better, was the feeling that I could outsmart him. He never realised that what I was writing about was his abuse of me. Once he insisted on knowing what I was doing, so I showed him a poem I was writing. The anxiety rose in the pit of my stomach, as I thought, “What if gets it?” He read the words with a confused look on his face and exclaimed, “Doesn’t make any bloody sense”... I took the page from him and silently smiled and declared, “It does to me!”

Poetry, Epiphany and me

Sometimes I feel like I don't even know the me that is me,
The only me I know, is a me I don't really know at all
—Karen Barley, *The me that is me*

My family were not literary minded. I never observed my step dad reading a book (in fact he would often decry, "I hate reading") and my Mum read occasionally, later in life when she was no longer busy with little children. My Nana (on my Mother's side) was illiterate and my Pop read medical or art books as he was fascinated with both genres. My step grandmother read Mills and Boon...kind of says it all really. I loved books, but there were none in my house. I recall going to play at a friend's house and their walls were lined with bookcases filled to the brim with tomes on every topic...ohh how I loved their house. I fawned over homes I viewed in the movies that had a library inside the house...with a ladder that would slide across the room...I would dream of a room like that. Reading was my first and most enduring love. Everywhere I went, I would have a book in my hand. I knew the characters intimately and I found fantasy and meaning in all words. If I wasn't reading stories, I was singing songs. I would sit by my Mum's big, freestanding record player and play her old 45 vinyls. I found meaning in the songs and before I knew it, I would be daydreaming about my imagined, wonderful life.

Discovering poetry was an organic extension of my love of literature, but this didn't occur until I was about sixteen in High School during English classes. Prior to that, I had developed a love of the poetry in music. As much as I enjoyed the music, it was the words that were most poignant and meaningful to me. I eventually started writing poetry because of my love of the lyrics of Dylan, McCartney and Lennon, Davies and Hodgson, Joni Mitchell and of course Melanie Safka. There was one album that helped me survive my teens, Supertramp's 'Crisis What Crisis' (1975). Every song meant something, from Easy Does It, to Sister Moonshine, Aint Nobody but Me, and the Two of Us. For the girl struggling to survive in a family pervaded by violence and 'drunkenness', Davies and Hodgson (1975) surely wrote this album for me.

And if my thoughts had wings
I'd be the bird that sings
I'd fly where love isn't shy
And everyone is willing to try
... And if you know who you are
You are your own superstar
And only you can shape the movie that you make
—Supertramp, Easy Does It

A natural segue was that of lyrics to poetry, as I recognised that words had a powerful effect on me. This discovery, as a teenager was the ultimate epiphany moment. Moved and inspired by the texture and layers of the verse of Yeats, Plath, Blake, Hopkins and Eliot (to name a few), I discovered, with every line, an altered experience of personal knowledge, awareness and epiphany. I could read and write words that appeared in code, interwoven with secret fantasies, dreams and musings. This might not seem much of an epiphany, but for a girl growing up with an abusive and oppressive stepparent, the ability to delve inside the secret world of words, without worrying about being exposed, provided an emotional outlet and freedom from the tyranny of domesticity. This unearthing provided light amidst the sordidness of my troubled home life and, in many ways, shaped my formative identity; including values, morals and sense of self. As the child who wanted to fly away from the abuse she suffered, I integrated poetry into my box of coping tools. I wrote poems of escape and transformation, and I often wrote, yearning for a form of love even though it was some nebulous intangible notion I had not experienced. Eaton and Paterson-Young (2015, p. 68) claim that “for the child writing poems, the feelings of romance and love effectively disguised the level of violence and abuse she experienced every day.”

I became enthralled by the words of the classic poets, as they spoke to me in ways no one else had. Reading William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* inspired me to look past the darkness of my childhood and propelled me into the realm of verse and imagination.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour
—William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, 1803

The simplicity of Blake thrilled me, for even the smallest of words could hold a memory, a thought, an experience. Words were like a cave that you could crawl into and hibernate, leaving the world outside to its own devices. I began to use poetry not only as a way to escape; but to forge my own identity, my own values, my own knowledge of the world, via the process of reading, thinking and writing (Mason, 2007). Reading the text of others, can “become meaningful vehicles for creating a shift of perspective from the ordinary to the extraordinary” by way of an epiphany (Mason, 2007, p. 360). Poetry illuminates text phenomenologically where it allows the reader to see what was previously hidden (van Manen, 1990). It is as if, reading poetry became a perpetual act of an “aha” moment; a cadence of epiphanies of wonder, awareness and insight. Poetry has a way of awakening our perceptions, which shakes and expands our world by using metaphor and image to illuminate lived experience (Kirmayer, 2000).

Poems of Importance

When I completed my Higher School Certificate, the natural path for me was to choose English Literature as one of my subjects. English, being a separate and compulsory subject, meant I could devote my time to my favourite pastime in two subjects. My English Literature

teacher had a passion for the topic and with a rich, baritone voice. He could read poetry in a way where the words would jump off the page and bounce straight into the imagination. I was captivated. I made the connection between the lyrics I loved and poetry and found epiphanies throughout. I would continue to read and write poetry throughout my late teens and later whilst undertaking my teaching degree.

The first poem I read of notable significance was nineteenth Century English mystical and lyrical poet, Gerald Manley Hopkins' *The Windhover*. This poem was a symphony of words and I danced with the meaning and alliterative play. Hopkin's epiphanic ode "To Christ our Lord" read as magic and wonder. Hopkins was a religious poet, but I was less enraptured by the religion than I was with his literary inspiration. He motivated the emergent poet in me to play with meaning, experiment with metaphors, and percolate and play with words, to hear how they sounded sitting beside one another.

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
—Gerald Manley Hopkins, *The Windhover*

This poem was like a song and I would read it aloud because I loved the way it sang. The words flowed together and formed a symphony. I also wondered about the Windhover, what sort of bird was this that deserved such accolades. The windhover is a bird that has the rare ability to hover, still in the air, while it scans on the ground for potential prey. The windhover was the me that wished to rise above the world, peruse the view and scan for danger. The lyrical element of the poem filled me with tangible wonder and joy, which instilled a semblance of hope.

When I first read Eliot, I had no idea what he was writing about. Does anybody? My first reaction was that the poem made no sense. Then, I read the words aloud (I like the way words sound, especially in poetry) and delved into the layers of the text, the animation of each line, the punctuation and the pauses. I felt like an explorer and losing myself within the poems of Eliot was an awakening, the poetic epiphany. It wasn't so much that profound knowledge emanated from the poem, but there was a spark of something visceral and somatic. Every line had movement and physicality; and every word could be what I imagined it to be. This brought another level of sagacity found within the written word; a further exploration, but also a mystery. Ohhhh! What could I do with this newfound wonder? Add more complexity to my own musings and also imbue all of my secrets deeper inside the verses. Writing allowed me to employ literary techniques such as metaphors and similes that can "bring new things into consciousness leading to initially unperceived knowledge" (Dyson, 2007, p. 46).

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That fade behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.
—T.S. Eliot, Preludes

I found a real connection to the griminess of Eliot. It felt like me... and my childhood. It felt like the neighbourhood I grew up in; working class, full of poverty, a pub on each corner and grubby children squealing and playing while the adults ignored them. It was

perverse and cynical; hope was elusive in the littered, dirty streets. Reading Eliot was like being in the backyard waiting for my stepfather to come home. Eliot was the dark and depressed in me; the anger and the sadness; the fear and betrayed. Each word held an awakening, and it was hard to take. It was difficult to accept that Eliot encapsulated (I'm sure not intentionally) the me, that was the abused child.

The moment of deepest profundity was ignited when I read Sylvia Plath's *The Arrival of the Bee Box*. Just like the lyricists I loved, it was as if Sylvia Plath wrote these words for me, or to me. This poem, like no other elucidated an intense, personal relationship to every word, theme and evocation. I *was* the beekeeper, and I hung on every word of revelation and discovery.

I wonder how hungry they are.
I wonder if they would forget me
If I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree.
... They might ignore me immediately
... I am no source of honey
So why should they turn on me?
Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.
The box is only temporary.
—Sylvia Plath, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*

Reading this work was firstly epiphanous and then transformative. Feeling torn between fear and responsibility, my young life was perpetually plagued with despair. As I wrestled with my conflicting emotions, I struggled with Plath's meaning behind the verses, but at the same time I felt as if I was sitting on the edge of my seat. I read and re-read. Via this poem, I was able to confront my own life experience and the endless competition between the emotions of fear and responsibility. The beekeeper in Plath's poem feels responsible for the welfare of the bees, but she feels terrified of them at the same time. I felt

responsible for my family, but I lived in fear of what they had done and could do. Survivors often take on the role of carers where they nurture the people around them (Di Palma, 1994; Rambo-Ronai, 1995) and they also take responsibility for the family's wellbeing (Ahmad & Nasir, 2010). Just like the beekeeper, I believed I had to save my family, but at the same time, I detested them because of the terror they provoked within me.

The power of the writing and the symbolism of Plath's words incited a private exploration and experimentation with language in ways that felt like uncharted territory. This connection in itself, was epiphanous. For a girl who had lived inside books for as long as she could read, the knowledge that could bury myself deeper inside the words upon a page was a true revelation. I crawled with Hopkins, walked with Eliot, but I ran with Plath. Not only that, words became a more potent tool for my personal revolution: to conceal memories, to speak truth and to silently protest against my oppressors.

When I was thirteen, I ran away from home. It was the second time I considered suicide. My Mother was not that effective when it came to my stepfather, but by this time she was literally making herself ill. My stepfather would come home drunk, then she would scream and yell, violence would ensue and then my Mother would spend the next week in bed with some imagined illness. My stepfather would then fawn over her and they would go back to the honeymoon phase. My parents would virtually live their entire marriage in and out of the honeymoon stage and us kids would be left on the sidelines, wondering what the fuck just happened. The day I ran away was one such occasion. A few days prior I came home and they were both sitting on the porch steps. We are going to separate, they tell me. You can choose who you stay with. "Ohh fuck!" This is going to seem completely mental, but one of my siblings chose to stay with my stepfather and I knew I would have to stay with him so he wouldn't be alone. The beekeeper... that was me. I laid awake for the next two nights. How could I possibly stay with him? As hopeless as my Mum was, at least she was a buffer. I needn't have to worried, because two days later we were back to the honeymoon phase. "Sighhhhhhhh." That night, forgetting my allegiance to him, my stepfather tried to force crumbed lamb brains down my throat. I ran out the door. I couldn't stand it anymore... death was better than this fucking nightmare. But how... but where... I was lost. My responsibility to myself kicked in. Needless to say, I survived. I was found and I was tortured by being forced to stay close to my stepfather for daring to do something so despicable. I wrote reams of

poetry at this point; my characters were animals who found superhero strength; or a human who discovered she could fly; or a child who made friends with a dolphin who showed her she could escape to a paradise under the ocean. All the characters and their worlds were good and safe places to be.

Discussion

Protection and Escape - The Ultimate Oxymoron

The greatest contribution of bees and other pollinators is the pollination of nearly three quarters of the plants that produce 90% of the world's food. (World Bee Day Organisation, 2019)

I am allergic to bees, so any sting I get in the future could potentially prove fatal. Yet, because of my fascination with the poem, *The Arrival of the Bee Box*, I have been strangely enchanted by the bee species. Ecologically, bees are vitally important to agriculture. Bees are responsible for the pollination of a third of the world's food production, as well as providing a role in the propagation of high quality foods such as honey and royal jelly (World Bee Day Organisation, 2019). To care for bees requires highly regulated management and cultivation. Looking after bees requires registration (each country and state has its own requirements) and any future owner has a legal and moral obligation to maintain the bees in a healthy state (Agriculture Victoria, 2018). Beekeepers need to be cautious and use safe procedures when dealing with bees. Protective and light clothing is necessary, with a specially designed beekeepers hat, complete with veil, elasticised cuffs, thick gloves and elastic sided boots (Agriculture Victoria, 2018). This uniform is vital to ensure the safety of the beekeeper when dealing with the bees in their environment. The beekeeper provides the perfect allegory for the plight of the sexually abused child. This child feels responsible for the very thing that could cause them harm and even death. Despite donning appropriate and protective clothing, fear and danger feels imminent. The beekeeper's garb becomes the protection *and* the escape

(by way of providing a layer) from a possible bee attack. Any fear one might feel is ignored because of the care that is required to keep the bee population alive and well harvested.

As a child who experienced CSA, I can testify to the tension experienced when you are trapped in an abusive environment. When I was younger, it did not occur to me that I should expose my stepfather. A young child isn't aware that what they are experiencing is abnormal, until they are exposed to the larger world and you realise that this kind of behaviour doesn't happen in other families (Ahmad & Nasir, 2010; Greydanus & Merrick, 2017; Slater, 2013). By this time, the person who is offending has either sworn you to silence, or made you feel responsible for your own abuse (Greydanus & Merrick, 2017). I wasn't groomed by my stepfather because he did not show much love to me at any time. He was oppressive, dogmatic and emotionally abusive. As long as I can remember, I hated him. I feared him. Yet I had no idea I could escape him. Tethered to his abuse of me, was his grooming of my Mother. He groomed her so well that she could not escape him (Barrett, 2010; DiLilo & Damashek, 2003). He controlled her financially, emotionally and sexually. I often witnessed my stepfather groping my Mother, whispering in her ear, putting his hands up her legs and under her skirt. She was completely under his spell and when he did not pay attention to her, she threw a two-year-old style tantrum. If she couldn't get his attention, she would suddenly get sick and spend weeks in bed. This meant I was left to raise my siblings. I was responsible for the wellbeing of my family. Under these conditions, how could I tell? Even if I did, I was never sure that my Mother would do anything to help me (Barrett, 2010; DiLilo & Damashek, 2003). It was obvious to me that she cared more about her needs than mine. So, I had no choice but to don the beekeeper's protective garb and buffer myself from the stings.

The Value of Literature

Write till your ink be dry, and with your tears

Moist it again, and frame some feeling line

That may discover such integrity.

—William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

The value of literature in my life was vital to my survival as a human. Books were the perfect escape and also the inspiration for further liberation from the despotism of my family. Paul Fry, English Professor at Yale University describes literature as being “a pleasant art of illusion” and poetry as “verbal magic” (Fry, 1980, pp. 2-3) where the utilisation of words on a page can take the reader on a journey of illusion and imagination. The magic and illusory nature of words can also precipitate and invoke transformative breakthroughs that can transcend the moment. James (1985) refers to memorable scripts of literature that are moving and powerful passages transporting us through “irrational doorways” that can be mysterious and thrilling (p. 3014). Literature has the power to be evocative and induce epiphanies that can transform lives and provide insight and illumination (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Stories and poetic expression have the ability to “elevate the sensory and perceptual experience to unprecedented heights” (Bauer, 2001, p. 4), which can provide a powerful insight into the author/s and by osmosis, the reader’s life (Bauer, 2001). The epiphanic element is the vital ingredient to the “escape” component of the written work. The literary techniques and skill of the writer can make “the sense of “escape” possible, but the real escape is perhaps one of slipping the leash of the habitual and becoming new again in our own, and consequently, others’ stories” (Williamson & Wright, 2018, p. 117).

Writing can also be psychologically beneficial and provide a pathway to healing and even cure (Bolton, 2004; Speedy, 2013; Williamson & Wright, 2018). Writing can be a

coping mechanism that helps children to survive an environment of systematic abuse in their home (Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018). Abused children may be hiding behind layers of constructed self-protection and their outward behavior could be an indicator of their inward angst and struggle against their environment. Anyone working with children should not underestimate the importance of literature in a child's life as well as creating a space for escape and engaging the imagination. This could be a topic for future studies.

Limitations and Conclusion

The wrestle I have with over exposing my experiences of sexual abuse is a tenuous but reflexive one (Etherington, 2004). This juxtaposition is exemplified using the analogy of the bee box and the beekeeper and the correlation of fear and responsibility experienced as a child and my sense of fear and responsibility in this research process. Both of these emotions run at each end of the continuum respectively. I felt fearful about exposing myself and the contemptible, grimy details of sexual abuse. I felt scared that if I told too much, the reader would question if I had taken it too far. I felt fear that I was also opening the Pandora's Box of secrets and that I would be forced to confront those head on. On the other end of the continuum, I was fearful that a tame tale would not be potent or compelling; would not be powerful and would NOT affect the reader in a way that is epic and epiphanic. Without gruesome and honest recall, how can I evoke emotion, empathy, understanding, empowerment? Second is the problem of responsibility. On one hand, I have a responsibility to myself and those who know me. Does keeping my secret keep me safe? Keeping the lid on means not exposing myself to scrutiny, judgement or questioning? I could become the bee trapped inside the bee box. On the other hand, do I have a responsibility to keep you, the reader safe? Is it ok to expose you to the shock and possible trigger that could stem from my stories? OR, is my responsibility to myself to be bold, courageous, open, and say "fuck off"

to anyone who dares to question my veracity? Keeping the secret perpetuates the crux of the problem... sexual abuse remains a hidden topic, because we keep the secrets, because we remain silent, because we don't report, because we are vilified when we do. That responsibility extends to the reader, because painting a prettier picture is deluding and delusional.

As I reflexively examined all the angles, the answer was crystalised. I owe it to myself and to you to be naked with my brutal transparency. I can no longer care about what you think of me and restrain myself as a result. I also owe it to society to do the same. The expression of shame, pain and responsibility for being abused, is not mine. It belongs to those who perpetrated those devious acts. There was nothing I did to call that upon myself. It was not possible to expose what was happening to me any earlier and reporting is not as easy as one might think. Nevertheless, it doesn't matter and doesn't change the facts, or the experience, or the aftermath. AND it should not be MY responsibility. It is time we changed this rhetoric and resist putting the onus upon the victim. Considering the epiphany inside an autoethnography... without gutsy, true and impactful data, the epiphany is unlikely to be piqued and combustible. The narrative should be eloquent enough to make the reader feel like they were living the story with the author.

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Chapter Six

[‘Peering over the fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and ‘others’](#) (Author: Karen Barley. Accepted with edits to the *Journal of Autoethnography*)

When I confirmed I would write all of my articles inside this thesis as an autoethnography, I had a number of options regarding my topics. As I delved deeper, I felt like I was stripping back layers – of my past, my childhood, of me; thus, any new study had to be more audacious and poignant than the others. I scoured my memories and history to determine how I could add another layer that could be more revealing, more naked. I could choose a number of different topics. My method had become to allow the epiphany to linger and then fall upon my mind, so I trusted this process again. I recalled the numerous people who had showed me kindness, or provided me a soft place to fall when I was at my most vulnerable; these recollections were etched into my history because it was this group of ‘others’ who mirrored to me a glimpse of myself and helped me find a way to salvation. To harken their praises does not seem enough because these incredible individuals will possibly never know what their kindness meant to a little girl who was so broken. They probably had little awareness that they helped to save my life and also gave me life; and they are most likely oblivious to the resilience they gave me by showing me I was worth their trouble. This means everything to a child like me!

Non-disclosure is not unique to my story, but it is a valuable discussion given the overwhelming damage caused by CSA. I wrote the vignettes first and focused on the front story. I pondered themes, but I realised I needed to add a separate subconscious and silent voice to these vignettes that would speak to what Karen really wanted to do or say. I chose to write stories as a performative autoethnography where the audience and performer (I) could construct the moments and epiphanies together. The first voice from the vignettes

were written with abandon, almost as a stream of consciousness. I sat with these tales for a time and the epiphany hit me that I should couple the vignettes with a second piece that stemmed from the deeper subconscious of Karen. If she could have, what would she have really wanted to say to the ‘others’ who showed her kindness? These conversations with self also provide some illumination as to why children do not disclose their abuse, even though it might seem that they have an opportunity to do so. (The referencing for this article is Chicago Manual Style as per the submitted journal’s requirements).

Peering over the fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and ‘others’

Karen Barley

Abstract

Facing childhood sexual abuse can be a dark and lonely experience. The kindness of ‘others’ can create moments of confidence and hope for that child. This provides an existential life line and reinforcement that the child is ‘ok’; gifted care from ‘others’ helps the child to know that they are worthy. This study is a performative autoethnography that retells memories from a childhood saturated with brutality and sexual abuse. There are two active voices: the author’s narrative voice retells the stories; and the voice of the subconscious who articulates the authentic utterances of Karen, recalling the depth of her emotions. This study also explores the profundity of the impact of ‘others’ and the impetus they can provide to a child whom is experiencing abuse. Lastly, this autoethnography examines the value of the epiphany in the life of an abused child, and in the writing of an autoethnography. Performing the autoethnography co-creates the stories so that the author and reader grasps the epiphanic together.

Keywords: Autoethnography, performative autoethnography, childhood sexual abuse (CSA), epiphany

Introduction

A performative autoethnography of sexual assault, the audience not only sees my body as evidence of an assaulted body, they also see my body performing a reflexive critique upon dominant cultural notions of victim and survivor contextualized in that place and in that time. (Spry, 2011b, p. 19)

Children are not meant to look sad and forlorn. Yet when I look at the many photos of young Karen, peering out from the child's eyes is sorrow and pain. When I see a sad child, I find myself drawn to them and it takes fortitude to stop myself from sweeping them up and rescuing them. I have to remind myself that the best I can do is be a voice in their life that advocates for them and supports them (Draucker et al., 2011). An adult saying "you're ok" is incredibly satisfying to an abused child... it feels like they 'see you', which is as comforting as a warm hug. It is difficult to assess the difference that kindness can make to children's lives, but as one who was a victim of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), the numerous 'others' in my life who showed me care and kindness made a difference to my survival. I have no idea whether any of them suspected that I was an abused child, but I feel that they were drawn to the sadness in me.

Growing up in the 1960s in an inner city suburb was filled with working class allegories. Potholed, bluestone, cobbled roads, grimy streets, beer smells, and a cacophony of suburban sounds. It was also a time when the only world news came from the daily papers, or the six o'clock bulletin on TV. There weren't any current affairs programs on the problems of CSA, except perhaps rare ones on the Australian Broadcasting Commission and despite awareness by Australian politicians and authorities of this issue "little [had] been done by governments to address the needs of survivors" (Bateman & Henderson, 2010, p. x) . It was still reasonable to give kids a 'good hiding' and corporal punishment was endorsed in the schools I attended. The people in my streets were not alert and it wouldn't have occurred to them that a five year old girl was being sexually abused at number 4 Maddox Street. They

couldn't have fathomed that at night while my mother slept, my stepfather would come into my room and do unspeakable things whilst my sibling laid in the bed parallel.

Could I have told anyone? I don't know how I could have because I wasn't aware that what was happening to me was not appropriate or acceptable. Children were instructed to obey their elders, do what they say and never speak back (Draucker et al., 2011). 'Seen and not heard' was my stepfather's favorite saying. How could a vulnerable and powerless child speak up against her abuser? The stakes are already against her.

It is the most desperate situation and like being trapped in an invisible cage. You peer through the bars out into a world that seems to be ordinary and normal. You wonder, is this happening to all the little girls of the world? I craved love, I craved soft cuddles, I craved gentle kisses. I craved parents who nurtured and cared for me. I recall observing my cousins one day. I think I was about eight. They were visiting with their parents, and the song "Oh my Papa" came on the radio. The next minute, they were dancing around their father, singing to him "ohh my papa, to me he was so wonderful. Ohh my papa to me he was so so good. No one could be, so gentle and so lovable. Oh, my pa-pa, he always understood"... their Dad joined their singing with a deep baritone voice (which I can still hear in my mind) and they all dissolved into a group hug. I peered through the bars at this scene and ached. The scene rolled by like a movie and mirrored what I did not have. And, in an instant, the pang of loss was more potent than the brutalisation of sexual abuse. I'm pretty sure this was the moment when anger manifested in me, via demonstrations of sulky mood swings. Most photos of me after eight, portray a girl sitting in a corner, with a grouchy look upon her face. I was sad and melancholy and the only time I felt any joy was when I was reading, writing or watching my beloved Richmond Tigers (Australian Rules Football team) playing football.

My stepfather was cruel, misogynistic and racist. I didn't really know what Judaism was, but I believed that what happened in Nazi Germany could not be humane or 'right', yet

my stepfather maligned the race and celebrated Hitler. Don't ask me how I knew he was wrong, but at eight years old, I began an intellectual war with my stepfather arguing with him about his perverse racist views. Maybe this was the only way I could defeat him, or maybe I realised a man who acted so despicably could hardly be a valid and reliable source. My rage didn't evolve into anger or tantrums, but a quiet, brooding determination. I'm not sure I was astute enough to be mindful of my tactics, but innately I became more calculating and used writing and education to build protections around myself. I was perceptually aware that my stepfather was my nemesis and I would find every opportunity to prove him wrong. I could not oust his sexual deviance, but I took great pride in ousting his utter stupidity.

I also found a pathway to advocating for the underdog. This would remain a passion throughout my life. There was a student from Japan who did not speak a word of English. My peers either teased her, or ignored her. One day I noticed her drawings and became fascinated with her artistry. Her English did not improve but we found a way to communicate. I would not let anyone tease her after that. Another student was from Turkey, who wore provincial clothing and a head-covering. This was unusual for suburban Melbourne in the 60s, so this girl was heckled and the kids would try to take her head-covering off. I am not proud to say I initially joined the heckling, until one day I noticed how sad she looked. The pang of regret was instant and I made every effort to protect her afterwards. I walked with her to and from school, so she wouldn't be attacked on the way. We skipped and jumped and laughed... without ever having a conversation. I realised that I was never one of the 'cool' kids despite desperately trying to be a part of the group; I belonged more with the underdogs.

On reflection, it feels as if this autoethnography, along with the others I have written (Barley, 2020a; Barley, 2020b; Barley & Southcott, 2019) are all part of the performance of my life (Denzin, 2016). On some level, it feels egotistical to think that my life could be of value on a wider sociological level. As I wrote story after story, the revelation hit me that the

autoethnographical performances of Karen are more salient than I realised. Denzin shares that the written performance brings forth the “sting of memory” which in essence is the epiphany where “the life story becomes an invention, a re-presentation, an historical object often ripped or torn out of its contexts and recontextualized in the spaces and understandings of the story” (Denzin, 2016, p. 126). Tami Spry infers that “performative autoethnography offers hope and efficacy in the doing” (Spry, 2011a, p. 410). The sting of memory is more than a pang; it’s like a sharp blade that pierces the body, oozing out images, emotion and sensation. Memory of CSA is visceral and somatic; it’s niggling, but palpable; it’s pointed and enduring; it’s, it’s... I can’t think of other words, though I am sure there are many more.

Both Denzin (2014) and Spry (2011a) extrapolate that performance autoethnography has a political and social element. I wrestled with this idea at first as I wasn’t seeking to make a political or social statement. I concede the political undertone as I seek change for those who have experienced CSA; change in the way that we are perceived; change in how we can seek and employ help; change in victimology; change in future reparation; change in the overall toll that is CSA. Ultimately I seek change to the societal acceptance of the large numbers of abuse. Why are we NOT more outraged that one in five girls and one in eight boys are likely to be victims of CSA? In a standard classroom of twenty-five, that is five children. This should start a revolution, should it not? If five children came to school with cuts and bruises we would act immediately; if five children started vomiting, we’d be concerned about an epidemic, wouldn’t we? The more I write, the more enraged I become. Why are we so silent on this issue? Because it is murky, uncomfortable, confronting... No-one wants to think about adults molesting children, let alone imagine what that could entail. No-one wants the image of an adult rubbing a child’s genitals, or making them rub theirs; or worse still no-one wants the visual of any adult having intercourse with a five-year-old. Yet this is reality; multiple times... somewhere in the world infants and children are being raped.

Makes us squirm, doesn't it? So society talks around it, alludes to the reality; whatever we do we don't say it aloud. This is the problem! Saying it aloud, demystifies and shatters all illusions. And writing about it, sets it in concrete... once the words fall upon the page they are able to be spoken out aloud.

Getting off my soapbox... perhaps I am more political than I originally thought. I won't apologize. If you are reading this, I need you to know the reality. I have to be brazen and brutal. I have to perform my story as sensorily as I can, so you can feel it with me. Maybe, just maybe this will compel more individuals to act, by utilising "autoethnographic texts [to] reveal the fractures, sutures, and seams" (Spry, 2011b, p. 93) in the author's world as the researcher defines herself in context of the society she lives in.

The Performance

I wrote the following vignettes in a performative style. The first part of the vignette is the background; the *mise-en-scène* or the backstory if you like. I have woven the tale, as if you were on the outside looking in. The reader gets to observe the view from the author's vantage point and at the same time, feel the experiences. I write poetically (without being poetry) to evoke an emotional response. Autoethnography is meant to be provocative and emotive where the reader should feel like they've taken a journey with you (Ellis, 1999; Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016; Bochner & Ellis, 2016). In this context, the reader is provided a glimpse of my inner-city backyard and can get a feel for the little Karen in this environment.

The second part of the vignette is what is happening in the subconscious of Karen. It tells what she is thinking, feeling, wanting to say. This section is raw and even painful. It might make you squirm, or want to stop reading. I hope you will keep reading with me, not because my intention is for you to feel pain... what I hope for, is that you feel something... empathy and compassion. If you were there in that moment, as a bystander, as an 'other',

what would you do? This might be considered somewhat presumptuous of me. I am trusting you will forgive my indulgence.

Vignettes - Homages to the ‘Others’

Peering over the fence - Mrs. Gale

The house I lived in, in the belly of the inner suburbs of Melbourne was the perfect environment for escape. It had lots of cubby holes everywhere because the house used to be attached to horse stables. On each side of the house was a side path that provided great places to hide. There was a sleepout (a separate room from the house that could accommodate visitors). There were other little hiding spaces to the side of the sleepout and in the broken concrete where stables used to be. There was also an outside toilet laundry that had a separate courtyard (a spot I never entered because of the mice). Always needing a place to hide, I knew all the nooks and crannies of our house and yard. My stepfather was the predator and I was the prey. When he wasn't sexually abusing me in the darkness of the night, he was torturing me during the day. His voice was loud and harsh and if you weren't doing something wrong, he would find something. If you were having fun, that meant work needed to be done. So my stepfather would require us to work, mowing lawns with a hand held mower, clipping the edges of the grass with these awful clippers that were way too big for a child's hands, or filling hessian bags with newly delivered briquettes for the fire. The worst job of all was to stack beer bottles along the bluestone wall at the very back of the house. This meant dragging all the bottles in a box from the back verandah to the back and stack them in neat lines so the bottlo could come and collect them. This task was bad because the smell of beer was rancid and if I didn't stack neatly enough, the bottles would all fall and many would smash. The worst was the constant smell of beer afterwards as it seemed to permeate my pores. One of my favorite places to hide was the side of the house. We were in

inner suburbia so the houses were like boxes side by side partitioned by a weathered, grey timber fence. On this side of the fence there were three rails that the slats were hammered into and they were wide enough for my little feet to stand on. One day I heard laughter from the other side of the fence and I climbed onto the second rail and peered my head over the top.

“Ohh hello there,” calls this rich, Aussie, female voice. I smile and wave. The smile is warm and the scene looks inviting.

“What’s your name love?” she asks.

“Kar-en” I whisper.

She keeps chatting to the other lady who is lying on a banana lounge, with a blanket over her. She is young, and smiles weakly.

“I’m Mrs. Gale and this is Ruth”. I don’t know why, but I instantly fell in love with them both and Ruth especially. I learned later that Ruth had melanoma cancer.

Ruth was knitting and Mrs. Gale was pottering in the garden. I gazed over that fence for a long time, wriggling on the fence as my feet began to hurt on the narrow rail. I wanted the connection though, it felt homely, loving, soothing. They asked me if I wanted to visit and I ran to ask my mother if I could and to my delight she said yes. I ran next door and rang the doorbell. Mrs. Gale opened the door and I walked down her long hallway. I could hear the radio and the football (Australian Rules Football) playing in the background. Fitzroy was playing (the team Mrs. Gale loved). I barracked for the Tigers, so of course we developed a football rivalry from that day. Through the small 50’s style kitchen and out to the small concrete yard; the same yard I had peered over a few minutes ago. Ruth asked me to sit near her as she continued to knit. She asked if I would like to learn and I said yes. So she taught me how to knit a tea cozy. I still remember it vividly, it was red and green. Later, I realised Ruth was pregnant and was Mrs. Gale’s daughter-in-law. She looked after her as if she was

her own daughter and would later raise Ruth's daughter. Ruth died nine months after she gave birth and I can barely acknowledge the grief I felt. There was something about her and in retrospect, I know she must have been in pain, but she endured my endless visits, asking for help on my knitting project. I wish I could have told her how much it meant to me. After Ruth's death, I forged a friendship with Mrs. Gale. She was tough as nails, but soft as butter... what an anathema. I am not sure if she ever knew or what she knew, but her kindness was the only soft place I could fall upon for a very long time. She showed me that love was real and demonstrated this to a little girl who had none in her own backyard. She would invite me to dinner and gift me lovely little treasures for my birthday and Christmas. Grown-up presents like fragrant talc and hand cream. As wonderful as those occasions were, her home presented a stark contrast to my dark and dingy childhood house. She also had the most wonderful sense of humor and she easily engaged in banter with me (which is something I love to do too) which helped me to forge my identity. There was no humor in my home, so discovering jokes and laughter was a gift to my perennial sadness.

In the middle of the night I waited for death, I imagined and wondered about all the ways death could come. Would there be a world war? What about a volcanic eruption?

Earthquake maybe? In some ways, any of these disastrous events would have been better than the creeping of the steps... the squeaking of the door... the awful heavy breathing... and then the weight upon the bed... beer breath.

Calls from a payphone - Mr. Bartlett

Mr. Bartlett must have known something was not normal with his brooding, angry student. He would often ask me why I behaved the way I did. I would brood, explode and then sulk. I'm sure if this was happening today, this teacher would probably report my situation to Child Protective Services (CPS)... but it was 1971 and not a regular practice in those days.

However, Mr. Bartlett encouraged my love of writing, and my love of football. Growing up not far from the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) meant that we regularly went to the football (Australian Rules Football). My stepfather used the MCG as a local pub and would take my brother and me with him. Whilst he was busy drinking with his mates, we ran around the MCG exploring every corner and crevice. I developed an enduring love for the Richmond Tigers. I can't explain why, but my team became a tribe I could belong to; maybe it had something to do with their symbol 'the tiger' being the fierce protector it is - I can't say for certain, but I've loved tigers since. When you are combined in a united love for a team, there's something magical in that. I took it one step further, because football became a passion. I studied it, knew all the teams, the players, if I could have, I would have played. Anyway, back to Mr. Bartlett... he allowed me my love of football. I was in charge of the footy tipping and would detail all the stats and figures from each week's games. I made predictions about who would win. He fostered that in me whilst also nurturing my ability to read and write. He planted the first seed that I was smart and that I should make the most of that. I have always felt that he knew something was wrong because he gave me his phone number so I could call him if I needed to. Every now and then I would call him from the local phone box, usually on a weekend when I didn't know who else to turn to. We usually talked football and that was it, but it was comforting to be able to call the number. It almost seems trivial, but it was profound for me. Another soft place to fall... when needed.

It was a Saturday night, Richmond had won the Grand Final. I was so happy that I went to bed forgetting about what could potentially happen. I sang the Richmond song to myself while waiting to sleep, "ohh we're from Tigerland, a fighting fury... yellow and black"... I hear the creak. FUCK. The smell of beer consumed the room... the sweaty touch... he turned me on my stomach so he could touch my arse and poke at the holes... I can't. I was so mad he spoiled this day for me. After he left, I sang the

song again... “We’ll fight and fight and win... “Fuck you, I’ll never weaken cause I’m from Tigerland arsehole”. The next day I called Mr. Bartlett... I’m going to tell him... we talked about Richmond winning... I wanted to speak the words, but I didn’t... we continue talking football instead.

What if the world was a triangle? - Mr. Martin

“Karen, you should be a writer” was Mr. Martin’s constant mantra after reading my stories.

This was another teacher who recognised Karen the writer and also understood that I was unique and unusual. He was the kind of teacher who would have music playing in the background (unusual for early 70s) and was an inventive, creative teacher. His style of teaching also gave me the latitude to explore, experiment and be me. One day, I decided to investigate if the world could be a triangle. Mr. Martin didn’t deter my curiosity, but indulged it. He allowed me to go to the library (no internet of course) and research the makeup of the planet Earth and the Universe. I did an entire project on this topic and a section on the Earth as a triangle as science fiction and then demonstrated the earth was actually a sphere. I even wrote a children’s story about the Triangle earth. Mr. Martin thought this was brilliant and hung all the pages above his desk. It stayed there the entire year. I wondered, did he know what was happening to me?

I worked on some of my project at home. As I was trying to write my story my stepfather demanded to see what I was doing, looked at my writing and scoffed, “what sort of idiot teacher is this?” He ridiculed everyone who wasn’t him and he had a special kind of wrath for teachers and authority figures. I vehemently fought for my teacher. How dare he? He threatened to take me from the school and my mother told him to stop being ridiculous. There was no other school in the area. Yeah, fucker. Later that night when he was in my room, poking at me, rubbing against me, exhaling his beer breath upon me, I floated up to the ceiling and that’s where the triangle story came to me. It was easy to imagine and invent

when your brain escapes the physical bombardment. Wouldn't Mr. Martin be able to see that the triangle story was code for I wanted to inhabit another world? Nope, despite the accolades, he missed the hidden message.

This is how you could be a writer - Mrs. Edwards

When I attended High School, my moods deteriorated. I could not rebel outwardly at home, so I used my first few years at High School to act out. I caused trouble, fought with teachers, threw tantrums... what a nightmare to have a student like me. My teachers didn't know what to do with me. Their strategy to counteract my misbehaviors was to say I was smart but I didn't believe them... this is an impossible tenet for a child who has no confidence. Then came the first academic report and it was not good; fails across the board, except for my beloved English. My situation at home was made worse because my stepfather used this to punish me further. So I quickly figured out that I could act out but I better retain my grades. I realised that I could do as little study as possible and get higher marks than anyone else in the Grade. "Maybe I was smart?" However, my behavior did not improve, I found new ways to be disruptive. Mrs. Edwards was my English teacher (my favorite class of course) and she also recognised that something was not right with me. She let me borrow books and praised my writing. She said I was writing at an extremely developed level and as a way to contain my behavior invited me to join the school newsletter group (which was normally attended by Year 12 students). I was in Year 7. I became more and more alert to my own intelligence although I did not have enough sense to value this fact. I was writing many stories and Mrs. Edwards allowed me the freedom to choose my own content (the rest of the grade had prescribed topics); she also went to bat for me whenever I was in a scrap with other teachers. By Year 9, I regained my love for learning and had matured enough to understand my behaviors were not helpful, so I dedicated myself to my studies. Afterwards, my competitive

nature drove me to be a consistent top academic. I found a new sport and thing to care about (gaining the best grades possible).

I was a crazy mess. I couldn't find friends... I found all the other students banal and trivial. I hate saying this because it seems so elitist, but it was difficult to be a normal teenager when your stepfather is fucking you, as well as emotionally torturing you. I wasn't allowed to have friends over, or do normal girly things. He would make me cut my hair (which I loved) and wouldn't allow me to do things like pluck my eyebrows and shave my legs. I was the odd kid and I made myself more odd hoping against hope someone would pick up my SOS. They just thought I was nutty and annoying. I would write with Mrs. Edwards and I prayed she would be able to use telepathy and figure stuff out. If I picture this scene in my head, can I transfer it to her? I picture, the night before... lounge room, me on my knees, him in front of me.... Yeah I can't look. Can't breathe either... can't breathe, can't breathe... I am going to faint. He stands over me, breathe in from your nose, breathe out... you're ok. Almost gentle... then his cock is plunged into my face. How does anyone not know this is happening? Did she see the image in my head? She keeps talking about writing... I guess not. Fuck it.

Saying I love you - Jane and Matthew Hart

Fast forward to Year 11. I was sixteen, painfully shy around my peers but passionate about learning. I would feel pissed off if the other students did not listen in class and would chastise them. They found me irritating, but sure enough, if they needed help they came to me. I only had a few alliances because it was difficult to like me. Some valued my passionate nature, but not many. A shift happened with my teachers, where I had once viewed them as my enemy, I began seeking their support. I would find myself in their offices, talking about school work, but also home. My stepfather's alcoholism had gotten worse and my mother's relationship with him a rollercoaster. Added to that, she was constantly ill, either in bed or in hospital. I

was forced to be a housekeeper and carer for my siblings. This added more fuel to the fire that was my stepfather. Instead of praising me for the extra help I gave him, such as cooking, hanging out washing, dishes, vacuuming...all of this was on me; he would find fault in everything I did. I didn't wash a dish well enough, cook fast enough, I forgot to add one extra load to the machine. Arrrgghhhhh I was living a perpetual nightmare. The sick dread stayed in my stomach every day and I developed extreme migraines. None of that mattered to him, or my mother. Going to school was a haven. I loved the challenge of study, the new learning, working on an essay. I loved it all, but I became perfectionistic. If I didn't get high marks I hated myself. Mr. Hart was my favorite teacher. He taught me for legal studies and politics. I knew I was one of his favorite students because he was a man who didn't tolerate nonsense and he spent lots of extra time with me. He was married to another teacher at the school and she was the welfare coordinator. I told her of the problems at home with my mother's illness (nothing else) and she tried to talk to my stepfather to let him know that I needed time to study. She told him that I would do really well if I was given the right environment. He didn't care, and I knew she was angry with him because she slammed the handset back into main body of the phone and cursed. She called me into her office later in the day and said she had spoken to Matthew and my stepfather and arranged for me to come to their house to study. These house dates became regular where she would give me dinner and allow me to study. They both would give me advice and ideas about my various assignments due. I am certain I would not have passed Year 11 or 12 without them. They had a little boy who was almost four and every night they would read him a story, tuck him in, give him kisses and say "I love you". He would sing back, "Love you too". That ache hit me in the pit of my gut... you mean people say "I love you" to each other. What a fucking revelation. Although I'm not sure I succeeded as a parent, I was determined that I would always tell my children that I loved

them. One day, after I told my son I loved him, he said, “you know, you’ve told me that a million times”. I proclaimed, I would tell him many million more.

Early into my final year of high school, my mother went to hospital again. I was left at home to deal with the house. I cooked dinner and organised my siblings before my stepfather came home from visiting her. I thought I had done everything...dishes were done, his food was on a pot of water keeping it warm, siblings in bed, lounge room tidy. Check. I sat down with my school books at the kitchen table and started to tackle an assignment I had to do on Macbeth. He came home, beer in hand. God I hate fucking beer. He surveys the landscape and can't find anything wrong. Then he walks into the kitchen and looks at his food. I hear a smash...he's thrown the plate on the floor and starts screaming, "I told you to cook beans not peas." Before I even had a chance to explain there were no beans, he walks towards me. I know he's going to hit me, so I pick up a heavy wooden fruit bowl in front of me and throw it at him, screaming. I cracked. No more. "Fuck off, fuck off, fuck off. I hate you, you evil bastard." I throw everything into my school bag and run out the door. I go to a friend's house and do not return for many months. Jane and Matthew kept me going, kept me studying, kept me sane. Most of all, they kept believing in me and I'm eternally grateful for what they did to sustain me. This was my line drawn in the sand. The sexual abuse stopped after this, although I hated him for the longest time.

You can do it... go be a teacher - Marion Jess

Fast forward another six years. I had performed spectacularly well during my final high school and received high marks which provided the opportunity to attend any University. Of course, my stepfather in his inimitable style declared that if I wanted to go to University I would have to pay for it. For fucks sake. I wasn't in any mental state to try to work and try to attend University so I put everything on hold. I attempted a number of office jobs (which I

hated) but then went back to my love of writing. I had this idea that I could travel and write. I found my way to a country town that was well known for its artistry and artists. After many drunken nights, I felt pregnant. I wasn't equipped to have a baby, but a sense of resolve grabbed me. I stopped drinking and smoking; found work at the local school and for the first time in a long while thought about my future. I bumped into a past teacher when I was about seven months pregnant and she asked me to bring my baby (when I had her) to visit, which I did. Forever seeking outside support, I found her wisdom engaging. I told her about my experiences at the local school and that the teachers suggested I should do my teaching degree. I was bemoaning that this was impossible now. She said, "Karen, you can do it... go be a teacher". So I went back to University, whilst raising a baby and was in the top five per cent of my year.

I was a single parent, the father of my child wanted nothing to do with the pregnancy. I was not able to deal with this emotionally, so I ran away. It will seem strange, but I went back to my parents for the last month of my pregnancy. I was desperate to have the support of my mother and something in the back of my mind made me think she would be there for me. I asked her to attend the birth with me and she agreed. She actually seemed happy about it, so I included her in the pre-birth exercises and my plan. I had music planned, breathing protocol, because I was going to have as natural a birth as possible (yep sure). I had high blood pressure at the end, so was forced to take up a camp bed in the middle of the lounge room. About a week before I went into labor, I was doing my breathing exercises. My Mum and stepdad were watching tv. The next minute, I felt like I was in a nightmare because I heard my mother say, "John, you should come to the hospital with us." Inside my head, I scream, "NOOOOOOOOOOOO!" I heard him say, "No, I don't need to be there." I think, "Thank Christ." My Mum doesn't give up, they banter back and forth and finally, he says, "Ok, I'll come."

Fuck NOOOO. What do I do? What do I say? Of course, I said absolutely nothing. Fuck, fuck, fuck. What is wrong with me? I don't want him to be there while I'm in labor, giving birth, legs open ...OMG. A week later, my waters broke. I woke my parents and they drove me to the hospital. All I thought about is this motherfucker being there with me. Why would my mother do this to me?

Twenty five hours of the most awful pain later, I have failed to dilate at all. They say you forget the pain, I can tell you that is absolutely bullshit. Every time the doctor would do a vaginal exam, he'd disappointedly tell me "only three centimetres". I told everyone, "Please just shoot me now". I've NEVER forgotten the pain. Is it any surprise to anyone that I didn't dilate? That I ended up having an emergency caesarean? In retrospect, not to me. Talk about the mind taking over the body. Nonetheless, I did give birth (even if it was surgical) to the most beautiful little girl and my life would never be the same. I finally knew what it was to feel bone crushing, soul splitting love.

Epilogue - Karen Barley

In my early fifties, I had disconnected from my siblings and stepfather. My mother had died ten years earlier and I had only seen my stepfather once or twice since then. I could not bear to be in his presence, especially since my mother was no longer a buffer. I had been travelling overseas and my stepfather had fallen extremely ill. My siblings called me and said that my stepfather had been asking to see me. I wrestled with what I should do. It is not in my nature to be cruel, so I agreed to go to the hospital when I returned from my trip. A few weeks later, his health had deteriorated and our family was told that he had weeks to live.

I walked into his room expecting to see my nemesis, the individual who had terrified me most of my life. Instead there lay a frail, thin, hollow man who barely seemed to exist. He was alert enough to know who I was, but given the state of his health, there was no in depth discussion.

He kept forgetting where he was and kept calling me “Peggy” (my mother’s name). Despite his appearance and frailty, I felt anxious about being in the room with him. Despite the palpitations, I visited him a number of times before he died. We were told he would probably die in days, so this felt like a small sacrifice. I can’t say what I was seeking, but I would sit in the hospital reading expecting some engagement. Maybe he’d say he was sorry. Maybe he would say he was wrong. As the days went by, he said less and less.

During his very last day, my siblings and I stayed in his room. He was in and out of consciousness and along with the nurses we attended to his needs. At about three a.m. I got up to stretch. It was silent and my thoughts cascaded back in time as I remembered all the moments; the horrendous and harrowing abuse; the harsh and gruff way he spoke; my complete and utter fear of him. I searched and searched for a tender memory; a kindness; a time when he extended himself to demonstrate love... I couldn’t find one and as he lay there in his last hours, it hit me that the feeling, the one that was burrowing a hole in my gut was still fear. He made a sound and I asked him if he needed water on his lips... he indicated yes. I used a large cotton bud dipped in water and rubbed them across his parched mouth... I thought about the poignancy of this scene and then to my surprise, he whispered, “thank you”. Was this symbolic, or was it my imagination? Was he thanking me for being there? For being there, despite what he’d done to me for almost eighteen years? Or was he thanking me for showing him kindness despite his craven behavior? I don’t know... but when he died the next morning, I felt like it was over. I cried, not from grief, but from relief. I cried because I no longer had an obligation to be near his presence. I cried because just maybe I was finally free from the fear.

Sitting in the chair inside the hospital, I wait. Waiting, amidst the silence from him, mixed with the clanging sounds that come from inside a hospital ward. There always seems to be a constant whirring sound coming from the walls, especially if you sit there long enough. I sat

and inside my mind I pondered all the conversations I could have with him. It was only possible to have these discussions in my mind... this was not disappointing because I am sure I could never have had them for real. I stare at him, his gaunt face, those piercing brown dots for eyes, still no soul. He's watching the television, some fucking fishing show and I think to myself, I feel sorry for you, but I feel nothing. Why am I here then? The question lingers...

Child Sexual Abuse in the 1960-70s Era

Imagine a society afflicted by a scourge which struck down a quarter of its daughters and up to one in eight of its sons. Imagine also that this plague, while not immediately fatal, lurked in the bodies and minds of these young children for decades, making them up to sixteen times more likely to experience its disastrous long-term effects. Finally, imagine the nature of these effects: life-threatening starvation, suicide, persistent nightmares, drug and alcohol abuse and a whole host of intractable psychiatric disorders requiring life-long treatment. What should that society's response be? (Glaser, 1997a; Glaser, 1997b)

During the early 60s and 70s of my childhood, sexual abuse was this murky threat that children were warned against... but the warnings were of an evil looking stranger in a park or street corner. No one thought to warn you about sexual abuse occurring inside one's own home, or bedroom; let alone what to do should this ever happen (Davies, Patel & Rogers, 2013). As a child, it is difficult to imagine the danger and violation that is CSA, let alone the long term ramifications to the childhood psyche (Butchart et al., 2006; Shapiro, Kaplow, Amaya-Jackson, Dodge, 2012; Greydanus & Merrick, 2017; Braveheart, 2018). In my family, sex was a taboo subject (which seems quite ironic, given what I was experiencing) so even if someone had warned me of what to be aware of, I doubt I would have understood

what that would even 'look like'. To try to rationalise whether what is happening to you is normal is impossible to conceptualise because as a child I considered what was abuse was normal because nobody tried to stop it and I bore witness to sexual activities by my stepfather and mother (Draucker & Martsolf, 2008).

This issue was not taken seriously by communities and the government until legislation was enacted in Australia during 1970s but this largely eventuated because of pressure from feminist groups and welfare organisations (Boxhall, Tomison & Hulme 2014; Bateman & Henderson, 2010; Quadara, 2017). Despite the legislation, as a whole society continues to ignore the ongoing crisis that is CSA and remains one of the most underreported crimes. Available "studies from a broad spectrum of service providers highlight that these figures are a 'drop in the ocean'" because many of the statistics don't separate childhood and adult sexual assault (Bateman & Henderson, 2010, p. 5).

Finding Refuge in the Kindness of Others - The Epiphany

As I finished writing the vignettes, it occurred to me that even though I had a number of valued others, this wasn't enough to shake me out of my silence. I could have told them. I'm sure most would have believed me but the barbarity that is sexual assault on a child ensures the retention of silence. Are children predisposed by the abuse itself to hold in the secret? Draucker et al. (2011) suggests that some of the reasons for non-disclosure of CSA are because children "suppressed thoughts of it, were ashamed, feared they would be blamed or disbelieved, or wished to protect the abuser or their family" (p. 449). I am sure any one of the various individuals who assisted me throughout my childhood and teens would have been helpful, but the secret felt easier to keep. I didn't want to protect my stepfather so much as I wanted to protect my family (Taylor & Norma, 2012). I knew at a young age that disclosure would destroy what semblance of a family we had; so I kept silent, which was more for the

benefit of my siblings than I. Attached to this fear was the belief that my mother would not have coped or survived if I was to blow up the family. In many ways this made my mother a co-conspirator. She made me responsible for her and my siblings at a very young age and then neglected us due to ongoing somatic illnesses. Later, when I did tell her (in my late thirties and after a breakdown after the birth of my fourth child) she tried to downplay it; suggesting she would have known; maybe it was someone else; maybe I had remembered wrongly. It would take another whole study to examine the relationship with my mother, but suffice to say, she demonstrated how concerned she was by telling my stepfather, only to have him call me and abuse me for lying. We never spoke of it again, reinforcing the notion that “it is often much easier to silence and expunge the victim from the family unit than face the shocking reality of sexual abuse within the family unit” (Taylor & Norma, 2012, p. 118). Instead I did things via my behaviour in the hope that someone would guess or made direct hints by alluding to it obliquely in my writing and stories (Barley, 2020a; Barley, 2020b; Draucker et al., 2011). I also made a pact with myself that I would survive, and that I would conquer. I girded myself with education and educational success as armory (Barley, 2020a; Taylor & Norma, 2012; Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018).

What is more salient is the profound impact that others can have in the life of a child in trouble. Those individuals may be teachers, relatives, or pastoral support but their impact on a child in need, especially one who is a victim of CSA is significant (Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; Hyman & Williams, 2001; Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Arias & Johnson, 2013). A number of studies (Valentine & Feinauer, 1993; Hyman & Williams, 2001; Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Arias & Johnson, 2013) indicate that having external support of at least one ‘other’ increases resilience in the child and facilitates a trusting relationship which is “a critical pathway to positive adjustment” in the future (Arias & Johnson, 2013, p. 836).

You might ask, what is the epiphany here? I stared at the word for a while and contemplated taking it out because I couldn't recall my motivation for adding it. Then it occurred to me, and I began to sob. The epiphany for young Karen was that 'others' liked her and wanted to help her. For a girl who felt such disdain and terror from within her own family and hated herself, this was almost too much to bear. I hardly believe anyone likes me, even my own children. The tears are falling, because the 'others' who chose to help me did so because they believed in me, and cared for me. This didn't occur to me before. It's truly an epiphany as I write these tortured words. I'm also struck by the notion that indeed, I'm grateful to the girl I was and the woman I've become. I hate trite notions, but the ultimate epiphany has been to deliver myself back to me through this autoethnographic expedition that I've been on.

Performance

This autoethnographical study is deliberately performative. I wrote it willing the audience to go back into history with me so that I might be able to paint a vista of my childhood. This is a dilemma because I don't want you (the reader) to feel anything like the pain I experienced when I was growing up, but at the same time if you don't feel the experiences with me, how can you have any kind of understanding of the experience? The other side of the dilemma is to surrender and just perform it anyway and accept that I cannot control what you will or will not feel.

Performance is an enactment embodiment of an interpretive event and in this study has been achieved through a series of vignettes (Denzin, 2018). Writing and especially writing stories can be a graphic medium, as the author shows their readership through enacted literary forms and techniques the lived experience. This piece can be reflexive, evocative and emotive as the writer engages the audience to endure the story with them and in doing so, result in some new awareness or knowledge (Denzin, 2018). Spry explains the ongoing

reflexive process as “writing that is about the continual questioning, the naming and renaming and unnamings of experience through craft, through heart, through the fluent body” (Spry, 2011c, p. 509).

Performance is also risky, in that it is much more intimate, much more revealing. I have permitted you into a dark and closeted space that dwells inside my childhood and it makes me anxious to do so, because by performing this piece, I’m really standing naked before the audience, but I do so in the hope that my story speaks to the larger story of CSA (Spry, 2009). Writing about trauma and pain can uncover raw emotion in a tangible and sensory way, because the author reflexively uses their writing as an insider to the scene (Etherington, 2004). I have wanted to escape from these stories a number of times, but they did not want to escape me. Cementing them inside this process has perhaps laid bare my soul, but also dissolved the angst I have felt with carrying the burden of secrecy. Perhaps the doing is even redemptive (Spry, 2009). BUT, I don’t seek redemption because seeking such a thing would suggest I was complicit in my own abuse. AND that is the opposite of what I want this work to say. I used the convention of forging through the ‘fourth wall’ to allow my subconscious to speak to you within each vignette. This was performative in itself, a plea to the masses, a cry for acknowledgement... but damn I hate to sound so dramatic... but I must implore that the epiphany of this moment is that you will be more aware, more alert and more inquiring. I don’t want you to see a ‘devil’ behind every corner, but I do want you to discern between that which appears to be an angel, and that which is truly a devil. Most of all, I want you to see Karen. The Karen of the past who sought out strangers to connect with in the hope that she might tell them her secret. Is society even ready for this outpouring? I don’t completely know, but I think I’m getting closer to the answer.

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Chapter Seven

Effecting epiphanous change in teacher practice: A teacher's Autoethnography
(Authors: Karen Barley & Jane Southcott. Submitted and published by *The Qualitative Report* in October, 2019)

Finally this article encapsulates my personal and professional life, hence the reason to place it last. These two aspects of my life are naturally intertwined, so it was apt to include a small focus on my difficult childhood and family life. This sets the scene for my development as an educator, since my tenuous upbringing created the groundwork for me to become a passionate and inclusive teacher. The epiphanies I experienced during my childhood and the assistance I had from 'others' instilled in me a habit of being mindful of the epiphanies that occurred during my career. I wrote many stories that covered my lifespan from early childhood to the current day (my late fifties) which reflected particularly on my journey to becoming a teacher and afterwards experiences that transformed my teaching career. Jane and I selected the stories that best punctuated my life and explored my topic. My research question posed what caused the many changes I made as an educator especially during my work as a diverse and inclusive educator. I aver that I experienced epiphanous moments with the many diverse students I taught that caused profound change to my beliefs, attitudes and teaching practice. These transformational moments altered the course of my future work as an educator. My students became my greatest 'teachers' and I discovered that my beliefs and attitudes about disability and diversity were indelibly altered. I evolved from a reluctant teacher of students of diversity to a passionate inclusionist, so much so that I have devoted the latter half of my teaching career to advocating for diversity rights and inclusive education.

This autoethnography was written first and set everything in motion for the future of this thesis; once I completed all articles, it was logical to order this one last due to the nature of

the content. This article also paves the way for further exploration of epiphanous change and transformation, which is a topic I seek to extrapolate in my future research.



Effecting Epiphanous Change in Teacher Practice: A Teacher's Autoethnography

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This study comprises of a series of autoethnographic vignettes stemming from Karen's life experiences that provide a snapshot of her quest for equality and fairness in her personal life, as well as her professional life as a primary school and special education educator. Karen later became a teacher of teachers, keen to share what she had learned with her peers. It was when she began educating other teachers that she became even more self-reflective with the most poignant question being, what causes one to change their beliefs, attitude, or way of thinking? The included vignettes encapsulate significant stories, starting from early childhood, to the motivation behind Karen's teaching career and then the students that she met who shaped her adoption of the belief of equality and fairness for all. The vignettes provide the foundation for a qualitative study where one teacher's journey of transformative and epiphanous change are analysed using autoethnography, reflexivity and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The study examines the value of tacit knowledge, and then segues to explore resonance with Dewey's constructivism, Kolb's experiential theory, Mezirow's transformational education theory and Tang's Synergic Inquiry. While these theories provide a foundation for how learning and personal transformation may occur and attempts to answer the aforementioned question; not one theory captured what Karen was seeking; which is: How does epiphanous, mind blowing, life affirming change occur? The author contends that to shift one's value's paradigm, one needs to incorporate the essence of all of the above theories to create a new integrated model.

Keywords: Autoethnography, Autism Spectrum, Dewey, Kolb, Mezirow, Tang, Transformational Learning, Experiential Learning, Synergic Inquiry

The Researchers

The first author is a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education and a Sessional Teacher in Inclusive Education at Monash University. Karen completed an undergraduate Diploma in Primary Teaching in 1989 and spent a number of years teaching in mainstream classrooms across Victoria. She later completed a Graduate Diploma of Education (Professional Studies) and then a Masters of Education (Special and Inclusive Education). Due to a number of experiences teaching in Special Schools Karen realised that she wanted to work with students who had diverse needs. Karen began writing Professional Development (PD) about Autism for teachers and has provided PD Face-to-Face (F2F) and online in Australia and the USA. She has developed her own Consultancy, where she works one-on-one with families and students. She is currently employed as a Sessional Teacher at Monash University, which has added another layer to her work as an inclusive educator. The second author, Jane is an experienced researcher and writer of autoethnographies. Karen and Jane worked together to shape and interpret Karen's vignettes that form the data for this article. When we use the plural pronoun, we mean both of us. When Karen uses "I" she is writing about herself.

Rationale

Before embarking on research for my doctorate, my online PD courses were exploding. Many teachers had written to me suggesting that the six-hour PD I provided caused profound changes to their thinking about Autism and inclusive practices, and they felt compelled to reflect upon their own teaching practices. This sparked my curiosity and compelled me to ask the question: "What beliefs and attitudes do teachers hold about children who have autism?" The question that then immediately arose in my mind was, "What causes profound change to one's beliefs and attitudes that in turn triggers a change in practice?" This second question is the one that drives this study. Of course, I then had to ask another question, what event, or series of events deeply influenced my own practice and pedagogical beliefs? Whilst the topic of Autism drives me professionally and pedagogically; it is not the only issue that motivates me. For as long as I can remember my personal incentive to do anything has been wrapped in the concepts of justice, fairness and equality. Via this autoethnography, I will investigate and share my interest in equal and inclusive opportunities that stemmed from the challenges of my childhood and education. Borne out of empathy and compassion for others was an interest in educational minorities; ultimately a quest to find or invent innovative practices that addressed these problems. The story of my life reflected in the following vignettes expands across fifty years. Beginning with, negotiating childhood experiences attending school in a multicultural environment and simultaneously confronting the bigotry and racism within my own family. In other vignettes, I explore the difficulties of my childhood and the serendipitous occasions that led me to my future teaching career. This eventually drew me to Autism, and teaching children who have Autism and how these experiences transformed me both personally and professionally. I began to consider what is fair and equitable education for ALL! Moreover, what causes and compels an educator to confront her own beliefs, attitudes, which in turn revolutionises one's individual practice?

This study also examines the juncture in my life when I had become a complacent teacher. My subsequent development as an educator has been a transformative process where I had to challenge and proselytize my own belief systems and narrow attitudes towards students of diversity. The question asked above, regarding 'attitudes and beliefs' led to a dawning realization that I had to step outside of a box of my own making, then out of the next box, then out of another box *ad infinitum* and essentially get out of my own way. I believe I am a much improved, more creative and inspired teacher as a result. The journey does not end with one

questioned answered...as I have discovered, one question leads to many more. In other words, one's own pedagogical position is never dormant, but a growing and maturing transformation of mind, practice and soul.

Methodology: Why Autoethnography?

To explore my experiences, understandings and assumptions, I chose to write an autoethnographical story (and I asked Jane to help me in this process). Bochner and Ellis (2016, p. 76) state that "we depend on stories almost as much as we depend on the air we breathe. Air keeps us alive; stories give meaning to our existence." I wanted to use the autoethnography to articulate the meanings into motion, by way of anecdotes from my life. I gravitated to autoethnography to depict my life and experience via the medium of storytelling (Denzin, 2014). To understand how teachers construct their beliefs and attitudes, it was vital to understand my own evolution of consciousness as an educator.

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that explores multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal story to a wider lens of cultural understanding. Autoethnographic stories can situate individuals in circumstances where they must confront their predicaments to find and/or create some emotional truth from experiences they've lived through. This truth can be interpreted as an epiphany or epiphanous moment (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) describe this type of research as researchers endeavouring to explore and understand their experiences "that have salience in our lives, whether these experiences thrill, surprise, intrigue, sadden, or enrage us" (p. 22). When designing an autoethnographic project, the following core ideals should be considered:

- Recognising the limits of scientific knowledge, instead creating nuanced, complex, and specific accounts of personal/cultural experience.
- Connecting the personal (insider) experience, insights and knowledge to larger conversations, contexts and conventions.
- Answering the call to narrative and storytelling and placing equal importance on intellect/knowledge and aesthetics/artistic craft.
- Attending to the ethical implications of their work for themselves and other participants, including the reader. (Adams et al., 2015, p. 25)

In this autoethnography, we have followed these guidelines and adopted a phenomenological approach. This embraces "a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon, as described by participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). I was also intrigued by the ability of the autoethnography to elucidate the "epiphanies - those remarkable and out of the ordinary life-changing experiences that transform us or call us to question our lives" (Adams, et al., 2015, p. 26). When writing the vignettes, I was exploring the value of the epiphany in altering beliefs, so using a methodology tailored to exploring this phenomenon was apt.

When creating the text, I was exploring the value of the epiphany in altering belief, so using a methodology tailored to exploring this phenomenon was apt. I approached my writing from an inductive stance, trying to avoid making assumptions. I acknowledge that I am the expert in my own experiences and that my stories are written and ordered to help me capture and explore layers of meaning. My stories offer complex data that I will discuss after their presentation, to engage in sense making and to relate my understandings to the work of other writers and researchers (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Ultimately, my aim is to understand how I could make sense of the events, relationships, and processes of my lived experience as a teacher in various situations (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborne, 2011).

Bresler (1995) suggests that these methods are more sensitive and adaptable to many mutually shaping influences and value patterns, which echoes what I am aiming to do in this autoethnography. What makes the autoethnography unique is that the researcher is also the participant (Reid et al., 2005). I am revealing the impact life's experiences have had upon my past and future choices as an educator and researcher. Consequently, this account acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and my own influence on the research, so the process has integrity (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Sharing pockets of personal information and illuminations can be both humbling and courageous because this process opens the door to conversation and controversy. I did a complete 180-degree shift from not wanting to teach children who had disabilities to cementing it as my life's work. I am frankly not proud of my early attitudes and preconceived ideas about children with disabilities; however, this is why my story is valuable as research. How and why I shifted my beliefs and attitudes about students who have Autism to one that was positive and embracing informs as a legitimate piece of research, via this autoethnographic process. Undertaking a phenomenological study of integral individuals around me, whilst shining a spotlight upon my own evolution as an educator enables myself, as the researcher, to be microscopic about how a shift in personal belief occurred. Whilst these series of happenstances are unique and life changing for me as an individual, the emphasis on what was unique raises the issue of applicability to other cases (Bresler, 1995). In other words, first, what is significant about my individual recounts insofar as they qualify as research? Second, how do these experiences inform others in the field?

Phenomenologists ostensibly do not set out to explain, interpret or theorise (van Manen, 2017). They do not need a theory to drive the research but may use a theory to interpret in this inductive process. Van Manen explains phenomenology as the study of what appears in consciousness, what shows itself in lived experience, or "the quest for originary understandings and insights into the phenomenality of human experience" (p. 775). Autoethnographical research is quintessentially phenomenological as the retelling of illuminating and reflexive stories of my life will then be examined under the umbrella of the larger cultural context of educator experiences.

Phenomenology, if practiced well, enthralls us with insights into the enigma of life as we experience it—the world as it gives and reveals itself to the wondering gaze—thus asking us to be forever attentive to the fascinating varieties and subtleties of primal lived experience and consciousness in all its remarkable complexities, fathomless depths, rich details, startling disturbances, and luring charms (van Manen, 2017, p. 779).

Data Collection: Writing my life

Considering the applicability of what I have learned via self-reflection, and then communicating this to others is what I have been doing all my life. Whenever I have had a life changing moment, or experienced some new epiphany, my first inclination has been to share and teach what I have learned. For the last fifteen years I have focused on professional writing by way of professional development for Online Course Delivery; blogs, articles and online forums on teaching ideas and strategies; and academic writing and research. I have also integrated stories, case studies and teachable moments into my presentations. According to Bresler (1995), the researcher's qualification, background and expertise are important factors to shaping research.

I have also had to rely upon memory to construct some sections of the vignettes. I have written many versions of my autobiography over forty-five years, so I have been able to glean details from these past manuscripts and integrate them into this study. The "significance of memory in the process of ethnography has been acknowledged" (Wall, 2008, p. 45) and the

use of memory is a legitimate aspect of writing an autoethnography (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, et al., 2011; Denzin, 2014). As mentioned, I have recounted my emerging fascination with Autism and Autistic students many times in Face-to-Face and Online PD, and tutorials, so the stories are clear in my mind and memory. I have spent over fifteen years teaching children on the Spectrum, and many of those teachable moments I have integrated one way or another into my work.

Within a number of stories, I have mentioned particular individuals and students. I have been careful not to identify any particular location where I have taught and all the students (including childhood friends) were written as composites to avoid any identification. The only real people are my family members. Both my parents died a number of years ago, so my stories will not have any impact upon them.

Selection of Stories

I wrote many stories that covered my lifespan from early childhood to the current day (in my late fifties). Jane and I then decided which stories to include that best punctuated my life and explored my research question. I selected five stories that I believe provide insightful, poignant snapshots of the life of Karen and despite being truncated moments in time, are indicative of my life viewed through a wider lens.

Vignettes

Vignette 1: My beginnings

I grew up in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, Australia in the early sixties to a white Anglo-Saxon family. My parents were quintessentially working class and working poor and with that were attitudes of racism, bigotry and sexism. My mother was one of ten children (four of whom were girls) and grew up in an outer-western Sydney suburb, in an era when girls were considered second-class citizens. My father grew up in a suburb of Melbourne, where pastimes consisted of regular attendance at the local pub or football games. My father was by osmosis, the head of the family, where all of our lives revolved around him and his drinking. I was the eldest of four and the only girl and from as long as I can remember, I battled my upbringing. I do not know how or why, but from a very early age, I had alternate attitudes and beliefs to my parents. I could not and did not abide my parents' racist and bigoted ideas; which meant I was forever at war in a family where I felt like an alien outsider. A deep desire for fairness and equality grew within my psyche. I was a little girl who fought for every cause and injustice and now I am in my fifties, my sense of fairness buttresses everything that I do, including my professional life.

Growing up in the inner suburbs of Melbourne ironically meant I had to integrate into a multicultural school environment. I was one of only five Australian-born students in my class. The rest of the students in my classroom emanated from Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Turkey, China, England, Wales, and Japan. I was a minority in my own classroom, which overwhelmingly affected my own cultural position. It was impossible to maintain my parents' bigotry when confronted by my peers' humanity. I envied the students who could speak another language and found their homes and home life mysterious and alluring. I often found myself in the middle of cultural wars. The Greek and Italian girls often fought; I did not understand what these conflicts were about, because from my young Australian viewpoint both groups appeared to be identical (I thought they looked and sounded the same, so they must be from the same place). My family's understandings seemed narrow-minded and bigoted, and

negotiating this multi-cultural arena made me acutely aware of the humanity in all people. I loved the exotic European names like Sia, Athena, Maria, Alena, so ultimately when my Aunt started calling me “Karina” instead of Karen, I eventually adopted Karina as my given name. I desperately wanted to know the Japanese girl, but she did not speak a word of English. I fell in love with a little Welsh girl called Sian - many years later I named my second daughter Sian based on my love of the name, but also my friendship with her. All my experiences, connections and friendships formed during my formative years would intrinsically mould my worldviews; and formed an antidote for the ongoing ostracism I experienced from my family. My multicultural friendships strengthened and emboldened my belief and attitudes, and my family’s influence dissipated.

I have always been a writer. This medium came naturally to me and as soon as I learned to put pen to paper, no one could stop me. Perhaps it was because in real life I was barely allowed to speak, I always have too much to say. Writing gave me a voice and offered escape from a troubled, violent and abusive childhood. My mother was the abused wife, I was the abused daughter and my brothers were the innocent, sometimes complicit bystanders. We lived with my father’s mother who was like the evil stepmother from a classic fairy story. She was a cruel and vicious woman with a deep dislike for me. When I was as young as four, just to scare me, she often locked me in the outside laundry. She would scowl and reprimand me for reasons I did not understand. To say I was terrified of her is an understatement. I find it useless to extrapolate further on the other gruesome details of my childhood but suffice to say her abuse of me implanted a very early yearning for fairness and equity in the people and community surrounding me. I was also on a search for human connection, but the conundrum was that I was painfully shy and awkward, so I struggled to connect with anyone. I desperately wanted people to like me, but I did not know how to be a friend, so I was constantly seeking attention from peers and adults. Most considered me odd and weird, which made for tenuous, confusing relationships. Loneliness became my friend and enemy, as I immersed myself into the friendly place of words, read, sung and written. I resonated with the lyrics of Melanie Safka’s “Look What They’ve Done to My Song, Ma” and would sing the words with gusto because everything she sang was about me:

I wish I could find a good book to live in, wish I could find a good book. If I could find a real, good book, I’d never have to come out and look at...what they’ve done to my song. (Safka, 1999)

I remember reading Roald Dahl’s, *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 2007) for the first time when I was ten and I convinced myself that James was my long-lost brother. I could have been him, just with different characters. I spent a good deal of time, planting apricot kernels and apple pips, just in case a special tree with ‘critter’ friends grew in my backyard. Eventually my childhood finished and, with age came escape.

Vignette 2: The Accidental Educator

As a young woman, I often heard the words, “you should be a teacher,” but I balked at the idea. I did not think I had it in me. During my early twenties, I travelled Australia dreaming of writing poetry and stories about pioneering women, whose stories of courage, determination and resilience fascinated me. A stayover in a remote country town changed the direction of my life. What was meant to be a short trip was extended - I loved the artistic and alternative lifestyle in this small town. I became a teacher’s assistant at the local school to make some extra money. In the early 1980s, a teacher’s assistant could do anything from creating

resources, assisting in the classroom, and teaching small groups. The school had received a donation of ten Commodore 64 computers. That was a big deal as computers were only just seeping into society and a few schools. I had always been interesting in technology. I imagined myself a Judy Jetson (from the 1960's futuristic cartoon, Hanna & Barbera, 1962) and could not wait to do everything by remote control. After the computers idled in a spare room for a month, I offered to put them together and work out how to use them. I successfully did this but since I was the only person comfortable with the technology, I became the unofficial computer teacher. I really enjoyed being able to teach students and other educators. The grateful recipients suggested that I should aim towards a teaching career.

I headed back to Melbourne after a troubling personal time. I had fallen pregnant and after a difficult time with the biological father, I decided that I would go home and raise my baby without him. Being fiercely independent, I knew that I did not want to sit on a Single Parent Payment, so buoyed by the recommendations of others I enrolled and was accepted into a Diploma of Teaching with Monash University. The teacher in me emerged with confidence and determination. If I was going to do this thing, I wanted to do it excellently, so I took my three-month old baby with me to University. I found myself again in a minority of "adult" students pursuing a career among the young and unencumbered. I pushed through sleepless nights; visits to hospitals with a sick child; and various childhood milestones; juggling motherhood and student hood. I knew early that I would become a passionate, innovative teacher, as I was never content to sit with the mainstream and traditional. Every struggle I had ever experienced compelled me to be an advocate for the excluded, troubled and forgotten. My daughter was three years old when I finally finished my last exam. I passed in the top five per cent of my year.

Vignette 3: The Emergent Educator

Fast forward many years later, my teaching career had become static and benign. This was a time when I was also growing my own family, so four children later; teaching had become just a job. It was difficult to be passionate about pedagogy and changing educational paradigms whilst managing both a classroom and a home. After my fourth child, I took some time away from teaching to focus upon my family. When it was time to me to return to teaching, I discovered that getting back into the classroom was extremely difficult. Sometimes you have to take any job you can get, so I was forced to enter the world of Casual Relief Teaching (CRT). After a few weeks working as a CRT, I was asked if I was interested in a term's work at a Special Education School. I am embarrassed to say I had NO interest in working in this field and knew nothing about the diverse students that make up the 'special education' world. I needed work, so I reluctantly accepted. The first week was difficult and confronting, where I questioned being in this environment every second of each day. Again, this is painful to admit but my first impressions of working in a special school was that it was not for me. I viewed the children in these settings through the narrow filter of what was considered 'normal.' I was unable to view these unique children through a different lens. I felt sorry for them, and felt compassion for them, but mostly I looked at them with sadness and sympathy. Hence, I was unable to see the potential or possibilities of children who were differently abled. I focused on their disabilities, differences and labels. Brownlee and Carrington (2000) deduce that "this is because the way that teachers relate to teaching students with disabilities and special educational needs is influenced by their past experiences and by how they perceive and define difference and disability in society" (p. 99). If we are honest, many of us might admit to having the same thoughts when confronted with difference, disability or diversity, especially when the disability or impairment is considered to be extreme or complex (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). There is a hidden form of bigotry and discrimination that persists in society - a bias against

disability. Looking back, without knowing it, I was a disability bigot. I believed I was lucky my children were born normal. Ten years on from that defining moment when I walked through the special education door, I no longer hold those views. I underwent a paradigm shift of thought and then belief, which occurred during my immersion into the special education system. From that time on, my core belief was transformed to value acceptance and equality for all.

I first taught a group of teens who had Autism and/or Down Syndrome. I had no experience with either and felt overwhelmed by my lack of knowledge. I was grateful for the knowledge of the teacher's aide and the teacher in the adjoining room. She was extremely helpful and offered endless support. I realized quickly that my idea of teaching was going to be challenged. Most of the students were still at a very basic level, where they were copying texts pre-written for them; and was still only counting to 10-20. I especially knew zero about Autism, except what I had vaguely heard in the media; most of which was negative and discouraging. I believed that children with Autism were anti-social, difficult, had intellectual deficits, and were mostly unmanageable. Surprisingly, within this classroom I was confronted with a "fruit salad" of variegates (Williams, 2006). Of the six children who had autism, each student was unique. Some were chatty, some not; most loved to hug, a few did not; most would not look you in the eyes; one did; only one had meltdowns; all had some form of anxiety and sensory issue; and they were hugely disparate intellectually. I was out of my depth because there was not one thing I thought I knew about teaching that was going to be applicable to these students. I had to go back to the drawing board.

During a conversation with an autistic student, my interest became piqued. Kyle was chatty, friendly and warm. He was keen to connect with me and to tell me about himself. He was not like the version of autism I had heard about - unsociable, cold and withdrawn. He began to tell me about how he liked dinosaurs and that he believed he lived in the time when the dinosaurs were still alive. He then proceeded to tell me all about the various categories of dinosaurs and what historical era they emanated from. I was fascinated and then perplexed. This same student could barely write his name, let alone a legible sentence; yet was able to recount with passion and in-depth knowledge about this one particular topic. Not only that, he was able to recall the scientific names of the creatures of this time with accuracy, interestingly also he was able to spell them (when writing on a computer). As I drove home that day, the perspicacity of this moment hit me and I knew that what I thought I knew was no longer credible. This sounds awful in a way, but looking back (and also forward), collectively we look at people who have disabilities as less human. Children who attend a special school are provided admittance if they are assessed as having an IQ below 70; so I naturally assumed this was the case for Kyle. Yet, his knowledge of dinosaurs, both historically and scientifically demonstrated the ability to comprehend one topic at a much higher level. I continued to think about this mystery for some time and questions appeared. How can he be unable to write, yet can recount, read, and type complicated words and names accurately from the Mesozoic era? There must be a part of his brain that was working above his assessed IQ level? If so, how do I (as the educator) access this part of his brain to help him to reach his full potential? How do I motivate to attend to things beyond his singular focus?

I went home and began my quest for knowledge on this subject. I became a researcher before I had even intended to be. I read everything I could find; searched YouTube and the internet; and borrowed books from the library. There was no social media at this point, so I was reliant upon web searches, and I discovered names of successful individuals on the Autism Spectrum. I also found both Temple Grandin and Donna Williams on YouTube and devoured everything that was on offer about their stories. They both classified themselves as autistic and were proud of the label. I was particularly fascinated with both these women, as they had become successful within the mainstream arena. Later I found Autism specialists, namely

Steven Silberman, Dr. Simon Baron-Cohen, Sue Larkey, Suzy Miller, Dr. Tony Atwood and many more. I consumed all the knowledge I could find and was struck by one prevailing realization, that autistic individuals were not who I thought they were. My preconceived notions were false and based on poor societal representation and misunderstanding.

My paradigm had shifted and so had my tacit knowledge (TK) about this topic. My continued quest led me to complete my Masters in Education where I could expand my accumulation of knowledge, but it also led to a solidification of my evolving belief. By this time, I had spent another four years teaching a variety of children on the Autism Spectrum where my evolving pedagogical position was buttressed with experience, research and human stories. My changing understanding was that these children were unique, varied, diverse, interesting, quirky, fun and talented individuals. With a success-based learning approach; one that focused upon what children could do, rather than what they could not, they had as much opportunity to learn and reach their potential as anyone else. My quest became my mission to change the world perspective of Autism that then expanded to a bigger picture view of awareness, acceptance and equity. Once again, the acquired values of fairness and equality rose to the surface. I could not view disability and especially Autism in the same way every again! The more I learned, the more I realised that as a community we examine disability through a veil of sorrow, grief and pity. Whenever, an individual step above that vantage point, they are applauded and celebrated for being special, so much so that these feats are considered extraordinary. I found this troubling because it meant that we do not see exceptionality as being achievable and normal for individuals with a “disability.” Professionals consistently tell parents of children who have a disability not to expect much from their child. The more I learned, the more my beliefs changed...what if we were to expect more?

Vignette 4: The Students Who Proved Me Right

I completed my Masters and worked in various Special Education settings until the end of 2011. I spent my last year with twelve students who were on various points of the autism continuum. One student was almost non-verbal, highly excitable and was unable to sit still. On the other end of the continuum was a young man, who was deep, intelligent and affectionate. He was highly capable but did not like to do any schoolwork. In between, was a range of students with diverse learning needs, some more extreme than others. I taught most of these students the year before, so I knew them well and was struggling to meet all of their needs. Being “Judy Jetson” I believed that my teaching career evolved and grew with technological advancements. I love technology and was willing to embrace each technological growth point and find a way to integrate technology into my classroom. I was already using the Interactive Whiteboard extensively for group lessons, group story writing, literacy activities, math modelling; and social studies lessons where we would combine photos, images, emojis and the written word. I found software on our class computers to supplement my literacy and numeracy programs; I discovered software like Google Earth, Reading Eggs Literacy Program, Mathletics, and Digital Portfolios; I involved my class in the Global Classroom Project; and used the Clicker Program for our daily morning circle, social stories, visual programs and personal skill development, such as learning to write their own name etc. By 2010 I had heard about a new tech tool that was coming out called the iPad. My children had given me an ‘iTouch’ for Christmas, and I was immediately impressed. I excitedly thought that if the device had a larger screen then the possibilities would be phenomenal for my students. My son told me that a new mobile technology called the iPad would be out in the new year. My imagination ran away from me and I was ready when the first iPad was released in Australia.

I subsequently spent many hours researching apps and envisioning how they could be used with my students. One of my parents purchased an iPad for their son and asked me if I

would consider using it to supplement his lessons. What a serendipitous moment! Given that I was already exploring this as an option, I was enthusiastic about the challenge. Greg was bright, bubbly and a fabulous personality. He did not like to sit still but loved to ask and answer questions. I quickly realised he had some interesting skills. He had an excellent memory and loved words. He also liked to know the order of things, like street names and train stations. He could recite every single train station, in exact order on the Frankston line. He could also tell you all the street names from his home to school. Whenever we were doing any kind of literacy activity, he was always interested in the words, the formation of words and how they were spelt. He did not like the work sheets offered to him during lessons (he would screw them up or tear them to shreds). He was dysgraphic and would get extremely angry during any writing activity; and was work 'resistant' where myself or an aide would have to sit with him to fulfil any part of an activity. I had gotten into the habit of asking my students why they did what they did and asked Greg why he destroyed his worksheets and he told me they hurt his eyes. Knowing what I know now, I feel confident in suggesting that this was possibly due to sensory issues that Greg was experiencing. He would often withdraw from harsh light, anything with a white background, and he constantly struggled with paper.

I introduced using the iPad with Greg for most literacy activities, especially spelling, writing and reading. The difference in work engagement and production alone was remarkable, but there were also significant increases in his learning outcomes. Greg was in many ways my first guinea pig. I learned a lot via trial and error and stepping outside of the box and then stepping outside the next box and the next box and so on. The other important element to this practice was collaboration with the parents. I have always believed that parents are a teacher's best resources and I needed Greg's parents on board with everything I was doing educationally. They had endured a lifetime of being informed by experts that Greg would never achieve anything, so they were delighted to see him accomplish small steps towards success and potential. This experience became a revelation to me because everything I thought was possible became reality. Before Greg, I only had supposition, yet after working with him using the iPad, utilising strategically tailored apps and programs, and then seeing results made me a believer in my own rhetoric.

My next greatest teacher was Jon. He was also on the Autism Spectrum, but he had a completely different personality to Greg. He was not friendly, barely gave a "grunt" to any of my greetings and questions and seemed sad and troubled. It did not matter what I suggested, he would say "no thanks." I ended up suggesting that he should try to find words, other than "no thanks" to use, but he still said, "no thanks." He was a conundrum that I was unsure I could figure out. I sensed, despite his uncommunicativeness that he was desperate for connection. I also detected behind the mask of autism was a young man who had significant abilities. I just had to prove it, not just to me, but also to Jon. I persevered for many weeks and felt like I was getting nowhere. One particular week Jon was having problems at school. He had emailed his classmates with what the school considered an unpleasant email. His parents were not happy, and the school suspended him for one day. When I spoke to him, Jon was disgruntled, animated and upset. He insisted he was trying to be funny, yet no one was able to understand his humour. I had learned to work intuitively with Jon and it hit me that to try to understand him, I needed to explore his idea of comedy. Like a bolt out of the blue I thought of Vyvyan from "The Young Ones" (Jackson, Posner, & Bye, 1982), an eighties British sitcom. Vyvyan is a difficult but likeable character and Jon was a little like Vyvyan. I decided to run with my hunch and introduced Jon to a few YouTube clips of Vyvyan. The response was miraculous because Jon giggled, laughed and was excited to find out more. For the first time, I felt that I captured a glimpse of what was hiding underneath Jon's autistic mask. We explored other comics such as, The Three Stooges, Charlie Chaplin, Robin Williams and Jim Carey. Vyvyan, made famous by the actor, Adrian Edmondson would remain his favourite. We then started to explore how

Jon could use the iPad to create his own funny movies, and comic strips. Very quickly, he began creating iMovie's involving his cats and jump scares (a jump scare is intended to scare the audience by surprising them with an abrupt change in image or event, usually co-occurring with a loud, frightening sound); as well as a series of comic strips about Autism.

Later, I felt compelled to apologise to Jon because like all the other adults in his life, at first I did not get it; did not get him. I had not taken the time to try to understand him and his humour, but when I stepped back, I "got it" and whilst "getting it" is somewhat nebulous and not very academic, it is the best way to describe what happened. The epiphany was like the metaphorical lightning bolt. When Jon sent the email to his peers, he really was trying to be funny. There was also a dawning realisation that the reason he was cold and aloof was that he had very successfully built a wall around himself to prevent being hurt by others. Jon had been bullied and ostracized most of his school life. He was also acutely aware of his 'differences' due to having this thing called autism. He saw autism as a blight on his life, whereas I sought to show him that 1. He had many strengths because of autism and 2. That he was not alone. We went on a journey of discovery, where I introduced him to others who had autism who had experienced success in the real world; we talked about his brain working differently and how he could make use of his skills and talents; and finally we worked on success, belief and confidence building. Three years later Jon is still one of my most powerful teachers. Connection and truly listening to a student are vital ingredients to successful teaching. As un-academic as it sounds, listening to my gut instinct prevented what I believe could have been disastrous for Jon. The epiphanous moment was when I saw past what seemed obvious and trusted my student. The day I apologised to Jon would change our relationship to one founded on trust and equality. Jon would go on to form better relationships at school; successfully interview for an exclusive high school; and take risks academically that would highlight his potential. At the end of 2017, he was promoted to a higher grade and for the first time in four years admitted (to me) that he believed in himself.

My smallest, but most exuberant teacher was Amy, who was six and had cerebral palsy. She needed a walker and had callipers on her legs and was the gutsiest human I have ever met. She refused to allow anyone to treat her differently and wanted to do everything by herself, including sit on the floor with the other children. Fiercely independent, she would not let anyone help her. Every day she would bound through the door with a big smile, calling out, "Hi Karina"! No matter what kind of day I was having, she made me smile. I struggled to allow her to sit on the floor, because my instinct was to help her. She used to groan as she got down and grimace getting up and I used to think to myself, "How dare I complain about anything." The greatest lesson she taught me was the importance of not being an enabler or ableist. Ableism can be defined as assuming that those with a disability need help or need our sympathy. The prevailing notion can be that because they have a disability that they are 'less than' and not equal in the eyes of society (Green & Barnartt, 2016). Amy refused to allow me to enable her. She wanted equal rights, even when I thought she could not do something. She demonstrated that when provided a way, she could achieve almost anything she wanted to; I (and all the other enablers) just needed to get out of her way.

Vignette 5: Teaching Teachers and 'Tacit Knowledge'

Ellis et al., (2011) contend that autoethnographers use this methodological tool to not only analyse life events, but to consider the ways that others may experience similar epiphanies, and in doing so, this illustrates and defines how that experience can be considered unified and familiar. Encasing autoethnography within a phenomenological construct empowers the subjectivity of storytelling to radicalize itself, so as to dislodge and confront the unexamined assumptions of our personal, cultural, political, and social beliefs, views, and theories (van

Manen, 2014). Writing compels the writer to be introspective and reflexive where in the writing “we take leave of the ordinary world that we share with others” (van Manen, 2014, p. 305). Inside the written world, one is faced with many twists and turns and one traverses the landscapes of language and by developing a special relation to language; a reflective relation, this disturbs and jolts the story into the transforming epiphany (van Manen, 2014). Berger (2015) argues that reflexivity is effective when the researcher is part of the researched and as such shares the participant’s experience. The researcher is also the central storyteller who influences the research process and outcomes by sharing their life and contexts; at the same time demonstrating transparency regarding beliefs, attitudes and values (Etherington, 2007).

The stories about my students sparked my curiosity about how teachers change their views, ideas and beliefs. Being an early pioneer of iPad use, combined with my research on Autism meant that I was offered a number of opportunities to teach other teachers by way of PD. I believed early that experience was the greatest teacher. I also understood that added to experience, a willingness to listen and be self-reflective was vital to making real change to one’s beliefs and attitudes. Being that I am an open book, to share what I have learned and teach others seemed like the logical step forward. Teaching in a special school forced me to examine what I was doing in the classroom. I honestly felt out of my depth and I knew I had to go back to the ‘drawing board’. I felt sure that by adopting new strategies, which included using appropriate and effective technology that I could improve the social and academic outcomes of my students. I was like a pariah and spent night after night researching, reading and reflecting. Two main pedagogical concepts emerged: first, when you establish a relationship of trust with an individual, this opens the doors for connection that can springboard to a space for deep learning. Second, using technology is an integral tool to this process. My imagination was ignited when I discovered the iPad. I was certain that when used effectively, that this technology could make learning more accessible for many diverse students.

What became clear to me was that underpinning my role and responsibility of teaching the teacher was the need for the content to evoke the kind of heart and soul changes I experienced throughout my life and educational career. The preface for that change involved partly the development of TK of the individual. TK is the relationship between teacher thinking and action and purports that teacher’s pedagogical knowledge influences what they do in the classroom (Rämä & Kontu, 2012). Grigorenko, Sternberg, and Strauss (2006) indicate that TK has been shown to be related to professional effectiveness. Berger (2015) continues that, “researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs and personal experiences on their research and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal” (p. 220). My natural inclination has been to continuously re-evaluate what I know and when I have felt out of my depth I have turned the researcher lens back onto myself to recognize and take responsibility for my own position inside each scenario. Without knowing it, I was applying TK to my own development as a teacher. I have been immersed in ongoing personal research, at the same time determining the effect that my learning may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation (Berger, 2015). My desire to impart information became an ongoing pursuit towards ensuring I was imparting the right information. I did not want to be a just a deliverer of words, but wanted to somehow, through my teaching to help recipients to “get it.” Again, I am aware that to “get it” is an elusive term, so it became (and still is) paramount that the impact of any PD I imparted was able to deliver the same kinds of epiphanies that I had experienced.

One of the epiphanies I had was the impact of sensory issues on students who have Autism who often have trouble effectively processing information that comes into the brain through the senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste). This can interfere with the ability to understand and interpret what is in the environment around them. This is referred to as Sensory

Processing Disorder or Sensory Integration Disorder. I was teaching in a Special School in South-East Melbourne and every afternoon the junior school would combine for a singing and movement session. I thought this would be a great activity. My class comprised ten six to eight-year-olds, many of whom had Autism and all had their individual quirks and uniqueness. New to this school, I followed the lead of the more senior staff. The very first week, we went as a group to a stuffy hallway that was crammed full of five classes of students. After the first song, I became horrified. Some of my students enjoyed the singing and movement, while others sat with their fingers in their ears, rocking back and forth, moaning. It was evident that for these students, this experience was not just uncomfortable, but intensely painful. I pleaded with the senior staff to remove these students. Despite initial resistance, the next week we were allowed to take those who had problems with the noise to a quieter space with soft, gentle music.

To help other teachers understand the importance of being aware of sensory issues I devised a PD activity. I had an iPod playing music, another playing background noise and lots of conversation. I found an audio recorder that emitted nature noises and an annoying flickering lamp. I also created minor physical chaos, shifting tables and chairs to random places. I asked teacher-participants to do a crossword whilst enduring the cacophony of sounds and visual disruption. This may not be exactly what a child with Autism experiences and in many cases, for the person with Autism, the phenomena is actually worse, however the activity partially simulated the conditions someone who has sensory issues may endure. This activity had a profound impact on recipients, most of whom begged me to stop the noise and exclaim how awful the experience was; some were in tears; others were frustrated; and most were deeply reflective. Almost all walked away stating that the experience was overwhelming and had forever changed them. They reflect about their previous students, feeling like they ‘know’ they must have been experiencing sensory issues. They vow that in future they will be mindful of sensory issues. This is what I want all PD to do; is to change and shape beliefs, which in turn influences practice. TK is a stepping-stone to a multi-layered, integration of a number of theories that will be explained in more detail in the next section of this article.

Discussion and Implications

Experience to Theory

Weaving educational theory throughout these vignettes reflecting my personal growth as an educator adds another layer to this study. As previously stated, discussing theory is not essential to the autoethnographical study, but in this instance, I contend that reflecting on theory is valid. While the tales provide perspectives of one teacher’s journey, the theory offers an integrative link between the two. The underpinning theme of the stories is my interest and quest for equality and fairness in life. Equally important is examining how a shift in an individual’s values, attitudes and beliefs can be simulated during teacher training or PD. Dewey asserted that educational growth is vital in creating a more democratic “provided that all members of society may have a full share in an education that offers them the necessary resources for making their own lives as well as the lives of others as rewarding as possible (Neubert, 2010, p. 488).

At each conjunction, I have constructed meaning, understanding and evolution of my own values, attitudes and beliefs. This process “recognises that remaking existing habits is always instigated and carried through by drawing on these same habits” (Pratten, 2015, p. 1039). My past is captured in short episodes to illustrate what defined me and led me to confront outmoded paradigms. I have always felt compelled to fight against any kind of inequality, discrimination and unfairness in my life and in my world. I have not changed and it feels like

I am still fighting the fight. As an educator, I have felt obligated to improve my own practice with the intention to improve the life of others. The educational struggle to further the opportunities for all, including the socially marginalised and disadvantaged, to truly participate in the life of their society is vital to the evolution of a democratic society (Neubert, 2010). Diversity in education is the cornerstone of this democracy and it is vital that teacher practice reflect this. Training should not only impart these values, but also instill them as quintessential components to any education programme because the creation of “a truly humane society...involves cultivating a flexible and adaptable individuality and requires reconstructing social conditions so as to educate individuals in the habits of moral selfhood” (Pratten, 2015, p. 1046).

This powerful message broadcast by my stories is that, the longer I taught diverse students, the more passionate I became about their educational and social exclusion. I firmly believe that for society to evolve, inclusion of *all* should be its base, especially those who have so-called disabilities because I believe these individuals hold hidden gems of wisdom. It is not just okay to try to transfer knowledge by delivering a message or classroom lesson and then expect it to be adopted.

Anecdotal stories can add another layer to PD instruction to engender critical reflection about one's teaching practice which can highlight specific experiences and the day to day running of a classroom (Lundgren & Poell, 2016).

The years I spent in Special Education were personally and professionally life changing. I now seek to provide PD to teachers that could potentially be as life changing and life affirming as my experiences. I use Kolb's experiential learning theory underpin the kind of learning I am seeking to crystallize, which is to devise learning experiences that are transformational in nature (Tomkins & Ulus, 2016). To engender this I tell stories, as I have within this autoethnography. I explicitly show how I relate my actions to theory, opening my normally private “process of transforming my experience into my knowledge. Expertise in modelling transformation seems to mean overtly linking the emergent ideas, reactions and feelings with the formal teaching-content” (Tomkins & Ulus, 2016, p. 168).

My life experiences were enriching and life changing, affecting my social and professional life, however I feel this is only one piece of the puzzle of what I call epiphanous change. The search continued for theory that extrapolated upon Kolb's model, which lead me to Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997). This theory is the process where one transforms their previous, taken for granted “frames of reference” into perspectives, habits of mind, and mind-sets that are more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that lead to action (Mezirow, 2000).

Transformational learning occurs when what we confront in life does not fit into our meaning perspectives and we experience a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991). In this we “are left with the feeling that life will not be as it was before, that this experience has created a sense that we cannot go back to the way we were before the experience” (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 132). I knew that I could not ignore the anomaly I witnessed with my students, especially given my personal belief in equality and fairness, which brought about a “profound change [to] one's cognitive, emotional, or spiritual way of being” (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 133). The ‘teachers’ I met along the way brought out the best in me. I became an advocate and supporter of those with autism and diverse abilities, passionately espousing the need for fairness, equality and inclusion into the mainstream. This is why I provide PD that recreated disorienting dilemmas “that provoke critical reflection and facilitate transformative learning, allowing learners to experience learning more directly and holistically, beyond a logical and rational approach” (Taylor, 2000, p. 7).

We learn through combined practical, physical, emotional and cognitive conduits (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). In doing this “a learner constructs or reconstructs knowledge or skills they are constructing themselves” (p. 633). Undoubtedly, “the ego and conscious awareness have critical roles to play in our abilities to discern the meaning of the messages arising within the unconscious” (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006, p. 135). To do this reflection is crucial and involves reflecting upon an issue of concern by connecting to personal experiences (Lundgren & Poell, 2016). Theoretical reflectivity is the highest level of critical consciousness, which is central to perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1981). In this emancipatory process we become acutely aware of our previously held position, and realise that we must act and change based on these new understandings (Mezirow, 1981). In hindsight, when reflecting and asking myself, question after question, I was engaged in theoretical reflectivity which led to a change in consciousness evoked by a disruptive dilemma and then epiphanous change.

Reflection and Conclusion

This study of self at various stages of my personal and professional life has provided an opportunity for me to reflect upon my own consciousness. I have also been able to self-examine my obsession with fairness and equality in life and the world. It almost seems cliché, but this reflection puts this drive into context, so that it all makes sense. I make sense! My account may be biased which needs to be taken into consideration when examining my research. As I am a proponent of fairness and equality, it was imperative that, as the storyteller I made my stories as honest as possible. For me it was important to include the harsh realities of my childhood as one of the vignettes because I believe this set the tone of realness for the rest of the study. I did not want the cruelty and violence of my childhood to define me, because from a very young age I have had a self-awareness (beyond my years) that those events would instead empower me. Again, I feel like I am stepping into cliché territory, but without the life-changing, epiphanous moments, my conscious reality would most definitely have been different.

Another powerful message emerging from the vignettes was the impact of my students as ‘teachers’. Without their wisdom, courage and resilience, these stories would just be anecdotal. I reinvented myself as an educator through their lives and individual journeys because in a way, their stories were reflected in and complemented my own. I was able to extend my own consciousness with the desire to impact the consciousness of others.

Flowing through the personal stories was the quest to determine how PD can be made more effective. We note that our study is not generalizable to others and more general populations, but we believe that others may find Karen’s journey resonates with them and triggers reflection. It is our belief that real changes in attitudes, beliefs and then practice stems from epiphanous change that transforms consciousness. This area is not often explored in research, because a change in consciousness is difficult to quantify. It would be beneficial for there to be future studies in this arena, specifically it would be worthwhile for more educators to share moments of positive transformation to their teaching practice. It would also be beneficial to address how to quantify the effectiveness of PD; especially PD that produces profound change to a teacher’s beliefs and attitudes. We contend that using the methodology of autoethnographical writing could be one way to achieve depth in this area of research.

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Experience is a profound teacher and cosseted within those experiences have been many individuals who have shaped me personally and professionally. Some have been positive, some not so much; yet they have all played a crucial part in my life. I am thankful to each and everyone one. Thank you to my supervisor, Dr Jane Southcott for her guidance and

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Chapter Eight – Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter comprises an integrative discussion of the overall findings of five autoethnographic studies presented in this PhD study. As mentioned in the exegesis I am also attempting to avoid unnecessary repetition derived from each of the included studies, although some reiteration may occur.

Key points from the combined studies can be grouped into three main themes:

Epiphany

- Pivotal to an autoethnography study as it is a potent storytelling tool and method in writing in an autoethnography
- Revealed through writing/autoethnography
- Can also be co-constructed during the writing/storytelling process
- The value of the revelation/s is equally salient for the writer and reader

Childhood Sexual Abuse

- What is the impact on one's life – imposing challenges personally and professionally
- Literature/storytelling can be a haven for escape from the trauma and as a coping mechanism
- Revelation – is potent in itself and plays a role in placing shame where it belongs - with the perpetrator, not victim.
- Value of others in the lives of students who experience trauma.

Autoethnography and Epiphany in troubled lives

- Storytelling as a vital research tool, especially when examining difficult stories/lives

- Storytelling as performance/sharing boldly and audaciously & writing to excavate the epiphany - microscopically viewing one's life via a narrow lens to elucidate the wider lens and the impact on the larger community
- The epiphany is both singular and cumulative; one can be aware of the epiphany and discover it in the writing; its role is illuminating and revelatory

Throughout this discussion, I provide clarity to these themes, which have also been examined extensively within each article. I seek to articulate the discoveries stemming from this study and make some proposals moving forward.

Epiphanies – What of them?

My night time ritual when I was a teenager was to read or write before I slept. I've always loved the night time as it's when the world seems to be at peace. It is also a time when I do my best thinking, which would culminate into the best writing... or that was the plan. I had lots of books and notebooks on the floor, so I would scoop them into a corner so I could navigate my way to my bed. One particular night I finished writing and turned the light off to go to sleep. As I lay awake thinking the final thoughts of the day, I heard a rustling amongst the pages. Instantly, my heart raced and I lay frozen to my bed. Listening intently. Did I imagine the sound? Nope, there it was again. The fear escalated to the point where I was completely paralysed. I couldn't move or make a sound. Fucking mice. I hated those disgusting critters with a passion. I had developed a debilitating fear of these creatures, where I couldn't walk into a room without scanning first. I especially couldn't go into the laundry, sheds, garages, anywhere where they were mostly likely could be. If I ever saw a mouse, I would scream, run and then collapse crying hysterically. Nobody understood. Now, I'm stuck in bed, door closed and one of them was in my room. Terror flooded the room, barely breathing, imagination spinning crazily. Could it crawl onto the bed? Could it creep up the covers? There was no sleeping as I laid like that for the entire night listening to the rustling, squeaks and my shallow breath. Afterwards, my mouse phobia exponentially grew out of control. Not even the places I previously thought were safe were safe from the anxiety and fear. Every step I took and every room I sat in I constantly scanned just in case one of those fuckers ran into the room.

You could say the word mouse to me and I would collapse and die (or so it would feel). The phobia was so debilitating that I sought counselling. One day, when my first daughter was only eighteen months old a mouse ran across our kitchen floor. I ran out the front door and left her in the house. Great mother aren't I? I had to coax my toddler to grab my car keys from the table and walk to me as I stood terrified at

the door... I couldn't have gone back into that house even if I tried. She eventually did what I asked and I left my house with only what we were wearing and drove to a friend's. Another friend demoused the house and I promptly bought a cat. Ten years later and I had recently given birth to my last child. I had my fourth caesarean birth and was emotionally fragile. My physical health was ailing and my mental health was even worse. I was struggling to function, because my mind was undergoing an onslaught of flashbacks, part memories and then the struggle to make sense of any of it (Barley, 2020, a). Again, I sought counselling. During one of the sessions, I told the therapist about my mouse phobia and told her the story of the night I was held up by a mouse in my room. I also told her about the time a mouse ran over me when my step grandmother was abusing me (Barley, 2020, a). Then I spoke the words without even thinking about it "the night before I was captured by the mouse my stepfather had come into my room". The epiphany. I had not correlated the two events until that moment. They say you channel your worst fears into small, insignificant things. My manifest terror upon seeing a mouse was a physical exhibition of the dread that stemmed from being abused. My phobia is not as debilitating as it used to be... I no longer scan rooms, but you'd still never catch me in an old shed, or in a garage, or laundry, or a kitchen I don't know. Come to think about it, maybe I do still scan rooms.

To examine the meaning of the epiphany, the researcher is compelled to "return to and explore that life altering moment" (Kien, 2013, p. 578) and reflect upon its revelation. Writing a series of autoethnographies for this thesis has been a process of re-examining pivotal periods of my life that have been transformational where erupted epiphanic moments of illumination and change have guided me through the trauma and grief (Kien, 2013). The "sting of memory" (Denzin, 2016, p. 125) takes you on a journey where you travel down a channel moving inward and outward until you reach a pinnacle of awareness and resolve formulating into the epiphany. I also discovered many of these epiphanies along the way as I conjured them from the text upon the page.

Autoethnographic writing is a leap of faith where one teeters on an "existential sheer existential cliff... [but also where we] shine a ray of hope through the boundless darkness to find positive meanings in even our gloomiest experiences" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 68). Upon finding and pursuing meaning, one can recover "lost innocence, faith in ourselves, our

friends and lovers, and future” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 68). What you discover can be beautiful or not, but there will always be satisfaction in the exploration; no matter what you discover. It is the leap into the unknown that yields the most fulfilment. The treasure I have discovered in this moment of writing; of excavation and searching is that I know myself deeply. I appreciate the experiences - the dark and the light because I am here today, in this exact time writing my story; AND in this moment, the story has a satisfyingly content ending.

Poulos powerfully explains that writing an autoethnography is like “finding a nexus for understanding these disruptions in interruptions [that] unfolds as a series of passages through gateways to transcendence” (2012, p. 323). When utilising autoethnographic methods, the life experiences of the writer becomes the field of research or as Spry intimates, “the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (2001, p. 711). I proffer my autobiographical tales as the field of research. My life, my body, my trauma, my pain, my joy, my discovery, my every epiphany was exhibited for you, the reader, to examine. (I’m using ‘you’ deliberately because I feel like we might know each other more intimately now). I contend that autoethnographical research is raw and authentic, it consists of data that when extrapolated in a cleverly constructed study, can provide potent and undeniable evidence. If the author is willing to lay their soul bare, then the excavation will glean untold treasure.

I shared my tales with grit and guts (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) and expressed my despair at what I assert as a monumental problem with how we deal with CSA as a society. I am not sure if it is possible to prescribe an ‘epiphany’ to another, but my hope is that one could be solicited from reading this work. You should walk away feeling the same kind of despair, but also be motivated to act. Educators, doctors, medical staff and care workers need to be more aware. Politicians should be driven to enact policy and legal recourse. Children need to be

protected and perpetrators should be educated and assisted. This is another whole can of worms and one that I don't have the time to address in this space, but suffice to say there is no solution without addressing the problem.

When I first sought help for the emotional issues that stemmed from past trauma and memories I was struggling with as a result of years of burying pain, I attended a counselling group that was meant to support those who experienced CSA. The couple who ran the group were from a Christian organisation but they approached the issue with honesty and rawness. They offered statistics and stories that left you reeling. During one of the group sessions, I sat next to a middle-aged man and for some reason he made my skin crawl. After introductions etc, the couple introduced this man as a guest speaker to share his own story. He recounted tales of his own abuse and then to my utter shock described how he became an abuser of children. One of the most shattering aspects to his story was that he told us that whenever he visited a park, or playground (his place of prey) he knew the children to target because of the 'look' in their eyes. Children who are abused at home are predisposed to further abuse and are recognised by other abusers. Not only that, they tend to draw in relationships that are abusive. The research that I have read supports this (Barrett, 2010; DiLillo & Damashek, 2003; Jaffe, Cranston & Shadlow, 2012). This fact does little to dispel my despondency on this topic because it all feels so fucking craven; that by virtue of our family history we are then predisposed to systemic abuse. It would be just as simple to put a sign around our necks. Yet I continue to seek answers, to find solutions, but more than anything I seek to be honest so that others can be too.

If I was to distil one epiphany from this study, it is that as a society we must provide a safe space for survivors to share their stories without the risk of shame, guilt or condemnation (Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018). For now, it feels like there has been no safe space and for me this is a disconcerting thought.

Epiphany just in!

I've been listening to Ronan Farrow's audiobook *Catch and Kill* and this morning I listened to his interview with Rose McGowan (92nd Street Y, 2018). *Catch and Kill* (Farrow, 2019) meticulously chronicles Ronan's investigation emanating in a Pulitzer Prize winning article in the New Yorker (Farrow, 2017) on the Harvey Weinstein allegations and ultimate arrest. Rose McGowan (actor) was one of the women who came forward with her story of sexual assault by Harvey Weinstein. She also retells stories of ongoing childhood sexual abuse and other molestations that she experienced throughout her life. I find her fascinating and her stories palpable, but one statement she made has been rolling around in my mind. "There are no safe spaces". She explains that

there is a systemic culture of abuse and then covering up of abuse. Only a small percentage of crimes are reported and a smaller percentage are ever prosecuted. Recently, I watched a documentary 'I am evidence.' (Adlesic & Gandbhir, 2018) This is one of the most shocking films I have ever viewed. Police departments have not been testing rape kits for decades in cities across the USA and they sit in old, decrepit warehouses across America. Tens of thousands of rape kits sit languishing in every city across the land of the 'free'. Is it any wonder women don't report because seriously... what incentive is there? The onus isn't on those who *could* be victims to prepare for a world that could attack them ANYWHERE. It reminds me a little of the *Green Eggs and Ham* rhyme. "I do not like being sexually assaulted, I do not like it here or there, I do not like it anywhere"... (doesn't quite have the same ring to it does it?) BACK to the epiphany... as I was pondering all these thoughts, I returned to this document and just reread the above vignette about my phobia of mice, especially the realisation I still scan rooms for mice. BUT the 'aha' that hit me in the face this morning is, I scan rooms for safety. "There is no safe place" when you have been a victim of CSA. You believe nowhere is safe and no one is safe because the danger for children is prevalent and it can also be perpetual. Holy fuck, all this time I've been scanning rooms for mice, when in essence I have been scanning rooms for safety. There is no safe place.

Childhood Sexual Abuse

It was September 2018 and I had been invited to a colleague's house for lunch. She had invited other friends, so I didn't know anyone else in the room. The #MeToo movement had been in full swing for almost a year and subconsciously I must have been struggling with what I was reading and viewing on SM. I was aware it was bothering me, but not how much - until that day. The event started pleasantly with chitchat conversation about what everyone was doing, how they were working in education, you know the usual stuff. We then sat down to have lunch which was beautifully prepared and I was offered a seat at one end of the table. Again lots of banter and chit chat until someone brought up the Kavanaugh hearing (MacKinnon, 2019b). I can't really remember the context, but I heard one of the male guests say "it's hard to understand why she would leave it so long to bring this up". Then another chimed in, "yeah, after 30 years why destroy his life now". The knot formed instantly in my stomach causing a wave of anxiety to rise within my chest. The guests continued to talk back and forth and I became more and more uncomfortable. The fight or flight response kicked in and I before I could stop myself, I blurted out "I only had to take one look at her to believe her". They all stopped talking and peered at me... curious... enquiring.

I gave them a response, "I knew she was telling the truth, because I've experienced something similar and didn't bring it up to my family until I was in my 30s. We don't tell, because, why would we?" I knew I'd lost myself so I continued to ramble, "Why would we want to be ridiculed and abused and berated? She is being torn apart by strangers. Who wants to go through that? I experienced this from my family".

I was shaking and the desire to run was tangible. Why the fuck was I saying all of this in front of people I hardly know?

Their eyes all looking at me - part pity, part scrutiny. Arrggghhhh, what did I just do? I finished eating as the conversation wandered to other issues. The two women guests

leant over and said I was brave and thanked me. I had to leave. Desperate to leave. I waited for what I thought was a respectable time after eating and said, “Oohh I have to go, I have work to finish at home”. Everyone hugged me. My colleague emailed asking me if I was ok. I didn’t reply. I frankly didn’t ever want to see her again, such was my humiliation. Fuck! Why am I humiliated? Why do I feel shame? Dammit, I thought I was done with this. I wasn’t. This all lead to what would become my torrent of fluidity, verisimilitude and frankness. I purged via the research, via autoethnography. I couldn’t turn my back on it now for the epiphany was startling in its clarity. The stories must be told.

It is impossible to measure accurately what CSA has deducted from my life or if it is even possible to make such assumptions. It is the ultimate ‘sliding doors’ question, isn’t it? How would my life be if I had not been a child who was sexually abused? As unlikely as it seems, there are a number of things I am grateful to my stepfather for... without his abuse of me, I am not sure I would have delved so deeply into literature (Barley, 2020a; Barley, 2020b) and I may not have been as competitive to achieve the best grades I possibly could. It is such a dichotomy; on one hand the physical, emotional and psychological toll was momentous, on the other hand, it was the very same abuse that caused me to fight and work so hard. There were years that included periods of fear, uncertainty, lack of confidence, depression and anxiety. Yet there have also been many successes. I have been a teacher for over 33 years. I’ve worked in primary, special education and then University settings. I created my own consulting business, have written over 20 PDs for F2F and online classes that are available in Australia and the USA. I have a Primary Teaching degree, Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Masters in Education and Certificate in Post Graduate Research and this document is the completion of a PhD. Some may consider doing a PhD at the age of 58 as brave, others may think it is madness. The epiphany is that doing this PhD has been an undertaking of profundity for me personally and it has occurred at this age, because I was ready! My children are all grown adults and wonderful human beings. They are interested in the world, care about humanity and the planet and care about each other – they are evidence to me that I did something right. I’m doing ok. Even as I write this a thought crosses my

mind. I am not sure I am the teacher or human I am today without my life experiences. So how do we mitigate the toll? Another unanswered question. Perhaps it's more valuable to measure according to what you do rather than what you didn't do or may have done.

CSA in the 1960 -70s Era

Abused children have been taught by parenting adults that love can coexist with abuse. And in extreme cases that abuse is an expression of love. This faulty thinking often shapes our adult perceptions of love. So that just as we would cling to the notion that those who hurt us as children loved us, we try to rationalize being hurt by other adults by insisting that they love us.

— (Bell Hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, 2018, p. 39-40)

To appreciate the effect of childhood sexual abuse on my life, it's important to examine the socio-economic context in which I was brought up. My childhood occurred during the sixties and seventies - a time when life was much simpler and seemingly more innocent. During my early childhood, our family lived in an inner city suburb and my family came from a working class, Labor voting background. We had black and white television, the word "damn" was considered swearing and men were considered to be the 'head of the household'. Most women didn't work because their role was that of the 'housewife' and divorce was a rarity. I recall meeting a new friend at the flats across the road and she told me her Mum was divorced. When I told my mother she wouldn't let me play with that friend any more. I didn't understand why. Made no sense. Sexual abuse was only foretold as a warning to children as 'the stranger that might be lurking in the park'; it was never considered that the abuser might be living in the same house as you.

To regress from the autoethnographical style for the moment, it is pertinent to view CSA in relation to the geo-socio-economic climate I grew up in. CSA was barely recognised as an issue across the world, including Australia until the 1930s. Freud had recognised that many of his female clients recalled experiences of CSA but later went on to debunk their experiences as hysterical, false, or that they themselves were the aggressors (Boxhall, Tomison & Hume, 2014). During the 1930s, feminist groups began raising societal awareness and concern regarding CSA across Australia and overseas (Bateman & Henderson, 2010; Boxhall et al., 2014). From the 30s to the 60s there were some changes to sexual offence legislation and the legal age of consent was raised from 13 to 14 or 16 years of age, depending on the jurisdiction. Some notable changes were also made to childhood pornography legislation, however there was still no major move from government and society to make changes that catered to the welfare of children (Bateman & Henderson, 2010; Boxhall et al., 2014). Other changes that occurred was the action of “many Australian state and territory governments taking greater responsibility for child welfare services, resulting in the establishment of statutory child protection and welfare departments in a number of jurisdictions” (Boxhall et. al., 2014, p. 8). However, it was not until the 70s that the issue was taken more seriously due to pressure from feminist women’s groups and political activists as they “posited that sexual violence was indicative and symptomatic of patriarchal societal attitudes towards women and children and the unequal distribution of power” (Boxhall et.al., 2014; p. 9). It was only with greater community awareness and concern that CSA emerged as having significant social and political value, which then placed pressure on Governments to enact better legislative protections for children (Boxhall et al., 2014). Despite this pressure, there is still a long way to go to address this issue in any significant way because the statistics about rates of rape and sexual assault appear to have barely changed (Kenny, 2019). If anything, the problem has escalated, especially with the advent of the internet and social

media (AIFS, 2017; McClellan, et al., 2017); the rates of child sexual abuse are alarmingly high (I will cover this in more detail below) and governments and organisations continue to record the statistics and address the problems in the same context as adult sexual assault. To understand the magnitude of the problem, I believe it is imperative to treat the sexual assault of children separately.

My mother had two babies in eleven months when I was about eight years old. We were still living in the inner suburbs that we shared with my step-grandmother. After my youngest sibling was born, my mother contracted the Hong Kong flu (Rogers, 2018). I can still see her teetering down our long hallway crying and collapsing. My step-grandmother in her inimitable style left the house and left us to it. My stepfather had to continue working, so I was pulled from school to look after my ailing mother and my two infant siblings. Considering I loved school (as it was one of my escapes), this was devastating for me. It is strange that I have little memory of looking after the babies but what I do recall is having to wash the nappies. My mother had an old wringer washing machine that loved to eat cloth nappies. It was the worst! After dragging all the nappies through the wringer, I would have to haul the huge wicker basket down the dirt-filled backyard to hang the washing on the Hills hoist. I was so small I had to use a chair to get up and down to hang out the washing. It was an arduous task and seemed like it would take forever. I hate hanging out clothes to this day. I then had to place one of my siblings into an old shopping trolley (while the younger one slept) and go down the street to buy food for dinner. No supermarkets then; there was a green grocer, a butcher and a small grocery store. My favourite thing was to purchase a paper bag full of chocolate wheatens (biscuits) and then the store owner would give us the broken bits which we would nibble on while we walked home. You would think that parents would be grateful or encouraging to an eight year old who had been handed so much responsibility - nope, not my stepfather. He came home and would find all the things I didn't do, berate and then belt me. The only saving grace is that he had little time to sneak into my room during the wee morning hours. It would be unimaginable for this situation to be acceptable today, but in the early sixties no one thought anything of it. Finally, my grandmother from Sydney came to help. I thought, "thank goodness... relief." Instead, she gathered up my mother and my siblings and took them back to Sydney with her and left me to deal with my stepfather. No longer encumbered by a sick wife, he was able to resume his sexual violence towards me.

As I indicated in the exegesis, if children came to school with bruises or scars, this would be hard to ignore. Yet, in Australia we continue to ignore the ongoing crisis that is CSA. According to the Commonwealth Government's Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), Australia is one of the only developed countries that has not employed rigorous and

systematic studies into the prevalence of CSA as well as other incidences of child abuse and neglect (Matthews et al., 2016). The AIFS analysed ten contemporary Australian studies and calculated that the prevalence rates of CSA for males is 1.4-7.5% for penetrative abuse and 5.2-12% for non-penetrative abuse. Prevalence rates experienced by females is 4.0-12.0% for penetrative abuse and 12-26.8% for non-penetrative abuse (AIFS, 2017; McClellan, et al., 2017). It needs to be pointed out that CSA is considered one of the most underreported crimes and the available “studies from a broad spectrum of service providers highlight that these figures are a ‘drop in the ocean’” because many of the statistics don’t separate childhood and adult sexual assault (Bateman & Henderson, 2010, p. 5).

Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse on the Individual

Another startling statistic from an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) report (2016b) is that persons who experienced childhood abuse are twice as likely to experience violence as an adult and three times more likely to be exposed to partner violence as an adult. Other statistics of note are that those who experience CSA report having psychological or physical disabilities, they struggle in education, finances and general life satisfaction, especially within their interpersonal relationships. I assert that the most critical statistic is that “the majority of persons who experience CSA knew the perpetrator(s) of their first incident of abuse” (ABS, 2016, para. 17) with an incredible 86% of first victims by family members. The statistics from the ABS (2016b) are potent but go largely unreported by the media or by governments. Gathering data on the extent of the problem of CSA and tracking the effectiveness of any programs to combat this issue is imperative to changing the culture of CSA nationally and internationally. Unfortunately, these figures combine the incidences of physical and sexual abuse, which can affect the reading of the data - I stress, the need for independent studies on CSA is imperative to addressing the problem effectively.

The World Health Organisation formally recognised PTSD in CSA sufferers in June, 2018 and outlined its differences to other forms of PTSD (Hinsliff, 2018). Bryony Farrant, the chief psychologist of the UK's Independent Inquiry into CSA (Hinsliff, 2018) suggests, "sufferers tend to have a completely pervasive and rigid negative belief about themselves" (para. 6). This UK study's data correlates with the ABS (2016b) statistics in Australia in that it reports that 85% of the participants experience lifelong problems of mental and physical health issues, relationship problems, educational and vocational struggles, substance and food abuse, and many have attempted to commit suicide.

I refused to let anyone look me in the face for my entire teens. I believed I was too ugly to look at. I walked everywhere with my head down and when talking to anyone, I would look the other way. People thought I was weird. I just thought if they don't look at me then they won't see my face. I also thought I was fat. I was probably about 45 kilos back then, eventually of course I would gain huge amounts of weight in that old self-fulfilling prophecy. I rarely look in the mirror now; the feeling has stayed with me. I look back at photos of the eighteen year old me and it literally breaks my heart. I was thin and beautiful but there was no way anyone could have told me that then.

Later in life, the fact that I was morbidly overweight would seem like an obvious epiphany to me – I mean clearly I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders; and perhaps using weight to ward off any further abuse (I mean, who would touch me at this weight?) Strangely, as I began writing this autoethnography the weight felt heavier and harder to carry. The more I wrote and purged, the more pain I felt in my body. I couldn't carry it any longer. I made the decision to have gastric sleeve surgery and have since lost almost 30 kilos. The epiphany wasn't so much a protection, or burden, it was my need to say the truth. The weight was my own lack of verisimilitude. I have gradually taken the layers off and maybe now can see the real Karen. Maybe I found my safe space inside the pages of this work...

The issue of CSA should take priority in this country and internationally. Public safety is constantly on the news and warnings about all sorts of lurking dangers to watch out for, yet rarely (if ever) are there public warnings about this rampant peril to children. Hinsliff (2018) questions the lack of urgency of society and governments to declaring CSA a "public health emergency" (para. 9). She goes on to advise that a public health approach to the impact of CSA could have significant ramifications on other societal problems such as addiction,

family violence, physical and mental health and societal crime. If we can address the issue of CSA with a holistic approach and recognise the urgency surrounding this issue, there are wider community benefits as well.

There are significant gaps in the data collected in Australia. This indicates that we still do not have a clear picture of CSA as a significant risk for children growing up in Australia (and internationally). A report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2018) indicates there are gaps in the following areas:

- No consistent definition and identification method that can be calculated and recorded across the country
- The data is “fragmented and dispersed” (p. 101) due to the multiple organisations and sectors dealing with this problem.
- Limited data on CSA in its own right. Most statistics for CSA are included in all SA data sets.
- Lack of data of “pathways, impacts and outcomes for victims and perpetrators” (p. 101). There is no data on the effectiveness of any interventions in this field (AIHW, 2018).

This report states that one of the main questions that cannot be answered is: “What are children’s experience of family, domestic and sexual violence” (Hunt, Webber & Montgomery, 2018, p. 103). I believe this is a powerful question and where I can be circumspect about the purpose of this PhD. Without the voice of those who experience CSA, one cannot truly understand its impact. Consequently, powerfully written phenomenological studies that describe real life experiences provide a body of ground-breaking evidence in this field. We need to also collect significant data on declaring the voice of the children. What

would I have wished for as a child who was experiencing CSA? I am aware that this might be difficult research to undertake due to a number of ethical questions, therefore perhaps the best we can do for now is to ‘witness’ the voice of a child told vicariously through the adult in autoethnographic studies like this one.

A factor I explored in this PhD and in particular the study, [‘Peering over the fence: An autoethnography performing the troubled child and ‘others’](#) was the role of the ‘other’ being a kind and benevolent adult who provided a small degree of assistance to myself was the difference between survival or not. I am convinced that without these helpers, I may not have been able to achieve what I was able to achieve despite the ongoing abuse that I suffered. Hinsliff (2018) also contends that “abused children who had at least one adult they could trust and relax around... [seemed] to have better prospects of recovering” (para. 32).

I feel fortunate that I had many in my life, who for whatever reason reached out to me and offered me a soft place to fall; a place to feel liked and valued; and who provided words of encouragement and belief motivating me to be the best version of myself. Whether it was to teach me how to knit, or provide me a space at the dinner table there is no doubt for me, these others made a difference (Barley, 2020a; Barley, Under Review a). Without sounding hyperbolic, this difference wasn’t just about what I got out of life, but they literally made a difference as to whether I lived or died. There is more that I could write on this topic and is a priority for future studies and research. At this juncture, I suggest that we need a cultural shift to address the problem of CSA effectively and most importantly, we need a “trauma informed, child-centred, anti-victim blaming, strengths-based approach to listening to, learning from, and working with children who have been subjected to sexual assault” (Eaton & Paterson-Young, 2018, p. 4). To have a cultural revolution as a society we need to

construct principles in our bricks and mortar, but also in our cultural storytelling (Musil, 1997).

It has been heartbreakingly sad to write the stories of the little girl that is Karen. I have so much pity for her and sometimes writing these vignettes has been excruciatingly painful. Much of this discussion has been interspersed with breaks for tears. There have been moments when I have wondered if I could face the memories and mould them into a story. Then again, the younger Karen makes me smile because it was her eternal resilience that helped her to survive. It was her effervescent wit and sense of humour that helped her to engage with ‘others’ who were drawn to her. These ‘others’ offered her a sense of belonging and worthiness (Barley, Under Review a).

I’m coming to the end and I almost don’t know where the end will be. I question and doubt myself because I’m acutely aware that the accumulation of epiphanies I’ve had during the writing of this thesis transmit one potent point: it’s only within this medium of writing that I found a space that is safe; a cave to write in; and soft place to fall (Barley, 2020a; Barley, Under Review a).

The Value of the Storyteller

Writing autoethnography is a test of one’s ability to be vulnerable to his or her self. It cuts and it rips at our spiritual and psychological bodies...old wounds are reopened and exposed to the world...the courage of being naked and vulnerable begins to heal our gashes. We become the embodiment of courage through writing. (Custer, 2014, p. 4)

Robert Cole, eminent child psychiatrist and Harvard professor wrote a part autobiography, part ethnography where he combined field notes with narratives about his various clients. His work exemplifies the value of the story to the human life and the healing of trauma. He espoused that by connecting to his patients through stories he was able to break down walls, create connection and a space for healing (Coles, 1989). He shared his wisdom in his celebrated book, *The Call of Stories* and declared, “He could pounce on someone’s adjective or verb” (p. 30) and discover hidden messages from his patient from within their story. The potency of a story has the “capacity to work its way well into one’s thinking life...but also one’s reveries or idle thoughts, even one’s moods or dreams” (Coles, 1989, p. 204). I discovered one more element, the epiphany... the writing of a good story can evoke the most

profound epiphanous moment right in the middle of a sentence. Poulos (2012) calls this as an interruption and where “something bursts into consciousness and grips our awareness” (p. 323). I find this a potent method and one that can bring “insight into the essence of a phenomenon [that] involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 77)

I embody the epiphany now... the one I had in the writing of this section. “There is no safe space”. I can’t shake that feeling, there’s rectitude in the words despite my repugnance at their revelation. When we lived in Darwin after Cyclone Tracey wiped out the city, our family shared a caravan. We had to live in this space because the cyclone had ravaged most of the homes in the city and the only available housing were caravans on lots that usually contained half a house. The caravan was huge, it had a living area in the centre; a double bedroom where my parents slept at one end; and a bedroom with four bunk beds up the other end. We also had a small area outside that was covered as a makeshift veranda. My Dad always had his workers over for beers during the weekend and this night was no exception. Us kids were told it was time for sleep and we that we should say goodnight. My bed was the top bunk on the left hand side of the room. There was a small concertina door that slid between the bedroom and lounge area for privacy, although at this time it was only half closed. It was awkward at the best of times to be fourteen and share a space with younger siblings. My mum and stepfather were in the centre living space with a couple of their friends laughing, drinking, smoking and after we all said goodnight to the adults we had to lay awake and listen to their ramblings. I struggled to ever sleep so this was going to be a long night. I heard one of the guys say out loud that he was going to say good night to us kids and the next minute he was beside my bed. (Mind you, not one adult questioned this). “Good night love” he says drunkenly, then he leans to give me a kiss trying to pash me. “Good night” I whisper. He then gropes my breasts and continues to try to kiss me, sticking his tongue in my mouth. Finally, he stops and goes back into the middle area of the caravan, back to where my Mother and stepfather sat oblivious to what his sleaze ball just did; he acted as if nothing had happened and picked up on the conversation. Did I say anything? Did I yell out for help? Did I make a sound? NO! I said nothing. “There are NO safe places”... not even underneath the eyeballs of your mother it would seem. Fuck this epiphany, it makes me feel exasperated, sad and bewildered.

BUT, there are safe places in the stories. And the stories gave me hope. I almost wanted to take the last section out of this discussion but doing so would have stripped away it’s verisimilitude. As much as some of the epiphanies have made me squirm, they have also provided me with a shattering awareness. It is the stories that matter because the stories

provide safety, comfort, healing, illumination, truth. Telling these stories have helped me to bring clarity to the facts of my childhood, but have laid to bed the haunting thoughts of madness and sadness... because honestly, being sexually abused can make you feel like that.

In this moment however, I feel satisfied, expunged, vindicated. My life has been worth it and the overcoming has been courageous, but it has been the telling...the storytelling, that has been the most audacious act of them all.

Writing Performatively

When you accept the challenge of writing performatively, you accept that you are writing for an audience that you value and care about (Madison, 2012). I care about you because you have taken this journey with me. I have written to take up my own cause, but also to take up the cause of the trauma of CSA. Most of all I seek to make a difference and a contribution to a societal discourse on this topic. It has been important to me that you come away from reading this work with something that “you did not feel or know” (Madison, 2012, p. 220) before you embraced this text. (Spry 2001) explains performative autoethnography where she uses her own poetry as a way to perform her story of sexual abuse. I too am using my ability to write as a way of performing my stories. Especially in [‘Life is like a box of Derwents - An autoethnography colouring in the life of child sexual abuse’](#)... the story unfolded like a stream of consciousness as the words spilled upon the page. I didn’t edit the poetic in the writing, instead allowed the metaphors, similes and alliteration to remain as an integral part of the story. The words became the performance; the emotion of the tone the witnessing; the story was intended to be imagined, felt and experienced.

The writing of an autoethnography deliberately employs a connected dynamic that welcomes the reader into their childhood, their lounge rooms and even their bedrooms. The writing opens the door and offers you a cup of tea whilst sharing your life story, punctuating with a teaspoon of ethos and emotion. Writing autoethnography offers you a tissue as you weep together with grief and sadness. And writing life grabs you by the hand as you forge new knowledge together.

Writing autoethnographically about a topic as intimate as CSA is embodying the text. The life of Karen is the field where the writing emanated. I revisited via the vignettes the life and body of myself. The knowledge comes from self and memories emerge from the skin, smells, taste and touch... “We write from our body and we write through our body” (Madison, 2012 p. 227). I am aware that not everyone is a natural storyteller or writer, but we can tell stories in many ways. There are many artistic, creative and natural ways to tell stories; some tell stories through music, some through physical art, others via drama and visual art; some build stuff, others tell stories through sport and physical activity. Stories evolve from all and every human experience; what is important is the opportunity to tell the stories using media that is organic to the storyteller.

Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness in Autoethnographical Writing

Whilst I have a stake in the outcome of this research, authenticity, evidence and credibility are paramount so that the stories are deemed genuine and worthy. Finlay (2009) suggests that the researchers' subjectivity should be placed in the foreground to begin the process of separating out what belongs to the researcher rather than the researched. In an

autoethnography, there is no avoiding the obvious bias; it is inherent in the personal context of the stories. I do not necessarily have to separate my own experience with the experience of others to eliminate bias in the findings because an autoethnography by definition allows for bias. By writing evocatively, I leave you with no doubt about the veracity of my stories. I chose to be emotive and graphic; I want to grab you with my reality; I wanted to write rich, opulent text that would evoke images for the reader; and I wanted you to walk this walk with me. Owning and telling my own story adds to its authenticity and genuity, “rather than having [the story] filtered through another’s perspectives, agendas, interactions, and interpretations” (Lapadat, 2017, p. 593). The author’s experiences and outcomes from the study is meant to be extrapolated to a wider audience. This is a vital component of the autoethnography. What is important is what information is important for the audience to know; so there is an element of trustworthiness on behalf of the author to ensure they are relaying a message that is transferable to the wider community.

Early autoethnographers such as Bochner, Ellis and Denzin advocate for changes to how we cater to reliability and validity and Pathak contends that this methodology “[disrupts] the scientific imperialism endemic in the social sciences” (2013, p. 596) and questions how do we determine knowledge anyway. Is knowledge just an intellectual pursuit that can be dissected and measured, or can knowledge be extrapolated from historical narratives, storytelling and lived experiences? Pathak declares, “knowledge is a more multi-dimensional realm than what we are taught to accept” (2013, p. 596) and as such there are many ways that we can produce data. An autoethnography’s individual value will be in how well the stories are relatable and connect to others in the field.

It is critical to me (as the researcher) to ensure the information presented is as ‘trustworthy’ as possible. I will be identifying issues and perspectives that are integral to the

discussion of CSA and how as a society we can best address this ongoing dilemma. It is in the best interest of any study to present objective research and literature that maintains and justifies the author's position, which provides utility and credibility to the work (Green, Johnson & Adams, 2006; Wall, 2008).

Research Boundaries

Autoethnography, as a whole faces criticism because of the subjective nature of personal narratives. As a qualitative method, this research practice aims to get close to the individuals they study, with the goal of understanding the complexities of a particular issue and to convey the meanings attached to related personal experiences (Ellis, 1999). The aim (as the researcher) of this study is to understand the poignancy of epiphanic moments and how the experiences of my life impacted my future pedagogical position. As I grappled with the impact of CSA, I found myself constantly comparing my own understanding and resolution of this dilemma to those of my students, peers and the wider community. The stories connect the writer and the reader in a unifying relationship (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2004); so that the storytelling is the method that “[evokes] readers to feel and think about their lives in relation to yours” with a view to live the experience with you (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). In essence, no definitive conclusions are usually derived from this scientific research method; the autoethnography is designed to be interpreted, dissected and understood on a personal level. The reader is thinking with and resonating with the story, reflecting and perhaps becoming a part of it (Ellis, 1999).

The limitation of an autoethnographical study is that the data is restricted to one singular source. On one hand, this could be considered a benefit because the autonomy of the

author “enables them to delve into their personal experiences as deeply and widely as they desire” (Chang, 2013, p. 111). On the other hand, many consider this a positive of autoethnography due to the privileged position of the researcher’s ability to draw on rich, authentic evidence (Adams, Bochner & Ellis, 2013; Chang, 2013; Denzin, 2014). It is argued that the insider perspective which holds personal bias, interests and perspectives is the strength of the autoethnographical study (Adams, Bochner & Ellis, 2013; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Pelias, 2013).

Boylorn (2017, p. 16) expounds, “auto/ethnographic methods are opportunities to story lived experiences and capture cultural phenomenon” but suggests it is equally important that the auto/ethnographer be self-aware and self-reflexive about the ethical ramifications of this type of study. Personal accounts of the lived experience are often poignant and powerful and offer an up close and personal vantage point as a way to understand and empathise with the author, “reminding us of our own fragile existence, they can resonate and touch us in unpredictable ways” (Finlay, 2017, p. 7). Ostensibly, it is up to the researcher to be accountable for their own stories, but also to those who are in relationship with the researcher who may be affected by the stories that they tell (Dauphinee, 2010).

Recommendations

When illusion spin her net
I'm never where I want to be
And liberty she pirouette
When I think that I am free
Watched by empty silhouettes
Who close their eyes but still can see
No one taught them etiquette
I will show another me
Today I don't need a replacement
I'll tell them what the smile on my face meant

My heart going boom boom boom
"Hey" I said, "You can keep my things, they've come to take me home"
– Peter Gabriel, Solsbury Hill

During the last year, I have listened to the stories. Ellen declared “me too” during her show and Ashley Judd opened up about her encounter with Harvey Weinstein. I recently watched a documentary about twin brothers who were not only sexually abused by their mother but she passed them around to her aristocratic friends. Just yesterday, I heard about a friend’s daughter who was part of a foster family and her foster father abused her until she escaped at 15. When she told her foster mother, the family did not believe her and she was told that she was crazy. Just this last week she tried to commit suicide. Thankfully, she failed.

I listened to Alyssa Milano’s podcast and she shared her #MeToo story and how she found the courage to inspire a movement, ignited by one tweet, which set the fire in motion. On October 16, 2017, she wrote "If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet." (Milano, 2017)



Figure 2 Alyssa Milano, #MeToo (Twitter Moment)

A friend told me her story of a famous local solicitor who used to hire young boys and then sell them off during his weekly sex parties. Yet another friend shared her experiences of a well-known jockey who she knew when she worked in various horse stables. She told me as tears ran down her face how he used to corner her in the stables. She was fifteen and when she told her parents, they didn’t want her to report it because she’d lose her reputation. I read in the newspaper about a grown man who raped an eighteen-month-old baby who died from the internal injuries he had inflicted upon her. On a visit to Ballarat, I sat in a local pub with a

friend and noticed the church across the road had hundreds of ribbons on the fence. My friend explained that people had put the ribbons on the fence to represent victims of CSA as a response to the allegations of Cardinal George Pell (Martin, 2019; McKibbin & Laird, 2019). The visual stunned me and that familiar feeling permeated my body, tears welling, shaking and those familiar knots in my stomach.



Figure 3 The fence around Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Ballarat is covered in thousands of coloured ribbons as a symbol of support for victims of child sex abuse. Photograph: Jonathan Barrett/Reuters

Story after story, abomination after abomination, one dastardly act after one hundred others. These observations and utterances come as a furious flurry because that is how they feel to me since every day seems to germinate a different story, a separate outrage, another reason to want to scream “wtf”? Are there really no safe spaces?

This study is a call, a plea, to be more alert to this blight upon our society. That approximately one fifth (by conservative estimates) of our children are exposed to CSA is a scourge and I admit to feelings of disempowerment and rage regarding these facts; yet at the same time I feel compelled to scream from the rooftops. I contemplated if I have answers to

the many questions I've posed and the truth is I do not. I have struggled to write the last word/s, because I felt that if I continued to write, I might find the answer/s. This leaves me with an uneasy feeling - what has been the point of writing these stories? What do my stories proffer, if at all? In this moment, I believe the stories are powerful in themselves and the questions will be answered, in due course in mine and hopefully other's future autoethnographic studies. I contend that to gather these stories into a collection, either in a special edition of a journal or as a book would be a worthwhile venture and assembly of evidence of experiences. Secondly, other researchers should be encouraged to write their stories authentically and audaciously to encapsulate a body of work in this field. I don't want a sad and sorry anthology, but an audacious, empowering legacy. Lastly, we need to facilitate a safe place for children to tell their stories. We need to be mindful of the children who are desperate to be heard, but you might recognise them as the quiet child, or the raucous child, or the sad child, or the angry child...what would this child say if given a safe place to do so? When alert to the statistics, this should make educators more watchful and then more vigilante in noticing and catering to the child who is being sexually abused.

Conclusion

"The world is indeed full of peril, and in it there are many dark places; but still there is much that is fair, and though in all lands love is now mingled with grief, it grows perhaps the greater."

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 1954

The world indeed may be full of peril, but it is also full of that which is fair and of course, of that which contains love. I remain hopeful that love is greater, despite the despair I sometimes declare. As much as the tales of my life contain moments of sorrow and trauma, there are equally as many stories that I have recalled about the wonderful people in my life.

The lovely lady next door, the people from the church who adopted a little girl and showed her love, the numerous dedicated teachers who gave me love and solace. There are the amazing, incredible students I have met, their parents, and the many dedicated educators I've encountered throughout my profession. All of these extraordinary humans shine a light on the darkness.

Then there are the stories, what would we do without them? I found my way via the written stories, but the world is a cornucopia of stories told through many mediums. We listen stories through the music we play or listen to; or watch dramatisations on our screens; there are the stories of conversation and the stories of silence. It is during these tales and anecdotes that moments are captured, unravelled and ignited. It is also here that you will find the epiphany. It has not been until the writing of this thesis that I was aware of how instrumental the epiphany has been in my life. I believe everyone has access to this transformative tool, one just has to search for that magical 'aha' moment in the stories we read and tell. The reader and writer "share the insights and epiphanous moments that occur in the writer's life [and colour is] an epiphany made manifest out of the darkness when illuminated" (Barley, 2020a).

It is vital that we provide children with a way to tell their stories. The Truth Project UK (2019) is a UK independent inquiry into CSA that offers victims and survivors the space to share their experiences in writing, by telephone, or in person. Stories can be shared anonymously to record their experience, as an acknowledgement of their experience and to gather data to direct programs and policies to protect children. So far, this project has collected 3,000 independent stories. They provide quarterly statistics on evidence gathered from The Truth Project, investigation, public hearings and research. It would be beneficial to have a similar forum in Australia. I would expand the idea to encompass many mediums,

such as writing, film, art, music, comedy, conversation, drama, dance, poetry, rap, mime...the key is telling stories that are organic and audacious. Offering this inside our education systems would provide a comfortable medium for children and teens to share their truth.

Last Word

Home is behind, the world ahead,
And there are many paths to tread
Through shadows to the edge of night,
Until the stars are all alight.
— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

I found a home here in this place and it is difficult to write the last word...but I know there are many words ahead of me. I have many stories to still tell and share. I have bared my soul within this tome and I have no regrets. I found a home in the words and comfort in the sentences and in many ways a companion in you, the reader.

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