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RAVENSTAHL, MATTHEW,JOHN

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Abstract

Matthew Ravenstahl

"Bringing the Apple and Holding Up the Mirror- A Qualitative Study of Student Engagement in Visual Art and the Navigation of Liminal Space and Transformation"

The thesis focuses upon the Threshold Concept theoretical framework and Transformative Theory as a means to consider the visual art making process. Constructs within the threshold literature that are highly relevant begins with the navigation of liminal space and interrelationships between the affective and cognitive dimensions. The study identifies the dialogic element of threshold concepts, as well as semiotic theory as integral to the visual arts and the navigation of liminal space and resulting transformations. The threshold concept theoretical framework and semiotic theory informs the epistemic nature of the art making process and the understanding of art making as a vehicle for navigating the liminal space.

The thesis employs qualitative methods as a form of participant interviewing and action research that represent case studies of Rene, Aline and Jayden. The data collection uses the organic deadlines and assessment procedures of the IB visual art curriculum. Therefore, the data consists of art portfolios, written statements and sketchbook excerpts, as well as two interviews with each participant. One interview is part of the IB assessment and the second takes place after the IB assessments are over. Thematic analysis of the interviews provides larger themes and sub-themes by employing a process of segmenting. I have conceptualised larger themes and sub-themes to delve more deeply into the experiences of the young women and their respective liminal journey.

The thesis documents the liminal journey of these young women as a basis for reflection upon the art making process. A point of departure for this research is to challenge the assumption that all forms of art education result in the development of critical thinking and self-expression. Many art learning environments are as prescribed and restrictive as any academic class, reducing art to exercises in technical skill. The Threshold Concept framework and the case studies documenting the liminal journey highlight important considerations for the role of art education in schools and the domain of education.

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**"Bringing the Apple and Holding Up the Mirror:
A Qualitative Study of Student Engagement in
Visual Art and the Navigation of Liminal Space
and Transformation"**

**Submitted by: Matthew Ravenstahl for Ed.D
Degree**

**Department of Education
Durham University 2018**

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

"You know what Mr. Ravenstahl, I realized I don't need a man to be happy." "You know what Ramesha, I think you just graduated high school." This exchange is the culmination of working with a student and a pivotal moment in my career as an educator. This exchange designates a personal initiation to challenge my prescribed thinking and pedagogy, which was informed entirely by assumptions and taken for granted. This study is conducted in the context of an International Baccalaureate (IB) visual arts course in an established American Secondary School. It becomes essential to address the contextualisation of the research within the IB visual art curriculum for several reasons. Most obviously the study is conducted in an established IB school where the curriculum has been implemented and formally assessed since 2001. However, the issue holds more relevance and substance than simple coincidence. The IB curriculum and assessment structure informed the design of learning experiences which fostered confidence in my natural approach to pedagogy. More specifically, I began to observe the art making process having a transformative impact upon some students. As a result I wanted to further evolve my depth of understanding and approach to pedagogy which led to my decision to pursue the Ed.D programme at Durham University.

The introduction begins with a powerful moment with a student, Ramesha, as a means to contextualise the thesis within a larger and ongoing debate, relevant to art education. More specifically, I hold concerns about art education in relationship to epistemic issues,

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pedagogy and the art learning environment which (within this thesis) involves implementing the IB curriculum. The student case (within this chapter) provides a means to locate these underpinning issues within the aforementioned ¹context. Moreover, the introduction will establish a link for relevant theoretical frameworks into the classroom experience which is intended to promote a rethinking of how learning environments may effectively engage the current generation of learners.

1.2 Ramesha

Several years ago I was working with Ramesha in assisting her to prepare for the IB visual art exam, the inaugural exam of the long May IB exam session. At this time the visual art exams were conducted by a visiting examiner. The examiner interviewed the candidate in the presence of their respective exhibited art work. During the course of the year, as is the case in many high schools around the world, a bond formed between Ramesha and myself. She would often discuss with me insights on life and particularly her life and relationships with men. This student made notable progress through the duration of the course, in regard to the quality and substance of her work, as well as her understanding of more deeply

¹ The student's actual identity has been anonymized and all images are produced with her consent.

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held issues. In her mind, the work (completed in the form of an installation) addressed issues of identity as a woman, power, self-esteem and self-worth in the context of her home. Ramesha was born



Figure 1.1 Ramesha's installation for her IB visual art assessment.

in Sri Lanka but was raised predominantly in the United States, therefore her home was more entrenched in Sri Lankan culture than the American. However, she was a typical American teenager in terms of dress, mannerisms and taste. In her view, she attended school in America but lived in Sri Lanka. This cultural context is important because it informed her observations of conflicting experiences as a young woman. More specifically, when at school, Ramesha felt as though she was treated as equal to any other student despite her gender or ethnic background; she felt accepted for who she was. However, at home she was treated distinctly differently from her brother, often citing differences in freedoms and obligations to the home. Ramesha referenced conversations with her father and his

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expectations for her, as being a good woman around the house that can cook and clean. More importantly, her job was to get married to a Sri Lankan man and make him happy. In the course of working with Ramesha the art work evolved from mundane and typical drawings that were indicative of negative self-image (unresolved drawings of skulls and skeletons with wounds) into a sophisticated site-specific installation. The installation consisted of domestic objects deliberately manipulated and assembled to comment on her experience and perception of being a woman in her family context. The eleven images in this section present the different components of the installation and provide some preliminary analysis of the meaning and intention of the work, in her view.

The installation was created in the school gallery, which is triangular in shape, with two carpeted walls and one wall comprised completely of glass. As figures 1.1 and 1.2 demonstrate, the student used ink to mark the glass windows with words and sketches. The words are written in Sinhala or Tamil, the official languages of Sri Lanka and are excerpts of a letter exchange between Ramesha and her aunt. The aunt was supportive of Ramesha's more progressive and modern views of womanhood as well as related issues previously mentioned and expressed in the installation. Ramesha often referred to the value she had placed upon her exchanges with her aunt, who continued to live in Sri Lanka and had divorced her abusive husband. According to Ramesha, her father disapproved of the aunt's divorce and described his sister as a bad woman, solely for the reason of her divorce. The relevance of this brief context is to offer insight to underpinning assumptions and attitudes that inform dialogue and dynamics in the student's home.

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Figure 1. 2 Ramesha marking the glass with ink in her native language.

It is important to note that Ramesha chose to exhibit in this space because she wanted people to "see in" from the outside of the space. The writing and marking on the glass, in figures 1.1 and 1.2, was a means to claim the significance of the transparency of the barrier in a visual and expressive manner. In other words, the marking on the glass places emphasis upon the transparent but solid barrier separating the internal space of the gallery and external space of the hallway. The significance of this visual element is that the viewer enters into the experiences, feelings and thoughts of Ramesha as one enters the gallery. One literally walks through her thoughts and words drawn onto the glass in figures 1.1 and 1.2. The installation becomes a representation of her version of home as interpreted through feeling and perception.

The installation broke the gallery into several smaller spaces that are representative of an abstracted domestic environment. Figure 1.3 shows the "front room" of the installation which is

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created by five doors attached together, one of which opens as a proper doorway. Ramesha also used found industrial light coverings, made of metal and Plexiglas that were partially transparent. These were used in order to create a smaller room, within the installation, one wall of which helps create the "front room".



Figure 1.3 Front room of Ramesha's installation

Figure 1.3 also shows the front room with a circular coffee table partially covered with a lace doily and an album of family photographs. Ramesha scanned and printed any family photographs she could find that had her image. She then digitally erased her face from the pictures which left an obvious white circle on her remaining body. Figure 1.4 provides a detailed image of this element of the installation which, in Ramesha's mind, was an expression of a lack of identity or personhood. It can be argued that leaving her body is indicative of her presence and the replacement of only her face with a circular white void is an

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expressive comment on personhood. The coffee table and photo album, in figures 1.3 and 1.4, further articulate the reference to domestic life and home.



Figure 1.4 Photo album of family images which Ramesha digitally altered her image.

At the other end of the room is a "found" skeleton (figures 1.5 and 1.6) placed in a seated position upon which the student smashed a large number of the found Plexiglas light coverings, leaving the skeleton partly buried in shattered Plexiglas. Above the skeleton was a clock which made a loud consistent buzz. In the student's mind, and as expressed to me, this element of the installation was expressive of her psyche and emotional state in regards to the complexity of her experiences.

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Figure 1. 5 and 1.6 Images of skeleton and smashed glass

The skeleton makes an overt and almost cliché reference to herself, whilst the element as a whole (including the smashed Plexiglas) suggests aspects of self-esteem and self-worth. Although these elements are expressive of internal feeling and psyche, there is an aspect of the viewer observing Ramesha. More specifically, we are still aware of her physical being whilst we gain insight into her internal state of being.

Within the installation, Ramesha built a smaller room out of some of the found light coverings whose details can be seen in figures 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9. There is the implication the room had been used as a dark room where photographic negatives were made into black and white prints. However, the room was not light proof and it was noticeably lacking an enlarger and means of washing finished prints. Both pieces of equipment are standard equipment to any dark room. The primary reference to the dark room and photographic process was a table upon which three labelled trays of chemicals used to print photographs were placed and a clothesline which could be used to dry prints. However, most dark rooms use electric print dryers as opposed to a more archaic method of drying on a clothes line. In addition there are prints hung to dry with traditional

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wooden clothes pegs, as well as, multiple prints scattered on the floor, and some in the chemical trays.

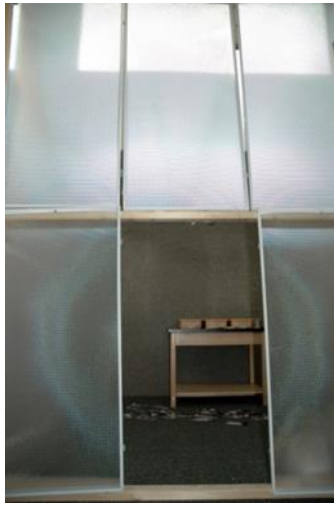


Figure 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9 The dark room of Ramesha's installation.

As formerly discussed, Ramesha claimed the significance of the internal and external underpinning of the space by writing on the glass with ink. By entering the gallery we are accessing her feelings, mind and experience. Therefore, this smaller room constructed inside the installation is suggestive of a deeper internal element of the self. There is clear reference to a processing of sorts. Although the photographic process is referenced, the aforementioned missing equipment and constant presence of light indicates the photographic process is not literal but a metaphor for mental processing.

One may interpret this room as a deeper layer of the mind and experience, a means in which she perceives herself. The mood of the black and white prints is clearly contemplative and in another place. In one image, although somewhat clichéd, the student stares at her own reflection. It can be argued that the difference of place, as well as the contemplative mood of the images in conjunction with considerations of process and space provide

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evidence from which interpretations may be made. It may be construed that this element of the installation addresses the idea of self-perception and the struggle to define and understand herself outside of the perceptions of the domestic environment. The detailed images of the black and white photographs are not presented in order to protect the anonymity of Ramesha.

The final element of the installation (figure 1.11) is a crib made of splintered wood and the found elements of a teddy bear and respective cloth elements associated with such objects in daily life. The student intentionally splintered the wood and painted it a pink colour, as well as chose found objects to be placed in the fabricated crib. Also seen in figure 1.11, on the floor next to the crib is a found woven basket which holds resin cast bones, which imply being human. The reference of the crib and other objects in this element of the installation make obvious and again almost clichéd reference to domestic life and childhood or innocence in particular. These references are in contrast to the manipulation of the material. More specifically, the aforementioned references are conveyed through the blanket and teddy bear, which stands in stark contrast to the splintered wood and the form of the crib. This contrast, along with the cliché of the bones, suggests a conflict between the two elements. Another manner of thinking is the blanket and bear are ideal representations of innocence or childhood while they are contained in the contrasting form and material of the crib. This suggests a conflict of either the ideal and her reality or the crib may represent the parental structure or support containing her.



Figure 1. 10 A fabricated crib in Ramesha's installation

1.3 A Transformation in Perspective

The opening statements of this chapter were made at the culmination of the presented installation for the IB assessment, which is a clear change in perspective in comparison to when the student began the creative process. More importantly, this change in perspective, suggests a relationship to the learning process that, I argue, is much more relevant and important to life than the performance on the IB exam (or any exam for that matter). There was a profound change in the visual representation and clarity of Ramesha's ideas. She evolved a more personal visual language and sophisticated representation of the affective elements related to her experiences. The dramatic change in her work and the profound expressive narrative, evident in her work, is a clear indication of

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a changed perception. The art installation is a powerful example of semiotic representation of subjective felt experience which is underpinned by an anger and criticism of her treatment. The ability, of Ramesha, to form and articulate linguistic signs as she explains the intentions, content and visual representation (of her installation) is evidence of an ontological shift relevant to the self and identity. Ramesha experiences re-subjectivity by accessing previously inaccessible thoughts and feelings (Land, Cousin, Meyer & Davies, 2005). The making of the art work negotiated the affective elements and informed the construction of knowledge in a visual mode and involved the cognitive element as she accessed and formed new perceptions. The epistemic element implicit to her art making process highlights the relevance of semiotic theory and the nature of visual art as a dialogic. Moreover, the art making process acts as semiotic dialogue in relationship to visual art in threshold crossing and the navigation of liminal space (which is discussed in more depth in chapter two).

One may construe the change in Ramesha's perspective with implications towards future actions as a transformative experience (Mezirow, 2000) which informs a fundamental question for this research: What relation does the art making process have to the ontological and visual transformation of meaning?

However, the art work suggests a visual representation of lived experience (ABER) that culminated in an articulated change within Ramesha. Although there is a presumed audience with any art display, the art work does not take on a political tone but an internal examination to which we are granted access. This raises

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important questions about the epistemic potential of visual art within the learning environment and the overall educational experience in regards to the role of art education in the twenty first century. In addition, the visual art provides data (ABER) that offers possible insight to the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning. The ontological progression of thought highlights the relevance of the threshold concept framework, transformative theory and semiotic theory which provides the opportunity to understand this interrelationship effectively.

Implicit to the writing thus far is the transformative experience that I underwent as well. As previously stated, implementing the IB curriculum into the classroom has led me to questions about fundamental aspects of art education, pedagogy and learning. My experience has led me to agree with the claim that the criteria related assessment philosophy provides a maximum opportunity for authentic student work in the context of high stakes exams (IBO, 2009a). As a result, I began to realize that the assessment structures and assessment performance are not a final objective within the art classroom. Moreover, they are a structure within which to facilitate relevant and authentic engagement with the meaning of experience. Until this point in my career, the focus was upon a quality portfolio for assessment and college admittance where self-expression or human development was a presumed element of the art making process. Ramesha and the other case studies of this thesis demonstrate the profound learning experiences that far exceed the production of quality art portfolios and indicate ontological shifts.

1.4 Potential of a Framework: Relationship to Curriculum, Assessment and Learning Environment

"IB aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right" (IBO, 2009a; p.3).

The rationale of the IB mission statement is in direct relation to the inevitability of globalisation and internalisation in the twenty first century. The demands of globalisation in the world have an impact upon education due to technology steadily increasing the volume and accessibility of information (IBO, 2009a). The social, political, economic and informational interaction of differing cultures is an inevitable reality that already exists (Parmenter, 2000; Walker, 2000). The mission statement is explicit in valuing rigorous assessment, as well as intercultural understanding. In fact, the mission statement primarily focuses on the need to foster young people with the hope that they can create a more peaceful world. Alec Peterson (IBO, 2009) summarises the IB mission as going beyond the curriculum content for the education of the whole person, which places emphasis on the individual's relationship to the environment:

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"an individual's ability to modify, understand, and enjoy all aspects of their environment by developing the will to act and make contributions to society as well informed citizens "(Peterson, 2003, p.33; IBO, 2009, p. 7).

It is important to note, when consideration is given to the IB philosophy, it is by design interwoven through the curriculum structure and assessment methods (IBO, 2009). The IB curriculum highlights the relevance of holistic learning, not only as being the core philosophy, but as May (1993, p.211) argues,

"the curriculum is more than the district curriculum guide, which is only indicative of institutional products or artefacts of the curriculum. These possess little if any aesthetic quality because they are crystallized forms produced by/for others, far removed from our experience. Teachers and students may pay little attention to this material".

The issue being raised in this section is the unfortunate reality that well-meaning policies or philosophies in education, can remain mere words that never actually impact learning environments. The IB philosophy is a beautiful notion but it may never actually impact pedagogy or learning environments.

The example of Ramesha exemplifies what Kalantzis and Cope (2008) consider authentic learning, i.e. student-centred learning that places emphasis on the pragmatic relevance of student life experience. Dewey (1934, p. 201) argues curriculum should allow individuals to project their own experience upon it resulting in the formation and expression of personal meanings. Therefore, the curriculum is something that is experienced as compared to something that is replicated or demonstrated. The art making process becomes

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more than a demonstration of skill within a preconceived assigned result but becomes a means of knowledge construction and discovery Eisner (1985).

There are many IB schools, mine included, where the holistic learning element is primarily ignored or simply presumed to be implicit to any learning that occurs. The specific niche of the research resulted from my personal experience in implementing the IB philosophy, less prescribed curriculum and assessment methods that fostered the opportunity for authentic student engagement with relevant life experience.

The consequence has led to the former questions in regard to the visual art making process and relevant theoretical lens' through which to conduct research. I often hear educators (of all levels) state what they want from their students in regard to a particular assignment. I am arguing that it is more relevant to provide the opportunity for students to use assessments as a means to engage relevant life experience. Art learning environments can then become facilities for experimentation and crucibles for personal transformation.

I argue the articulation of this interrelationship among curriculum, learning environments and assessment establishes a foundation for a substantive link with the threshold concept theoretical framework, transformative theory and the domain of art education. One can overlay any theoretical lens into a given context but I am attempting to establish a substantive connection that goes beyond superficial observations and arrives at relevant content for the continued relevance of the field.

1.5 Transformative Theory and the IB Context

"Mezirow (2000) talks about our need to pierce a taken-for-granted relationship to the assumptions that surround us; Mezirow says, we need to "take as object ... what is taken for granted, like conventional wisdom; [or] a particular religious worldview, rather than being subject to it. This is not only a call for an epistemological shift; it is a call for a particular epistemological shift, the move from the socialized to the self-authoring mind." (Kegan, 2009, p. 50)

Cognitive Development Theory (Kegan, 2009) argues that a socialised mind ties personal identity to living in relationship with others in roles determined by one's local culture (Pruyn, 2010). The individual is subject to the opinions of others and what one believes others want to hear. The self-authoring mind is able to take a step back from its environment and hold it as object and is able to distinguish the opinions of others from one's own opinions (Kegan, 2009). Therefore, "self-authoring" one's identity independently from one's environment overlaps with the IB mission of an individual ability to modify or participate in their environment. Ramesha demonstrates at least an ability to separate herself from the imposing views of her father and formulate her own perspective. When contextualised within the IB programme a correlation can be drawn between the actual transformative process and the holistic learning that is at the core of the IB philosophy. While it is presumptuous to argue the IB curriculum results in a transformative experience in all cases, it can be argued that there is potential for individual awareness of perspective or frames of reference. It

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can be argued that this perspective of transformative theory is implicit to the philosophical underpinning of the IB programme. This inter-relationship predicates upon the individual and his environment and the ensuing interactions. Mezirow (2000, p. 7-8) states in transformative theory that individuals can challenge existing habits of mind "to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action".

This interrelationship established between IB philosophy and transformative theory holds specific relevance in the stated implicit presence of transformative theory. In other words, in regards to the thesis, the relevance or employment of transformative theory is neither an arbitrary decision nor one based on convenience, as it pertains to the context of the visual arts. Rather, transformative theory is an element to the philosophical underpinning of the curricular goals and assessment structures utilised in the IB programme. Which substantiates and establishes a valid theoretical link between transformative theory, the classroom context and the resulting learning.

1.6 Threshold Concepts as a Theoretical Framework

The thesis provides an in depth discussion conceptualizing the threshold concept framework (in chapter two) and establishes relevant links to the art making process and the domain of art education (chapters four, five, six and eight). Meyer and Land (2006, pg. 6.) argue "there are 'conceptual gateways' or 'portals'

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that lead to previously inaccessible and initially perhaps 'troublesome' ways of thinking about something". Threshold concepts "represent a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress" (Meyer and Land, 2003, p.1). Threshold concepts have identifying characteristics, in that they are transformative, bounded, integrative, irreversible and troublesome (Meyer and Land, 2006). A more substantive discussion in regard to the relevance and nature of these characteristics, as they pertain to this thesis, occurs in chapter two. However, for the sake of clarifying my initial thought process and introducing the logic of this research, there are two constructs worth explicating to some degree at this point.

Obviously the transformative nature of threshold concepts provides a direct link to Ramesha and the creation of her installation as well as her underpinning felt experience. Meyer and Land (2006) introduce the transformative aspect of threshold concepts as a student crosses a subject threshold they will have a qualitatively different understanding of the entire field. However Meyer and Land continue by arguing that transformations can go beyond subject landscape and result in a transformed subjective worldview:

"In some instances the shift in perspective may lead to a transformation of personal identity, a reconstruction of subjectivity which involves an 'affective component such as a shift in values, feeling or attitude" (Meyer and Land, 2006, p.7).

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This research predicates the evidence of transformation as being a change in subjectivity and personal worldview (Meyer and Land, 2006) as Ramesha clearly demonstrates these characteristics. Furthermore, in the context of this study, transformation is an internal process, which is personal and the result of crossing into new ways of thinking and perceiving which is represented within the art work.

As previously stated, Meyer and Land (2006) describe threshold concepts as the crossing of a conceptual portal that is often troublesome in nature, which is characterised by a transition through a state of liminality. In other words, the description of crossing a conceptual portal requires it to be "approached, negotiated and perhaps experienced as a transition in terms of sense of self" (Meyer and Land, 2006, p.19). Meyer and Land (2005) argue the liminal state is akin to being in the threshold and describe liminality as a rite of passage, in some disciplines, into communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998). These are discipline specific and relate to the individuals' conception of themselves in both the ontological and epistemological sense, in relation to the said discipline (Meyer and Land, 2005). Ramesha's case represents an experiencing of identity as a woman that is troublesome as she entered the liminal state during her experience in IB visual art. This should not be perceived as a causal relationship but her art installation is a representation of the liminal state. The presumed transformative element, in regard to her not needing a man, suggests that the troublesome knowledge was engaged and the liminal space navigated.

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Therefore, the research focuses upon visual art as a means of traversing or negotiating liminal space, as well as relevant epistemological and ontological issues.

1.7 Research Question

This introductory chapter establishes my research aim as a substantive consideration of the visual art making process within the threshold concept framework. The implicit interrelationships with epistemic and ontological issues point to the relevance of personal transformation and the potential role of the visual art making process associated with these ontological shifts. The threshold framework provides constructs, such as transformation, troublesome knowledge, liminal space and others, that provide the opportunity to conceptualise and formulate an understanding of the movement through conceptual portals.

This points to a research question: To what extent can visual art provide insight into the personal experience of the liminal space?

The research question points to claims or arguments that inform epistemic understanding of the visual art making process within the context of education and the threshold concepts literature. Similar to the example of Ramesha the research question is addressed by presenting case studies (chapters four, five and six) of young women who independently of my instruction employ visual art making as a means of engaging troublesome knowledge. The thesis and the research question highlight the benefit of the domain of visual art and its inherent epistemic qualities. The visual art process allows for a unique documentation and analysis of the subjective experience

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of the liminal state and in turn informs understanding of significance of the visual art making process in the aforementioned contexts.

Chapter three will explicate the relevance of qualitative methodology, case studies and arts-based research. Chapter three will also describe the need for thick and rich data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) that can insight understanding of some epistemic issues in regard to visual art.

1.8 Relevance of the Study

Ramesha's case precursed my studies and became a means to consider a larger discourse in my profession. Samuel Hope addressed in the Handbook of Research and Policy of Art Education (Eisner and Day, 2004 pg. 98) that the relevance of research in art education must address the health and survival of the field. The contribution of my work is an intersection of the health or arguably survival of art education in the twenty first century context. It focuses upon theoretical considerations that provoke a rethinking of learning environments and pedagogy in order to promote meaning and purpose of art classrooms, as well as considerations of learning within visual art.

Eisner (2002, p. xi) considers the role of arts in schools and argues that "traditional views of cognition and the implications of these views for the goals and content of education have put the arts at the rim, rather than the core of education". One may construe Eisner's observation as an inherent unfairness within the hierarchy of subjects within education based on a presumed cognitive rigour or

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value in regard to overall quality of education. However, as much as I agree with Eisner's observation he ignores the fact that art educators have done very little to change this perception. In other words, many classrooms restrict the arts experience to one that is limited to being an exercise in technical skill that results in nothing more than aesthetic production. As the introduction makes explicit, student engagement in visual art can present many cognitive challenges of the highest level. Eisner (2002) acknowledges research that shows positive contributions of arts education to academic performance. However, he conceptualises visual art in classrooms as the complexity of the representation of experience as aesthetic knowledge. In other words, Eisner assumes that classrooms across the country establish environments that allow for the opportunity to engage in art that promotes epistemic value and depth.

My earlier claim that art teachers are partly to blame for the status of second class citizen is rooted in observations of prescribed pedagogy despite the implied creativity of the domain of art education. Eisner (2002, p.5) argues, "The arts are among the few fields in the school that emphasize the importance of personal view, providing space for it to emerge without undue intervention is crucial". The prescribed methods of pedagogy that are informed by misguided assumptions often lead to teachers acting as gatekeepers. I include myself (at one point in my career) in this criticism as I used to design learning experiences that were overly prescribed and impeded the students' ability to enact creative decision making. As

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a result, the student work would be primarily based upon aesthetics and technical competence, as opposed to complexity and authenticity.

Reasonable speculation points to the common reality of schools and classrooms believing there is effective implementation of a given curriculum that in turn results in meaningful or substantive learning. Pope (2011) presents a qualitative inquiry using several case studies which summarize student perceptions of school as nothing more than a line on a resume that leads to success in life. In other words, one has to get good grades in high school in order to get into a good college and get a good job. In fact it is this perception or experience that devalues learning as an inherent element of school. There is a reduction of learning to mean nothing more than the passing of assessments and completion of tasks which often results in a lack of authentic viewpoints in classrooms (Pope, 2011).

Within visual art and by extension art education there is an assumed individuality inherent to the subject. In other words, a common misconception is the use of art media to create a product that is evidence of authenticity and independent thinking. Moreover, it is this assumed individuality that allows the field (of art education) to presume learning outcomes are more meaningful or thoughtful than may be the reality. Prescribed pedagogical approaches in art education reduce the art making process to mere production focusing on development of competencies in skill (Illeris, 2007).

(As cited in May, 1993, p.212) Eisner suggests that art is a process in which "skills are employed to discover ends through

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action; whereas craft is a process whereby skills are used to arrive at a preconceived end". In other words, students are often confined to the art as a demonstration of skill when art media and associated skill can be a launching point or stepping stone for discovery.

Art classrooms are often predicated on the same assumptions as academic classrooms, which is that of a traditional orientation. In other words, the teacher acts as a gate keeper and access to learning and tasks is granted through the teacher. In the visual arts the learning is most often assessed based upon its aesthetic appeal and the demonstration of technical skills, which stands in contrast to consistent validation of education in the arts as an effective means to develop or foster critical thinking. I argue that this is a presumption and attempts to address a fundamental question as to the extent and means in which the arts foster conceptual development and critical thinking. The importance of consideration of this larger discourse, of the research, is effectively summarized by Eisner (2005); "our preoccupation with test scores, unfortunately, makes the arts nice but not necessary".

1.9 Approach to the Thesis

The thesis addresses the research question: To what extent can visual art provide insight into the personal experience of the liminal space? This research question moves beyond the original conceptualisations of the threshold concepts theoretical framework that concentrated on disciplinary concerns and specifically the ability for individuals to enter communities of practice. Rather this thesis is concerned with more recent threshold literature that focuses upon the liminal experience and associated affective and

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cognitive elements. Therefore, issues of epistemology and visual art as non-linguistic knowledge are integral to this thesis.

The thesis employs qualitative methods of case study, action research and participant interviewer. The case studies document three female students that I taught in an IB visual art course in my public high school. The case studies document the respective liminal journey of the students by using their art portfolios, writing in their sketchbooks and two interviews as data.

The aim of the thesis is to provoke reflection and a rethinking of art education and pedagogy through the lens of threshold concepts research. The threshold concepts literature points to the relevance of semiotic theory and transformative theory to understanding the epistemic value of visual art as non-linguistic knowledge and a means of engaging troublesome knowledge through the affective dimension.

Chapter three provides a full explication of methodology and the underpinning theories informing the logic of knowledge construction. The research adopts a form of participant interviewer and action research. The case studies of three young women named Rene, Jayden and Aline provide data in the form of art portfolios, written statements and interviews. These are pseudonyms meant to keep the young women anonymous. The case studies document the liminal journey and its relationship to the visual art making process. As previously discussed, the IB context holds some relevance to this thesis. Therefore, data collection procedures make use of IB assessment processes in order to make data collection as non-intrusive as possible and results from each young woman's

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decision making. The visual data, sketchbook pages and the first interview are all data submitted to IB for assessment. The second follow up interview is conducted after the IB assessments are over.

The claims made by the thesis are not causal in nature nor meant to be presented as strategies to be replicated. The claims are meant to provide insight as to the internal experience of the liminal journey and relevance of the art making process in navigating the liminal space. As a result, the thesis is meant to provoke reflection upon the epistemic value of the art making process and the role of art education in schools in the twenty first century.

1.10 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters, including this introductory chapter. In chapter one I chose to use the example of Ramesha to provide a broad context for my interest in this research. I wanted to introduce the relevance of the threshold concept theoretical framework and transformative theory by establishing links with the learning experiences. This in turn provides an opportunity to briefly highlight other important constructs.

Chapter two is the literature review which offers a substantive but focused conceptualisation of the important theories and constructs of the thesis. The literature review establishes the importance of the affective dimension, semiotic theory and the construct of self, which is eventually understood as a threshold concept. Chapter two also establishes how visual art making functions as a mediating object and addresses the issue of boundedness.

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Chapter three provides a substantive understanding of the logic of methodology. The chapter highlights the relevance of qualitative methods and case studies and subjective approaches to the research. Chapter three also addresses issues of arts-based research not just as a form of data but the epistemological elements of visual art as knowledge construction. The issue of subjectivity is further addressed by explicating the relevance of positionality in regards to the methodology as well as my role of participant interviewer and action research. The issue of trustworthiness of the research and the relevance of interviews is also explicated.

Chapters four through six present specific case studies of three young women. Each chapter focuses on one of the respective young women and documents their liminal journey through art work, written excerpts and interviews. The intention is to provide insight as to the internal subjective experience and navigation of the liminal space. This highlights the importance of the epistemic nature of visual art and its impact in ontological shifts.

Chapter seven is an analysis of the interviews with thematic codes and subthemes. This analysis is a reflective process where the young women are able to discuss their intentions of their art work and its importance in their navigation of the affective elements of the liminal space and transformations.

Chapter eight is a discussion chapter that focuses heavily on the constructs and research findings in the context of pedagogy and the learning environment. The intention of this chapter is to more

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pointedly address the research question and the larger issues relevant to art education in the twenty first century.²

² Parts of this thesis is in press. "Threshold Concepts: On the Edge". Sense Publishing

Chapter 2 Literature Review

"Conceptually, art education has become something of a goldfish bowl floating in a larger sea of issues and considerations. The world within the bowl is not invalid or unrealistic, but it is not cognisant of wider, equally relevant horizons" (Nadaner, 1984, P. 26)

2.1 Introduction

This thesis was conducted in the context of an IB visual arts course in an American Secondary School where the IB curriculum has been formally assessed since 2001. The thesis introduces case studies as a basis to explore a potential interrelationship of the theoretical framework of transformative theory and threshold concepts in relationship to the IB visual art learning context. Threshold concepts can provide an important theoretical lens through which to consider the visual art process and learning environment. Consequently and through continued research, art education may find new relevance in the curriculum and 21st century education by providing a means for teacher reflection upon the epistemic potential of visual art, as well as relevant pedagogical approaches. The opening quotation effectively summarises issues I have observed in my many years of art education. The quote highlights the insulated reality of art education that, in my opinion, desperately needs new relevance.

The relevance of this stated aim originates in personal criticism of common assumptions as to the role and practices of visual art as they pertain to the education of young people. The

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most common assumption is that student participation in the art making process, in any form, results in the cognitive development of problem solving, critical thinking, and the presumptive affective dimension of self-expression. In other words, the creation of an art project does not necessarily involve genuine self-expression. In many cases art projects can be overly prescribed and formulaic.

While critical thinking and genuine self-expression are possible outcomes it is a sweeping generalization to think these are inherent and automatic without considering the manner of student engagement with the art making process in the classroom context. Prescribed teaching limits art education to a production process, focusing on development of competencies in skill, achieved by precise teacher directed objectives (Illeris, 2007). I argue that such pedagogical approaches prevent authentic engagement with the art making process and emphasize replication and demonstration of technical skill as opposed to critical thinking. Freire (1970) considered traditional education as the "banking" method of learning, whereby the teacher deposits information to those students whom the teacher deems worthy of receiving the gift of knowledge. Art classrooms are often orientated in the same manner as traditional academic classrooms where the teacher acts as a gate keeper and access to learning and tasks is granted through the teacher (i.e. White, 1998). The major problem with this form of education is that students become dependent on the teacher for knowledge and do not learn to think for themselves, which in the context of visual art removes the most essential ingredient to achieving the aforementioned development. As a result, assessment is often focused upon aesthetic appeal and the demonstration of

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technical skills, which is an inherent contradiction to the common presumption that education in the arts fosters cognitive development of critical and conceptual thinking. In reality the emphasis is placed upon the student's demonstration of facility with material and media reducing the conceptualisation of learning to a student proving themselves worthy to the teacher. Kegan (2009), within Cognitive Development Theory, argues the student is held subject to the curriculum rather than holding it as object, or a launching point or tool for obtaining relevant or personal knowledge. A threshold approach to curriculum in visual art provides an opportunity for learning environments to support authentic and relevant learning through the art making process. When authentic and relevant learning is integral to the learning environment there is also opportunity for transformative potential and value to learning in visual art.

In *Experience and Education*, John Dewey states; "the history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; that it is based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure" (Dewey, 1938, p. 17). Dewey states (Glassman, 2001) there is little to be gained by getting the child to simply exhibit the required product of activity. Dewey (Glassman, 2001) places emphasis on the process (activity), and the disposition of the student towards that process. In other words, the issue of visual art as cognitive and affective development inherently involves the potential to cross thresholds and relationship to the liminal state.

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The remainder of the chapter will conceptualise the primary theoretical framework of threshold concepts and transformation. The importance of the affective dimension, semiotic theory and the concept of self are clarified further. More importantly, the visual art making process is clarified and understood in a more nuanced manner by considering its epistemic association to the theoretical frameworks established and contextualized in the learning environments.

2.2 Threshold Concepts

Meyer and Land (2006, p3) describe a threshold concept as a conceptual portal "opening up new and previously inaccessible ways of thinking about something". Implicit to this description is the aspect of transformation, in regard to understanding and perceiving, without which, Meyer and Land (2006, p.3) argue, a learner cannot progress. This aspect of stuck place or not progressing is important to this thesis, in the nature of the case studies being used and implications it holds for education. Much of the threshold literature discusses the theoretical framework as it pertains to learning within academic disciplines and from the perspective of an educator improving upon student learning as it relates to academic performance. However, the recent volume, *Threshold Concepts in Practice* (Land, Meyer and Flanagan, 2016), addresses threshold concepts from the much needed perspective of the student experience (Felten, 2016). Within this volume there is an important discussion of the affective element within the threshold concepts (Rattray, 2016) and the construct of liminality.

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In particular, Meyer and Land (2006) identify characteristics of threshold concepts as being: transformative, irreversible, integrative, troublesome and bounded. Within this thesis the constructs of transformative, troublesome and bounded hold particular relevance as well as the discursive nature of threshold concepts. Cousin (2006) describes the transformative characteristic of threshold concepts as being an ontological and conceptual shift in knowledge that becomes a part of our perception and understanding of self.

Boundary objects are frequently discussed in the context of communities of practice within the threshold literature (i.e. Star & Griesemer, 1989; Kirby, 2006; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Star and Griesemer (1989) consider boundary objects in the context of management and focus upon communication of concepts. More specifically, "artefacts of practice that are agreed and shared between communities and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them" (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p.393) suggest the unique potential of boundary objects to communicate and convey ideas. Rourke & O'Connor (2013) conceptualise the construct of bounded within context of art and design. According to Rourke & O'Connor (2013) disciplines have "borders that when crossed can lead to other conceptual developments and as such they assist in the definition of the boundaries of a subject area." For the purposes of this thesis I am less interested in defining boundaries but I am rather interested in the ability of visual art to cross boundaries, or act as a boundary object, that results in a transformed worldview.

The construct of troublesome knowledge is often attributed to Perkins (1999) who states that troublesome knowledge is conceptually

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difficult, counter intuitive, alien or incoherent. Meyer and Land (2005) states that troublesome knowledge is not necessarily required in the crossing of thresholds but they signify the important and identifying presence of troublesome knowledge in the theoretical framework. More specifically, Meyer and Land (2005, p.9) state that "the notion of threshold concepts might remain merely an interesting issue of cognitive organisation and perspective" if it were not for the consistent evidence of threshold concepts being troublesome. The relevance of this point is not only to provide some basic definition of the construct but to highlight the distinction between threshold crossing being a purely cognitive experience and the presumed association of troublesome knowledge to an affective dimension.

Perkins (1999) identifies specific types of troublesome knowledge including inert, conceptually difficult and alien types but acknowledges there may be other sources of troublesomeness in knowledge. Meyer and Land (2006, p. 12) identify a type of tacit knowledge which is derived from the work of Polanyi (1958) and is described as knowledge that "remains mainly personal and implicit". Meyer and Land (2006, p.12) further conceptualise the construct of tacit knowledge by citing Giddens's (1984) description of "practical consciousness" as emergent and unexamined understandings. In other words, tacit knowledge is difficult to make explicit to other individuals although we possess and employ this knowledge (i.e. playing a musical instrument, creating an art work). In this thesis troublesome knowledge is conceptualized primarily as being tacit and ontological which holds an arguably inherent and relevant interrelationship to visual art.

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Therefore, the role of these constructs becomes important as they explicate the affective and cognitive role the visual art making process provides. In other words, these constructs provide some valid correlation to the ability of visual art to hold a role in the perceived knowledge construction. In the context of this study, it is argued that threshold concepts provide an effective and relevant lens to consider the role of visual arts in 21st century education in a more informed manner which can more effectively utilise its ability to transcend conceptual boundaries. According to Meyer and Land (2006, p7) the transformative aspect suggests that crossing a threshold results in "significant shift in the perception of a subject landscape or personal identity, a reconstruction of subjectivity". This element of identity transformation is of particular interest in regard to the study. There are clear associations to the work of Mezirow, and transformative theory, which will be addressed further in section 2.7. Moreover, there are underpinning links between threshold concepts and the role of the affective and cognitive dimensions which further suggest the poignancy of consideration of the potential of visual art.

2.3 Liminality

The construct of the liminal space holds great significance in the threshold concept framework and is central to this thesis. As previously discussed, Meyer and Land (2006) identify characteristics of threshold concepts with most relevance to this thesis being troublesome, transformative and bounded. Implicit to these constructs is the liminal state which the threshold literature often describes as a transformative state or a "liquid space with great

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potential for learning, experimentation and growth" (Felten, 2016, p. 5). Meyer and Land (2006, p.19) describe the liminal state as integral to the crossing of thresholds: "passage through a portal or space that needs to be approached and negotiated" and "perhaps experienced as a transition in terms of sense of self". The liminal state is often troublesome and involves the affective dimension with unpleasant feelings and discomfort. This difficult state often motivates the learner to be productive and experimental in order to reduce the unpleasant feelings (Land, 2014). More specifically, the impact of the affective dimension on the ontological state can open the learner to try new means of knowledge construction or means of navigating the liminal space which is a form of experimentation. This thesis focuses upon the visual art making process as a means to navigate the liminal space which derives from each of the case studies wanting to change their unpleasant ontological states.

Meyer and Land (2005, p.21) describe liminality as "discursive and reconstitutive". More specifically, the learner will demonstrate ontological shifts or change in subjectivity as well as, enhanced language that may be more sophisticated or the ability to articulate previously inaccessible thoughts and feelings. The elements are intertwined to an extent in the reconstitution (change in subjectivity) is often evidenced in the enhanced language of the learner.

For example, Carl Jung is used to illustrate liminality in regards to "midlife crisis as uncertainty about identity of self and purpose in life" (cited in Meyer and Land, 2006, p. 22). Thus far the construct of liminality has highlighted "the condition of liminality may be transformative in function; there may be a change

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of state or status" (Meyer and Land, 2006, p.22) and it is this conception of liminality that the research will focus upon.

Another aspect to these "transitory states" (Meyer and Land, 2006, p. 22) is they act as rites of passage into communities of practice (Meyer and Land, 2005) in some disciplines. Thus far I have tried to be explicit that the student's negotiation of liminality is neither limited to their rite of passage into the discipline of art or artist nor bounded to the domain of art and art education. Although the young people evolve in the discipline of art the relationship of liminality and visual art focuses more upon a negotiation of identity and sense of self. This is not to say that the students do not evolve as artists or cross thresholds related to this community of practice and domain but the thesis focuses upon the subjective liminal experience and the ability of visual art to provide us insight in the navigation of the liminal space. Therefore, this thesis places emphasis upon visual art as a means or vehicle for the navigation of liminality.

The issue of the vehicle employed to navigate liminality becomes more potential when considering that learners may move back and forth across the liminal state. One may presume that the liminal state is straight forward or linear but an individual may not traverse the liminal state in a straightforward manner. The navigation of the liminal space can be impacted by the affective and cognitive dimensions and the most effective vehicle may not be immediately associated with a particular domain. In this thesis, this issue relates back to the discursive element of threshold crossing which was previously described as evidence of enhanced language. The original conceptualisation presumes that language

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manifests as linguistic signs but visual art is a form of non-linguistic knowledge (Langer, 1957). The forms, materials and other inherent qualities of visual art construct and express meaning. These discursive elements and the inherent epistemic elements can arguably be understood as vehicles for traversing liminal space. I argue that traditional vehicles which are often considered evidence of learning may not provide adequate means for negotiating liminal states that may be complex or thorny. The liminal state may be suspended due to a "lack of vehicle through which to express and progress his thinking" (Meyer and Land, 2006, p.25).

Meyer and Land (2006) argue the subjective nature of thresholds and liminal experience and this implies the importance of the nature of the vehicle employed for traversing the liminal space. In other words, one may assume that thresholds and the liminal space may only be negotiated through linguistic or more presumed conceptual vehicles common in learning environments. In this thesis I am interested in the potential of visual art to act as a vehicle for the negotiation of liminality as well as in the inherent epistemic qualities of visual art. The subjective experience of the liminal space with its affective elements is explored further in the next section.

2.4 Affective Dimension of Liminal Space and Art as a Vehicle for Navigation

The thesis builds upon the work of Rattray (2016) and argues for a more complex interrelationship between the affective and cognitive dimensions within which the visual arts hold a particular relevance. Rattray (2016) focuses on the importance of the

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affective dimension in threshold concepts. "Threshold transformations foster ontological shifts that are associated with both cognitive and affective changes in the individual. They cause the individual to view and experience the world differently in terms, not just of the intellectual understanding of an idea but also in the way they feel about, or experience, the world" (Rattray, 2016, p. 67). Rattray considers the extent to which liminality might be experienced as both a cognitive and affective state which is navigated by some students more easily than others (Rattray 2016). Rattray's observation raises a salient point and interesting questions that open a door of relevance for research in the domain of the visual arts within the threshold literature. Does variation in the ability to navigate liminality have to do with individual attributes? In other words, some students may be more capable of navigating liminality than others due to their psychological capital (Rattray, 2016; Luthans and Youssef, 2004; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Rattray (2016) explores constructs of hope, optimism, emotional security and resilience particularly as they pertain to psychological capital as a means of understanding variations in the willingness of individuals to engage with troublesomeness. The implication being that some individuals can become overwhelmed or incapable of engaging complex affective elements that are associated with the liminal experience (Land, 2014). However many individuals overcome powerful experiences and navigate associated liminality in many aspects of life. For example, the death of a loved one or drug addicts become sober. It would seem oversimplified to assume that in each of these countless examples the individuals that proceed or evolve all possess some

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innate attribute. I point to the issue of an epistemic vehicle as another important consideration in regard to engaging power affective elements.

Within the positive psychology literature Reynolds & Lim (2007) research women with a diagnosis of cancer who turn to involvement with visual art making as a means of managing emotional distress and turmoil, filling occupational voids and regaining a sense of achievement and purpose. Reynolds & Lim (2007) conceptualise the diagnosis of cancer and ensuing impact upon the affective dimension of the respective patients' as a form of post-traumatic stress and the study explores the patients turn towards visual art.

In a similar manner Mathieson & Stam (1995) use narrative as a means to explore identity work which they define as; "used to describe the process of patients' evaluations of the meaning of their illness within the actual context of ongoing, organised social relationships, including the medical system". The study presents patients that use narrative to "make sense of their illness" and social relationships with the individual with a new identity of being ill (Mathieson & Stam, 1995, p. 283).

There are obvious distinctions that can be made between narrative and visual art but the implicit association is the use of a creative process to make meaning of troublesome experience and engage in reconstitutive aspects of thresholds. There is clear involvement of the affective dimension which can be to such a degree that individuals may not be able to progress through the liminal space (Land, 2014).

I argue this is a crucial point. Land (2014) goes on to state that the liminal experience may cause individuals to repeat familiar

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but ineffective strategies to change their unpleasant state.

However, the overwhelming nature of the affective dimension may become more manageable with different epistemic approaches which may be possible due to the inherent fluidity and experimental nature of the liminal state. This raises the question: Does the discipline or media employed as a vehicle impact the ability to engage the affective dimension and foster the navigation of liminality? The domain of art (visual or narrative) seem to provide an effective epistemic vehicle for the individuals (in the aforementioned studies) to construct meaning or engage with troublesomeness. It is fair to speculate that differing forms of counseling occurred with these individuals either previous or simultaneous to their creative pursuits.

In the research by Reynolds & Lim (2007) and Mathieson & Stam (1995), the patients knowingly pursued a means to address or engage the ensuing emotions of a traumatic experience. In the context of the classroom, students do not knowingly enrol in an art class with this same intention. But as the example of Ramesha in chapter one indicates students can employ the visual art making process for powerful learning whether they planned on it or not. The case studies presented in this thesis employ the art curriculum and art making process as a means to address the affective dimension associated with the liminal experience. This epistemic function of the art making process was not preconceived and only became incrementally clear to the young women through the liminal journey as indicated by discursive characteristics of threshold crossing became apparent. Therefore the issues being raised about pedagogy and learning environments (throughout the first chapters) become

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increasingly relevant. The next section will discuss issues of the affective dimension in the learning environment.

Focusing upon the art making process as a means to glimpse the navigation of the liminal state addresses what Felten (2016) states as a need for the threshold literature to address the student perspective in the learning process. Presumably, liminality is at the core of the student experience in regard to learning. In my opinion, the implication of Felten (2016) is the need to understand the students' experience and perspective of the liminal state.

2.5 The Involvement of the Affective Dimension and Liminality in Learning Environments

I think it is important to provide a substantive understanding of how threshold concepts, liminality and the affective dimension can link to the learning environment. The importance of this linking has two reasons. The research I am conducting must be more than a template that I am laying over an existing educational context so that methods and claims may also be substantive and relevant. It is beneficial to describe how these constructs and theories relate to the curriculum being employed. The second reason is, I have offered a lot of criticism of prescribed teaching and overprescribed learning environments without offering solutions to my criticisms. This section will address issues of the importance of the affective dimension and liminality in the classroom context. The title of my thesis "Bringing the Apple and Holding Up the Mirror" is a direct reference to the need for art education and specifically educators to challenge students to employ visual art making for engagement with feeling and experience that results in

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the expression of meaning. I wish to argue that this means of challenging students can find origins by involving the affective dimension and the liminal experience in the learning environment.

The role of the affective dimension in learning environments (in my experience) is often ignored or only considered in contexts that focus on learning difficulties that magnify in traditional classroom situations. Most often the classroom context focuses upon cognition that can facilitate the aforementioned "banking" method (Freire, 1970) of teaching. Bloom (1956) identifies the generally accepted understanding of cognition as mental processes required to assimilate knowledge or information. I argue the importance or significance of the cognitive and affective dimensions may not be as easily discernible or prioritised as common assumptions suggest. For example, literature on emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) argue "intelligence is more than intellectual abilities" (Illeris, 2007, p. 84). In other words, the affective dimension can be a way of knowing, a means of knowledge construction as well as a means to understand other individuals and contexts.

It is important to highlight that pedagogical approaches can be a response to the assessments that are required by states and schools districts. In America the Standard of Learning exams are standardized tests that drive much of the classroom activity based upon their high stakes impact and the amount of material that must be covered. Land (2016) offers a critique of the gradual shifts toward what he calls consumerist education. This shift is based upon "certainty, clarity, straightforwardness and control" (Land,

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2016, p. 16) which values data and test scores as a means of justifying a valuable learning experience. Land (2016) contrasts consumerist education with learning as transformation which is described as inherently involving the affective dimension and liminality which promotes discomfort and less certainty.

In my experience this element of struggle is often misconstrued in classrooms. The personal struggle associated with transformation requires an internalisation and application of knowledge and skills to relevant life experience that results in the making of meaning that is embraced (Mezirow, 2000; Land, 2016). This is not the same as learners struggling to complete tasks of a heavy workload or score well on assessments. The issue of consumerist education has direct consequences upon classrooms and the students experience and understanding of education. For example, Pope (2001) presents the student's view of school as being nothing more than a line on a curriculum vitae that enables the next step in advancement (college, job, marriage).

The IB curriculum is underpinned with a philosophy of holistic learning and the development of personal attributes that can empower learners to have positive impact as global citizens (IBO, 2009). Within the larger domain of international education Cambridge & Thompson (2004, p. 164) frame IB education as a "reconciliation of pragmatic and ideological dilemmas ". The pragmatic interest is the cognitive development manifest in globalist concerns of international education as academic qualifications recognised around the world for admittance to university and participation in processes of globalisation (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Yang, 2002).

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Ideological or internationalist interests view education as a "moral development of positive attitudes towards peace, international understanding and responsible global citizenship" (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004, p.164).

The point is that the affective development of IB is not only prioritised but is arguably the distinguishing characteristic of IB education. As previously discussed with Land (2016) and Pope (2001) issues of engagement and struggle can be misconstrued in classrooms when focused solely on the pragmatic issues of education. In the context of art education struggle must involve the affective dimension and engagement must involve the internal self. This is not to say that all art work must be about the artist themselves but the creation of the work must involve a holistic engagement that goes beyond formulaic products. In this thesis the case studies employ art as a means to engage troublesome experience and feelings. Therefore the constructs of identity and self are important to understanding the young women represented in the case studies creative and liminal journeys. The following section will address the constructs in more depth.

2.6 Identity and Self

The constructs of identity and self are integral to this thesis as they represent the origins of troublesomeness. As discussed in the case studies troublesomeness comes from other sources in other contexts or disciplines. Furthermore, identity and self are thresholds crossed by the young women described in the case studies of this thesis. The literature provides many variations defining the constructs of identity and self (Lapsley, 2004, Maslow, 1967;

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Rogers, Smith, Coleman, 1978); furthermore the literature is explicit in the shortcomings of existing understandings of these constructs and the need for constant evolution of their meaning (Fearson, 1999).

Fearson (1999) focuses upon extending the well-established conceptualisation of identity by Erikson (1968) which argues the formation of identity as a social construction in relation to the perception of others. Fearson (1999) revisits the concept of identity accounting for more contemporary realities of society. Implicit to Fearson (1999) is the internal experience of one's identity and an awareness of the external social reality that may be in conflict with the more internal experience of identity. More specifically, elements of identity can be considered physical or genetic traits that one may "feel powerless to change, or which in their experience they cannot choose, such as sexual orientation or membership in a social category" (Fearson, 1999, p. 23). The physical or genetic identity is subject to external perception and this may be in conflict with one's internal experience of identity. Fearson (1999, p. 22) continues that "personal identity is the social identity whose content I am most committed to" and "the one that trumps others when I have to make choices" in more socially complex situations. The importance of this discussion is it highlights the distinction between the internal and external realities of an individual and the potential complexity between the two.

The internal experience of identity can be more effectively clarified as: "identity" is not the same thing as my feelings about

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self" (Fearson, 1999, p.10). In this thesis I make consistent reference to a sense of self which is a more consistently internal and private understanding as opposed to the more socially influenced understanding of identity. Cooley (1902) argues the individual as self produces stronger emotions than what is labelled non-self, and that it is only through subjective feelings that the self can be identified. Brewer & Gardner (1996, p.83) argue the individuated self-concept is the person's sense of unique identity differentiated from others. This may seem obvious at first but when taken into consideration with identity based upon physical and genetic traits this individuated self becomes important. In other words, as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Gecas 1979; p.7) which distinguishes one from others who may share certain characteristics.

Epstein (1973, p. 2) argues "there can be no argument but that the subjective feeling state of having a self is an important empirical phenomenon that warrants study in its own right. Like many other phenomena, the subjective feeling of self tends to be taken for granted until it is absent". Epstein (1973) highlights contributions of this thesis in the sense that access to the student's perspective of the liminal experience can be represented. Felten (2016) argues the need for threshold literature to take more account of the student's perspective especially in regard to the liminal state. Moreover, the focus of the affective dimension and the context of the art making process can provide a unique glimpse into the student's perspective that allows for empathy and understanding.

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My experience and observation of these young women informs the understanding of the social and internal affective elements of their troublesomeness and threshold crossing. The young women were impacted by their socialisation process and its integral complexities. As a result, their experience of identity and self are reflexive and intertwined with the liminal state and its associated affective complexity and stuck place. It is the contention of this thesis that the art making process provided a semiotic navigation of the experiences associated with the complexities of self and identity ultimately identifying them as a threshold concept.

A crucial element related to the claims of this thesis focuses upon the construct of transformation and ontological shifts obviously associated with identity and a sense of self. It is important to highlight the characteristic of transformation as an essential and identified indicator of threshold crossing. Therefore, the constructs of identity and self not only conceptualise the actual thresholds being crossed but they are also indicative of threshold crossing in a more general sense. The next section will conceptualise and discuss issues of transformative theory in more depth.

2.7 Transformative Theory

Integral to the underpinnings of the IB philosophy is transformative theory, which, according to Mezirow (2000, p. 3), is predicated upon the "urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience". Piaget conceptualises this process as accommodation (Wadsworth, 1996). More specifically, accommodation is when the organism changes itself to take in new influences from the

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surrounding environment in order to maintain equilibrium and avoid a prolonged state of disequilibrium (Illeris, 2007). Disequilibrium occurs when individuals engage in and with new experiences that conflict with their existing knowledge (Wadsworth, 1996). In other words, transformative theory builds upon the assumption of the human need for understanding and making meaning of our experience and to integrate it with what we know. According to Mezirow (2000, p.5) "learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action." However, our revised interpretations are challenged by our habits of mind or sets of assumptions that influence our interpretations of experiences (Mezirow, 1990, p.1).

Transformative learning is "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions" (Transformative Learning Centre, 2004; as cited in Kitchenham, 2008, p.104). Mezirow (2000, p.6) also argued that transformative learning is often "an intensely threatening emotional experience" due to our subjective challenge to our taken for granted frames of reference. There is an inherent affective element to transformative learning that makes an important distinction in regards to the conceptualization of learning, affective element in knowledge construction and engagement with experience becomes highly relevant and present within the learning process. Furthermore this is indicative of conceptualisations of knowledge that according to Perkins (1999) that are troublesome, tacit and ontological.

2.8 Troublesome, Tacit and Ontological Knowledge and the Liminal State

Perkins provides a foundation for threshold concepts with his work addressing nuances of knowledge. Perkins (1999) identifies troublesome knowledge as knowledge that seems counter-intuitive, foreign or even intellectually absurd as an individual first engages with it. Presumably, troublesome knowledge holds a relationship to the aforementioned construct of disequilibrium. This means troublesome knowledge does not align with an individual's existing knowledge. Moreover, Meyer and Land (2003) state that troublesomeness is a characteristic of the liminal state and the crossing of thresholds. In this thesis troublesome knowledge is associated with past experiences and there is involvement of both affective and cognitive dimensions. The residual troublesomeness continually impacted the young women where they remained in a stuck place unable to process the past experiences with its implicit affective and cognitive elements.

In this study, troublesomeness takes the form of tacit and ontological knowledge. Tacit knowledge is described by Meyer and Land (2003) as mainly personal and implicit and Polyani (1958) further describes as a level of 'practical consciousness'. Giddens (1984) conceptualises tacit knowledge as being "emergent but unexamined understandings". One may construe these meanings as a form of subconscious thought or knowledge yet to be engaged with on a more direct and conscious level of awareness. Ellsworth (1989, 1997) conceptualises ontological knowledge as inherent knowledge that results from the unique experiences associated with race,

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religion, ethnicity or economic, physical or mental disadvantages that shape perception and understanding. One may simplify ontological knowledge as being implicit to one's being and inextricable from an individual's experiences. In the context of this study there are clear correlations to the constructs of tacit and ontological knowledge which highlight the relevance of the visual art making process as a means of learning or navigating the liminal state.

In the example of Ramesha there is clear indication that she experiences troublesomeness in the differing understanding of her identity and power/esteem as a woman. More specifically, her experiences in the community and the letter exchanges with her aunt provide differing experiences and perceptions from those derived in her home. I argue that Ramesha's engagement with the differing perceptions push her into the liminal state. As previously discussed, the creation of this installation was at a time that was extremely productive and creative for Ramesha. Moreover, it was a radical departure from her typical visual language (up until that point in time) moving from unresolved drawings on paper to an installation that filled an entire gallery. Ramesha began perceiving everyday found objects as possessing meaning and holding potential to become forms of representation of her affective experience at that period of time. This change in perception is representative of a shift from a safe and traditional manner of working into an entirely foreign media and materials that were completely new to her. Furthermore, this sudden change was a potentially high stakes risk, in that the IB assessment exhibition and interview was in the

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very near future. At this time the IB visual art assessment consisted of multiple components that required a deep understanding of one's art work and underpinning concepts. Typically students continue working with a particular concept and style as they approach the IB assessment. Ramesha's radical departure was atypical of students approaching the exam and suggests the issue of engaging and expressing her internal feelings was a priority over the exam itself. This more complex manner of representation was done with greater success, understanding and resolve than all of her previous work. There is no direct explanation for this change, in the sense that as her teacher there was no "lesson" given on installation or a specific rationale intended to provoke her into working in this specific media or materials. The only consistent in the classroom experience was informal discussion on her struggles with identity and self-esteem as a woman. Therefore, it can be argued that the installation acts as a means of engagement with the tacit and ontological form of troublesomeness.

As formerly discussed, liminality was described as a transformative state or a "liquid space with great potential for learning, experimentation and growth" (Meyer and Land, 2005; Felten, 2016). When the troublesome knowledge is considered in conjunction with the generation of the art installation there is evidence of great experimentation, growth and learning as they pertain to Ramesha's development as an artist. As previously stated, Ramesha generated art work that held complex meanings and did so with greater success than any of her previous work. In other words, the work became more compelling as a visual experience and expresses a

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meaning that can be perceived by others in the interpretation of symbols and manipulation of materials. It can be argued these present evidence of the student being in the liminal state and the installation itself is a physical form of the student's attempt to navigate liminality. Moreover, the student's statement about not needing a man to be happy suggests evidence of some reconciliation of the troublesome knowledge and ultimately the liminal state. I am not attempting to make a causal argument or argue evidence of an actual crossing of a threshold, but rather a possible glimpse of a threshold related to the navigation of the liminal state. Furthermore, the navigation of liminality occurred within the knowledge construction inherent to the art making process.

2.9 Visual Art as Insight to the Experience of the Liminal State

"what makes material a medium is that it is used to express a meaning which is other than that which it is in virtue of its bare physical existence." (Dewey, 1934, p.201).

The strongest evidence of the ability of visual art to give form to the liminal state is found in the domain of art therapy. Sibbett and Thompson (2008) predicate their research upon an inherent relationship of the liminal state and what Turner (1995, p.128) calls, "an urge to generate, symbols, rituals and works of art". Sibbett and Thompson (2008, p. 4) further argue that it is essential to effectively utilize the "reflexive symbolic and art expression generated by liminality as a means of navigating it".

The argument being established is there are domains where the art making process has been utilised to engage troublesome experience. There is a long history of art fostering the ability for individuals to process trauma that involves complex affective

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and cognitive involvement. Clearly in the field of art therapy there is counselling and other components to assisting the patient but art is a valuable tool in this process. Furthermore, there is an urgency to reduce discomfort which is accompanied by a willingness to experiment and productivity (Land, 2014). In the context of the case studies (in chapters four, five and six) and with the example of Ramesha the young women discover this epistemic potential of art making. The ability to understand and utilise this potential of the art making process was in part due to the learning environment and the nature of how I present the conceptual nature of the art making process. It is important to note that I do not attempt to perform therapy in my art courses which is explained and made explicit in chapter three in the discussion on the ethics.

The previous discussion on art therapy also is relevant to issues of boundedness but the core point being made was to establish theoretical context for art making to engage troublesome experience and complex cognitive and affective involvement. However, another important element to the visual art making process as a means to provide insight into the navigation of liminality is the Art Based Research literature. Eisner (Eisner, 1981; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) argues, arts based educational research (ABER) provides emotional and interpersonal description that allows for unique understanding within social sciences that departs from the limitations of literal scientific description. In *Methods Meets Art* (2009), Patricia Leavy argues ABER practices offer researchers "new pathways for creating knowledge within and across disciplinary boundaries" (Leavy, 2009, ix). Furthermore, these practices are employed in all phases of research including data collection,

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analysis, interpretation and representation resulting in more "holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined" (Leavy, 2009, ix).

I argue that this same understanding of the art making process can be applied to students in the art studio environment and specifically for the case studies used in this thesis. Knowles and Thomas (2002; Leavy, 2015) conducted a study that was a participatory arts-based method. The study focused upon a sense of place in school and upon the experience of school from the students perspective. Knowles and Thomas (2002; as cited in Leavy 2015) highlight a particular example where a young woman drew a portrait that is cropped closely around her face. The young woman states this is representative of the lack of freedom she feels at school. My point in this example is the young woman may have been experiencing these feelings and the process of drawing moved these feelings from a tacit dimension to being articulated in visual and linguistic signs. In other words, the involvement in the study may have given her an opportunity to recognize her perspective and give it meaning, as opposed to having an opportunity to express something that was being stifled.

The ABER literature frequently conceptualizes the researcher as "merge their artist self with their scholar self" (Leavy, 2009, p.2;) which is further understood in the a/r/tography literature as the practitioners occupy in-between space which merges knowing, doing and making (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2005). The relevance of understanding this point is I make the argument that the student is acting in a similar capacity. More specifically the student is employing the art making experience to engage troublesomeness and

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navigate the liminal state by indulging the "urges" for expression and form. I am not arguing that the student is engaging in art therapy or ABER but is drawing from the same aforementioned epistemic characteristics. The art produced is tangible evidence of the liminal journey and offering insight to its subjective experience.

When considered in this manner, one may construe, the role of the arts educator is to utilize the creative process as a means of leading students towards troublesomeness and ultimately liminality. Jaspers (1931 p.716) discusses the revealing function of art and argues that; "Arts-based expression and learning offers the potential for revelatory inclusion of that which otherwise might be excluded as taboo." In the context of the student sample there are strong correlations of the urges of liminality and revelatory factor of the art making process.

Implicit to the arguments made in this section are issues of boundedness and semiotic theory. The young women that are case studies in this thesis (as previously stated) exploit the epistemic potential of the visual art making process. As the opening quote (of this section) states, the materials they use become a medium that gives form to profound life experience. Furthermore, it fosters and provides insight to their complex liminal journey. Within the following sections there will be discussion on boundedness, semiotic theory and the discursive aspects of threshold concepts. This discourse will provide more insight to the reader into the nature of visual art as a means of navigation of the liminal space.

2.10 Boundedness and Boundary Objects

Meyer and Land (2003) state an identifying characteristic of threshold concepts is the issue of their being bounded. More specifically, Meyer and Land (2003) acknowledge the reality of distinctions between academic disciplines and their conceptual frontiers. The issue of boundedness is central to this thesis as the example of Ramesha indicates. In other words the focus of the art making process engages life experience and meaning that falls outside the specific domain of art. However, the art making process is essential to the knowledge construction and understandings that Ramesha ultimately arrives. There is an interrelationship that involves the art making process but transcends the domain of art. The issue of boundedness is highly relevant in the consideration of visual art as a means of navigating liminality, which is addressed to some degree in the previous sections. The case studies in chapters four, five and six are similar to the example of Ramesha in the use of the art making process to engage experience outside the domain of art. The young women employ the elements and principles of art but formulate knowledge and meaning relevant to their own human development and wellbeing. I have also offered (earlier in this chapter) criticism that art education is often assumed to always result in critical thought and reflection. Therefore, there must be substantive discussion on boundedness in order to give credibility to my own claims about the art making process.

Akkerman & Bakker (2011) state boundary objects possess a "bridging function" which "refer to ongoing, two-sided actions and interactions between contexts. These actions and interactions across sites are argued to affect not only the individual but also the

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different social practices at large" (p. 136). Akkerman and Bakker (2011, p.136) distinguish boundary crossing from transfer which is "a unique instance in which something learned in a given context is applied to another context". I argue the art work in this thesis functions as a form of boundary object. When taken into account as a conceptual subject the visual arts are bounded in that there is development specific to the field itself in regard to use of material and form. But when considered in relationship to the liminal experience and the affective dimension there is meaning and expression of experience that transcends the subject of visual art. I argue it is these affective elements and troublesome experience that provide substance for art making to transcend the boundaries of the domain of art. Wenger (1998, p.58) argues that boundary objects are based upon "reification," which is "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'". Wenger's statement is indicative of the art making process, as understood in the case studies. The transformative boundary objects in the literature (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) are experienced as interpretive engagement with an externally existing object. In the case of visual art we are considering an object that is born into existence from the internal cognitive and affective dimension, which provides a form of representation of the student's experiences. It would be obtuse to ignore the obvious and distinct differences of interpreting an object versus the complex processing of creating the object that makes tacit and ontological knowledge explicit and concrete. Upon further consideration, it can be argued that the art making process acts as a form of "reification".

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When the visual art learning environment extends beyond the replication of technical exercise there is opportunity for student art work to become boundary objects that cross conceptual frontiers. As presented with Ramesha in the introduction, this thesis is predicated upon the notion of boundary and threshold crossing facilitated by the art making process. Therefore, the issue of language becomes an inextricable element. The art making process becomes a unique form of processing the experience of the affective dimension and evolving the cognitive understanding; it can be argued the art making process provides a means of inner discourse through non-linguistic signs and signifiers.

2.11 Discursive Element and Visual Art: Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Knowledge and Self Dialogue

The discursive element is described by Meyer and Land (2005) as noted change in sophistication or enhanced use of language relevant to a respective community of practice. When a student traverses threshold concepts they are capable of discourse that is substantive and indicative of understanding that transcends their previous ontological state. The change in the discursive element of threshold concepts is representative of "a reconstitution of the learner's subjectivity" and results in "new and empowering forms of expression that in many instances characterise distinctive ways of disciplinary thinking" (Meyer and Land, 2006, p. 20-21). In the context of this thesis and visual art the discursive element is more complex than has been described thus far and further discussion can be framed as linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge and self-dialogue.

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Rudolf Arnheim (1954, 1966) and Susanne Langer (1951, 1953), emphasized cognitive aspects of the arts to large academic audiences and highlighted the intellectual basis for approaching art making as serious inquiry (McNiff, 2008). As a result, the domain of art-based research is a more focused application of the larger epistemological process of artistic knowing and inquiry; Moreover arts based research is an extension of a significant increase of studies researching the nature of the art experience in higher education and professional practice (McNiff, 1998). I am contextualizing the example of Ramesha and the case studies in chapters four, five and six within this discussion. My justification for doing so is the extension of the epistemological process of the art experience in the certain situations in secondary learning environments. For example, Ramesha makes clear cognitive gains and arguably crosses a threshold and experiences transformation that the art process facilitated to some degree. This raises the argument of the nature of the discursive element in the context of visual art as a facilitation to threshold crossing. More specifically, Meyer and Land (2005) clearly presume linguistic knowledge as an indicator of enhanced language as a result of transformation. However, in the case of Ramesha there is radical departure or change in her visual work that becomes much more sophisticated and expressive of complex experience. I argue this visual language is a also evidence of the discursive element of threshold crossing.

The epistemic core of arts based educational research (ABER) is a distinction of different forms of knowing; the literature "distinguishes between discursive and non-discursive modes of

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knowing" (Langer, 1957 cited in Barone and Eisner, 2012, p.9). More specifically, the distinction is that ABER is an emotional expression (as opposed to a description) with the intention of understanding how others feel, by using different forms of representation (Barone and Eisner, 2012). When considered in this manner, one may construe, the presented case studies (and the example of Ramesha) are engaging in a manner of merging the scholar and artistic self (Leavy, 2009). An implication suggests the role of arts educator is to utilize the creative process as a means of leading students towards troublesome knowledge and ultimately the liminal state. As stated by Perkins (1999, p. 5) "Qualitative problems lead students to confront the character of the phenomenon rather than master computational routines.

Another implication of the art making process as non-linguistic knowledge is the internal and possibly tacit nature of knowledge construction. In the thresholds literature there are many claims to alternative or non-discursive forms of dialogue (Arnheim, 1954, 1966; Langer, 1951, 1953). Obviously, within this context, the art installation acts as a form of "cultural practice" (Bhaba, 1990) that engages and expresses experiences to others. However, in this installation the issue of dialogue is not as relevant to the media in which it transpires but the fact it is a dialogue with the self, or as Markova (2006) states, the ego. In my view, Ramesha is able to engage in a dialogue with the self that is internal and can involve the complexity of the affective dimension. Others eventually have access to the installation and have the opportunity to derive meaning but Ramesha's experience is one of dialogue with

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the self or a form of reflection that engages feeling and experience.

The work of Chi, Bassok, Lewis, Reimann, and Glaser (1989) state that self-explaining is a means of knowledge construction that has had impact in academic classrooms. Land and Meyer (2006), clarify that self-explanation theory requires an "awareness of changing understanding" and when considered in conjunction with different forms of representation, highlights the potential for research into the "dynamics involved in reaching understanding" (Land and Meyer, 2006, p.65). It can be argued that Ramesha employs the visual art process as a means of self-dialogue or self-explanation. Further consideration into the generation of the installation and the surrounding identified changes that accompanied highlight the relevance of the discursive element. Especially when the evidence of a transformed worldview is taken into account it is clear the art making process played a role in affective and cognitive changes in regard to the cases utilised in the thesis. However, as previously stated there are many experiences that stimulated the troublesome knowledge and potential liminality, that in turn may have assisted in a growth process. Therefore, it suggests the relevance of claims towards the epistemic role of the visual art making process in regards to this transformation and the integral role of the affective dimension.

2.12 Semiotics

Semiotics is commonly understood as the study of signs and symbols that are generated by humans which communicate intentions and/or meaning (DeSaussure, 1959; Brandt, 2009). This section

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considers semiotic theory in the context of this thesis which places emphasis upon visual art as non linguistic knowledge and visual signs as well as the role of semiotics in the learning environment. Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014) and Smith-Shank (1995) address issues of semiotics in learning environments with focus upon implications for pedagogy. Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014) place specific emphasis upon semiotic theory informing pedagogy as a means to facilitate students' movement through the liminal space in the classroom setting. Smith -Shank (1995) does not make specific reference to the threshold literature or specific constructs such as liminality but there are similarities in what is labelled semiotic pedagogy.

Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014) propose that knowledge of semiotic theory can enhance pedagogical approaches that can account for subjective difficulties with troublesome knowledge. Smith-Shank (1995) builds upon Charles Pierce (in Houser, 2008) who claims the importance of the university to focus more upon learning than instruction. Pierce (Houser, 2008) is referencing pragmatism which is also integral to the work of Dewey (1916) which argues that learning is an active process of engagement with experience. Pragmatism conceptualises learning as student driven and occurs as engagement with vital experience (Dewey, 1916). Vital experience in education is activity in which the link between action and consequence is interconnected with previous and future (related) activities (Glassman, 2001). The consequence or end-in-view is still tied to the immediate situation, but the process of inquiry used to reach this end-in-view not only has a connection with, but has been

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enriched by, previous inquiry in some way. In order for life to progress and personal growth to occur there must be the ability to engage with disequilibrium or troublesomeness and the liminal space. Therefore, education is based in preparing the student not only to face these moments of vital experience, when habit is of little use, but to actually desire them, and to enjoy them when they occur (Glassman, 2001). The implication for this thesis is that the student can employ the visual arts as a means to engage with experience, feelings and concepts that are troubling but vital to authentic and relevant learning and human development. The role of semiotic theory is one of epistemic value in that the visual signs used in art making can both construct and express knowledge. In the context of the classroom environment educators can become more empathic and aware of student struggles.

As a result Smith-Shank (1995, p. 235) presents semiotic pedagogy underpinned by two essential concepts of collateral experience and the artificial nature of historically determined boundaries. Smith-Shank (1995, p. 235) argues the necessity of inviting the learner's collateral experience into a learning environment because they bring with them "acknowledged resources" that facilitate making meaning out of new experiences. The premise of this argument is the prior experience of individuals is an invaluable resource that can be applied even in a subconscious manner and the relevance of learning and meaning can be derived from the embracing of these prior experiences.

Smith-Shank (1995) also argues the artificial reality of historically determined conceptual boundaries that are often

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stringent in educational environments. This notion coincides with the construct of collateral experience since individual learners will possess a wide range of experience and the construction of knowledge and meaning can be highly subjective and non-linear. Therefore, this more subjective and messy process can extend beyond the more constrained understanding of knowledge within school subject disciplines.

The construct of semiotics becomes integral to the understanding of this liminal journey in that the girls lacked the language to express or construct an understanding of the continued impact of their past trauma. The previously discussed notion of semiotic pedagogy (Smith-Shank, 1995) is partly relevant in my pedagogical approach which embraces collateral experience and views art making as a means to transcend boundedness. However, Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014, p.5) state, "the tunnel is drawn in the conceptual domain, which is internal to the individual learners and tutors involved. Communication between these individuals is in the physical domain where the oral, textual and graphic signifiers play their part". The importance of their conceptions of semiotic theory and pedagogy suggest my ability to interpret and understand the troublesome state in which the learners find themselves. The implications point to the relevance of art making in regard to the feeling and experience of the young women and their ability to represent them in the physical world and my ability to facilitate this navigation. There is an interesting relationship, worth exploring, between the epistemic element of the art making process and semiotic considerations of dialogue. More specifically, in the

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art therapy literature Hamden, Rosales & Greenfield (2004) argue that art making is a means in which depressed persons can release aggression without having to engage in oral communication. In my working with these young women the details of their experience are not overt but the visual signs allow for a form of questioning and dialogue that slowly revealed deeper meaning and feeling that had otherwise been unexpressed or processed.

2.13 Conclusion

The literature review of chapter two establishes conceptualisations of threshold concepts and transformative theory. Important elements to this clarity is the relevance of the affective dimension and the construct of liminal space. The issue of liminality is further discussed in terms of learning environments and the subjective nature of the experience of the liminal state. In addition, the visual art making process is conceptualised in a substantive manner in relationship to threshold concepts and the liminal space which highlights the importance of boundedness, semiotic theory and the associated discursive nature.

The following chapter presents the research design that accounts for the inherent subjective nature of the liminal state. The research design and methods embrace a subjective approach that intends to collect data that is rich and substantive. The logic and relevance of the research design and methods is to address research questions that require insight as opposed to a causal relationship or specific answer. The research questions: To what extent can the visual art making process navigate the liminal space? And To what extent can visual art provide insight into the subjective experience

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of the liminal state? require the ability to glimpse the subjective nature of feeling and experience which highlights the appropriate use of visual art as a substantive element in the research process. The following chapter expands upon this logic and presents the nature of the inquiry.

Chapter 3 Methods

3.1 Introduction

The chapter begins with ethical considerations of the case studies in my work with the young women. They are above the age of eighteen at the time of writing this chapter and fully capable of granting relevant permissions. The data analysed for this thesis was generated while the young women were enrolled in my IB visual art course. There were ethical concerns due to their age and the content of their work that teachers are obligated to report to appropriate authorities. More importantly, a strong bond formed between these young women and myself and I feel moral obligation for their safety.

The selection of these case studies transpired as individual conversations with each respective student. These conversations occurred at different times of the year and independent of each other. The basis for recognizing the young women as case studies occurred in the second half of the school year when they began to demonstrate semiotic visual evidence of transformation in regard to a re-subjectivity. Many art students progress in their art work and evolve conceptually, technically or both. It is this element of transformation that is integral to the liminal space and in my view worthy of in depth analysis.

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The qualitative methods employ action research and participant interviewer which embraces the reality of my teaching position and employs student art products created for the IB assessment as data. My pedagogical approach was not altered by this study and the students were only asked to join the study after there was significant development of their portfolio and semiotic indication of transformation. The relevance of this point is the research design does not focus on the use of treatments or establishing causal relationships but attempts a documentation of the liminal experience that can be glimpsed through the art making process. Therefore the young women were approached to be case studies when their art work and surrounding discussions began to demonstrate the involvement of troublesome knowledge in their art making process.

The ability to substantively research the liminal journey requires a focus upon the affective and cognitive dimensions which can often be unspoken but expressed in non-linguistic means. This highlights methods that necessarily and logically embrace subjectivity and are intentionally designed toward representing personal intentions manifest in the visual outcome.

I employed the IB assessment interview, as well as a second interview that focused more on the clarity of intention and eventual clarity of the liminal journey. The use of the IB assessment process as a means of data collection is discussed in sections 3.9 and 3.10. Both of the interviews act as a form of reflection, for the young women, and were executed well into the school year and after the students produced the majority of their art work.

3.2 Ethical Considerations and Identification of Case Studies

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In order to introduce the logic of the methods of this research it is beneficial to introduce the cases used and introduce the ethical implications of the research at the start of the chapter. Presenting contextual information about Rene, Jayden and Aline will reveal and substantiate decisions in regard to relevant methods. I will address the process of recognising these young women as case studies later in this chapter. However, there are immediate ethical questions which require explication. The study presents case studies of three female high school students; Jayden, Rene and Aline. The case studies were developed when the young women were seniors in my IB visual art class. It is important to note that this thesis uses the interviews, research and art portfolio all three young women submitted to IB for assessment. However, they have since graduated and are above the age of eighteen and have given consent to their portfolios and interviews forming the units of analysis for my thesis. All of the students signed consent forms and willingly participated in the interviews and research process. Moreover, the students (unrelated to this thesis) willingly exhibited their work in public galleries during the time of this research, which demonstrates a willingness to present sensitive and personal experience in a public forum. It is also important to note that the names of the students being represented in this research, have been changed to protect their images and identities, despite their previous public displays.

Jayden is a female of mixed race, born of an African father and a German mother. She was adopted as an infant by a Caucasian (white) family with whom she has lived her entire life. Jayden has lived in diversely different areas of the United States before moving to my

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area and attending high school where I teach. Jayden struggled with issues of racial identity her entire life due to various experiences and the diversity of areas where she has lived.

Rene, is a white female that lived her entire life in the area where my high school is located. Rene suffered sexual abuse as a young child, well before she attended high school. The abuse was discovered and legal and therapeutic remedies were pursued. The lasting impact of the abuse seems to impact issues of self-esteem and has led to depression.

Aline, a white female, lived in several different areas of the United States. Aline also suffered sexual abuse as a young child. The abuse was inflicted by her father's friends and it is unclear (to me) if her father participated or only was aware of the crimes but remained complicit. Aline holds deep resentment towards her mother because she told her mother of the abuse and her mother instructed her never to speak about it. As a result of these experiences, Aline suffered immense psychological and emotional turmoil, turning to self-harm and cutting as a means of addressing her suffering. Aline had been engaging in self harm for multiple years and she was hospitalized on several occasions and has undergone many intense residential treatment programmes. At the time of our working together, Aline was no longer in residential treatment and had been free from self-harm and cutting for some period of time. She was still seeing a therapist, although she openly said she was not honest in sessions, and she was voluntarily living with her father, despite the history, as she felt her mother was too dysfunctional.

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It is essential to point out several key issues regarding the ethics of working with Jayden, Rene and Aline. Even though two of these students shared an art class (the third was in the following period) they were not aware of each other's histories or that each was participating in the research. The selection of these girls for inclusion in this research arose from each of them beginning to address complex issues in their art work completely independent of me. In other words, it is through the art work and their explanations of it that I became aware of their deeper concerns and troubling experiences. I did not ask them to make art about prior difficult experiences; each of the girls felt safe enough to express these issues, in the context of their art work, as a result of a developed trust between us. I had worked with two of the girls for a year or more (in the context of different art classes) and one of them for several months before they began expressing the content relevant to this research. At different points in the year the young women began to demonstrate ontological shifts in relationship to the respective content of their art work. As presented in chapter one with the example of Ramesha, I found these shifts compelling.

Unfortunately, in my many years of teaching it is not uncommon to discover there are multiple students per class that have similar experiences in their past. As a result I am well versed in 'County procedures' and have an established routine in implementing them. In short, when such situations occur I walk with the student to the school psychologist and sit with the student while the relevant history is revealed. This is done to ensure all information is disclosed and the student feels the difficulties are represented

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accurately. This is done in a non-threatening manner but usually requires discussion as to the need to reveal the nature of the art work being made by the student. I also call each parent and alert them to the content of the student's work and the fact that the school clinical team is aware of the situation. As a result the parents have all consented to my working with the students, as the events are known and are part of the past. In my experience, this awareness allows for a freedom for the student and me to talk about the artwork with a safety net in place in case the student becomes overwhelmed or troubled while working. Although this did not happen during the course of this research, there have been occasions with other students where a breakdown has occurred during class periods. When clinical teams and parents are aware, as previously mentioned, there is no hesitation on anyone's part to support the student as needed.

It is also essential to point out that the nature of our work together is not an attempt to conduct therapy sessions. In the case of Aline and Rene, I do not know many of the details of the events that occurred in the past and we did not spend time discussing them. The research focused entirely upon their art work and its relationships to these troubling experiences. While I am sure there is some therapeutic value to the student's engagement with the art making process, it was neither a motive nor concern of this research. The thesis is concerned with the nature of each girl's engagement with visual art and its ability to navigate troublesome knowledge and the liminal space.

3.3 Research Question and Introduction to Methods

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Chapter one introduced this thesis with the example of Ramesha which presented a powerful ontological shift associated with troublesome knowledge derived from life experience. More specifically, Ramesha struggled with issues relating to identity as woman and power which was represented in her powerful installation. I became interested in the role of the art making process in the transformation experienced by Ramesha. Chapter one locates the example of Ramesha within the threshold concept framework and transformative theory due to the ontological shifts exhibited by Ramesha and the presence of troublesomeness and the liminal state. The importance of this point is that I argue Ramesha navigated the liminal state and crossed thresholds related to identity, self and womanhood. It is clear that the art making process had an important role in the example of Ramesha and suggests the relevance of the stated research question; To what extent can visual art provide insight into the personal experience of the liminal space?

The aim of the research question has also been discussed in chapters one and two. I wish to provoke other art educators into reflecting upon the epistemic nature of art making and its implications for the classroom and art education in the twenty first century. The consideration of the art making process in the threshold concept framework points to the relevance of this aim as well as provides constructs for substantive research that fosters this aim.

It is important for me to explicate that the research question states the ability to provide insight into the personal experience of liminality. The point being made here is that I am careful to not suggest a causal role of visual art in the navigation of

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liminality but as a means to understand certain aspects of the liminal journey. However, this wording of the research question does not intend to rule out the ability of visual art as having an ability to foster the navigation of the liminal space but this is just one aspect.

As a result the relevance of the qualitative paradigm and methods becomes a clear logic for research design to address this research question. The young women that are presented in the case studies are introduced in section 3.2 with a brief summary of their troublesome experiences. I argue that a research design that embraces the depth of subjective experience and empathic representation in case studies will provide the most powerful and relevant research for the stated aim.

3.4 Why a Qualitative Inquiry into Art Education? Qualitative Methods as Educational Research

The purpose of this research is to further understand the navigation of the liminal space through engagement with the visual art process with a focus upon the art work created by Jayden, Rene and Aline. There is a particular interest in the explicated intentions and meaning of the art work as it pertains to their feelings and experiences. Moreover, it may be indicative of constructs relevant to the threshold concepts framework and how the students experience and engage with these constructs. Therefore, the nature of this research does not consider the art work as a treatment but more as a subjective means to navigate troublesome knowledge and the liminal state that is internal and unique to each of the young women's stories.

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The logic of the methods, for this research, points heavily towards the benefit of a qualitative inquiry which places emphasis upon subjective judgement and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Silverman, 2013). The history of research methodology heavily favours quantitative experimental research often dismissing the more subjective qualitative paradigm. However even in the quantitative methodology paradigm the presence of subjective judgement is integral to many aspects of the research design process (Gorard, 2006). In reality 'statistical analysis relies on judgement of the most personal and non-technical kind' (Gorard, 2006, p.67). Eisner (1992) argues that objectivity in research is often a deeply held assumption attempted to be demonstrated in language or procedures which may provide an appearance of objectivity but may lack substantive contribution to the research question and aims of the research.

A benefit of qualitative inquiry within educational research, in regard to the aims of this thesis, is well stated by Eisner (1991, p.30); "policy decisions, in education, geared at improving instruction will be best informed by 'the enlightened eye' which is a means of representation of the observer's experience so that others can have a full understanding". Silverman (2013) explicates a logic for using a qualitative approach as being rooted in the nature of the questions driving the research. Of course, this is true of all research, in the sense the question should drive the method; The point that is made here is that certain questions can only be addressed using qualitative design. For example, Sullivan (2004, p. 795) argues 'understanding is as significant as explanation as a goal of research, and more so when outcomes are

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applied in educational contexts'. Silverman (2013) highlights that research topics can be intimate and in the case of this research the knowledge being investigated is tacit and ontological. Therefore, matters of enquiry into personal experience require a more subjective and personal voice (Leavy, 2015; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 2008).

The issue of student voice is integral to the nature of qualitative educational research and representation of the subjective student experience. Pope (2001), is rooted in concern over the lack of research that addresses the classroom experience from the student's perspective. Similarly, Felten (2016), as mentioned in Chapter Two, argues the need for research that represents the student perspective specifically within the threshold concept framework.

As previously discussed, the nature of the research question holds implicit issues of understanding and representing the subjective experiences of Jayden, Rene and Aline. The data most capable of explicating this subjectivity (in this context) is analysis of visual art which is complemented by oral and written explanations. More specifically, the research is designed to provide some understanding in regard to the presence of the affective dimension, evidence of possible transformation and evidence of liminality as they correlate to the authentic experience of the young women. The intention of this focus is to represent the student perspective and the opportunity to explore the epistemic potential of the visual art making process with focused consideration of the lens of threshold concept theory.

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The implications of this research design are relevant to shed light on the value of engagement with visual art in schools, as well as its relationship to the affective and cognitive dimension as it pertains to the navigation of the liminal space. As a result, a more nuanced understanding of learning in the visual arts can evolve and inform reflection upon pedagogy and the role of curriculum. In short the research is interested in the premise of further understanding the threshold framework and constructs in the visual art context. This provides a means of supporting new perspective and insight to the nature of pedagogy, learning environments and the potential of visual art as a school subject. Therefore, qualitative case studies offer an appropriate means of study in further understanding these issues.

Research being conducted in the context of the art environment lends itself to rich and thick data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). There is no single measurement that can be offered with credibility in regard to certainty or causal relationships. The question is one of understanding as opposed to proof. The qualitative paradigm, theory of case study and action research provide voice to observations that initially lacked clarity until contextualized within the threshold framework. The methodological approach of the study is meant to offer as much of Jayden's, Rene's and Aline's perspectives as possible in the natural environment of working in the IB art studio. Therefore, the natural assessment deadlines of IB are used as data collection points which involves art work, research pages and oral exam submitted to IB. Furthermore, discussion that is a form of unstructured interview throughout the year informs context or personal stories of the cases used in this thesis.

3.5 Case Study, Participant Observer/Interviewer and Action Research

In the context of this thesis the interactions that are paramount are internal to Jayden, Rene and Aline in regard to their affective and cognitive dimensions and their manifestation in their art work. Therefore the penetrating aspect of case studies and the context provided establishes a clearer understanding of the epistemic value of art making for Jayden, Rene and Aline. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) describe case studies as specific instances that are capable of explaining larger ideas in a manner in which numerical analysis may fall short. Furthermore, case studies have the ability to penetrate specific situations that provide context and wholeness of human interactions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The ability of case studies to represent the more personal and specific contexts involves many encounters in personal settings with open-ended interviews that are meant to understand individual perspectives and experiences (Hammersley, 2006).

However, this thesis in line with Pope (2001) uses the qualitative case study of the student experience with the intention of informing pedagogy through the understanding of that experience. The importance of the student perspective and the use of qualitative methods is to avoid the assumptions that often surround the visual arts. As stated in the previous chapter, the visual arts are often presumed to result in the development of critical thought and the benefit of self-expression. However, these are observed from the outside looking in, as opposed to trying to represent and present the students' experiences with art. The representation of Jayden's,

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Rene's and Aline's subjective experience offers insight into a fuller understanding of the epistemic possibilities residing within the visual arts. This aim presents a consistent logic in the use of case studies and highlights issues relevant to the role of my involvement as researcher and participant.

The research is conducted within my own classroom and involves the young women with whom I have developed a strong bond and trusting relationship. Therefore, I am directly involved in many aspects of the young women's development of their art portfolio and I am familiar with many aspects of their daily lives. Becker and Geer (1957, p. 28) state 'by participant observation we mean that method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time.' Ahola and Lucas (1981, p.77) describe the participant observer as follows: 'the observer is a natural member of the group being studied. This natural membership makes the researcher more apt to know about hidden motives and agendas.' Participant observation employs a variety of methods that emphasize observation in the setting, interviewing, document and artefact analysis with varying degrees of emotional involvement by the researcher in the events being studied (Reinharz, 2017; Alexander, 1982). The varying degrees of emotional researcher involvement as a sort of spectrum that ranges from pure observer that wishes to function only as a researcher of events to an involved participant that becomes a researcher after the fact (Sediman, 2013; Gans, 1968).

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More specifically, the research focuses upon a small sample engaged in the liminal space through visual media and my role as researcher is not one of distance and intended objectivity but one of participant involvement with the student cases. The benefit is that of intimate awareness of the thoughts, feelings and motives of Aline, Rene and Jayden derived from a trust established over time. Bersson (1978) locates participant observation specifically in the context of art education research. More specifically, Bersson (1978 p.61) addresses the researcher involvement: 'proposing a special form of participant observation wherein the art educator would be both an actual participant in and observer of his own program'. Bersson (ibid.) further argues that such subjectivity extends to research design which is 'intentionally unstructured so as to maximize discovery and description rather than systematized theory testing'. Bersson (1978) and Eisner (1974) both argue that art education research requires more subjective methods that circumvent the limitations of traditional scientific inquiry so as to effectively inform policy and pedagogical approaches. Bersson (1978) and Scriven (1972) offer criticism of participant observation in regard to questionable objectivity of observations. However, this point is made in the context of participant observation addressing aims focused on evaluation of programme effectiveness where conflicts of interest may exist. The relevance of participant observation in regard to this thesis focuses more upon the logic of the nature of the question, the type of data relevant to the inquiry, and the nature of the methods needed to collect such data, which involves researcher participation.

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An important element of the theoretical lens of the methodology is the obvious context of the Ed.D for which the thesis is being conducted. In particular, the study is being done within my own classroom with the sample of Rene, Aline and Jayden with whom I have bonded through the course of their high school years. As chapter one indicates, I have consistently reflected upon my own teaching and the nature of the engagement with art by my students. May (1989) points to the presumed distinction that researchers generate theory and teachers teach. However, as the aforementioned context points out, I and those that are proponents of action research disagree with such distinctions. A primary motive for the resurgence of action research in the 1950s was to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Creswell, 2002). Action research is traditionally targeted to a specific issue relevant to a specific group of people with the intent to empower those that are "members" of the relevant community; in this case students, teachers, administrators (Berg, 2004)

This research is, in part, a means of inquiry and reflection upon my own practice but the underpinning curiosity lies more in exploring the potential that the threshold concept framework offers to understanding student engagement in visual art. The thesis is not concerned with the conception of teaching strategies meant for universal replication but inspiring personal reflection in other art educators upon their own pedagogical approaches and the nature of learning in their classrooms in the context of engagement in the art process. Tripp (1990 p. 159) clarifies teacher self-reflection as 'understanding resulting from an analysis of information gathered',

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to which May (1989 p. 231) adds 'not as a result from habit, instinct, opinion or mere whim'. Schon (1983) argues that teachers consistently develop theories that are developed in action and applied reflexively. This thesis attempts to escalate this initial process to the peer-reviewed level of original knowledge. Both of these points, in regard to the research, highlight the methodological relevance of action research.

According to Bresler (1994 p.12), 'action research is based on the close interaction between practice, theory, and change'. Its intent is to inform one's own pedagogical practice, which in the case of this research is in turn meant to promote similar reflection in others. Creswell (2002 p.53) clarifies by stating an 'objective of action research may be to empower, transform and emancipate individuals in educational settings'. I argue that, along with students, the educator can also be empowered and emancipated from limited understandings of the epistemic value of visual art which in turn impact policy and an undervaluing of the art domain in education. Moreover, the student's educational experience can more often result in authentic and transformative learning, which may be the case for Aline, Jayden and Rene. Therefore, an important issue is highlighted in that this research makes the assumption that further understanding interrelationships between the threshold framework and the ability of the visual arts to navigate the liminal space provides a means for reflection and empowerment of one's pedagogy and curriculum implementation. In order to make this operational, I am building upon the powerful experiences and courage of Aline, Jayden and Rene as case studies as a means to closely

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examine engagement with the visual art making process as it pertains to the liminal space.

Bresler (1994, p.12) states 'a key distinction between action research and the other qualitative genres is the identity, role, and expertise of the principal investigator'. Bresler (1994) further explicates that teachers working in conjunction with a university faculty are most common to employ action research. Furthermore, Schon (1983) provided a legitimacy to action research by utilizing daily knowledge of teachers in his work with reflective practice. May (1993) points out problems with action research that are specific to the context of art education which focus on methodological issues as well as a need for deeper self-reflection and criticism. More specifically, she refers to 'teacher educators who do not engage in reflective inquiry of their own practice and, therefore, cannot offer much guidance for students' (May, 1993 in Bresler, 1994; p. 13). This problem as identified by May (1993) supports the appropriateness of the stated aims in regard to this methodological application. Moreover, the means of representation of the issues and the subjective experiences and art making of Jayden, Aline and Rene provide an opportunity for more accessible research that may connect with other educators.

Implicit to this discussion is the role of the visual art making process as both a methodological tool and a epistemic vehicle for the navigation of liminal space. Therefore it is essential to consider the relationships between art and knowledge which is addressed in the next section.

3.6 Art and Knowledge

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'The arts-based researcher may persuade readers or percipients of the work to revisit the world from a different direction, seeing it through fresh eyes, and thereby calling into question a singular, orthodox point of view' (Barone and Eisner, 2012, p. 16). This quote articulates the core aims of the thesis presentation of case studies with the intention of provoking art educators to reflect upon their pedagogical approach in the context of threshold and semiotic theories. The use of the case studies presents an interrelationship of liminal experience and the art making process. The power of this documented journey may empower other art educators to reflect upon the potential of their own learning environments and reconsider the purpose of art education.

In the important chapter, Art and Knowledge, Eisner (Knowles and Cole, 2007) begins by asking the question if the arts are merely ornamental or if they have a more significant role in human understanding. The answer is both and the classroom context dictates the aforementioned conceptualisation for students. More specifically, the pedagogical approach will obviously underpin the learning environment and, as a consequence, the nature of student engagement in a relationship of art and knowledge. Therefore, a previously stated aim of this research is to provoke educators into reflection upon the breadth and depth of visual art to far exceed limitations of being merely ornamental.

According to McNiff (2008 p.29), 'Art-based research can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by

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both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies'. Barone & Eisner (2006 p.96) argue that a primary purpose of arts-based research in education is to 'persuade the percipient to see educational phenomena in new ways, and to entertain questions that might have otherwise been left unmasked'. Furthermore, Langer (1957) argues there are discursive and non-discursive forms of knowledge which is an important issue, in this research, namely the consideration of visual arts as non-discursive knowledge. However, the previous citations, as well as others, (i.e. Barone and Eisner, 2012, Leavy, 2015; Bagley & Cancienne, 2002) generally think of the value of non-discursive knowledge as a means of enhancing research to being internalised by readers. However, the aspect of visual art as being non-discursive knowledge is important to research of liminal space as it applies to learning in the arts and knowledge construction that encompasses the affective elements as well as the cognitive.

Arts based research results (in part) from the work of Langer (1957) that helped establish the cognitive element of the arts in the academic context 'and established the intellectual basis for approaching art making as serious inquiry' (McNiff, 2008, p.30). In addition, Eisner states (Knowles & Cole 2007 p. 5-6) 'knowledge and understanding are not always reducible to language' and argues that 'words are proxies for direct experience'. Implicit to the quote is the limitations of language as semiotic signs that may often lack the capacity to effectively represent the complexity of human experience and feeling. Whereas employing non-linguistic or in the case of this thesis visual signs may more effectively represent and

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express the nuance of subjective meaning and experience. From the perspective of the researcher the arts-based methods, in this research, take form as visual data and a semiotic dialogue that occurs within the learning environment. In one sense the arts-based methods provide us with a unique opportunity to glimpse the affective experience of the liminal journey. In another sense it can be considered an invaluable tool for teaching and learning in the arts. The visual art making process can help address the limitations of words in regard to the cases studies and the feeling associated. This is particularly relevant since the liminal state can involve a difficulty in the formation of linguistic signs as a means of communicating or processing troublesome knowledge (Land, 2014).

The role of arts-based research, within this thesis and in general, is not to reach conclusions but rather to raise questions or possibilities for understanding issues more deeply (Barone and Eisner, 2012; Leavy 2015). As previously stated, visual arts provides a unique lens through which to glimpse the liminal state. However, to this point, we may come to understand aspects of the affective and cognitive elements within the liminal state. Susanne Langer (1957 cited in Barone and Eisner, 2012, p.9) 'states arts-based research is not a literal description of a state of affairs; it is an evocative and emotionally drenched expression that makes it possible to know how others feel'. The visual art making process can make an important contribution to the threshold concept literature in that it provides a unique means to glimpse the liminal experience from the student perspective. This understanding is both an empathic understanding of its difficulty and potential impact of

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the learners experience but also the navigation of the liminal space. This is due to the visual art making process ability to make the internal and emotional empirical providing understanding through different forms of representation.

As presented in the example of Ramesha, there are potential relationships implicit to visual art production and the engagement of troublesome knowledge and the threshold framework. This exploration is not concerned with conclusions which further argue art is a form of knowledge (as opposed to ornament) but rather builds upon the dense theoretical literature that establishes this as a truth (Dewey, 1934; Langer, 1957; McNiff, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015; Eisner, 2008). The significance of this point is that the research-based and established relationship of art and knowledge suggests an inherent ability of visual art to navigate liminality and cross thresholds through non-discursive and affective knowledge. Therefore, implicit to this inquiry, visual art functions in multiple roles and is viewed through lenses of educational subject, as well as, the product of expressive activity, a research method and form of data. Therefore this research is contingent upon the student engaging with the visual art process as an opportunity to convey experience and construct knowledge in a manner that is authentic to real life experience making it relevant within the threshold framework. As a result, this allows for the transformative aspect of the work to be received in more personal and profound manner (Knowles & Cole 2002) as the percipient can engage the liminal journey of the case studies and associate them with their own experiences in classrooms. Sullivan (2004 p. 795-796) argues that 'making art and interpreting art become the basis for

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constructing theories of artistic knowing' and educational research that 'merely borrow[s] research methods from other fields denies the intellectual maturity of art practice as a plausible basis for raising significant theoretical questions, and as a viable site for applying important educational ideas'. The point being made is the consideration of visual art making in the context of threshold concept framework can provoke educational researchers to understand inherent epistemic potential for effective use. There is potential in the consideration of visual art as a contribution to the threshold concept literature as a methodology as well as a vehicle for navigating the liminal space. The inherent characteristics of visual art that are prevalent in the arts-based research literature establish the epistemic value of the domain which can offer a unique glimpse into the much needed student experience of liminality.

Patricia Leavy (2015) describes the value of arts-based research by referring to her own experiences as an academic. She encountered frustration with more traditional forms of research in regard to the limitations of representation in the context of ethics and accessibility by an audience. For example in the case of Ramesha we are able to engage her struggles with identity and self in a manner that is more accessible and rich due to the unique means of representation that are drenched in feeling and experience. I argue it is essential for the reader/viewer to experience her liminal journey along with her as opposed to only locating coded excerpts within an existing theory. Leavy (2015 p.2) argues the arts-based approach allowed for effective representation of content while generating 'empathic understanding, self-reflection and longer lasting learning experiences for readers'. More specifically,

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Knowles & Cole (2002 p.208) describe a dissertation on child sexual abuse that is presented as poetry which gives insight to the issues relating to trauma but allows us to access through the affective lens of the lived experience. Bagley and Castro-Salazaar (2012) argue that art's primary purpose is to provide an audience with evocative access to multiple meanings, interpretations and voices associated with lived diversity and complexity. In other words, research may often address issues that fall outside the scope of the reader but art-based approaches can make them accessible. Art based methods can provide the de-literalization of knowledge which opens the door for other modes of knowing whose truth is important to uncover and represent (Eisner, 2008). At the heart of this is a distinction between expression and statement where 'science states meanings; art expresses them' (Dewey, 1934 p.84). Barone & Eisner (2012 p.3) argue the expression of meanings empowers percipients of arts-based research with a 'heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world'.

The form of representation of the research can assist in expanding the knowledge base and challenging assumptions in regard to learning in art classrooms to a wider audience of art educators less interested in purely theoretical literature. However, academics interested in the threshold framework may find the research further introduces arts-based approaches which may offer insight to highly relevant constructs and our ability to understand them. In both instances visual art is employed as a means of seeking and representing human experience and perspective. In the context of

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this thesis, the art making process is not only a mechanism for students to engage with the liminal state but the same art allows us to empathically participate in the student journey itself. The linguistic data provides context but the art work itself provides a means for us to experience an exchange of subjectivity with the cases presented. It can be argued that this perspective can produce research that provokes reflection and insight that can address the arguable stagnation of art education.

McNiff (2008) discusses a danger of arts-based research as the reality that the work can become a form of self-indulgence (of the researcher) and the meaning or value of the work getting lost. In this context it is important that I do not become more interested in presenting quality art work made in my class instead of issues related to art education understood through the lens of threshold concepts. The mere correlation of art and research does not make it arts-based nor valuable research (Bagley, 2002, 2008; Bagley & Castro-Salazaar, 2012). In other words, we must avoid presenting 'a delightful poetic passage or a vivid narrative that does little educational work'(Eisner, 2008, p.23). In this thesis the use of the case studies and the art making process meant to provide insight to educational issues related to threshold concepts and the navigation of the liminal space.

The discussion on arts-based methods highlights the epistemic benefits inherent to the visual arts which holds implications for the richness of data. Part of the relevance of this discussion also directly relates to research in threshold concepts and the domain of arts education. "Visual media's contribution derives mainly from

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the ability of images to facilitate and enrich communication thus enhancing the data (Pain, 2012, p.303)". In other words, the affective dimension and liminal experience is given form in moments of navigation of the liminal space and transformation. The reflective interviews are literal evidence of linguistic signs of transformation and further explanation of the underpinning thought process of the young women. The epistemic role of visual art making is another profound source of knowledge that is unique and directly generated from the each of the young women. The implications of this methodology can also hold implications for art education learning environments and a source of reflection upon pedagogy.

3.7 Positionality

Positionality, in qualitative research, is often associated with the racial, cultural, gender, sexual, religious or other identities of the researchers and the participants. It is concerned with the potential relevance of the similarities or differences of these positions and their impact in the research process. England (1994) states that research is a dialogic process that is equally impacted by the researched as well as the researcher. As a consequence 'dialogism means that the researcher is a visible and integral part of the research setting' (England, 1994, p.84). Milner (2007) presents a form of literature review in regard to issues of positionality, specifically in regard to research of the African-American community, and results in a proposed framework for research. According to Milner (2007) there is a range of literature which takes a view upon the ability of a researcher to accurately represent the experiences and views of subjects from a different

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race. Tillman (2002) discusses culturally sensitive research approaches, with emphasis upon research that also focuses upon African-American community. Milner (2007) and Tillman (2002) both argue that the key issue is the ability of the researcher to acknowledge their position in relation to subjects and have the respective conscious awareness in representing the experiences of the subjects under study. More specifically, Milner (2007, p.388) 'rejects practices in which researchers detach themselves from the research process, particularly when they reject their racialized and cultural positionality in the research process'.

In short those who are researched 'should be treated like people and not as mere mines of information to be exploited by the researcher as the neutral collector of facts' (England, 1994; p. 82). England (1994) argues that 'traditional positivist research hides behind the formality of researcher as being different or removed from the subjects and the personal considered a threat to objectivity'. England (1994) considers her underpinning philosophical approach as that of suppliant which places value and insight upon the subject as being more important than that of the researcher; she argues this reflexive approach is self-critical and requires sympathetic self-reflection. The implicit role of relativism and pluralism in the construction of knowledge in research (Eisner, 1992) should not be mistaken for 'mindless' but that all knowledge is created to a personal framework and there is not a single way to know the world (Eisner, 1992).

Positionality is of relevance, to this thesis. First, the experiences which Aline, Rene and Jayden are addressing in the art

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work and talking around but acknowledging to me are highly sensitive. The sensitivity is arguably heightened by me being a white male, as well as their teacher and researcher. Disregard for positionality could result in an exploitative relationship. I represent a demographic that is associated with their troublesome experiences and it is important that I remain sensitive to their being victimized and truly vulnerable. In other words their emotional safety and well-being of the young women is most important in the conducting of this research and I must not exploit my authority for the sake of extracting information.

However, the relevance of this point to positionality is that the dialogic process (England, 1994) changes within this research as it is not primarily exchanged through linguistic means. In other words, Aline, Jayden and Rene are expressing their most personal feelings through their art work, as opposed to literal description or statement. The linguistic data primarily focuses upon explaining intentions behind art work and the impact of the art process upon them. As previously mentioned, the research is careful not to act as a form of therapy and the details of the experiences are not often, if ever, directly discussed. The argument being made here is the visual art provides an emotional safety for the girls to engage their more troublesome knowledge without feeling exposed or re-victimized, in the name of research. Furthermore, the dialogic occurring through the art work arguably provides a balance of power between researcher and subject. The girls each have control over how their experiences are represented and to some degree explained.

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Another perspective in regard to positionality, and this research methodology, is the attributes and experiences that I bring which may enhance the dialogism (England, 1994) of research. Bresler (1994 p.16) states 'In action research the researchers are not only participants and insiders, but they play a central role in shaping the educational setting which they study'. The primary attributes that underpin the learning environment in which I teach are my experiences as an exhibiting artist involved in the creative process, my personal struggles with addiction and journey to sobriety, and intensive theoretical work in pursuit of my Ed.D. The majority of my educational background focuses upon studio art (i.e., MFA in sculpture and drawing, B.S. art education and BFA in sculpture and drawing). Therefore my personal experience of learning and education has manifest in visual representation. I also have an extensive exhibition record, with various gallery contexts as well as a list of reviews in various news and art publications. The relevance of my art background is to indicate a strong level of commitment to the visual art making process and that I naturally understand my own experience and feelings most effectively through visual expression. Therefore, a common introduction of myself to new students involves: "I am not an art teacher, I am an artist that loves to teach". This philosophical view drastically changes the learning environment from art class to a studio experience. In other words, I do not approach art education as something where I attempt to generate effective results from students. Rather I attempt to foster a personal understanding of the art making process as a means of expressing and arriving at meaning. The previous chapters introduce the threshold concept theoretical framework and the

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example of Ramesha highlights the learning environment as a context for visual art as a means of engaging relevant life experience. As referenced in Chapter two, Dewey (1938 p. 201) states, 'what makes material a medium is that it is used to express a meaning which is other than that which it is in virtue of its bare physical existence.' Therefore, the primary pedagogical approach is to question as opposed to instruct.

The position of artist is also fuelled by my openness towards my struggles with alcohol and drugs well into adulthood. Although I have been sober for over ten years, I did not get sober until the age of thirty five. As is the case with many sober alcoholics this is considered a positive attribute and I often introduce aspects of learning about living a sober life to students. Whether it be a personal conversation or class discussion there are many principles of sobriety that would benefit anyone. In order to be more specific as to the issue of positionality there are two points to be made. The first is my background involves intimate involvement with the creative process and human struggle which are integral to my pedagogical approach. These experiences are frameworks which inform my perceptions of student work and often invite open dialogue and create an emotionally safe environment within which one may feel empowered to engage troublesome knowledge. I often say to students that my openness is an act of fairness in the sense that I am asking them to be vulnerable. It is only fair that I do so in return. The second and perhaps more important point lies in Peter Vivian's (2012) description of crossing a conceptual threshold. Vivian (2012) describes the experience as moving through a dark tunnel and toward

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light. When one considers this as a form of metaphor we can associate personal feelings and experience with this visual description. As a result, one can argue this understanding of threshold crossing seems particularly visceral and relevant within this research. In the specific case of Aline, Jayden and Rene, I may not have the ability to completely understand how it feels to experience their darker moments but the journey to sobriety does allow me to understand struggle, mental anguish and despair. I argue, from my experience, that this shared understanding gives us a means for genuine communication, trust and a faith in my understanding of moving toward light.

This description of my positionality as a researcher stands in stark contrast to the situation raised by Becker and Geer (1957) who address the issue that an interviewee (due to sensitivity or lack of trust) may not reveal all that is desired or needed for effective research on a respective issue. Moreover, the researcher may not always be aware there are gaps in the information to be conveyed in the interview process. The research does not attempt to avoid or disguise issues of positionality; rather I perceive it to be a foundation upon which the research evolves.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Rigour

The previous sections of this chapter make a clear argument for the role of qualitative methods for inquiry and the need to embrace the subjective nature of the paradigm. In turn this highlights the need for consideration of issues of validity or reliability of the research design and the resulting claims; however, the terms reliability and validity are entrenched in the quantitative

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framework (Agar, 1986). Guba (1981) argues the qualitative research methodologies present unique problems when considering issues of reliability or validity and rigour is more effective when evaluating subjective inquiries. Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1981) identify trustworthiness as an effective framework for evaluating the rigour of qualitative research. Trustworthiness is comprised of four criteria: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Guba 1981). It is important to highlight that the ensuing conceptualisations of the aforementioned constructs are underpinned with naturalistic inquiry (Guba, 1978, 1979, 1981; Guba and Lincoln 1981). In other words, truth is constructed of multiple realities and the methods of this thesis attempt to effectively represent these subjective experiences.

Truth value is concern with "confidence in the 'truth' of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out" (Guba, 1981, p.79). In other words, it is my obligation to effectively represent the subjective realities and experiences of the young women that constitute the case studies. Sandelowski (1986 as cited in Krefting, 1991) states that credibility in the representing of the experiences (of Rene, Jayden and Aline) exists when others with similar experiences would recognize the descriptions presented. The thesis makes use of visual data (art work), written excerpts taken from journals, as well as documented and transcribed interviews, in an attempt to make the internal subjective feelings understood to readers. It is important to be explicit in the role of semiotics, in this thesis, where linguistic and non-linguistic signs are both of

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great importance. It is through both forms of conveying meaning that I am able to understand and represent intentions and meaning of the young women. More specifically, context is established with the young women's experiences and feelings which informs their art making process in a semiotic lens.

Applicability refers to the ability of the research to apply to other contexts, which makes immediate associations with generalizability (Guba, 1981; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Campbell & Stanley, 1971) and is also entrenched in more traditional forms of research. Guba (1981. P. 81) explains "transferability between two contexts may occur because of certain essential similarities between them. To determine the extent to which transferability is probable, one needs to know a great deal about both the transferring and receiving contexts". Geertz' (1973) notion of thick and rich description was introduced as part of the earlier discussion, in this chapter, arguing for the relevance of qualitative methods. Implicit to the discussion of trustworthiness and transferability is the epistemological importance of thick and rich description. There are many similarities amongst art classrooms around the world in their use of materials, media and aspects of design. My intention, for this research, is to provide an in depth experience of these young women that engaged visual art as an epistemic and semiotic navigation of the liminal space which, presumably, is a distinction from many art classrooms around the world. In order to effectively represent this engagement the data must reflect life circumstance and experience along with subjective feeling and perceptions. As previously mentioned the data is visual, written and spoken which

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allows the reader to empathically understand and learn from the young women's experiences.

The construct of consistency involves the inherent and inextricable human element to the qualitative paradigm (Krefting, 1991; Duffy, 1985; Field and Morse, 1985). More specifically, qualitative methods employ "humans as instruments- instruments that change not only because of "error" (e.g., fatigue) but because of evolving insights and sensitivities" (Guba, 1981, p. 81). Therefore, Krefting (1991, p. 216) argues "the key to qualitative work is to learn from the informants rather than control for them". The argument being made in regard to this thesis is over time the young women and I evolve and increase in sensitivity to the experience and feelings inherent to the art making process. These evolved changes need not be perceived as error (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991) as in this study the young women are on a continual journey, in that the art making process continually clarifies their own understanding and ability to accept aspects of self. I can argue the documented liminal journey is likely to reveal evolved understandings and changes in the young women as well as myself.

This chapter on methods makes clear and logical arguments for the qualitative paradigm and the necessary role of subjectivity in elements of research design. As previously discussed in section 3.5 it is important for the subjective methods to result in claims that are substantive and of relevance to educational research.

"Neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations, and perspectives" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). The issues of objectivity and positionality are of

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importance in regard to this aspect of trustworthiness. In the previous section I acknowledge and establish the role of positionality and its value in regard to this thesis. More specifically, positionality allows for a deeper connection and trust between myself and the young women which seems to contradict the notion of objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative research is dependent upon researchers establishing relationships with their cases; therefore neutrality exists with the data that is collected and not in the distance between researchers and subjects. The issue of neutrality is integral to the methods of this thesis in that my relationship to Rene, Jayden and Aline established a foundation for their ability to employ the art making process as a means to engage troublesome knowledge. Moreover, our established trust provided the emotional safety that allowed students to share their experiences and feelings. However, this access and the environment within which the young women created their work did not influence their thinking but simply empowered each of them represent their authentic perceptions and understandings.

3.9 Selection of Case Studies

What is key in the description or clarification of the choosing of the case studies is the interrelationship of their choosing and the formation of the research question (Coyne, 1997). Kitson et al. (1982) provide criticism of qualitative research that lacks clarity in sampling strategies claiming that it muddies the ability to interpret findings. Patton (1990) conceptualizes purposeful sampling as selecting information rich cases that can provide insight to the

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purpose of the research. Consistent with qualitative methods, my learning of theory, in the Ed.D programme, arguably heightened my ability to observe phenomena naturally occurring in the learning environment. In the context of this thesis, observations focused upon three students that were employing the visual art process as a means to engage life experience. The nature of this engagement extended far beyond technical exercises, the illustration of life events or generic emotions; rather the nature of the student engagement involved the cognitive and affective dimensions and suggested the relevance of troublesome knowledge. At different times of the year each of the young women demonstrated a transformation or ontological shift related to the troublesomeness being engaged through their art making process. Each of the young women demonstrated these shifts independently and at different times of the year. It was at these points I asked the students to be interviewed and to use their IB assessment portfolios as data for research.

The three case studies, for this thesis, are all female and seniors in high school; which is also the year the visual art assessment is submitted for the IB curriculum. Implicit to the previous paragraph, the case studies were not selected on any basis other than the epistemic nature of their visual art making process and their ability to contribute knowledge to the threshold framework. There is no conscious concern for diversity or consideration of any particular demographic quality. As previously stated, the case studies were determined by my initial observations of their art work engaging troublesome knowledge that resulted from

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life experience. They also happen to be female and in their examining year of the IB programme. The IB curriculum holds logical implications for procedures and data collection. This thesis, is neither attempting to make claims of generalization (especially in regard to gender) nor attempting to be apologetic for focusing on three female cases. However, acknowledgement of this fact and some exposition allows me the context to highlight the true basis for the selection of the case studies.

As previously stated, the rationale for emphasis of selecting case studies was based upon the epistemic nature of their art work. As the thesis evolved in theory and methods, it became clear as to the importance of an underpinning relationship of visual art and troublesome knowledge. More specifically, this epistemic role of visual art also is a means of structure with which to consider the capacity of art to navigate liminality. In other words, the nature of the visual art process came about as a natural exploration for these students; which is arguably an important element in regards to methods as well as the qualitative framework. As stated by Meyer and Land the state of troublesomeness is not finite or predictable; in a sense a student has to be emotionally capable of engaging with such meaning making, thus highlighting the relevance of students that naturally arrived at a state of being that fostered either a tacit or intentional epistemic relationship with the visual art making process. I argue the explicated discovery of relevant cases provides a reliable and less intrusive means of engaging in action research. The identification of these young women as cases occurred early in the academic year when their art work and surrounding discussions revealed the tacit or previously unspoken motivation of their art

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making process. I asked each of them if I could consider their art work and the development of their thinking for my thesis. These conversations happened independently and at different times. More specifically, the thesis is applying a theoretical framework to a learning environment and individuals that demonstrate attributes that coincide with important constructs and theory. I would be hard pressed to argue that a more imposed approach to the research, such as a treatment, would address relevant questions or become operational without impacting the natural environment of the class or the young women that are the focus of the research. As stated earlier in this chapter, the young women are identified well into the school year and the interviews conducted are a form of reflection upon their art making experience. The visual art produced for their portfolios provides data of their internal experience of the liminal state.

In short the intention of the research is to employ the threshold theoretical framework as a means of understanding the potential of visual art learning environments, as well as track relevant implications. Therefore, relevant questions highlight a focus of relationships between visual art and the liminal state and the use of case studies that are indicative of such a state.

3.10 Procedure, Data and Trustworthiness

I used the established IB assessment process and deadlines as a basis for data collection. At the time of data collection the IB exam consisted of a portfolio of art work of eight to twelve or twelve to eighteen pieces, standard level (SL) and higher level (HL) respectively; as well as selected pages from each student's research

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workbook (sketchbook) which ranged from twenty to thirty pages (SL and HL respectively). The selection of artwork and research pages used for the IB assessment was made by the student with the intention of representing their creative and expressive journey over a one or two year period. The dates and the amount of work formally presented was determined by the IB assessment criteria and exam calendar.

In addition (as part of the IB assessment) each student was interviewed, in private, about the content of their work and their expressive decision making process. At this time the maximum length of the interview (per IB criteria) was approximately ten minutes for SL and twenty minutes for HL. The following section addresses pertinent issues in regard to interviews with more depth. In regard to the procedures it is worth noting that Rene, Aline and Jayden were each interviewed, twice. The first interview was conducted for the IB assessment and approximately a month after the IB exam, a second interview was conducted. The second interview was the only data collection method employed in this thesis that was not a part of the IB assessment and occurred tenth of June.

The intention underpinning this decision for data collection was to avoid unnecessary disruption of the daily classroom environment or impact upon the students' thought process. As previously discussed, Rene, Aline and Jayden presented their relevance, as case studies, due to the epistemic interrelationship of their art making process and troublesome knowledge, which is not a requirement relating to performance on the IB assessment. In other words, Rene, Aline and Jayden utilized the IB course and assessment process as a means to engage relevant life experience. I have

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discussed, in my IB courses (over the years), that if we are going to submit for the IB assessment we may as well take the opportunity to learn something about ourselves. In other words, in my learning environments we make distinctions between exam performance and authentic learning, human development and academic performance. The submission for assessment does not have to be work that is indicative of engagement with authentic experience; but it can be and is an implication of the formerly discussed issues of positionality. Therefore, on a daily basis, in conjunction with the IB assessments Rene, Aline and Jayden focused upon the profound and personal content of their work with little concern for my research. It can be argued that the reality of the impending IB assessment could act as a motivation to produce work, but this does not dictate or influence the substance of the content or expressive choices.

It is important to explicate that my role as participant interviewer always prioritized my pedagogy upon the students' development as individuals; as well as the development of their visual and written work in preparation for the IB assessment. In other words, the personal nature of my interviews and interactions with students, as well as feedback or suggestions to their work, was typical for learning environments that I facilitate. As implied by the introduction of Ramesha, every year I encounter students that use the visual arts course for more personal and profound learning; however, this direction evolves internally to the student. The visual, written and spoken data, of this thesis, is the actual work that each of the young women selected to submit to IB for assessment. I argue that the procedures and resulting data provided

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a unique opportunity to consider the visual art learning environment in the context of the theoretical framework of threshold concepts.

3.11 Interviews

The qualitative methodology literature identifies several types of interviews that range from highly structured to taking the form of natural dialogue (Cassell, 1980; Fontana & Frey, 1998; Morse, 2002; James, 1994). In other words, highly structured interviews offer less control to the interviewee (Corbin & Morse, 2003) whereas in this thesis I preferred more of a natural conversation. In my view the benefit of a less structured interview was to allow the young women to explain the intentions to their work and how these intentions were visually represented. Furthermore, the less formal interview approach was intended to be less threatening and allow the interviewee to control how they discussed the more sensitive aspects of their life experiences that are represented in the art work.

However, justifying the role of interviews as having a relevant epistemological role in methodology is paramount; Silverman (2010) highlights the importance of researchers to question the ability of interview data to help in addressing the topic of one's research. I conducted two interviews with each of the young women. As previously discussed, the first interview was part of the IB assessment process and submitted for evaluation. This interview is beneficial because all examining students attempt to explain the intentions underpinning their work and the expressive decisions they made to visually represent these intentions. More specifically, students frequently discuss the perceived meaning of their work and how they effectively chose media, materials and employed design elements.

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Considering this interview through the lens of interview data there are several benefits. Aline, Jayden and Rene each describe, with some detail, the correlation of their troublesome life experience and their art work, in addition, the nature of the visual representation of these feelings and experiences. In other words, each of the young women spend time describing the engaged troublesomeness in their visual art making process. This interrelationship is fundamental to any considerations as to the relevance of threshold concepts. As discussed in both chapter one and two, the visual arts as a means of navigating liminality is the focus of the research. While the art work presents evidence of students engaging troublesome knowledge, it is of benefit to have explanations of their perceptions and feeling. Therefore, having the opportunity for the young women to discuss the issue of troublesomeness, in relationship to their own life experiences, is a crucial element to the research. Furthermore, the interview was conducted for the IB assessment, therefore, Rene, Jayden and Aline provided responses to interview questions with another purpose in mind than my research. Therefore, the students' weren't focused on what I may want them to say but rather being clear in regard to their art work and its meaning; their interviews were to explain their work to someone they have never encountered. My role in conducting the interview was to help establish this clarity which in part was providing an emotional security. I was familiar with the deep and personal aspects of their work and life experience, I simply tried to facilitate a description of their creative process in this regard. There were no pre-set questions for the second interview which occurred about a month after the IB visual art exam

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on tenth of June. In this interview, I asked the young women to reflect on the meaning of their work and any potential impact the art making process had in relation to troublesome knowledge in regard to changes in understanding or perception (i.e. transformation). In all three cases the second interview involved lengthy discussion as to the trauma or difficulties of their youth through the time of enrolment in my IB art course. Between both of the interviews, in conjunction with the art work and written excerpts there is a lot of information that provides opportunity to glimpse the internal affective and cognitive experience in regard to the navigation of the liminal space.

Fontana & Frey (1994) present a history of interviewing as a method. In their overview they discuss important epistemic distinctions of the different interview styles. The unstructured interview style employed, in this thesis, held a continuity with the established dynamic between the young women and myself. In other words, employing a more clinical interview style and environment would be a departure from our normal communication. More importantly the use of structured interviews may "elicit rational responses, but it overlooks or inadequately assesses the emotional dimension" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 364). This thesis is predicated upon the ability to glimpse the liminal experience through semiotic representation of the affective dimension; therefore, the use of an interview style that elicits the ability to discuss powerful experiences and feelings is essential. It could be argued that a group interview might elicit such responses and even benefit the students' wellbeing. However, due to the highly personal and

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sensitive nature of the content of the art work and the underpinning experiences, to do so would be unethical due to privacy.

I argue that participant observer and unstructured interviews provide an effective method due to the implicit need to bond and establish trust in order to elicit genuine responses (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The sensitivity and profound nature of the experiences, of the young women, are not going to be accessible unless there is a relationship of trust. Through the multiple roles of participant observer and teacher in conjunction with the issues of positionality, I argue the interviews became possible.

In summary the interviews were intended to provide insight into three basic issues: the correlation of the affective dimension in regard to troublesome knowledge and the visual art making process, the cognitive dimension and the visual art making process and the construct of self. Furthermore, the act of interviewing provides insight into possible ontological shifts; the young women were capable of using linguistic signs as a means of describing differences in the self as a result of this journey. The ability to form and employ these signs is important evidence in its own right. I argue the interviews in conjunction with the visual art work provide a glimpse into the affective and cognitive dimension as they navigate the liminal space.

The coding and analysis of the interviews provide description of what informed the art work; which is unique to each of the young women with analysis within the cases and their art work. Therefore coding would focus upon elements in the interviews that are linguistic signs of these cognitive leaps, as well as, constructs that relate to visual art providing a vehicle for liminal

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navigation; meaning constructs that suggest the visual art acting as a cognitive tool. When it comes to the visual art as data and the use of unstructured interviews, I argue the first interview (for IB exam) provides evidence of correlation between the art work and the experiences of the young women. Hence I can argue the student did engage troublesome knowledge with their art work and is a basis for using art for the navigation of liminal space. When analysing the data, I will consider aspects of the art work and interviews that represent visual art as a means of engaging the affective experience of liminality. I argue the second interview provides context and some details about actual life experience, as well as, feelings that underpin the art work. I also spent time in the second interview asking if they had changed (transformation) as a result of making art about these experiences and if art making had any role in said change. Therefore, further analysis will consider aspects of the visual art making process that represent the cognitive development in regard to ontological shifts.

3.12 Coding

The practice of segmenting is employed while engaging the interview transcripts as a means to effectively analyse the data; "Segmenting involves dividing the data into meaningful analytical units" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 426). I have read through the transcripts line by line and identified meaningful text, of varying lengths which are relevant to an existing theoretical theme (Life, 1994). Obviously, this thesis segments in regard to threshold concepts as a theoretical lens focusing upon the young women's art making process and the experiences expressed in their art work. More

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specifically, the aforementioned sequence of interviews, directly present the students understanding of the intention and meaning of their art work; the interviews also give details as to the underpinning life experience represented in their art work. These segments were then coded which Miles and Huberman (1994, p.56) describe as: "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study".

There is a clear intrapersonal nature of the young women's experiences in terms of the cognitive and affective dimensions associated with liminality, the art making process and the self. Consideration of the larger purpose of the research to consider art learning environments and pedagogy through the lens of threshold concepts, highlights Patton (1990) and Life (1994); both argue the importance of purposeful sampling and coding with the intention of learning and contributing knowledge to relevant theories.

The intrapersonal nature of the case studies is also highlighted by Saldana (2015, p. 105) which discusses affective methods; "affective qualities are core motives for human, action, reaction and interaction and should not be discounted from our investigations of the human condition". As the literature review explicates, the affective dimension holds particular relevance to the liminal experience of these young women and therefore I need to consider the importance of issues related to analysis and coding. Emotion coding and values coding "taps into the cognitive systems of participants (Saldana, 2015, p. 105)". Saldana (2015) explains emotion coding as labels for feelings experienced by participants. Saldana (2015, p. 110)) also identifies values coding which "reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs representing his or

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her perspectives or worldview". This thesis places clear emphasis upon the internal feelings and experiences of the young women represented in case studies. I argue that the affective methods of emotion coding and values coding in conjunction with the visual representations, I argue provides a trustworthy epistemological structure to analyse, interpret and represent meaning.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter on methods presents the underpinning logic as to the attempt to gather and analyse data that is relevant to the research questions being asked. In order to understand the ability of visual art to document the liminal journey the methods must embrace subjective experience and embrace a research design that does not disrupt the natural learning environment. Therefore, there was a maintenance of my normal pedagogical approaches and emphasis upon each individual's expressive interests. In my view the methods chapter establishes a sound logical understanding of the interrelationship of methods and the intention of the research as well as trustworthiness.

The next three chapters will present the case studies of the three young women Jayden, Aline and Rene. Within each of the following chapters there will be some background information provided but the focus is primarily on each young women's liminal journey and their use of the art making process as a means of navigation.

Chapter 4 Jayden; A Split Self

Chapter 4 Introduction

The young woman that is the focus of this case study is named Jayden. She experienced profound questions and uncertainty in regard to identity and an understanding of self; due to complex interrelationships of racial composition and socialization. Jayden was born to a white female and a black male which had obvious genetic influence upon her physical features. Further complexity resides in the fact that Jayden was adopted by a white family that experienced dramatic life change soon after her adoption. Jayden's social context during early childhood was upper class, predominantly white private schools and communities. As a consequence of dramatic change Jayden's social reality switched to urban public schools with a much more diverse demographic in regard to race, ethnicity and economic status. These differing social contexts placed Jayden in extremes of not only socio-economic realities but she formed bonds and relationships with peer groups of extremely different racial and economic back grounds. A consequence of these extremes of social contexts raised questions within Jayden in regard to her racial identity and ultimately her sense of self. In addition, Jayden was, with some frequency, confronted with comments, questions and

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observations that in some cases were racist and hurtful; penetrating the affective dimension.

Jayden's understanding of identity is troublesome and the liminal journey is plotted in this way. The art work demonstrates an emotional and cognitive engagement with racial identity and stereotypes that moves internally to the core of Jayden. Moreover, the art work demonstrates an ontological shift where the visual representation of feelings and experiences is a semiotic navigation of the liminal space. In Jayden's experience identity is a complex emotional threshold and visual semiotics guides Jayden through the liminal space; the art making process facilitates her ability to talk about her complex journey through the thresholds of identity and self. In short, she uses visual signs and signifiers before linguistic ones.

4.2 Jayden

As the introduction presents, Jayden began her education at an "all-white private school" where she and one other child were the only individuals of colour. "That kind of shaped who I was. I was always very, I guess white" (Jayden). Implicit to her description is the suggestion that her early childhood environment resulted in a socialization to be white. More specifically, Berger & Luckmann (1966, p.152) state, "the self is a reflected entity" meaning that it is a "dialectic between identification by others and self-identification" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 152). Jayden states in the interviews that she always associated her own heritage as being the same as her mother's; even though she was adopted she did not make a distinction between her mother's ethnic heritage and her own.

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I argue Jayden identified through the emotional and psychological interactions with her mother which allowed Jayden to disregard racial differences between her mother and herself.

Although socialization is not a focus of this thesis, it is a point at which troublesome knowledge finds origins. Jayden's experiences uncover a struggle with understanding and accepting her identity and sense of self due to the diverse racial experiences of her upbringing. More specifically, as previously mentioned, Jayden's early childhood was in an affluent white area and then due to the death of her father she moved to a more diverse area where she befriended other black adolescents. While Jayden does not have a problem being raised by a white family the reality of being a black female has come into conflict with the social reality of being African American and different racial assumptions made about her as a mixed race person. "That's when like mass confusion set in" (Jayden), her earliest memory of experiencing conflict in racial identity and self was in third grade. Jayden's class was assigned a book on Martin Luther King Jr. which she went home and read. "The very next day, I was like, Mom. You're horrible. Your people did this to my people. I think that's when like the mass confusion started. Because I was like but, wait. I'm white too. But I'm also black. It was like my people doing this to my people. There was just like a huge conflict that I couldn't handle especially at such a young age" (Jayden). I asked Jayden if that was the earliest she can remember a conflict in racial identity and she affirmed this was the first moment; her appearance and internal identification were in direct conflict. The interviews with Jayden reveal a theme of her understanding her racial composition as being split or in halves. In

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her mind, this moment was a fissure in the whole of her identity. As previously mentioned, Jayden had naturally adopted her mother's ethnic and racial identity as her own. She was aware of the racial difference between them but at Jayden's young age the distinction did not fully resonate. "That was the first moment where my African- American side and felt there was some kind of conflict" (Jayden). The reading of Martin Luther King exposed or clarified Jayden to the difficult reality of racial tension and violence that is inextricable from American history. Jayden being aware that she is adopted and African American clearly had complex reactions to this racial history. I argue this troublesomeness is comprised of emotional complexity and conceptual absurdity. "I had known my dad was black. But, I never really thought much of it. Like I knew I got my hair from him and my skin tone was a mixture. But like nothing else really hit me on that. But then, when I realized that I know black people who were getting dissed or something. All of a sudden, it was like my problem now"(Jayden). In other words, Jayden awareness of her racial composition is heightened in the context of historical tension. Jayden clearly loves and values her mother but this moment put her in touch with two racial identities which by her description was a moment "where all the confusion started" (Jayden). Jayden even briefly blames her mother (as a representative of white people) for the racial difficulty she learned about. I am not sure as to the degree her age had impact upon the moment of troublesomeness but the affective element and the conceptual absurdity clearly caused Jayden to see black and white as distinct racial identities.

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Jayden discusses how she switched from private to public schools (for middle school) and the difference between the two environments was very striking to her. During this time Jayden states she changed from "wanting to be all white to wanting to completely belong to a black friend group". Jayden is explicit in not knowing why she experienced these feelings but she soon belonged to a black friend group exclusively. Moreover, Jayden states: "Like in order to make sure that I was accepted; I didn't want to be like just that one friend that wasn't black. I had to be black just like them. I changed what I did with my hair. I tried cornrows a very brief time, I hated it. It was horrible. Being tan, like as dark as possible, that was it". Jayden also generated a sketchbook entry that further clarifies just how deeply her acceptance, in appearance, as a black female meant to her.

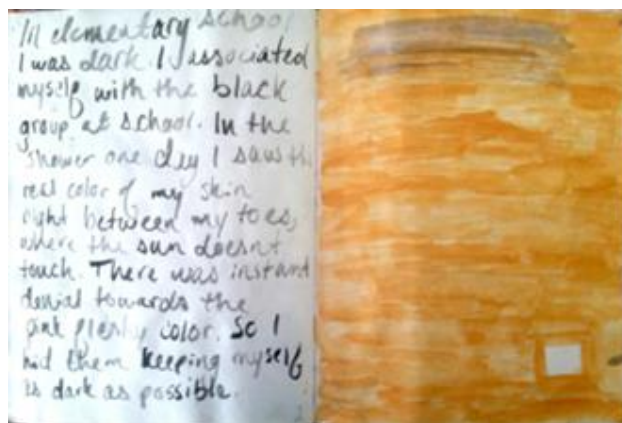


Figure 4.1

Transcribed text: In elementary school I was dark. I associated myself with the black group at school. In the shower one day I saw the real color of my skin right between my toes, where the sun doesn't touch. There was instant denial towards the pink flesh colour. So I hid them keeping myself as dark as possible.

During the interview, Jayden further elaborates on the experience of seeing the skin colour between her toes; "That's like always your natural skin colour. Because it's never seen in the sunlight. It was so much lighter than the rest of me. I panicked. I was like, no. This can't be. Like I have to be all dark. But that

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was a part of my body I was extremely self-conscious about. Because I had to be dark. I had to fit in."

It is clear at this point in Jayden's development she went to great lengths to identify as a black female and the effort focused upon her physical attributes. It is important to acknowledge there is a possible relationship between puberty and other normal aspects of individuals changing into teenagers that overlap or explain some of these feelings of insecurity and awkwardness. More specifically, Jayden is exhibiting an insecurity about her physical appearance in regard to being accepted by peers that are important to her. It is reasonable to explain this insecurity as a normal element of adolescent development. However, the shower experience where she obsesses over the pale tone of her the skin color between her toes arguably goes far beyond insecurity over friendships and appearance. This experience, as Jayden suggests, is indicative of a deep need for her entirety to be accepted as black; to be identified by her black peers at school as black; "I didn't want to be the single white friend in a black friend group, I wanted be black and accepted as black" (Jayden). In contrast Jayden would act and speak in the manner in which she had always done with her mother at home. This was in a sense a duality of identity and persona. It can be argued at this point in her life Jayden was not necessarily denying her white identity, rather, Jayden is vacillating between her racial identities. More specifically, Jayden feels a need to embrace and develop her black identity; as previously stated, Jayden consistently refers to having a "white side and a black side".

Jayden discussed her language as part of an effort to be black. Therefore, in addition to the changes in her appearance she also

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spoke in Ebonics. Ogbu (1999) describes Ebonics as a dialect of English that was spoken by black people in the United States. Jayden claims she only spoke like that (Ebonics) at school and at home she spoke in a standard American speech pattern. This is further evidence of a dichotomy of identity as well as a sense of self. The embracing of a language is a means of expressing one's sense of experience, feelings and state of being. Ebonics is different than slang which still holds some association with typical white language. As Ogbu (1999) states, ebonics is a dialect evolved by black America and spoken exclusively by that population as an attempt to separate from white majority. Jayden's use of this dialect suggests a genuine identification with black identity and sense of self as black. In contrast she spoke in typical dialect or speech patterns when at home with her mother. This in turn suggests her identification with her socialised white upbringing.

It is important to note that Jayden did not feel judged or a need to hide anything about her changes in appearance or speech in regard to her mother. She always felt her mother accepted her need to explore different aspects of her personality in regard to styles, appearance and even speech patterns. However, at home her speech and behaviour was more typical of her upbringing and different from what she presented to her friend group.

In both the interviews and her sketchbook, Jayden discusses a memory that was particularly painful and troubling that strikes to the heart of her vulnerability and insecurities in regard to racial identity. Although Jayden does not remember the exact details she does recall the basic context of the event: "I'm not really sure, maybe I called my mom or something and I did not talk like that to

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my mom (Ebonics). It was mostly at school, because I knew she didn't care what I was. But so I guess I was talking to her or something and I was speaking like whatever, and one of the girls in the group called me an Oreo. And, that's when, like it's such a silly name, but at the time it was so hurtful, like implying I was only black on the outside and white on the inside. And, that seemed like such an insult, because I guess, even though I put on this whole guise as a black person, I think I actually became very proud of what I was. Even though, I guess, there's a lot of negative stereotypes about it, I still became very proud to be a black person. And, so when someone told me that I wasn't, that I was just a fake, it really hurt."

Jayden continues her reflection upon this event by explaining how she shook the comment off, in the moment. However, it struck her more deeply; "I knew I was like, yeah, that's me, that's pretty much what I am." Jayden goes on to describe feelings of being exposed as her efforts to become "black" was her personal secret. "I guess I just thought it was a bad thing in my head, to be so dark looking on the outside, but so white on the inside".

Erikson (1963) provides insight to identity formation for adolescents forming independent identity that is autonomous from others and forming bonds with those of the same and other genders. Sue (1981, cited in Poston, 1990, p. 152) states, "Racial identity development is defined as developing pride in one's racial and cultural identity". Potson (1990) states that racial identity formation is important because it develops attitudes about the self, as well as attitudes towards others in the same racial group and the

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majority. Potson (1990, p. 152) further argues that racial identity formation also "dispels the cultural conformity myth, that is, that all individuals of a particular minority group are the same". This literature partly explains the hurt that Jayden felt in response to the Oreo comment because racial identity forms attitudes about the self. More importantly Jayden is explicit in the importance of being accepted by black peers as being black. The Oreo comment is clearly a rejection from the black peer group from which she desires acceptance. The comment of "oreo" is particularly hurtful because touches the core of Jayden's upbringing and her insecurities associated with wanting to be accepted as black. As a result, this compounds Jayden's feelings of being two halves which prevented or complicated some aspects of this identification process.

It is clear that Jayden had developed a sense of pride in her racial identity as both white and black. However, Jayden has encountered many hurtful statements from individuals in her social circles. It can be argued that these hurtful comments had clear impact upon her understanding of self in regard to the affective dimension. More specifically, her feelings of being exposed (as mentioned previously) resulted in feelings of insecurity and self-doubt continuing for many years. Jayden's sketch book provides a little more insight in regard to some of these experiences in regard to her adoptive family.

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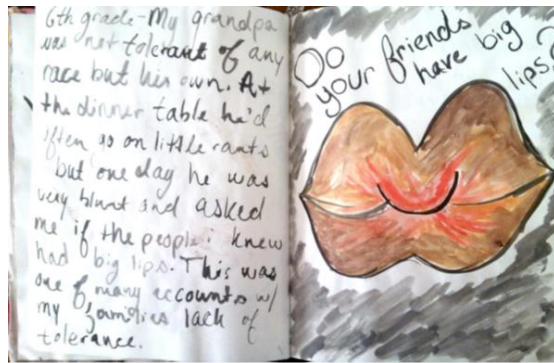


Figure 4.2

Transcribed text: 6th grade- My grandpa was not tolerant of any race but his own. At the dinner table he'd often go on little rants but one day he was very blunt and asked me if the people I knew had big lips. This was one of many accounts with my family's lack of tolerance.



Figure 4.3

Transcribed text: Oreo-an insulting term often used by blacks to derogate other blacks as "black on the outside, white on the inside". White on the inside meaning anything from speaking proper English, getting good grades, liking music other than rap/hip hop and having diverse friend groups. When walking through our halls I am never stopped and told to have a nice day. MY EXPERIENCES. Because my speech is not "ghetto" and I do not dress as stereotypical "black women" clothing, my peers assume I hold no ethnic traits. They are surprised when they see my music. When I get a mediocre or bad grade they claim "but you're mostly white". My only black assets are apparently my butt and my curly hair otherwise people view me as a tan

white girl. My boyfriend even state I'm glad you're only half black when we pass a loud group of girls. Many assume I can or cannot dance based on what race they identify me with. The one areas I get "looks" and compliments all predominantly black is the Bahamas.

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Figure 4.4

Transcribed Text: Being ashamed of my own race. Black side known for being loud, poor, rude, uneducated, unfaithful. White side known for being rich, hierarchy, intolerant, cannot dance/sing, "Marry white to dilute the brown". "You're not like other black people". "Yes, I am mixed". You are whitest black guy I know". The race card.

The preceding sketchbook pages describe encounters with racism which manifest as mean comments or comments underpinned by racial insensitivity. Furthermore, Jayden (through these comments) is subject to racial assumptions, by others, in regard to her character, quality and taste despite her daily behaviour. In the interview, Jayden spends time discussing her shock at "comments thrown out so easily" although she feels she has become immune to them for the most part. However, Jayden does "sit back and realize what people will actually say to each other and not think that it's offensive" (Jayden). She states, this form of expressed racism is pervasive and multidirectional, meaning it is not just white comments on black people. She states, black people are racist to black people as well as the normal understanding of racism (white toward black). Her point is the more open discourse had impact upon her by not only magnifying her feeling of being split but that one side, race was better than the other. As discussed below some of the comments she encounters reinforce the experience of a split self and that the white side is solely responsible for her academic success and ambition.

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More specifically, "For some reason, I think a lot of mixed kids have this issue, where sometimes, I've met some people who are like that, but for a good portion, you feel that one race is better than the other. And, I can't really explain why. I think it might be that, maybe the area where you're brought up. Because, obviously, environment has an influence on a lot of things". Jayden goes on to describe issues of "privilege" being afforded in regard to better treatment on job interviews but on the dance floor she "wants her black side to kick in". Jayden describes this as a conflict in "this side has something better, but then this side has something better too". "So sometimes there are moments where you forget to mix them and say, like, oh, this is awesome. And you kind of separate them both and say one's better than the other."

Although Jayden has had racist and hurtful encounters, she clearly has also acknowledged positive attributes associated with different aspects of her racial traits. In fact, in her description she actively wishes to exploit them at opportune moments. However, Jayden also describes the embracing of attributes as engaging her white side or her black side kicking in. For example she discusses her ability to dance or particular physical attributes (curvy figure and curly hair) associated with black features are aspects she finds positive and flattering. Conversely, her success in school and highly articulate speech are indicative of an educated and sophisticated young woman upon which she places value. Jayden is still not a nuanced individual that is rich in heritage and experience but a white and black version of herself that finds benefit in embracing different racial associations in order to successfully navigate different social contexts. The implication

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highlights the reality that Jayden seems to lack a holistic self and holds compartmentalized versions of a self that maybe is connected or situational.

4.3 Jayden Art Work and the Liminal Space

Jayden articulates the experience of feelings of racial halves which implies understanding that is represented in her art work. During her experiences throughout childhood and high school Jayden did not possess the language to express the depth of feeling and conflict she was experiencing. The affective component arguably impacted the cognitive understanding to form linguistic signs or signifiers. More importantly, the art making process provided a means for knowledge construction that involved both the affective and cognitive dimensions.

Section 2.12 introduces semiotic theory and establishes a relevance to this thesis for its importance. The relevance of semiotic theory to this case study and the thesis as a whole is the inherent ability to form signs and signifiers that benefit the knowledge construction that is inhibited by aspects of troublesomeness. More specifically, Jayden discusses a friendship with a mixed race male that she met during her high school years. She describes an important role of her friendship with the young man as being a venting session based upon jokes they both know aren't completely funny. In other words there is truth to the issues they both face but the humour makes light of the more serious aspect. The significance of this point is Jayden makes a distinction between venting with this young man about her racial issues and engaging them in her art work. "Well I would say a venting session, it's for

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me personally. It would be more that I could share it with someone who I know had experienced it, too"(Jayden). She goes on to say, "I wasn't trying to solve anything with it, it was just nice to get it out in the open". It can be argued these venting sessions are another means to address the unpleasant feelings of the liminal state especially when language to address the complexity of the issues is not formulated. Furthermore, Jayden describes the role of art making in distinction to a venting session; "With my art, I was actually trying to actually find who I was, I guess. I was trying to like say, well, am I black or am I white? Like I really wanted to know where like where both sides met up. So I think that's when I started, that's when I started trying to address it, and that's when I, when it all started when I met my dad (Jayden)."

Obviously the second experience that profoundly influences her art work is the meeting of her birth father. It was during the winter break of her junior year and members of her adoptive and biological family were present. Jayden remembers it as being strange and she was very insecure as to whether her biological family would accept her based upon her upbringing and skin colour. The interview clearly reveals this meeting carried great significance for Jayden, in being accepted for change and not seen as inferior because of her racial composition. She describes the meeting as going very well and it being another moment of profound change in her. Jayden said she felt complete acceptance from her father and biological family members present at the meeting: "walking away from this moment, I just really, wanted to know like why was this a problem with me" (Jayden). More specifically, walking away from this meeting Jayden

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wondered why she still had a problem with the racial experiences in her past.

Clearly the meeting of her birth father provided feelings of acceptance on a deep level that I argue provided a form of permission for her to move forward. It is essential that Jayden's linguistic insight to these moments is in retrospect. In other words, the understanding that resulted from these experiences (in the moment) occurred through the affective dimension and it was her art making that allowed a processing of these feelings and provided a semiotic navigation of the liminal state. Jayden claims she did not enter into art expecting any profound changes in her life but when she came back to school after meeting her father she now realizes she immediately began engaging these feelings she had about her father and self. Considering the semiotic lens, Jayden's art portfolio demonstrates a dramatic switch in use of signs which clearly correlates to this experience of meeting her biological family. The next section in this chapter provides visual evidence of this semiotic journey.

Land, Rattray & Vivian (2014) focus on semiotic issues in relationship to the liminal state. Jayden is engaging with deep complex feelings that directly impact on her understanding of her place in her world. It can be argued that Jayden may not have had the linguistic means of forming or articulating thoughts in this liminal state for many years. This is in part due to a lack of support or trust with others to help her formulate the language toward understanding.

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During our second interview, Jayden describes the content of her art work as having to "do with the personal transformation and the personal journey of trying to identify with myself as a bi-racial child" (Jayden). Jayden goes on to state "each piece has a personal message or a personal story that I have experienced. Mostly in the past; there are some recent things. But, each time I do something, it's just kind of like a relief. That's the only reason I do my artwork. I think..."

Taking into account this evolved understanding about her work it is clear that Jayden discovered purpose within the art making process. She clearly states the positive manner in which art making engages the affective dimension. Furthermore, Jayden implies the epistemic value of her art making process in the evolved cognitive engagement with her past experiences and feelings; This is evidenced by her ability to articulate meaning and use linguistic signs. Although tacit, Jayden was able to employ the art making process as a vehicle to navigate through the liminal state and cross thresholds related to identity and self.

The following section presents Jayden's art portfolio that was submitted to IB for assessment. As previously discussed in section 1.4, this art is in Jayden's view the best representation of the focus and quality of her art work during the IB course. The art portfolio provides a visual representation of Jayden's semiotic navigation through liminality.

4.4 Jayden's Art Portfolio

Jayden's artist statement submitted for the IB assessment:

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A little over two years ago, I met my birth father, Robert, for the first time. My nerves stemmed from the fact that he is an African American who was raised in Philadelphia and I am a biracial adoptee who was raised in a white household. The overall experience of meeting Robert was amazing because I can now say that I know where I get my features and mannerisms. The meeting also raised a very serious and unanswered question, am I Black or White?

After my encounter with my father, all I could paint were up close profiles of various African men. I had no explanation for my new fascination until I remembered the stories that my mother made up about a distant tribe in Africa that my birth family belonged to. I realized that I was looking for a connection between myself and my father and once I was able to satisfy that need I could expand my understanding of my other inner-racial issues. My new mission was to get a better idea of why I could never settle on what my personal identity is (racially).

My research focuses on the thought processes I went to in order to accomplish this task. I had to know what I approved and disapproved of for both of my halves. Once I could accept the faults and benefits of both I was able to open up my mind to the types of artworks that I could create. I no longer feel like I have to hold back for fear of offending someone or of touching on an area that is still too sore for me. Everything is out, resulting in my growth and acceptance of who I am. I would not have made any of the necessary connections without my art.

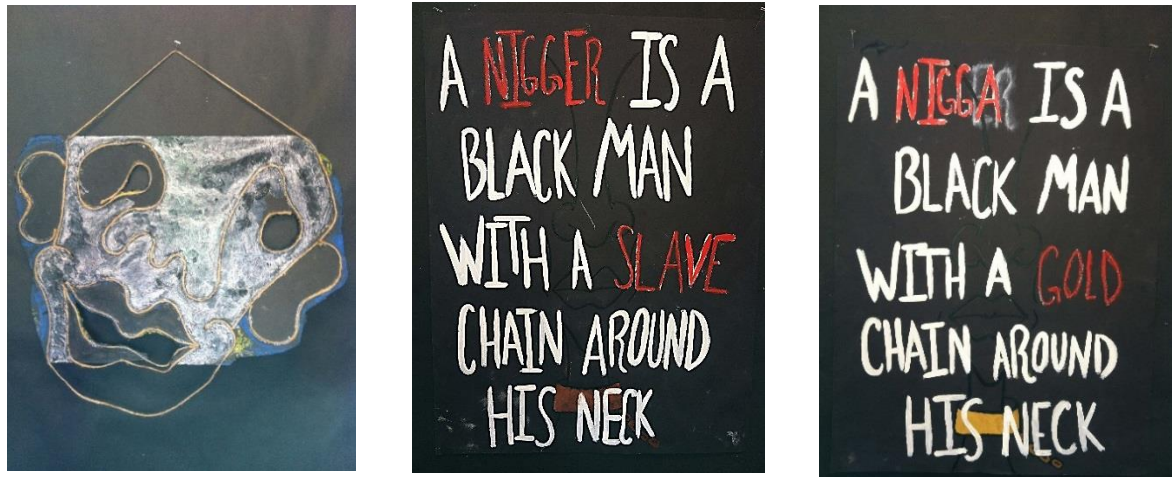


Figure 4.5, 4.6, 4.7

These pieces are entitled, "Black Face" and "Nigg" which is two sides of a single sheet of poster board. There are clear references to racist practices and thinking but they are interwoven with Jayden's sense of experience and feeling. More specifically, blackface (in America) was a form of theatrical makeup and form of entertainment in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. White actors would wear makeup for the appearance of being black. The actors would then act like fools referencing the black race as lacking intelligence and common sense. Jayden, however, reverses the historical roles and covers the face to have the appearance of being white. When taking into account of her Oreo experience, in particular, the piece is clearly expressive of difficult feelings in regard to her appearance and racial composition.

The "Nigga" piece makes use of the most difficult and sensitive of racial slurs. As previously stated the piece is two sided and the words are a quote from a famous rap artist, Tupac Shakur, which he believes explains the difference between the terms nigger and nigga. In America the term nigga is often used among black males as a term

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for friendship, however, many people (including African Americans) find it offensive as well. In this piece, Jayden writes in white the "er" which is the most offensive of the syllables. The piece is highlighting a fine line of offensive language and the racial boundary associated. However, Jayden is also suggesting that although a syllable may have changed the meaning is the same.

These pieces represent a layering of races that lack harmony but rather suggest conflict. In the black face piece Jayden is layering her racial components and re-contextualizing the humiliation and shame into her own sense of experience and feeling. The "Nigg" by using both sides of the board suggests opposite or even a change in time or context. However, the use of similar elements of design suggests a strong similarity, as if to say nothing has changed. The only distinction is the almost transparent white letters that change the important pronunciation. Jayden seems to be addressing the many absurd and hurtful assumptions stated to her throughout her life as they apply to her identity.

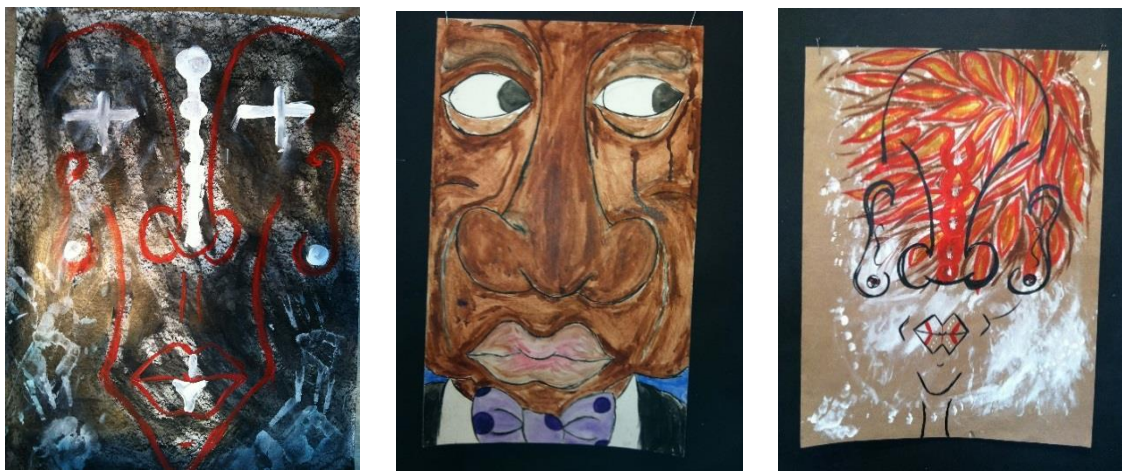


Figure 4.8, 4.9, 4.10

These drawings are titled, "Inner Warrior", "Jazzy Resentment" and "Killer of" and are fitting of the descriptions of the work Jayden says she completed upon the return of meeting her father.

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They make reference to both tribal and urban black males. Jayden states that upon her return she became obsessed with drawing black faces but she did not make an immediate conscious connection between the drawing process and the "profound life experience" she had just undergone. The tribal figures are indicative of being in a process of construction or destruction. The middle figure is clearly located in a context but the others are more ambiguous in their state. The middle figure also has a racial reference to a time, in America, known as the Harlem Renaissance which was a time of explosive creative energy in the African-American community called Harlem; a lot of the work created at that time had a social conscious. Taking these references into account it can be argued these drawings are suggestive of a rethinking or reconfiguration. More specifically, Jayden is undergoing a semiotic processing where the visual representation is a means of understanding or processing the nuance of her father's heritage despite her lack of awareness of her interest in these aspects of him. Jayden is quite explicit in her concern over this aspect of her fathers nuanced identity remained tacit an the art making process facilitated the processing of this complexity.



2
Figure 4.11, 4.12

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These pieces are entitled "Two Faced" and "Better" which are clearly similar to the other drawings of black males but with important distinctions. These two works have clear visual and linguistic references to the face being split or in halves. This references Jayden's own understanding of her racial composition and is indicative of her work becoming expressive of her internal experience as opposed to being about her father or someone else. Furthermore, the drawing on the right, "Better" makes clear references to mixed race in regard to the different colour tones used for skin and the black and gray or lighter eye; Moreover, the darker skin tone is on the side with the lighter eye and the lighter skin tone is on the side of the darker eye. This is suggestive of Jayden's sense of becoming whole or unifying her racial composition within her own understanding. The title of the work is also consistent with these observations. The other drawing in this pair, "Two Faced", is a distorted, even abstracted, black face. The visual element that bisects the drawing has a design reminiscent of tribal and arguably African design. This drawing is suggestive of changing composition in a literal and personal meaning of the word. The bisecting element seems to create a distortion and is an abrupt or powerful element in the drawing. This can be related to the power of meeting and being accepted by her father. This realization by Jayden is a result of analysis of her current work and making the connection of consistent representation of black male portraits after meeting her birth father.

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Figure 4.13, 4.14

"Purity" is the only piece to this point that uses a female subject matter. The piece is made with hemp glued onto paper which leaves the silhouette of a bald (presumably) African female, although she is the white of the paper. In her sketchbook, Jayden writes about hair as an important element of racial identity and is critical of the common use of hair products to straighten hair or alter it in some way to be more acceptable. Jayden references how slaves would attempt to change their hair to appeal to their masters. In conversations with Jayden she would also refer to African tribal women who had shaved heads and how beautiful she finds it. The distinction in the two scenarios in the motivation for manipulating one's hair provides insight to this piece. The figure surrounded by hemp is a reference to more primitive materials and the figure is clearly African and female. It is unusual for Jayden to use female subject matter and the title of "Purity" of this piece is suggestive of a journey inward. It can be argued this piece is a more honest conversation in regard to what is beautiful in regard to her true self.

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The final and by her description most important piece is "Black Transformation". The art work is a video of Jayden applying paint to her face, neck and shoulders and then removing it. The video is two minutes and twenty four seconds in length and is looped in order to play continuously restarting automatically when the video completes. The art work is comprised of still photographs that are put into a video program that sequences through them at the rate of speed Jayden felt was most effective. As previously stated, the video documents access of Jayden applying paint that references African American skin colour and then removing it with a towel. The expression on her face during this process shows strain and relief which was an issue of primary importance to Jayden.

The applying of paint and its removal is clearly an activity of profound expressive value for Jayden. In her words the piece is "obvious transformation of going from myself to black to back to myself, like natural physical transformation. And then there was the personal inner-accepting transformation, I guess...I would say from elementary school, from the moment the girl called me an Oreo, there's been an overall transformation of how I feel about myself. And that's what I tried to show through those pictures, because I don't know if other people can tell, like once, the paint's completely off, like I'm content, I'm really happy (Jayden)."

Jayden visually represents these obvious and more profound transformations in a powerful and emotional way. The visual metaphor of applying dark paint is a consistent choice to her sense of identifying as white as a young child and then discovering and engaging a black identity. Moreover, the facial features and the

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effort it takes to wipe the paint from her face and neck clearly depicts struggle. When one considers the visual representation of identity as well as the depiction of struggle, the piece makes an inner dialogue visual. The psychological and emotional torment experienced by Jayden was most often internal and resulted in questions about identity and self she was not able to verbalize. More importantly, in this art work Jayden relives her painful moments and documents a personal transformation over time but the meaning of her experiences reaches new clarity as she is engaging in this expressive act.

In our interviews I asked Jayden if the piece is a literal moment of transformation or if it documents a transformation over a longer period of time. This is what she said: "I think it was over a period of time. It was definitely points during that where I really felt it again. Like, kind of like a reminder of everything. But, I just, because it's been such a long process and I knew before that point I'd overcome a lot. So, I just kind of wanted to condense it into a single piece...I just wanted to like have an overall thing that could show how I was feeling (Jayden)"

During this period of discussion about the video piece Jayden elaborates that the piece was originally just a test to see what colours would look like on camera and in conversations with me she made important revelations about the work. "And then you asked if I could put into a series of like, like a video and once I saw it in that, I realized this is awesome, like this says everything I've been going through. And, just like a series of like 200 pictures or something... And then like I was thinking about it more, like it some faces I could remember what I was thinking, I guess. Like, the one,

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like the last one where I'm like, my hairs all messed up and I have everything off and I just have like this silly smile, like in that moment, I remember that I was like this is good, like I feel great right now. And it wasn't just because the paint was all gone, yeah a little bit, but I mean it was more of thinking back to, I guess, just like accepting myself, like I just felt awesome (Jayden)."

Jayden continues to speak in the interview that part of being human is to have flaws or aspects we do not like about ourselves and we need to accept ourselves a little more each day. In reference to the piece and the notion of acceptance, Jayden states, "I'm sure in another five years like I'll probably be making another piece and have like another totally aha moment about something. Because, that, I think that one mostly was, not just like skin tone. I think like a big thing about it was skin tone and just like fully accepting myself as a mixed person."

Jayden clearly describes the making of the piece as an intentional visual metaphor for her struggle with racial identity. However, it is also very clear that the making of the art work and viewing it in a video format allowed her to arrive at new meaning of the piece and her sense of self. In other words, Jayden used and constructed visual elements to express a state of being but in doing so she crossed through a threshold that allowed for a linguistic description of her struggles with identity and self.

Chapter 5 Aline: "Im Just Hoping I can Stop Surviving and Start Living"

Chapter 5 Introduction

The young woman that is the focus of the case study in this chapter is named Aline. I met her during her senior year which was her second year back in public school. Prior to this she was institutionalized due to severe psychological issues and self-harm. I was not aware of the full extent of her issues when I first met her and the importance of forming trust in working with Aline. Addressed later in this chapter Aline developed a profound mistrust for adults and institutions based upon her experiences. She discusses the significance of bonding with myself in regard to her expressing openly.

As I developed a relationship with Aline, we were able to spark an expressive interest and direction for her work. Unfortunately, Aline suffered profound trauma as a young child and her struggles with this trauma became a focus for her work. In fact, I argue it was essential for Aline to engage with these feelings and experiences through the visual art making process in order to facilitate her healing.

As Aline explains, she experienced several profound moments of betrayal when she was young, which arguably acted as a catalyst for her psychological pain and practice of self-harm. Aline was abused by her father and his friends, however, when she finally talked about the issues with her mother, she was told to never speak of it. As the chapter discusses, this directive to maintain silence impacted Aline the most, according to her accounts. As a result she

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maintained silence and her expression of the associated trauma manifested in a destructive manner.

As a result of my bonding with Aline, she began to express her feelings and experience in an explicit and unapologetic manner. As outlined in chapter three, I was obliged to issues of ethics and I set up a support system for Aline. More specifically, I alerted the school psychologists and counsellors. Moreover, I contacted her father (with whom she resided) and informed him as to the content of her work. This was more an effort to be proactive in the event that Aline experience emotional turmoil more than concern over any bureaucratic policy.

Aline experienced troublesomeness in regard to self and identity, which relates to her experienced trauma and family dysfunction. Moreover, Aline was instructed and socialised at an early age to not give voice to her feelings and experiences of pain. Therefore, linguistic symbols were not only beyond comprehension, but in her case, they were repressed or perceived as negative. In my experience with Aline she employed the art making process as a means to engage her past experiences and traversed the liminal space as a means of healing. Her inability to use linguistic signs was remedied within the semiotic lens with non-linguistic or visual signs. The case study of Aline represents a young woman that traverses liminality and crosses thresholds that involve an experience of healing and voice achieved within the semiotic domain. As a result, Aline undergoes an ontological shift that results in a new self and identity.

The following artist statement and images were submitted, by Aline, to the IB for assessment. Other images and writing were

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submitted as well and will be utilized in other aspects of this chapter. However I feel it is necessary to immediately provide insight to the profound sense of feeling that coloured Aline's experiences and an underpinning element of her daily living which is best achieved through her expressive work. The piece that is being used to introduce Aline is entitled Institution which is about her experiences in the mental health facility throughout her youth.

Institution

I constructed this cell out of 4'x8' luan sheet and painted it white to mimic the environment of the hospital I was institutionalized in, and wrote on the inner walls to represent the feelings that arose during my stay first, I used black marker and pencil to create mostly uniform, neat phrases. At some point, I started changing my strokes, using darker and heavier marks, making them more distressed. Initially I was confident I would be able to resurface the emotions needed to produce the results I intended in the piece, but once inside my structure it was very difficult to pull forth things I had kept hidden for so long. It wasn't until I sat in the corner, closed my eyes and tried to remember trauma from my past that I finally opened up. I moved to using a paintbrush, then finger-painting and clawing on the walls, which felt more like a true release of the pain and anxiety I experienced. After completing the piece, I realized the build of intensity as the project progressed matched the downward spiral of

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my mental condition the longer I was forced to stay in the hospital.

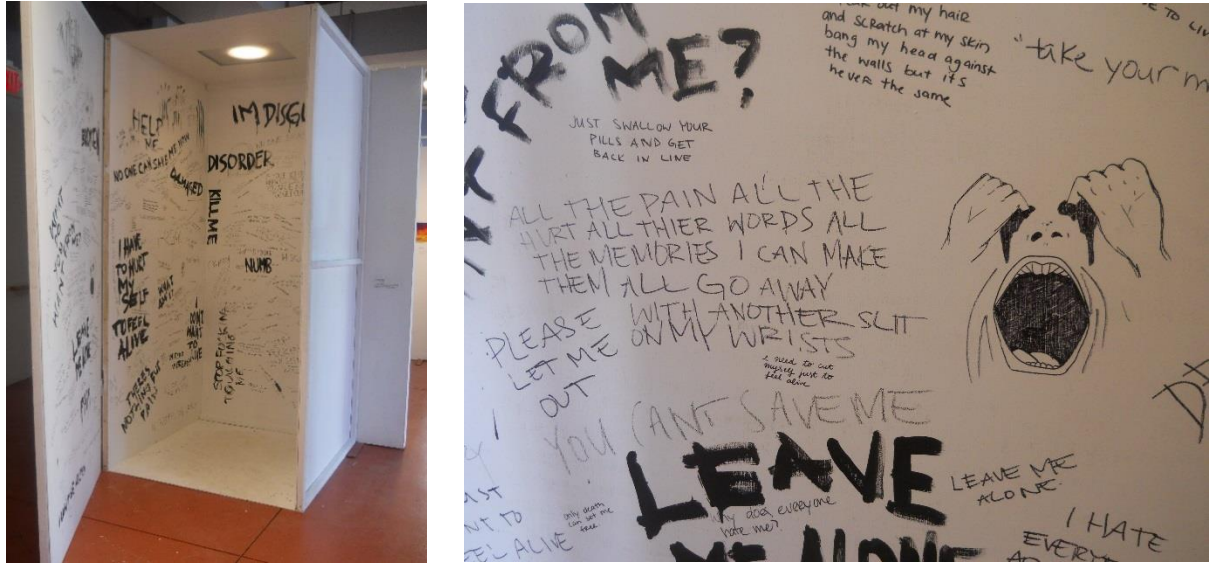


Figure 5.1 and 5.2

Apart from her time in the mental institutions the statement hints at her liminal journey and the use of visual and linguistic signs as a means to reengage the affective dimension associated with past experiences. I argue the re-creation of the cell is more than a memory but is semiotic representation of the imposed psychological and emotional silence by her mother. In other words, Aline represented the cage she had been in since the time of her abuse and when she told her mother about it. Later in this chapter there will be description and discussion of the process that is integral to the creation of this piece that far exceeds the labour of construction. The process is one of a liminal navigation that is achieved in a powerful experience of several days.

5.2 Aline's History, Art Work and Finding of Voice

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The previous section established an introduction of Aline that went beyond the details of her traumatic past and represents her ontological state. The purpose for this approach is the images of the installation provide a deeper insight to her internal experience and some insight as to the psychological and emotional turmoil Aline carries with her. In this section I will provide more detailed description of Aline's past experiences along with some of her art work and writing. The intention of this section is to represent the facilitation of Aline's expressive voice through linguistic and visual signs. The previous section introduces the significance and lasting impact that the imposed silence and abuse had on Aline, which I described as a lack of voice. As Aline began to trust me and engage in art making she created powerful visual representations that facilitated her engagement with the affective elements of her liminal state.

"I first started self-harming around like, sixth grade. But I remember like, I started cutting in eighth grade. And it was just, I became like, obsessed with hurting myself (Aline)." Aline describes herself as not having family or friends and she describes her act of cutting as "part of me, it was the only thing that kept me on this earth (Aline)". When one considers this statement more deeply, Aline has developed a cyclical relationship with self-harm. It can be argued that due to a lack of words there is a reliance on a familiar or satisfying action to address the feelings integral to the liminal state (Land, 2014). More specifically, the cyclical relationship with cutting refers to what Land (2014) states in terms of individuals relying on ineffective behaviours to relieve the

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discomfort of the liminal state. In other words, the lasting affective impact of Aline's past trauma has kept her in a liminal state for many years and the act of cutting was her only approach to relieving the pain and torment she continually experiences. According to Land (2014) individuals can continually employ behaviours or actions (in Aline's case cutting) despite the fact they are ineffective.

In ninth grade Aline was hospitalized due to accidentally cutting too deep and hitting a vein and was admitted to the psych ward. She states that she was hospitalized three more times in that same year and the hospitalizations continued the following year for suicidal thoughts and depression. Aline describes being heavily medicated "to the point where like, I didn't, if I wasn't sad, I just didn't have emotions. I was completely numb. It made me feel like a robot." Aline would frequently express an extreme distaste and lack of trust with the mental health institution and associated professionals. In her mind the professionals were a form of drug pusher and did not possess a genuine concern for her or her well-being. The following excerpts are from Aline's sketchbook and they provide insight to her experiences and feelings in regard to her hospitalization.

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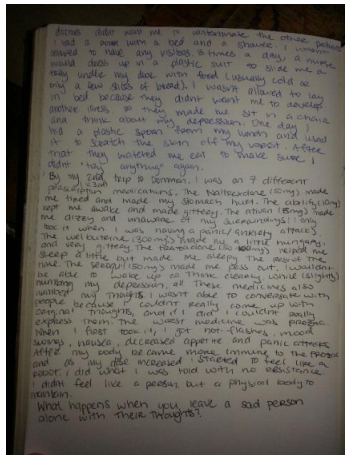


Figure 5.3

Transcribed text; doctors didn't want me to contaminate the other patients. I had a room with a bed and a shower. I wasn't allowed any visitors. 3 times a day a nurse would dress up in a plastic suit and slide a tray under my door of food (usually cold or three slices of bread). I wasn't allowed to lay in bed because they didn't want me to develop another illness, so they made me sit in a chair and think about my depression. One day I hid a plastic spoon from my lunch and used it to scratch the skin off my wrist. After that they watched me eat to make sure I didn't "try anything" again. By my second trip to the mental hospital. I was on 7 different kinds of prescription medications. The naltrexone made me tired and my stomach hurt. The ability kept me awake and jittery. The Ativan made me dizzy and unaware of my surroundings (I only took it when I was having anxiety/panic attacks). The Wellbutrin made me a little Hungry and very jittery. The trazadone made me sleep a little but it made me sleepy the rest of the time. The Seroquel made me pass out. I wouldn't be able to wake up or think clearly. While slightly numbing my depression these medications also numbed my thoughts I wasn't really able to converse ate with people because I couldn't really come up with original thoughts and if I did I couldn't really express them. The worst medicine was Prozac. When I first took it I got hot flashes, mood swings and nausea, decreased appetite and panic attacks. After my body became more immune to the Prozac and my dose increased I started to feel like a robot. I did what I was told with no resistance. I didn't feel like a person but a physical body to maintain. What happens when you leave a sad person alone with their thoughts?

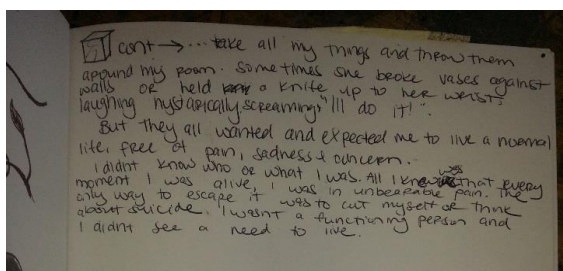


Figure 5.4

Transcribed Text: take all my things and throw them around the room. Sometimes she broke vases against walls or held a knife up to her wrist laughing hysterically screaming "I'll do it". But they all wanted and expected me to live a normal life, free of pain, sadness & concern. I didn't know who or what I was. All I knew was that every moment I was alive, I was in unbearable pain. The only way to escape it was to cut myself or think about suicide. I wasn't a functioning person and I didn't see a need to live.

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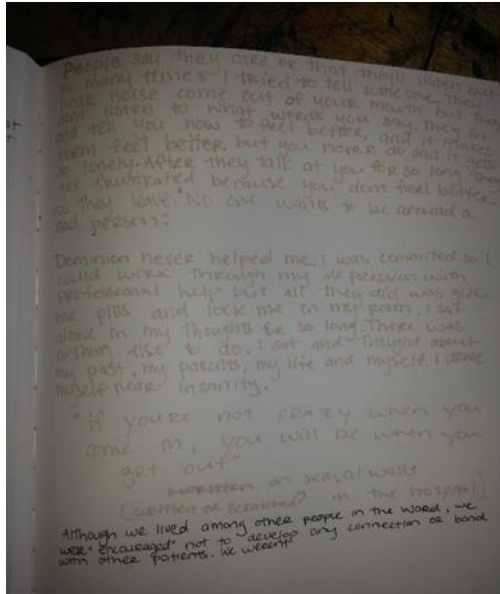


Figure 5.5

Transcribed text: People say they care or that they'll listen but so many times I tried to tell someone. They hear noise come out of your mouth but they don't listen to what words you say. They sit and tell you how to feel better and it makes them feel better but you never do and it gets so lonely. After they talk at you for so long they get frustrated because you don't feel better so they leave. "No one wants to be around a sad person: Dominion never helped me I was committed so I could work through my depression with professional help but all they did was give me pills and lock me in my room.

I sat alone in my thoughts for so long. There was nothing else to do. I

sat and thought about my parents, my life and myself. I drove myself near insanity. "If your not crazy when you come in you will be when you get out". (on several walls written or scratched in the hospital). Although we lived among other people in the ward, we were encouraged not to make any connection or bond with other patients.

These excerpts from Aline's sketchbook suggest a hopeless and even cynical perception of the hospital as a place of incarceration rather than a place of healing. It can be argued that due to the profound impact upon the affective dimension that Aline was simply incapable of entering or even comprehending a construct of healing. Moreover, in her mind it was a battle of an institution trying to forcibly make her "live a normal life free from pain, concern or sadness" and her natural impulse to self-harm or indulge suicidal thoughts which was her only coping mechanism for addressing her turmoil.



Figure 5.6

Figure 5.6 is a graphite drawing Aline submitted as part of her IB art portfolio and was part of her sketchbook. The image of self-harm and cutting is the obvious topic but there are several contrasts that suggest the image is not just an illustration of self-harm but of the medicated state she discusses in her writings and the experience of the hospital itself. More specifically, she presents herself in the hospital clothes she describes and there is a sense of sterility to the implied environment. More importantly, there is a stark contrast between the extremely violent plunging of the knife into her wrist and the somewhat expressionless face that is being manipulated by puppet strings. The pulling of the puppet strings forces a smile upon the figure's face as the corners of her

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mouth and her eyes are being forcibly held open. This is consistent with her description of the medicated state where she is "robotic" and incapable of feeling unless it is pain or sadness. The female in the drawing has an almost vacant but crazed stare with signs of humanity as indicated by the tear and arguably the act of cutting itself. In other words, Aline is representing the "robotic" state she explicitly attributes to the medications she was taking but it also suggests the act of self-harm is also "robotic". More specifically, the drawing suggests the knife is plunged deep into the wrist without hesitation or fear on the part of the young woman in the drawing. When considering Aline's description of herself, her only sense of feeling was sadness and pain. When not medicated, the act of cutting is her natural or automatic response.

Implicit to Aline's experience with the hospitals is an obvious sense of hopelessness but more importantly a lack of voice. She consistently references the isolation and lack of communication in a literal sense. Another form of isolation and feeling voiceless is not being heard or understood in therapy sessions, more specifically, being talked at or told how to behave. Aline interpreted these as disingenuous concern or selfish attempts for others to feel better about Aline. Furthermore the drugs, by her own admission, dulled some of the depressive feelings but issues were not addressed only treated as a symptom. The drug treatments also further isolated Aline due to her lack of clear thoughts due to being in compromised states.

In Aline's junior year, her parents divorced which she describes as one of the best things that happened in her life. As a

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result her mother moved away and Aline felt her life had started improving at that point. "It's just once my mother left like, it felt like this huge blanket had been lifted (Aline)." Aline further explains that she had to drop her mother off in Alabama, which is where her mother lives to this day. Aline chose to live apart from her mother and resides with her father despite the past history of abuse. When Aline returned home she remembers stepping into her bedroom and "it was just like, there was something different, I'm not sure. But it just seems like everything was so much better (Aline)". I asked Aline if she had been hospitalized since that day and she responded that she has not. It is important to highlight that Aline at this point in her life is voluntarily living with her father, who was "inappropriate with her at times (Aline)". Yet the absence of her mother is a huge relief and improvement to her life. According to Aline, her mother imposed the emotional weight upon Aline, which she describes as carrying the emotional weight of two people. Once Aline returned from Alabama she "didn't have to carry her burdens. I didn't have to care for her (Aline)".

Both of Aline's parents committed a profound betrayal in the perspective of Aline, in regard to the abuse as well as the imposed silence. According to Cook, Spinazzola, Ford, Lanktree, Blaustine, Cloitre & Van Der Kolk, (2005, p.392) "early caregiving relationships provide the relational context in which children develop the earliest psychological representations of self, other, and self in relation to others. These working models form the foundation of a child's developmental competencies, including tolerance to distress, curiosity, sense of agency, and communication. When the child-caregiver relationship is the source

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of trauma, the attachment relationship is severely compromised."

Implicit to Cook et al (2005), there is theoretical evidence of how the traumatic experiences began to impact Aline's sense of self and ability to connect and form relationships with others. As a consequence, lacking an ability to express and communicate about her troublesome feelings and impulses for self-harm.

When I turned off the camera, for this interview session, Aline stated that the school psychologist expressed a deep concern over the lack of adult and parent connections in her life. Aline stated that she is realizing how upset she is over not having parents. "It makes me very sad to not have parents. I don't love my mother. I don't love my father. I don't think I'm capable of loving myself. I don't know what love is really (Aline)". I responded by saying well you made a big start by connecting to several adults, myself, the other art teacher and your therapist. Aline smiles and says she is happy. She concluded by saying with a soulful look, "I'm just hoping I can stop surviving and start living, there's a big difference you know (Aline)."



Figures 5.7, 5.8, 5.9

These images are film stills from a video that Aline produced for her portfolio and prior to her main installation work, introduced formerly. I believe the video effectively represents the impact of her childhood experiences in both trite and more subtle

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ways. The video consists of a wreath of flowers, made by Aline, in the shape of a peace symbol. The figure in the video is Aline's father. He squirts lighter fluid on to the wreath and then ignites it with a match. The video lasts the length of time it takes for the wreath to completely burn to ash. It is significant that Aline uses her father in the video and makes the film at her house since both are closely involved in her past abuse. The burning of the wreath made of flowers and in the shape of a peace sign is a clear visual representation of Aline's destroyed innocence. Moreover, it is the father that squirts the fuel and ignites the flames that begins the destruction and her innocence being lost. Not just in the sexual context but the deep betrayal experienced by Aline and the consequence in her own words of not being able to love.

It is worth considering the visual element of letting the flames burn out and extinguish on their own. The logical visual interpretation of the flames burning out is a form of destruction and loss that can never be recovered. In addition, the flames burn for a period of time while emphasising the shape of the peace symbol which suggests a lasting turmoil and pain. I argue the burning is a representation of traumatic events of Aline's past continued to burn in her psyche and affective aspects of self. However, the flames do burn out and there is nothing left. In one sense this can be understood as the emptiness that Aline feels towards herself and her family. Another interpretation of the flames being burnt out is a lessening of power of the past events over Aline. More specifically, as Aline engages these experiences she is extinguishing the power they have over her. Aline's art making

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process and writing about her experiences has provided voice and a means to engage the power of the affective dimension. The art work that Aline has made thus far is, in my experience, extremely brave and bold and the use of her father in the video was significant. She could easily have chosen a model that has less complex associations to the events about which she was expressing (ie. a male friend instead of her father). However, the use of her father in the video enhances the expressive power of the work and is indicative of commitment to an expressive representation which indicates the presence of her voice in the work. In other words, the making of the film had clear affective elements that are inextricable from her worst moments in her life. But Aline chose to use visual elements that represented the truth of her experience as effectively as she could no matter what discomfort was involved in the making of the art work. These decisions were clearly hers to make and are suggestive of a young woman that is finding a means to offer voice through semiotic visual signs. As her portfolio evolves Aline continually engages the art making process as a means of giving voice to her experiences and act as a semiotic navigation of liminality associated with aspects of self and healing.

5.3 Aline and the Liminal State

This chapter has established an important relationship between the affective elements of Aline's experiences and aspects of voice as a means to engage and make meaning out of these experiences. I argue that Aline was (and may still remain) in a liminal state due to an inability to give voice to profound affective elements associated with her trauma. Meyer and Land (2005) establish the

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essential point that threshold crossing would remain a conceptual issue of cognitive organisation or perspective if it were not for the element of troublesome knowledge. As argued by Rattray (2016), the crossing of thresholds and the liminal state clearly holds complex emotional components as does the associated transformation to individuals. Aline is struggling with more than acknowledging the reality of her past abuse and is struggling more with a means to engage the emotional components and process them for the sake of healing which in her case is a profound ontological shift.

Meyer and Land (2006) clarify that individual learners experience differing levels of troublesomeness with different threshold concepts and, by extension, their willingness to engage them will also fluctuate. Rattray (2016) considers different psychological constructs of hope, optimism, emotional security and resilience particularly as they pertain to psychological capital (Luthans and Youssef, 2004; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) as a means of understanding these individual differences to engage differing levels of troublesomeness.

The case of Aline clearly demonstrates that the construct of troublesome knowledge involves the affective dimension. According to Aline, her willingness to survive and her coping mechanism of self-harm was her sole source of agency. The issue being highlighted is again found within the art therapy literature. More specifically, Harnden, Rosales & Greenfield (2004) argue that art making is a means in which depressed persons can release aggression without having to engage in oral communication. Furthermore, Waller (2006, p. 281) states, "that art made in the safe confines of the art therapy room may enable a child to explore and express feelings that

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cannot easily be put into words. Instead of acting out difficult feelings the child puts these into the object. This can then be shared with the therapist. The art can act as a 'container' for powerful emotions, and can be a means of communication between child and art therapist." I argue that the art making process functioned in a similar way for Aline in that she was able to give voice to complex affective elements through the use of visual signs. This is particularly relevant for Aline due to her inability to use linguistic signs due in part to the power of the associated feelings and the negative impact of her mother's command to never speak about her trauma. In short, Aline lacked a vehicle or means for moving beyond her "robotic" behaviours of cutting and self-harm which Land (2014) describes as a dependence upon familiar courses of action despite evidence of their futility.

The argument being made here is the role of visual art making as a semiotic navigation of the liminal space. This chapter has established that Aline had an inability to form linguistic signs as a means to engage her troublesome experiences and as a result Aline relied upon cutting as a means of engaging her feelings. A relevant example is from a conversation earlier in the year, during which Aline had started to cry. When I asked if we needed to stop, she said no it was a good thing. "When I was younger, I got into trouble for like expressing feelings kind of, or like expressing concern with my situation, so I just didn't. And then, I guess, when you're sad all the time crying just like doesn't matter. And, I know when I was cutting, it was like a replacement. I know biologically, when we cry we release, well, it's like to release emotions. But, I kind of replaced that with cutting myself and I just felt numb. I didn't, I

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just couldn't cry. It wasn't like that I wasn't sad, it was like my sadness was so deep that I just couldn't bring forth tears. And then going back over really emotional things earlier with the other interview, I started, or I started crying and it felt really good, because there's a lot of things, you know, bottled inside. And then it was released without cutting myself. That was really powerful (Aline)."

Aline is clearly describing a liminal state that is drenched with an affective element and becomes overwhelming. Her description of being scorned for "expressing feeling or concern" arguably magnifies the overwhelming power of these feelings as her ability to engage them had been impeded. In other words, the liminal tunnel (Rattray, 2016; Vivian, 2012) is arguably deeper and darker for some and the tools employed for its navigation may reside only within oneself; despite the myriad of resources presented. This highlights issues of boundary crossing and the discursive nature of threshold crossing. As Aline began to engage in the art making process she was able to give voice to her experiences and their powerful affective elements. I argue that the ability to give voice through her visual signs empowered her art making to act as a semiotic vehicle and navigate her liminal experience. The previous example of Aline forming tears is significant evidence of her beginning to process and make meaning from her experiences which suggests an ability for ontological shifts or transformation. The next section will address this aspect of her art making process and threshold crossing.

5.4 Institution and Healing

As discussed in the former section, a holistic introduction of Aline was best served by the use of some of her artwork. More specifically the graphite drawing and the video stills were submitted to IB as part of Aline's art portfolio and indicate her giving voice to her experiences and liminal experience. However, the piece (presented in the opening paragraphs) accompanied by the artist statement was the focus of Aline's expressive work for most of her year.

There are primary reasons for the length of time involved with this installation. The first was the conceptual component of the piece which was to relive or arguably re-experience her feelings while in an isolation cell in the mental hospital. This conceptual component involved aspects of design and construction of an isolation cell but also the more complex aspects of conveying and representing these experiences in a compelling manner. Aline and I arrived at the decision of involving the performative element to the piece which required a great deal of conceptual structure but can be improvised in the creative moment. In other words time was spent considering the intention of the piece, as well as, how the performative element would be executed and presented as an artwork. More specifically, the performative element of the artwork was the action of Aline enclosing herself inside the room and engaging in the writing and marking process. As the teacher (with a lot of experience creating performance pieces for my own expressive work) I expose the students to the emotional and conceptual depths of performance art. One rationale for this is performance art often devolves into a form of bad theatre or a form of mental masturbation

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(although literal masturbation in some cases i.e., Vito Acconci). The point being performance art involves an extreme commitment to an expressive activity that the artist finds meaningful and expressive of respective concepts. This commitment to an expressive activity often challenges conventional thought (of the viewer) and can place absurd physical, emotional or psychological challenges upon the artist performing the work.

Therefore the primary questions students need to consider when engaging with performance art are: Should I do something in front of an audience? Should I present visual documentation of myself doing something (photo, video, etc.) should I leave the evidence of something I did? Obviously, Aline arrived at the latter. Once this primary determination is internalised, the rest of the presentation of the piece becomes a matter of understanding the attitude and implicit logic for the piece. The affective dimension is part of all performance work as the artist must be prepared to commit without hesitation to the conceptual and visual structure put in place. Obviously, the performance element of the piece directly involves the affective dimension in regard to Aline's use of visual art to engage her experiences.



Figure 5.10

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"Institution" is the final piece and the primary focus of Aline during her year in IB art. "I wanted to mimic my experience in a mental institution... the original plan was to construct the sort of cells that I'd be enclosed in. Some that make the feeling of being trapped inside the hospital...After painting it white, and constructing, putting the cell together, I enclosed myself inside and proceeded to write on the walls thoughts I had while I was in the hospital. Things the doctors, nurses, my parents, other students and kids I knew had said to me. Everything I had felt, I just kind of tried to express on the wall."

In Aline's case the commitment to her performance involved a great deal of courage and vulnerability. It also required an adherence to ethical principles on my part (as an educator). Obviously, the piece involves much more than writing and sketching things she remembers on the wall. In the context of art criticism the art work would be considered a failure if the viewer's experience of the piece remained limited to reading written memories on the wall. In reality the piece transcended this state and involved the reopening of a wound and a reliving of feelings and experiences that are profoundly painful. In my view I held an ethical obligation to ensure the physical and emotional safety of Aline in the process of her performance. This ethical concern intertwined with some of the practical structures used in executing the piece, as well. After the construction and painting of the structure, Aline and I sat in the exhibition space each evening afterschool for four days, from approximately 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm each night. During this time period Aline would enclose herself inside the structure while I sat in close proximity. I would do

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verbal checks at random intervals to ensure her well-being. At the end of the sessions I waited with Aline until she was picked up to be driven home and would gauge her state of mind as best as possible. It is important to note that chapter three addresses other steps taken, in the course of the study, such as parent awareness of the art work being made, in order to meet ethical obligations to the student's safety. Aline working in multiple sessions was also a necessary structure as she attempted to consciously enter or acknowledge the liminal tunnel by intentionally engaging her most painful experiences, giving them visual form and literal representation. As the week went on, the writing and mark making changed radically from being controlled and limited to writing to much more expressive and involving scratches, drawings and hand prints. As I sat outside the structure I often saw it shift and heard noises as the intensity of her physical interaction in the space amplified.

As Aline said: "It was very hard to bring up a lot of the things from my past. Being in the institution in general was a very horrible experience. It was really painful to remember. Not to mention all of the things that had put me in there in the first place. But it was...After kind of pulling out all of the painful experiences and forcing myself to go through that again. When I finally finished, it was so relieving to express some of these things that I've never been able to share". I asked Aline if this is literally the first time she actually articulated some of these thoughts and feelings. "Uh Huh" (Aline).

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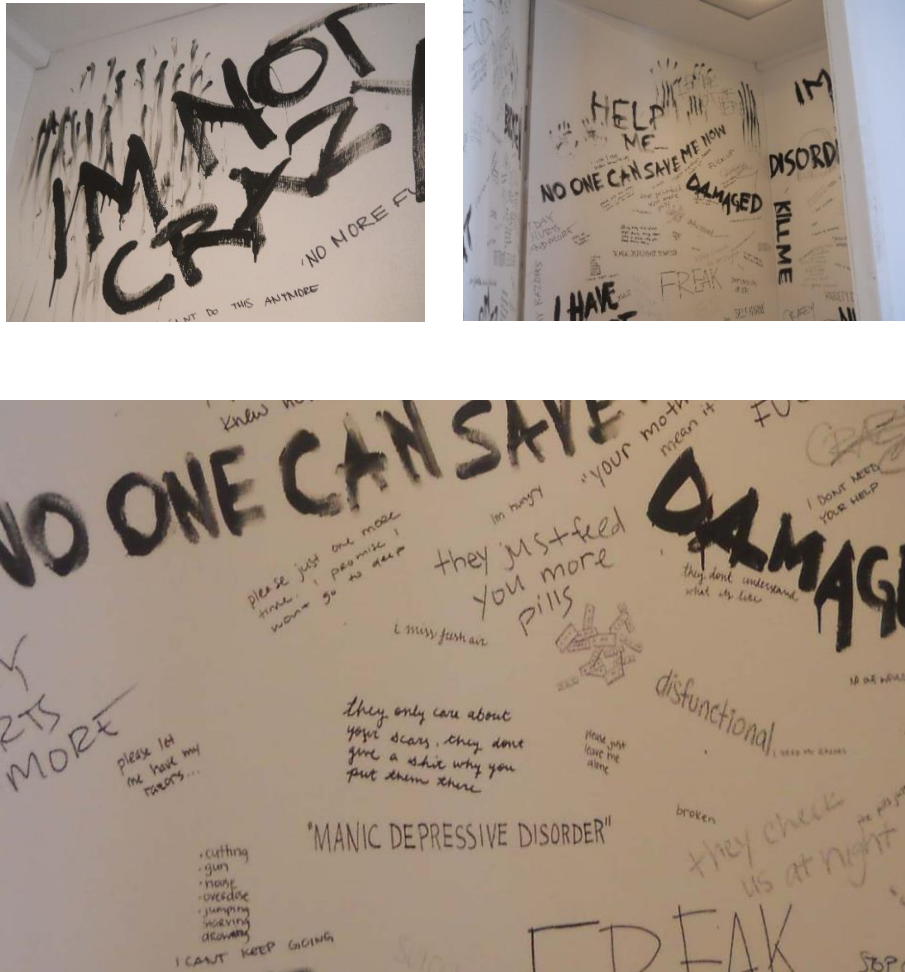


Figure 5.11, 5.12, 5.13

In the interview Aline goes on to describe the role of the visual art making process in her life over the past year. Aline states that making the art work combined with her mother's participation in a therapy programme has allowed her to understand just how deeply her past had impacted her. Aline was not specific as to the nature or type of therapy programme her mother had been attending and she did not bring it up any more than this brief statement. This makes sense in the context of our interviews which began to focus more on her art making process and less on family relationships and therapy.

"In my artwork, I've noticed that like, a couple of my pieces are kind of graphic, I guess, and I feel like that's a lot of

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repressed anger that I'm feeling, or repressed sadness that I like to pretend is not there. But as I create the artwork, you know, if it's like graphic in nature, it's kind of hard to ignore that repressed, those repressed feelings. And, I guess, just taking an image out of your head and then actually creating it, puts things in a different perspective and it makes you look at what you're thinking in a different way (Aline)". Implicit to this quote is an element of self-dialogue that is semiotic in nature and provokes Aline to reflect upon the meaning of her experiences. The visual signs that represent the affective dimension associated with her past are given voice and become accessible to her in a manner that is safe and perceptible. In other words, the art making process acts as a vehicle for the navigation of her liminality because her emotions that were previously overpowering are now able to be engaged through the semiotic discourse. As a result Aline talks about a new perspective and is even capable of using linguistic signs in describing her experiences and feelings about them.

"It's really hard for me to communicate how I feel (Aline)". She elaborated on this by saying that given the choice of speaking directly to a person or using artwork she would choose to use her art work. "I mean, with words, you can say anything and people they can listen, but that doesn't mean they're going to hear you. But with art work you can show someone and images are very powerful, like when you look at something, chances are somewhere in your memory, it's going to be there for the rest of your life. And there's so many things you can say with an image that you can't say with words, that you can't describe with words (Aline)". Aline alludes to her art making as it relates to self-explanation theory

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in her conscious decision to engage ideas that allow her understanding to "kind of expand and grow, or become more in-depth". "It's usually a conscious decision but on a few pieces, it was kind of I did it and then I stepped back and I realised like it had a deeper meaning than I thought (Aline)."

The conversation then turned to changes she sees in herself since the start of this journey and her art making experience. The major changes Aline acknowledges in herself is that she is more positive and a lot stronger than she has ever been. Although she acknowledges that there is still work to be done in her healing she has also formed a trusting relationship with three adults; myself, another art teacher and her therapist. As a consequence, she finds value in communication and she is honest with her therapist and knows how to ask for help when she feels at breaking points. As she said "I feel very capable of surviving". I asked Aline if she has hope. Aline answered that she is hopeful but feelings are tricky. She explained that the day her mother left she stopped taking her medicine and she believes that feeling negative and positive emotions is a good thing. The implication points to the impact of her mother upon her ability to engage and process emotions. Moreover, Aline is indicating an ontological shift from being subject to her emotions to being capable or willing to experience them.

The childhood repression of expressing feeling and viewpoints had a profound impact upon Aline and her ability to navigate the liminal tunnel. This is clearly evident in her discussions and understanding of her emotional states. This is especially evident

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when Aline is discussing her art making process and her understanding of her ability to express her current emotional states. Obviously the sexual trauma is an egregious and immoral act but her forced repression of feelings profoundly debilitated her ability to move forward. When Aline discusses her past events or her mother or father she is less articulate. While once again I do not attempt to make causal arguments, clearly Aline has undergone many different treatments and experiences that clearly have facilitated her healing in different ways. But she places clear value on the power of making and experiencing image and the inherent power of expressing the self as means of understanding the self, more deeply.

There is clear significance attached to her art work "Institution" and the experience of its public exhibition. Aline was able to achieve an expressive commitment in representing her most horrible experiences with the knowledge that others would interact with the finished piece. As previously stated, Aline was initially nervous about people seeing her work but found it empowering as the evening unfolded and after it was over. The experience of giving voice that was experienced by others in an authentic manner provided a form of healing for Aline. The acceptance of self that had been disrupted by horrific events found some ability to be whole.

In this case study, Aline clearly struggles with the trauma of the past and the instructions from her mother to maintain silence, no matter the pain. As a result, she became self-destructive and engaged in self-harm; her sense of self was intertwined with the pain as well as the institutions and attempts at self-harm or suicide. The trust formed with myself and the more enlightened

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conceptualisation of-art as non-linguistic knowledge provided a semiotic means toward the navigation of liminality, transformation and threshold crossing. In chapter two, I discuss the work of Reynolds & Lim (2007) and the use of art for women to engage and reconcile the emotional trauma associated with cancer. Reynold & Lim (2007) also discuss the observation of women finding purpose in their lives. Furthermore, the art therapy literature claim the need for individuals to generate symbols associated with the liminal state and troublesomeness in a reflexive and symbolic way (Sibbet & Thompson, 2007; Turner, 1995). In other words, Aline, was able to benefit from the learning environment to generate art informed by a semiotic lens. I argue this semiotic navigation of the liminal space involved making overpowering emotions accessible and facilitate an ontological shift.

Chapter 6: Rene: A Conversation with my Subconscious

6.1 Introduction

The individual that is the focus of this third and final case study is named Rene. I had worked with Rene for several years before she made a conscious transition in the nature of her art work. The interviews with Rene revealed that she had come to learn in various art courses with me, the dialogic and communicative element of visual art. Rene soon understood that this dialogic element is both expressive to others as well as introspective and reflective. This learning empowered her ability to begin navigation of the liminal space and engage with troublesome knowledge.

Rene suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her father when she was younger. As a result, she carried the weight of complex emotions that impacted her sense of self and self-worth. More specifically, Rene discusses the internal desire to be accepting of her past experiences and the reality she was a victim in regard to the abuse. However, Rene experienced feelings of guilt and shame as a result of the abuse she suffered. Therefore, the threshold that is pertinent to Rene is relevant to identity that consists of an acceptance of self and healing.

The chapter on Rene, provides little or no details of the abuse that she suffered but focuses entirely on its continual and lasting impact upon the cognitive and affective dimensions of accepting the self. Rene also discusses the inability to form linguistic signs primarily due to inextricable feelings of pain and shame with any words attempted to be communicated. At times this inability to form linguistic signs is less associated to not having the words but

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literally an inability to speak them due to the aforementioned affective element. Therefore, Rene provides an interesting and powerful example of a young woman that came to understand the unique ability of visual art to communicate complex feelings and thoughts through non-linguistic or visual signs. As a consequence, Rene has been able to navigate the liminal space and arguably cross thresholds involving identity and understanding of self.

6.2 Rene's Portfolio

Rene does not describe much detail of the trauma of her past. Instead, she concentrates primarily on how she utilizes the art making process to overcome her lingering struggles with her experiences. As she said: "Well when I was a kid, my parents got divorced, so every once in a while I was required to visit my dad and he was a very domineering person. I had problems and it was discovered that I was actually being abused. It was addressed. I went to court, but it continued to happen for several years. And what my art is really about is just about my feelings and the struggle with really being ok with what happened and understanding it wasn't my fault. There wasn't anything I could do with it. And just dealing with the aftermath of what happened." Implicit to this statement are issues of liminality and the affective element resulting in a struggle to accept the self, due to the weight of complex emotions. The following is the artist statement that Rene submitted to IB as an explanation for the underpinning ideas of her submitted art portfolio.

"From the beginning, I used my artwork to express the feelings I had that were too difficult to express with words. Things that

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were too hard to speak. These feelings stem from a childhood of abuse. I started with pieces that only hinted at the feelings I kept hidden, but I soon began to explore my emotions more overtly, and it shows in my work. Through my pieces, I share my darkest days with those who view them. I share my feelings of inadequacy, feelings of shame, and the idea of being the victim. But I also share a light through my work. That shining beam of hope that is recovery, being a survivor.

In some of my pieces I share the idea of being proud of myself, even. However, most of it is about more negative feelings. Some of it is simply about mindset. My sculptures reflect that. The hands sculpture shows the idea of reaching out for help, understanding that you are broken and wanting to be fixed. Many people do not get to that second step of fixing the problem. The other sculpture, the door, is about perception and trust. We are never what we first appear to be, but others have to take that first step to open us up to the world. Doors don't simply open themselves.

There is often a contrast in my work, a sort of opposing forces. I first showed this idea in my mural, displaying the negative and the positive sides of one as separate entities. Later, I showed this idea in my photography. In one, I show the contrast between male and female. The other two go as a pair; one of shame and one of pride. This two sidedness shows how I am often conflicted with myself."

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Rene describes her art as "a conversation with my subconscious". In her mind, the nature of the art making process changed from being purely for the release of feeling to having ideas she wished to communicate and express. Rene embraces the dialogic element of the art making process in communicating with others but also as a means of engaging the self. "But after a while, I realized that my art was actually telling me something about myself. So I started looking at it a little further. I knew that some things were sort of similar and there was a common undertone behind it. So what happened is I started to explore that. That's when I found out art is a way that I was expressing myself in ways I didn't feel comfortable expressing before. It's also a way of me trying to point it out to myself even when I don't know it. I know that sounds very weird but it's how it works (Rene)."



Figure 6.1

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This untitled painting (Figure 6.1), by Rene, is an important piece in her development through her years in the art programme. This painting is Rene's first successful attempt at communicating her inner struggles with an external audience. More specifically, during the interviews, Rene had told me that it was easier to answer questions about her past than it is to find the words to say and she made this piece with the intention of provoking me into asking questions. Rene told me that she was confident I would have sensed something in the work and begin to ask her about it. Rene was correct, I had immediate concern as to the meaning of the piece. As we critiqued and discussed the work, she revealed the reality of her past trauma. Therefore, this artwork is a conscious form of dialogue intended to initiate a linguistic exchange with myself about her past. Moreover, it is a conscious use of visual art through a semiotic lens.

The visual elements of the painting present a clear composition of a figure standing and (presumably) waving. There are no clear features that fully define or resolve the figure. In other words, the figure is in flux or a process of taking form. It is also worth noting the figure is greeting the viewer, almost as an invitation or introduction, and when taken into the aforementioned context, it can be argued we are meeting the "real Rene".

Rene explains that she is interested in the implicit personal association of hand and finger print with identity. "The colours- the parts that are coloured and white, they make the outline of myself. This is actually me. And all the different colours represent different emotions, different feelings I have. And everything that is black is something is not part of me, that isn't the individual

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colours. And it's just pushing in. It outlines it because it really just sort of defines me because about one point when I was literally defined by others people's feelings, other people's identities. The only thing that is overtly supposed to be free is these hands that are done in small metallic colours, which you'll see, there's sort of extra white space around them that isn't oppressed by black. Those sort of really define themselves. So it's sort of showing how even though being depressed and defined by other people's ideas and identities, I was still able to be myself in a way (Rene)."

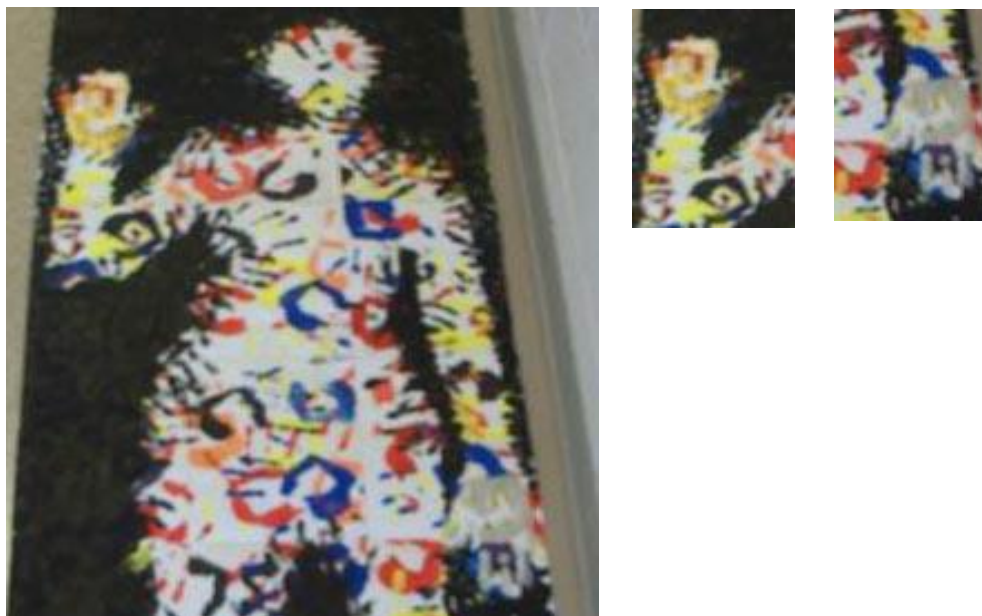


Figure 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4

However, Rene attaches the idea of identity to the hands and the hand print. When one further considers the handprints as a visual element of the painting, issues of intimacy and abuse is also quite explicit. The background is made entirely of black handprints that are layered with an extreme density causing them to appear as a single opaque tone. The background invades the natural outline of the white figure (with fingerprints) which conveys a feeling of either the figure emerging from the background or potentially in danger of being pulled back into its abyss. Furthermore, the colour

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white, which Rene describes the figure with references of purity or virginity. The colourful hand prints can be interpreted as a molesting entity, in that they do not belong to the body. They are invasive and even menacing in some cases, appearing to be grabbing or smacking the figure. This is compounded when one considers the figure is white with coloured handprints on top. The implication is that white is a natural and pure or innocent state of being. I find this representation particularly interesting in its subconscious visual reference to a tunnel or space. Although Rene has no academic awareness of threshold concepts, I find this representation a powerful depiction of the affective experience of the liminal space. The aforementioned quality of the figure being in flux is suggestive of a transformative state which holds significance in the context of the intended communicative element of the work. More specifically, it may be indicative of the willingness to communicate her affective reality.

As previously stated, Rene sees the figure/background relationship as a conflict over identity, and more specifically, as a struggle to resist outside forces and to be self-subscribing. In other words, Rene makes an important distinction between herself as the figure and the other elements of the painting (the colour hand prints and the back ground). As she said: "The only thing that is overtly supposed to be free is these hands, which are done in metallic colours, which as you'll see, there's sort of extra space around them that isn't oppressed by the black." Rene continues by describing these hands as being her own hands, which are the only body part represented in form as the rest of the body is represented as a silhouette. This subtle distinction allows one to interpret

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issues of power and powerlessness within the artwork in regard to the handprints and her use of the hand as an expressive element that holds connotations (Langer, 1942). The relevance of this observation is it suggests a means of Rene articulating the liminal state and a formation of the self or identity.

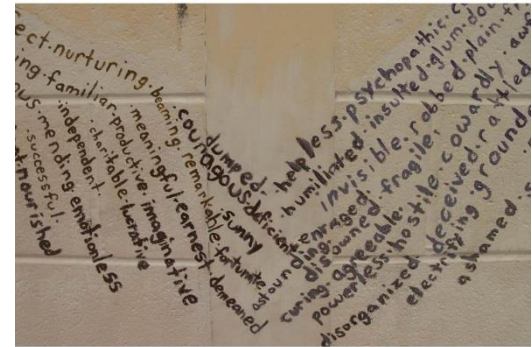


Figure 6.5 and 6.6

Figure 6.5 and 6.6 is a large mural painted in the main hall way of our high school; it is measured as 88" x 72". The mural consists of two female figures facing each other, presumably a form of mirror image of the same individual. There are obvious differences in the females as one is painted in warm, fleshy tones with a happy expression whereas the other figure is painted in cooler blue tones and is seemingly depressed or sad. The more positive figure is gazing upward as part of her laughing gesture and the more depressive figure is gazing downward. The hair for each figure is long but its movement and form is not rendered with tones. Instead the gesture of the hair is filled with words (positive words and negative words in order to match with the respective figure). As

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the gesture of the hair moves toward the centre of the composition the negative and positive words meet but do not blend in a visual way. However, the words do integrate with the opposite side; more specifically, at the bottom some negative words are listed on the positive side and vice versa (Figure 6.6).

According to Rene, "I really tried to show sort of two halves of a person. And how everyone's really sort of put into opposing forces... And so they're like looking at each other because you're always working off of both halves of yourself. The part that you like and the part that you don't like". Rene chose this location for the mural because of a natural division that is part of the architecture that creates a visible but not disruptive separation between the figures. "But I could still paint a mural on here as I wanted. So, really showed how it can have one whole. Again, just like everyone has two sides, side they like, side they don't like. But they're still the same person, still interconnected (Rene)".

The use of literal words and the choice to create this work as a public mural holds importance that need to be considered. As previously discussed, Rene intentionally exploited the dialogic element of visual art as a visual sign to convey powerful feelings she was incapable of expressing in linguistic signs. The previous art work was created at the end of her junior year; this mural was the primary focus of the beginning of her senior year. There are several murals created by students on the school walls and are typically limited to seniors and executed in the spring after exams. However, Rene was quite insistent that she create one and not wait to execute it. Bringing attention to herself is not a quality I had associated with Rene in the past, therefore, I argue the public

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nature of this work holds meaning beyond execution for its own sake.

I argue that Rene was now announcing to the school community this inner dialogue and struggle through visual signs. It is part of the work to be in public and viewed by others on a daily basis.

Moreover Rene assigns literal words to her feelings within this art work, making them available for all viewers. I argue that this public display is another form of Rene constructing her identity and understanding of her sense of self within the school community. She has moved from sharing her experiences with just me (or a select few) to introducing her "self" to the school community as a whole through a semiotic lens.

These first two art works are about communicating or expressing to others her traumatic past experiences and the intertwining affective element. More importantly Rene intentionally used the art process as the vehicle to navigate her liminal experience. This is supported by her conscious use of the art and its presentation to engage others in a semiotic dialogue and the sudden use of linguistic signs when she previously was incapable of employing them.



Figures 6.7 and 6.8

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This sculpture (Figures 6.7 and 6.8) consists of a found object door (an actual door) painted white with a plaster casting of Rene's (actual) hand in place of the door knob. "Well, I started working in sculpture because I felt like I needed to put a piece of me in it (Rene)". It is significant to highlight the choice to literally incorporate an aspect of her body and by her own words "me" in the sculpture. She discusses how this piece is about the idea of becoming more open or presumably emotionally accessible which suggests transformation (Mezirow, 2000). It is worth noting a similarity to the previous painting (Figure 6.1) that represents the figure waving. In this sculpture a cast of Rene's hand is placed where a door knob would traditionally be located. The cast of the hand must be grabbed like a hand shake in order to open the door. This, like waving in the previous piece, is a form of greeting but it can occur in the three dimensional world and one can literally grasp a cast of her hand. Rene explains: "A lot of times you have to have someone ask you to open up. So this door is just sort of like this barrier between what's in my mind, what I'm thinking and the outside world. And the hand is really me reaching out to sort of sitting there waiting for someone to grab it and then open up the door to see what's inside."

The use of a cast of her own hand is an interesting and important element in Rene's liminal journey. In the first piece (Figure 6.1), the symbol or sign of the hand held implicit relevance to issues of power which was supported by the overt reference to abuse. However, in this piece Rene creates a cast of her hand to function as a mechanism for opening a literal door. I argue that within this piece the issues relating to power have changed or

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altered. It is worth making more explicit this piece following the completion of the public mural with which Rene engages the community in a semiotic discourse. The hand in this piece has literal form and physical existence; as well as being extended. The extension of a hand is by tradition a willing and confident act. One grips someone else's hand and Rene stated that the hand is waiting for someone to engage her and ask her to open up. Therefore, the extension of the hand is an invitation on her part.

Rene, as compared to Aline and Jayden, makes the most overt representations of the emotional and psychological act of crossing thresholds. In this piece, the symbol of the door is clearly claimed as an intended meaning of the piece. Rene frames the opening of doors as someone "looking in" with the implication of one accessing her feelings and experiences, which is indicative of the transformative experience (Mezirow, 2000). However, a door swings both directions, which means that Rene is able to walk out of her current space and into a new space.

It is important to think of the door in the context of linguistic signs which have been an integral concern in Rene's liminal journey. More specifically, Rene has used the art work as an intentional means of engaging others in conversation. This, in my case, was a literal conversation. As previously described, Rene created the door piece as an intended concrete representation of a more accessible self to others. However, dialogue is clearly important to Rene and therefore allowing one access to her more true self is a limited understanding of the work and her liminal journey. The accessing of self is clearly through relationships and dialogue and I argue it is not just to allow one to see in but for Rene to

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step out. In other words, the reality of linguistic signs, for Rene, is one of establishing power over the affective element of her liminal state. The dialogic element whether visual or linguistic consistently provides a form of empowerment over her past trauma and an acceptance of self.

Therefore, the symbol of the door and the cast hand are more than coincidence. They are a form of tacit understanding of the liminal state through an affective lens. Moreover, it is the dialogic element of visual and linguistic signs that empower Rene's ability to navigate liminality. The increasing ability, value and representations of linguistic signs is arguably evidence of Rene moving through the liminal space and crossing thresholds. The use of the door and hand are powerful symbols of this journey. Although Rene does not possess academic awareness of threshold theory her affective experience is arguably the most authentic experience with threshold crossing. I argue Rene demonstrates this understanding in her art work.



Figure 6.9

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Figure 6.9 is another sculpture and it consists of two hands. The lower hand that is reaching upward and is coloured with yellow and red paint, represents Rene's hand. She states: "Only one of the hands is mine. The one down here. I purposely did this because this one represents myself and it's sort of reaching out to this other hand". Rene specifically identifies the second hand as female; "And this one's supposed to represent something pure...I tried to go for sort of a feminine feel, especially because a lot of times women are considered to be more caring and nurturing." Rene explains that the lower hand that represents her is coloured in order to represent blood and that it is broken. "It needs nurturing. So it's reaching out to the other hand and really just trying to say 'I want help'". Rene presents the art work as reaching out to another which is obviously an element to her story and the sculpture. However, she acknowledged that the hands could represent a dialogue within the self between her more broken self and a stronger and more pure side.

Photography is a medium Rene began to explore due to a dissatisfaction with sculpture. According to Rene sculpture has "distortions of material" that she felt distracted the viewer from the intention and meaning of the piece. I argue this point of view is worth some discussion because I believe Rene is not articulating what she truly means. According to Rene, photography "really captures- you can really tell who it is". She believes the photographs are meant to capture varied feelings she has about herself in relation to her experiences. In my view, the most important aspect of photography, for Rene, is that it captures her likeness (as she stated in the previous quote). Rene uses her own

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image, in her photographs, so I am not including them in this chapter in order to protect her anonymity. In two of the photographs Rene seems to be in a contemplative state staring at the camera and one photograph is digitally manipulated. The manipulated photograph depicts two images of Rene facing each other touching hands. It is reminiscent of her mural in that it uses two figures that both represent her. The argument I am making is the previous sculptures and painting were visual representations of her shifting ontological state as she began to navigate the affective elements of the liminal state. As I previously discussed, the previous art work demonstrates an evolving shift into three-dimensional form and visual presentation that invited viewers to engage her feelings and experiences. The use of her likeness, captured in photography, is another ontological shift that implies aspects of crossing a threshold of acceptance and healing of self.

More specifically, Rene often discusses feelings of shame in relation to her past and the difficulty this had on her ability to form linguistic signs and discuss her feelings. Therefore it is important to highlight that her work increasingly involved aspects of inviting the viewer to engage her on an intimate and personal level. I argue this effort to consider the viewer was one element of her liminal journey. Furthermore, Rene described her final sculpture (figure 6.9) as a dialogue between her broken and stronger self which I argue is indicative of an acceptance of self. Therefore the use of her photographic likeness is a logical and important continuation of her liminal journey. I argue that in order to use her likeness Rene must have overcome (to some degree)

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her feelings of shame and guilt that had been an affective element to her liminal state for many years. Therefore, I also argue that Rene's original statements about photography removing distortions of material is a misrepresentation of her true meaning. The use of her photographic likeness is another important evolution in her liminal journey that suggests a more holistic representation of her ontological state of self-acceptance.

6.3 Rene and the Navigation of the Liminal Space and Threshold Crossing

This chapter focusing on Rene and her experiences highlights thresholds and associated liminality of self in regard to issues of healing and acceptance. There is a clear and profound intertwining with the affective dimension (Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014; Land, 2014) and I argue there was more initial awareness in regards to the cognitive dimension in the case of Rene (in comparison to Aline and Jayden). In other words, Rene clearly had an understanding of how her past experiences were impacting her with feelings of shame and guilt which resulted in an inability to talk about her past. More importantly, Rene had the cognitive awareness to identify her feelings as well as their origin. I think this is an important distinction from Aline and Jayden in that Rene did not necessarily formulate the cognitive awareness or thoughts as a result of art making. Rather, the affective dimension arguably acted as an obstacle or weight that prevented Rene from articulating thoughts to others as well as an inability to integrate or accept these experiences and reconcile the ongoing troublesomeness. As a

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consequence, this conflict between the affective and cognitive dimensions arguably impacted the internal sense of self.

Troublesomeness that involves conflict of the cognitive and affective dimension, in the context of transformation, is addressed in the thresholds literature. More specifically, Timmermans (2010) points out that some individuals remain in a stuck place while others open up. The implication is that the affective complexity (Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014) impedes the cognitive development as well. Timmermans (2010) further argues that the epistemic potential of individuals may become relevant in reference to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). More specifically, aspects of knowledge construction that individuals can achieve alone as compared to aspects of knowledge construction individuals need assistance. Maturity and individual context are clearly relevant factors in such transformations as well as psychological attributes (Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014); however, the epistemic elements of visual art possess unique qualities in regard to the formation of meaning. As discussed in the previous section, Rene's art work functioned as a means for her to engage others and convey meaning in a manner she felt was safe for her to do so. Furthermore, the evolving portfolio empowered shifts in ontological states that allowed Rene to engage in self-dialogue that resulted in a more holistic understanding and acceptance of self. I argue that the vehicle of visual art empowered Rene to navigate the affective elements of the liminal space as a semiotic vehicle for the making of meaning and dialogue.

When one considers Rene's portfolio and her explanation of the art pieces, she consistently represents the self, as being

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introduced or accessed by the world. When considered in the theoretical context of thirdness (Bhabha, 1990) and socialization, the self is (in part) directly shaped by interactions with others. In Rene's case it can be argued that the truth of her prior experiences and their impact were inaccessible to others and her internal self arguably was less evolved. However, her external identity would be understood and recognized by many.

Rene is explicit in the power of the affective dimension in her experience with liminality. She discusses her inability to form or at least voice linguistic signs due to the overwhelming emotional connotations inherent within them. Rene also presents an individual that is well aligned to the research of Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014) in that she has certain attributes that allow for hope or efficacy. According to the research this likely empowered her ability to move on. It is interesting that she quickly understood visual art in a semiotic theoretical context and consciously employed this understanding as a means to give voice to her struggle. As a result, the visual arts became a vehicle for traversing the liminal state.

6.4 Semiotic Dialogue; Communication, Expression and Voice

In my view, a remarkable aspect to Rene is the intentional use of the dialogic element of the visual art making process. More specifically, the dialogic element is crucial in the navigation of the liminal space, threshold crossing and in the overcoming of the affective barriers. Meyer and Land identify the dialogic element of threshold crossing as a change in language that is indicative of a new understanding of a field and identity in a community of

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practice. In the context of this study and especially in the case of Rene, the dialogic element functions as a semiotic discourse with others. I argue that the visual art making process provided semiotic discourse with others that in turn evolved Rene into understanding of self. In other words, Rene continually used visual art as a semiotic discourse to introduce and form a sense of self within the community. Her art work was a means of holding conversations and processing her trauma despite the overpowering impact of the affective dimension. As Rene continually stated, she knew the words or thoughts she wanted to convey but was incapable of speaking them. The dialogic element expressed through visual signs allow Rene to further evolve her sense of self.

Arguably, Rene more consciously understands the visual arts through a semiotic lens. As previously mentioned, Rene made a conscious decision and effort to entice me to inquire about her past trauma through the use of visual signs. Rene is in somewhat of a contrast to Jayden and Aline in that there is a cognitive awareness of this dialogic element. Whereas Jayden and Aline engaged in a more tacit process at first and awareness evolved as they understood their work with more depth and clarity.

When considered in a succession of work, figure 6.1 (the handprint piece) suggests the origins of forming a self or perhaps a glimpse of a complex threshold of self. More specifically, the art work visually represents a feeling of being in flux and the figure is either emerging from the precipice of a tunnel or is in danger of falling into an abyss. The mural is suggestive of being a part of the world or an entity within it as Rene creates visual signs and uses linguistic signs to engage public viewers in a dialogue.

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Moreover, the door piece suggests physical form and structure that is dimensional and is presented in time and space. When considering the ephemeral quality of the previous piece, the permanence and physicality of this work is an important contrast. The act of making it real suggests a further movement through the liminal space. The viewer is invited to grasp the hand and interact with the work, opening the door if they choose; which is a profound change from the earlier use of the hand in regard to power and abuse. The implication being that Rene is constructing access to the world or a new space and that she has control or power manifest in her invitation to grasp her hand.

Finally, Rene employed photography as a means to represent her literal image without what she called the distortions of material. As previously stated, the photos are not particularly strong art work but they are significant in how she describes the need for a true image of her. In other words, this transition observed through her portfolio is indicative of the formation of a self. The use of the materials and how her ideas were represented and presented to viewers continually involved a dialogic element through the semiotic lens. It was through this dialogue that Rene was capable of navigating the associated liminality of self and arguably cross the complex threshold.

The intuitive ability of Rene to grasp and employ the dialogic aspect of visual art is not only impressive but an essential role in her navigation of the liminal space. In other words, the semiotic conversations with viewers offer an empowerment that is similar to Aline's experience of exhibiting her work in the gallery. An important distinction is that, for Aline, the literal interactions

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and validation from viewers about her work and bravery provided a healing experience. In the case of Rene, the validation is not a direct experience but a form of empowerment. In my view, the act of making the work and having it viewed in public is enough and the empowerment is found in Rene having voice or giving voice to her troublesome past. In this specific context, Rene shares the details of her past but it seems this is kept for relationships she values. Therefore, the experience of presenting her voice in a public manner or giving form and name to her underlying troublesomeness empowers her to accept the self in a manner she had struggled with for a long time.

Chapter 7 Analysis

7.1 Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to draw together themes and issues from the interviews and case studies. Within each of the case studies there is explanation from the young women regarding their respective life experiences and its representation in the visual art work. The case studies suggest the affective elements evolving to cognitive clarity through the semiotic dialogue of the art making process. Analysis and coding of the interviews is intended to provide a transparency and understanding of the conceptual links I make to threshold crossing and the liminal state.

Through a process of segmenting I have conceptualised several classifications in the coding and analysis of the interviews. The intention of this coding is to delve more deeply into the experiences of the young women and their liminal journey. I consider the interrelationship of their experiences and the semiotic navigation in non-linguistic signs. The classifications are, in my mind, effective indicators of threshold crossing or at least a glimpse of thresholds. More specifically, the classifications discussed in this chapter are Art as a means of engaging the affective elements of the liminal space, cognitive dimension and discourse associated with the art making process, as well as, self. Within these larger classifications there are more specific codes offering enhanced insight to the perceptions of the young women as these pertain to the liminal journey and the role of visual art. It is important to note these interviews are a form of reflection by Rene, Jayden and Aline in relation to their art making. Therefore

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it is a retrospective journey where understandings have possibly evolved over time.

As discussed, in chapter three, there is relevance for emotion and values coding as insight to cognitive and affective dimensions in the art making process (Saldana, 2015). More specifically, the case studies presented the art making process as a semiotic vehicle due to the profound impact of the affective elements of the young women's liminal experience and troublesomeness. As previously stated the interviews are a form of reflection upon the art making process of the young women to effectively represent their intrapersonal experience which aspects of their affective experience are inextricable. The following sections introduce and analyse excerpts from interviews with Rene, Aline and Jayden that focus upon the art making process and the affective dimension which emotion and values coding is appropriate.

7.2 Art as a Means of Engaging the Affective Elements of the Liminal Space

There has been clear indication with relevant literature (Land, 2014; Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014; Rattray, 2016), as well as in the presented case studies of Rene, Jayden and Aline as to the inextricable nature of the affective dimension. Therefore, it is important to understand the manner of affective involvement in regard to the liminal journey and, more specifically, the presence of the affective dimension in troublesome knowledge and semiotic navigation of the liminal space. The specified codes highlight different understandings implicit to the young women as to the

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relationship between their art work and engaging these affective dimensions.

The following themes are introduced and discussed as a means to more effectively understand art as a means of engaging the affective elements of the liminal space. The discussion of the themes occurs with an analysis of selected interview excerpts from the presented case studies. The first theme, *Coping, Relief and Therapeutic* explores a more basic understanding and use of the art making process as a means to relieve stress or overwhelming feelings. The second theme, *Movement through the Tunnel*, considers the art making process that is more focused or directly addresses the life experience of the young women. The third theme of *stuck place* addresses the issue of the profound impact of the affective dimension that results in an inability to move through the liminal space.

7.3 Coping, Relief, Therapeutic

These excerpts indicate times when the students employed art as a means to relieve stress or cope with complexities tied to the affective dimension associated with the troublesome knowledge. It is important to make the distinction that the art making process in these more therapeutic roles lacks the understanding of the role of the art making and engaging underpinning issues. Instead, the young women indicate they do not have an awareness of the semiotic aspects of art making and primarily understand art as a release of sorts.

As Rene said: "I just had an idea in my head and I put it down. It made me feel good. It made me feel better. Oftentimes, I would use it when I was angry because I used to have anger

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management problems and art is one of the things that helped me get better at that". "I was using art as a way to cope with certain things in my life" (Rene). "In my artwork, I've noticed that like, well, a couple of my pieces are kind of graphic, I guess, and I feel like that's a lot of like repressed anger that I'm feeling, or repressed sadness that I like to pretend is not there" (Aline). "But I wanted his face to seem angry or just distraught, frustrated and screaming. Because I feel like everyone kind of has an inner warrior. And in today's society, its kind, like the best way to show your stress is to be calm, cool and collected. But sometimes, you just have to yell. And get it all out" (Jayden).

In these excerpts there is a clear reflective element and recognition of an immediacy or urgency in engaging the affective dimension and its lived and felt experience within the young women. It is clear that the art making process provided an effective means to at least engage and provide emotional release for Rene, Aline and Jayden. Rene suggests the idea of coping and a basis of understanding a role or purpose to the art making process but her description is not indicative of more complex understanding of epistemic elements to visual art. The word cope is interesting in her excerpts, as it suggests a dire or extreme state, which is consistent with being in a liminal state. The restless and uncomfortable state in response to the abusive experiences she found troublesome.

Individuals existing in a liminal state experience difficult or uncomfortable feelings which can promote very experimental and productive action (Land, 2014). In one interview Aline mentioned: "I was very upset. I didn't really have a reason. I was just feeling

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extremely overwhelmed, and I just sat down with my sketchbook and basically, like this image come out and it was so clear. Like, it was so easy to draw, to this day, I don't understand how that happened". Aline is referring to the skilfully executed drawing of the young woman plunging a knife into her wrist. Considering this statement in conjunction with the previous statement that suggests a lack of understanding her feelings is an interesting insight. It can be argued that the affective element of the liminal state is powerful and present despite Aline's effort to cognitively disengage. Furthermore, the immediate creation of such a drawing is an intriguing example of the art making as a mechanism for engaging overwhelming affective states.

At certain points the young women's use of art for engagement with the affective dimension was primarily a therapeutic release out of a necessity. More specifically, the young women discussed their difficulty in forming linguistic signs or talking about their feelings due to their complexity and overwhelming nature, therefore, art as a release of feeling was an essential function for a period of time. As Aline said: "In my artwork, it's like, well, sometimes, I'll have a specific person in mind that I'm trying to communicate with. A lot of times, it's just kind of like to everyone, just as a way to say this is what I feel. It's really hard for me to communicate how I feel". Rene states: "At the beginning, art was really just a way to get my feelings out because it was a lot easier than saying the words".

7.4 Movement through the tunnel: Visual Art as Vehicle for Navigation of the Affective Element

Another key theme to emerge is the idea of movement through the liminal space. This links to the idea of passage through the troublesome knowledge and grappling with associated difficulties. The excerpts relevant to this theme suggest evidence that the art making process has assisted epistemic movement or navigation of liminal space toward threshold crossing and transformed understanding. Clearly, this movement through the liminal tunnel is wrought with complex affective elements, inherent to navigation of the liminal space, and can be overpowering to some individuals (Land, 2014). These young women seem to delve deeper into interrelated experience interwoven by the affective elements.

As Rene said: "So I decided to try and resolve things with my mom and stop fighting as much, get along. So by doing that, I removed the reason for making art for that reason. So I had to find another reason. So as you go along and you just get rid of the day to day things, all that's left is the big chunk buried down -under the ground". There is an element of transformation here, in her changing behaviour and resolving things but an important element is her feelings of needing to make art to address deeper and more complex issues. Because Rene on a tacit level knows there is more to her identity than her relationship with her mother and there are core issues relating to thresholds relating to self and identity. As evidenced in her case study, Rene layer by layer engages the more profound and troublesome experiences. This is evidence of navigation of the liminal space and movement into deeper or darker places of

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the liminal tunnel. The vehicle of art making may allow her to feel equipped to navigate these darker aspects or emotionally open or capable (Mezirow, 2000).

The issue of empowerment to engage the darker or more powerful affective dimensions of the liminal journey is highlighted with Jayden and Aline as well. As Jayden said: "I would say I have a better idea of it now than I used to because I was always afraid of offending people in my artwork". "It wasn't like that I wasn't sad, it was like my sadness was so deep that I just couldn't bring forth tears. And, then going back over really emotional things earlier with the other interview, I started, or I started crying and it felt really good, because there's a lot of things, you know, bottled inside. And, then it was released without cutting myself. That was really powerful" (Aline).

The excerpt from Jayden implies empowerment in her liminal journey. There is a sense of purpose or importance that overrides the opinions of others. This suggests an aspect of communities of practice in this is how many artists think about their work and the importance of its creation. The excerpt from Aline is an interesting issue of empowerment although she clearly experiences a release of sadness. Aline is explicit in the depth of the sadness that had been tacit, to an extent. The distinction here from the previous discussion on release is the explicit reference to depth which implies the navigation of liminality; as opposed to the urgency and immediacy inherent to the previous discussion.

The piece "Institution" by Aline and her reflection upon the making of it provides a vivid account of visual art as a vehicle in the navigation of the liminal tunnel. As Aline said: "*It was*

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very hard to bring up a lot of the things from my past. Being in the institution in general was a very horrible experience. It was really painful to remember. Not to mention all of the things that had put me in there in the first place... And I had broke down and started crying inside of the box. And that's really when I started being more expressive. And I brought in paint and used my fingers to paint what I was feeling, and I made calmer. And as I, I guess, drew and painted more expressively, it brought out more feelings"

As addressed in chapter five and the case study of Aline the performative element of her piece "Institution" was a dramatic and profound experience that was in itself a form of reflection through the doing of the art work. One can speculate that the extent of the trauma she suffered required more extreme measures to express. But Aline became increasingly aggressive and emotional and she implies an interrelationship in the remembering, the mark making and the depth of her emotional states. Clearly the art making process with its performative element had an integral role in this engagement and acted as a vehicle for navigation.

7.5 Stuck Place: Troublesome Knowledge

The themes of troublesome knowledge and stuck place are integral to the young women as case studies. As described in chapter three my recognition of these young women as valuable case studies resulted from their use of art work to engage with these experiences and the suggestion of ontological shifts as a result. The affective dimension that is interwoven with the associated experiences had overwhelming power over the young women. In my view, the young women remained in a liminal state for many years in

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part because they did not have a proper vehicle to move forward. The amount of affective element present in their respective liminal experience was clearly enough to deter its navigation (Land, 2014; Land, Rattray, Vivian, 2014).

As Jayden said: *"Then, I think that's when like the mass confusion started. Because I was like but, wait. I'm white, too. But I'm also black. It was like my people doing this to my people. There was just like a huge conflict that I couldn't handle especially at such a young age. That was the first moment where I my African-American side and felt that there was actually some kind of conflict"*

As discussed in chapter four the experience Jayden describes (in this quote) occurred when she was very young but her entire art portfolio focuses on this issue of racial identity. Jayden is describing troublesome knowledge that held an absurdity or conceptual difficulty that became layered with affective elements as she continually encountered racial complexity. Her youth also played a role in the troublesome nature of the knowledge. A relevant question is would this same experience be troublesome if encountered at an older age? However, this also points to the nature of racism and racial identity and some of its complexity.

However, the issue of stuck place involves further complexity than the original experience to which it can be attributed. In other words, Jayden has continually struggled with issues of racial identity but there are many experiences in the lives of these young women where it may impact.

As Jayden said: *"But then when I really thought about it, I had a deep connection to my personal life. Because having*

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someone ask what are you and having the inability to explain what you are is really difficult". As Aline said: "I do. When, when I was, well, when I was younger, I got in trouble for like expressing feelings kind of, or like expressing concern with my situation, so I just didn't. And, then, I don't know, I guess, when you're sad all the time, crying doesn't like just doesn't matter. And, I know when I was cutting, it was like a replacement".

These excerpts highlight the lack of ability to form linguistic signs. Underpinning this inability is partly in the absurdity or profound nature of their respective experiences that is layered with the affective dimension. Both of these young women were incapable of moving forward or evolving their cognitive understanding of associated experiences. When Aline was punished for her attempts to communicate her trauma she was given little alternative other than her consistent use of cutting as a replacement for grieving or feeling emotion which is indicative of implementing ineffective measures to reduce unpleasant feelings associated with liminality (Land, 2014). Jayden internalizes her consistent racist encounters in the affective dimension but the complexity of the issue of race and identity impacts her ability for linguistic signs despite her understanding of the racist undertones of comments made to her.

The issue of being stuck or in need of help was evident in different aspects of the case studies. The semiotic means of representation is discussed in the following excerpts.

As Aline said: "I wanted to make sure that it was painted white and fully constructed so I could enclose myself inside before I started writing. To, I, it was a bit feeling of being

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trapped inside of the hospital room, not being able to leave. Not being able to communicate". As Rene said: "And as you can see, the hand down here with the fake blood on it, this one's mine. It's very broken. It's very—it needs nurturing. So it's reaching out to the other hand and really just trying to say, I want help. I want to solve this. I want to fix this".

These excerpts by Aline and Rene are explicit in their feeling helpless or trapped. Each describe a feeling of being vulnerable and alone. However, there is an implication of hope in that Aline and Rene have awareness of another ontological state. It is important to point out that the reflective aspect of the interviews may have influenced their linguistic description and associated understandings different from the actual moments of their art making. The relevance of this observation is the existence of hope as a positive attribute which may inform some understanding as to why the proper vehicle of art making was so essential in navigation of the liminal space.

This section presented some core elements of each young woman's troublesome knowledge and liminal states. It is clear that Rene, Aline and Jayden had remained in the liminal state for years with little ability to communicate, express or process their experiences and feelings. Clearly the visual art making process provides a vehicle for navigation. A relevant question implicit to this section and that links to Rattray (2016) in regard to the human attributes and the navigation of the liminal state with the profound affective elements. Do positive attributes, such as hope, inform a tacit recognition of appropriate epistemic vehicles for navigation?

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In other words, do the positive attributes on some level allow us to recognize the relevant means for us to navigate our liminal experiences? This places a priority on a rethinking of the visual art learning environment and its epistemic potential.

7.6 Introduction to the Cognitive Dimension and Discourse Associated with the Art Making Process

The classification of the cognitive dimension and discourse associated with the art making process provides evidence of the young women engaging in aspects of discourse with self or others through the art making process. This suggests a level of awareness on the part of the young women as to the purpose of their art making and underpinning intention. In other words, at differing points each of the young women began to not just engage feelings with their art making but also consciously engage underpinning troublesomeness associated to their life experiences. Moreover, the young women utilize the art making process to engage in a form of self-dialogue as well as a form of dialogue or exchange with the viewer. The issue of dialogue highlights the relevance of semiotic theory with focus upon the art making process. The classification of the cognitive dimension is discussed with several themes that focus on dialogue with self and others as well as different aspects of semiotic theory that are relevant to the making and communication of meaning in visual art making.

7.7 Dialogue with the Self

The case studies of Rene, Aline and Jayden all present elements of the art making process as a means of navigating the liminal experience in part due to the affective dimension. However, the

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young women (at different points) began to intentionally make art work about their past experiences which became a form of dialogue with the self. "My art is kind of like a conversation with my subconscious" (Rene). Rene suggests the art making process brings the tacit to awareness and the element of awareness suggests cognition. She continues: "But after a while, I realized that my art was actually telling me something about myself. So I started looking at it a little further. I know that some things were sort of similar and there was a common undertone behind it". This excerpt gives some explanation as to the role of semiotics and visual signs; as well as the epistemic importance of non-linguistic knowledge. "But, as I create the artwork, you know, if it's like graphic in nature, it's kind of hard to ignore that repressed, those repressed feelings" Aline. Rene and Aline describe the art making process as a dialogic; the artwork points things out that each ponders further. Therefore, the importance of the nature or manner of this dialogue is extremely relevant; in this case the art making process as a semiotic dialogue.

"It's also a way of me trying to point it out to myself even when I don't know it. I know that sounds very weird, but it's how it works" Rene. This excerpt clarifies the nature of the semiotic dialogue as one with the tacit self that employs visual signs as a means to make meaning from the troublesome experiences. "Once I started looking at my art in that kind of way and sort of analysing it both while making it and after finishing it, I was able to delve further into things that were less immediate because the more I thought about my art and what I was doing with it, the deeper I could go with the connections with myself" Rene. She is explaining

the value of this dialogue with self; a means to engage the affective dimension and navigate the liminal tunnel. This occurs by engaging the visual signs and interpreting them even though she created them; it is a dialogue with the self.

7.8 Dialogue, Communication, Engagement with Others

The dialogic element of art also addresses a consistent desire or need within the young women to communicate with or express their feelings to others. I argue that this aspect of their art making process was an essential element of their navigation of liminality. It was a means for Rene, Aline and Jayden to process and receive forms of validation either from me or others. As Rene said: "I was purposefully making it to address the issue of the abuse that I have had been through. It was the first one where I actually wanted people to ask questions". As discussed in chapter six, Rene was intentionally provoking me to ask her about her work which led to a conversation where she revealed the trauma of her past.

Where Rene sought out validation and support from me, Aline has profound mistrust of other people. However, Aline still places value on the ability to share her experiences with others but through the semiotic lens of her visual work.

As Aline said: *"I'd probably still prefer to do it through the artwork. I mean, with words, you can say anything, and people, they can listen, but that doesn't mean they're going to hear you...there's so many things you can say with an image that you can't say with words, that you can't describe with words"*.

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Aline continues: *"When I was finally finished, it was so relieving to express some of these things that I've never been able to share"*

This excerpt is clear that Aline views presenting her artwork in a public space as a means of sharing her experiences as a form of semiotic dialogue with others. Aline is also clear in her feeling rewarded or "heard" through this means of semiotic engagement which raises an interesting point. Aline consistently (and understandably) held a mistrust of others. However, the validation received by the individuals that attended the exhibition of Aline's artwork provided a crucial element of acceptance for Aline. Therefore, it may not always be others that are unable to hear what Aline is saying. Aline may not be able to hear them as well due to the trauma of her past.

Aline discussing people viewing her piece at the exhibit: "I was extremely nervous about how others would react, especially like, my peers at school. But I was truly pleased with how accepting people were. And so, I mean, people seem to be able to relate. Which I'm really happy with".

She is describing the validation she received by becoming vulnerable in displaying her art work. Clearly there are elements of evolved trust or some form of psychological capital (Rattray, 2016) that allowed Aline to reveal her feelings and experiences in a public exhibition. Moreover, Aline may have gained or evolved psychological capital as a result of the move.

The excerpts so far consider communication with others as a means of reaching out or seeking validation. I needed to be sure not to understate the significance of this desire and the role of

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the artwork and semiotic navigation. For long periods of time these young women were not capable of assigning linguistic signs describing their trauma. Obviously they presented art work in a public space or in such manners as to provoke questioning. It is a fair assumption there would be few moments more unnerving in a lifetime than representing one's deepest feelings in a public manner. As Rene said: "Because it's so much easier to answer a question than to go to people and say something".

In the case of Jayden there is a confrontational element to how her art work engages a viewer. "And I kind of have to get over that. Because I want my work to be profound, and I want people to stop and say, wow, maybe I haven't thought about it in this way... At first I just had nigger and nigga just in white... Because then your eye goes straight to those two profound words. And then you actually want to look at the piece" Jayden. Although Jayden is a kind, loving and positive person, she has experienced extreme frustration and anger as a result of her racial experiences. She is explicit in her desire to challenge viewers to think about different perspectives in regard to racial issues. Jayden uses the art work to not only give voice to her experiences but the visual art expresses with a power that reach beyond her natural self.

In an excerpt from Aline, earlier in this section, she describes the ability of image to express meaning beyond the limitations of words. This raises the question; does the semiotic element of art making allow one to transcend the limitations of self by acting as a vehicle for voice? This question is more substantively discussed in the next section.

7.9 Semiotic Representation of Troublesomeness and the Liminal State

This section presents excerpts of Rene, Aline and Jayden reflecting upon their art making process through a semiotic lens. Therefore, it is important that there is some analysis provided of the young women describing their use of visual art as a means of engaging their relevant life experiences and troublesomeness. This is associated with semiotic theory and the use of visual signs. There is a general awareness, by the young women, as to what the art is expressing but it is unclear as to their respective levels of awareness of their ontological states. Each of the young women arrived at a point in their art making process where they were expressing profound experience with visual signs and symbols. This resulted in a form of dialogue that began to inform the cognitive elements of their art making process. This section will focus on specific excerpts of the young women reflecting upon the construction of meaning in their work.

As Rene Said: "Well, part of it is that handprints are very-or something that each person has a different handprint, has a different thumbprint. So part of this is the whole identity thing. The colours-the parts that are coloured and white, they make out the outline of myself. This is actually me. And everything that is black is something that is not part of me, that isn't the individual colours. And it's just sort of pushing in".

She is describing the visual signs, of figure 6.1, expressing meaning about identity and self. She also describes the black

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handprints as being negative identities or feelings that press in on her. In her case study I argue this is a visual representation of her experience of the liminal state derived from her troublesome experience. Also discussed in her case study is the issue that Rene had a strong awareness of her liminal experience by the time she and I had started working together. Her art making process was heavily focused on conveying her experience to others and using art as a means of dialogue.

However, Jayden and Aline had less specific understanding of their respective liminal experiences and although dialogue with others was an important part of their liminal journey the semiotic representation functioned just as importantly as a self-dialogue.

As Jayden Said: "And I didn't really think much about it other than the natural overwhelming as if meeting your biological father for the first time. But when I came back to the art room in Studio, I felt like there was a common theme in all of my artwork. I'm constantly painting African men and just close ups of their face. And I couldn't really explain why. But I was just drawn to the colour brown and drawn to the stereotypical broad nose, big lips. Everything about it. I just had, I just did it over and over and over again".

This is an interesting excerpt in the implication of troublesomeness is remaining tacit but there is a semiotic representation of glimpsing a threshold as well. More specifically, Jayden has yet to make meaning out of the experience of meeting her biological father and the art making, as a dialogue with self, fosters the ability to make meaning. The reason I argue there is a glimpsing of a threshold, for Jayden, is her case study suggests the meaning of

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this experience was one of acceptance by her biological black family. As a result, Jayden began her ontological shift in regard to self.

More specifically, as Jayden completed the series of the black male portraits she began to make profound changes in her work which was discussed in her case study. The point being made is Jayden had become more deliberate in her choices of media and materials by exploiting them for their most expressive potential.

As Jayden Said: "And so, what I wanted to show through this piece was that it was really easy to get all of the paint on. It was a very smooth process. It was a bit uncomfortable. But ultimately, it was really easy compared to taking it off. Where you could see, there is a lot more movement in the pictures. There's more of a struggle to actually get the blackness off of me".

This excerpt is a representation of core issues in relationship of the liminal experience of racial identity and self. Jayden is describing the ease with which she and others associate racial stereotypes and racist perceptions to her appearance. In her case study Jayden describes her attempts to embrace a black identity at times and her struggle to evolve beyond a split self, due to racial complexity. The art work specifically represents her ontological shift towards acceptance of her racial composition and believing she does not have to fit into a specific racial category and stereotype.

This section discusses an important theme of establishing that there was an intention on the part of the young women to create

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visual representation of their troublesome experiences. Moreover, these representations were created in order to engage affective elements and a dialogic with self and with others. In chapter two I argue there are many assumptions applied to the visual arts and their ability to foster critical thinking. The following section discusses art as semiotic representation and the relevance to art learning environments. The next section will focus upon representations of movement through the liminal tunnel and visual art as a semiotic representation of transformation.

7.10 Semiotic Representation of Transformation or Navigation of Liminality

The previous sections and case studies present evidence of the young women navigating the liminal space through engagement with the art making process. The process of the young women reflecting upon their art work reveals elements of transformation and ontological shifts. This section will focus upon the semiotic representation of transformation as evidenced in excerpts from the interviews with Rene, Aline and Jayden.

As Rene said: "So this door is just sort of like this barrier between what's in my mind, what I'm thinking, and the outside world. And the hand is really me reaching out to sort of sitting there waiting for someone to grab it and then open up the door to see what's inside".

Although there is implicit reference to discourse with others the primary issue is her representation of a felt need for others to understand her internal liminal experience. As addressed in her case study, the door is a tacit but overt visual symbol of threshold

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crossing or possibly another example of glimpsing. The symbol of a door is not the only evidence of threshold crossing or glimpsing. Rene further describes a shift in her ontological state of wanting someone to open the door and get to know her and when considered in the context of her portfolio this desire has evolved through the body of work.

Rene makes compelling choices in regard to media and material that indicate movement through the liminal state and possibly transformation. "So I started to get into photography simply because it really captures—you can really tell who it is. There aren't any distortions in material" (Rene). As discussed in chapter six, the photographs are her least visually compelling art work but they are important when considered as evidence of threshold crossing. Rene's art work evolves from being purely for the releasing of feeling to an art process that is a form of self-dialogue and intentionally communicative to others about her experiences. This communicative work is specific and quite expressive. The move into the sculpture and casts of her hand takes the sign of identity into the real space of reality giving it a literal form. She then uses her actual image in her photography which is arguably evidence of a more fully formed and transformed self.

Jayden also executes her primary work in the medium of photography that is displayed in such a manner that it reads as a video. As previously explained in her case study the work is many still images presented at a rapid pace. "And it just shows all physicality that it took. And I guess kind of the hardship that I had to go through. And then in the end, in the last picture you just

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see how relieved and how happy I am to finally have it off. And so- It just kind of all came together. And I think these pieces are what set up everything else that I had. So, that was really important for my development" Jayden. Implicit to Jayden's description is the desire to exploit the reality of photography to capture her struggle and relief. This piece is a departure from her normal visual language. The work is highly conceptual in comparison to previous work and the use of photography is unlike the more material based paintings and drawings. In my view, the piece "Transformation", which Jayden is discussing, could only be conceived as she began to navigate the liminal space and made meaning from her experience of feeling acceptance from her father. The piece suggests evidence of ontological shifts in the visual language and signs employed for expression.

This sudden change in visual language with Jayden and Rene raises an interesting observation associated with transformation and threshold crossing. Integration has been conceptualised as the learner's identity interrelated with thinking and language and involves both affective and cognitive dimensions (Meyer and Land, 2006; Timmermans, 2010). In my view, visual language functions in a similar manner as linguistic signs and is acting as personal knowledge construction that is potent and effective for each of the young women. There is clear evidence of transformation in the young women's abilities to make meaning out of experiences that had previously lacked understanding. I argue the change in medium may align with changes in understanding and movement through liminality.

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The use of photographic processes suggests a clarity or new reality or perception.

In the case of Aline there was profound personal transformation throughout her visual art making experience. Aline's art portfolio has fewer pieces and they are all quite powerful. Aline was arguably similar to Rene in that she had an awareness of her trauma and that it was impacting her in regard to her self-harm. But due to her imposed silence Aline was never willing to process her feelings and substituted self-harm in the place of processing feelings. Therefore, I argue the bold and intense nature of her art work is a form of transformation.

As Aline said: "I enclosed myself inside and proceeded to write on the walls thoughts I had while I was in the hospital. Things doctors, nurses, my parents, other students and kids I knew had said to me. Everything that I felt, I just kind of tried to express on the wall. But as I got more in depth, I realized that I was pulling out really deep emotions. And then even after that, I started to learn things about my past and about myself that I had never even looked at or realized before"

In her case there is less of a change in medium but there is an obvious use of language. When considered within her case study, Aline was punished for overt expression of her ongoing abuse. When coupled with the performative element there is a re-living of many painful experiences but the use of linguistic signs is a brave and powerful action for Aline. Overall, the installation is heavily reliant upon visual signs, in terms of mark making, expressive

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gesture and visual representation of the institution. As previously mentioned, the linguistic signs and performative element are departures from other visual language but the profound display of courage is integral to this discussion. In a sense this willingness or desire to create this work in a public context suggests a transformation of self. Identity, thinking and language integrated for meaning making suggests a breaking away from the affective and psychological constraints specifically in the explicit linguistic description of her experiences and feelings. The positive response played a role in the healing of self that she had so desperately needed for many years.

7.11 Self

The theme of self is implicit to the art making process of three young women but I have also been identifying self as a threshold concept through which the young women cross and experience associated ontological shifts. Therefore, the theme of self is a separate theme from the previous sections. This section will focus upon excerpts from the interviews that support and clarify this element of the work.

Implicit to identifying the complex threshold of self, the young women navigate and arguably cross is troublesome experiences and disruption to their understanding of identity and self. The complex threshold of self involves (for these young women) a strong affective component and cognitive dimensions as the navigation of liminality evolves. The affective dimension is an aspect of self (Fearson, 1999) and it is within this construct that the liminal state and troublesome knowledge resides. The threshold associated

with the construct of self involves elements of acceptance and healing for these young women. The following section addresses liminality and troublesomeness in regard to the acceptance of self.

7.12 Liminality and Troublesomeness in Acceptance of Self

This section addresses the complex threshold of acceptance of self, which involves trauma in the past of Rene, Aline and Jayden. The affective elements are intertwined with issues of understanding the self and identity which make the thresholds complex and troublesome to navigate (Rattray, 2016; Land, 2014; Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014). The excerpts from the interviews present the young women as being left to navigate a complex emotional state for which they were not equipped.

As Rene said: *"And what my art is really about is just about my feelings and the struggle with really being okay with what happened and understanding that it wasn't my fault. There wasn't anything I could do with it. And just dealing with the aftermath of what happened"*.

Aline continues making reference to cutting as a means of dealing with her profound emotional state: *"It was the only relief I had is, I didn't really have any friends or like, family. It was just, I viewed like, my cutting as like, part of me, it was the only thing I had to keep me on this earth if I wasn't sad, I just didn't have emotions. I was completely numb. It made me feel like a robot"*.

Although Rene's past trauma is intertwined with negative feelings about self which involve guilt and shame. Aline, seems to have lost a sense of self and relies on cutting to even feel human

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or alive. Moreover, Rene, is referring to the residual impact of her past trauma has required a need to heal or become "ok" or able to reconcile any associated guilt. As a result, the threshold of acceptance of self and healing is seemingly relevant. Aline (as is the title of her case study) is simply trying to survive for most of the time that I know her. The healing she experiences is the result of the exhibit but presumably was not something she strived for expected to happen.

"I didn't really bring it into light until last year and I actually did that with this piece here with the hand. I just really wanted to show how a lot of times I just feel sort of trapped by other people's ideas, other people's identities just sort of coming out of me, trying to make me be something else than I am" Rene.

The formation of self is a social construction where the individual attempts to find harmony between societal perceptions and one's understanding of self (Erikson, 1966; Marcia, 1968). The case of Rene is indicative of a struggle of accepting the self resulting from her trauma and her associated feelings of guilt and shame. The excerpt from Rene highlights her inability to reveal her experiences or put words to them. This disharmony is an example of self as a liminal experience and acceptance of self as a complex threshold. Rene references others having power over her which suggests her abuser and the struggle of living with the trauma and trying to move forward from it.

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In the opportunity to reflect, in the interviews, Jayden is clear in the content and liminal navigation experienced in her artwork; which engaged the affective aspects of being mixed race.

As Jayden Said: *"I would say as a whole; a lot of my work just has to do with the personal transformation and the personal journey of trying to identify with myself as a biracial child". "Like in order to make sure that I was accepted; I didn't want to be like just that one friend that wasn't black. I had to be black just like them".*

The excerpts from Jayden are indicative of Marcia's (1966) and Erikson's (1968) argument as to the social construction of identity and the need for our understanding of self to be aligned with the social perceptions that surround us. There were long periods of time where identity formation focused on being perceived as black, especially when she lived in the west where the sun kept her skin dark. "I'm not even sure where the switch from wanting to be all white to wanting to completely belong to a black friend group came from" (Jayden) but Jayden is explicit in her need to feel acceptance by this peer group. Moreover, this shift in peer group is across racial identities which suggests a deeper complexity in regard to understanding oneself.

Part of Jayden's liminal journey involves the troublesomeness associated with her physical features and the complex perceptions of others towards her and her feelings about identity and self. In the case of Jayden identity and self are important issues due to her physical appearance and the implicit stereotypes imposed upon her. "So, when I moved here (east), it completely faded away. And then

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people kind of asked, well, you have curly hair and your kind of dark, are you just a tan white girl who curls their hair, or are you actually a really, really, really light ethnic person. And then that's when everything just kind of jumbled into my head" Jayden.

Jayden is referring to the reality that movement in the liminal state is not always progressive but we can shift in many ways. The new circumstances caused her to face new questions and perceptions that resulted in a re-questioning of identity and self. Part of this navigation overlaps with her cognitive engagement with principles towards race. "But I focused in more on things that matter to me. And things that also bother me. And one of my biggest pet peeves is the use of the "N" word... And it's a really touchy topic for me because people often ask why are you going to get offended by the "N" word. You're only half black" Jayden. The absurd complexity here is the racist assumption that physical appearance determines the principles one holds in life. Specific to Jayden and her journey is her physical features are assumed to indicate her principles and perceptions toward life, people and society. At a younger age she seemed to be willing to embrace this unfortunate reality for the sake of convincingly being accepted as black. "Because I found that it was easier to kind of blend in with the African crowd at my school and to do everything they said. And I would do anything basically to fit into that group. And as time went on, it was really easy for me to get into the character of being kind of ghetto and just trying to fit in with the African American crowd" Jayden. However, in the recent move east, and at an older age, she is more willing to form a self that is substantive and authentic. However, her identity, as a mixed race individual causes

others to make assumptions and judgements that are troublesome in regard to her continuing developing self.

7.13 Ontological Shift

With these young women, healing and acceptance of self is an appropriate conceptualisation of ontological shifts associated with threshold crossing. However, the interviews reveal that in some instances these shifts simply occurred along their journey and not necessarily as a climactic end point. The excerpts suggest evidence of changes or transformed perceptions towards life and self which may or may not be dramatic.

As Jayden said: "I would say as a whole; a lot of my work just has to do with the personal transformation and the personal journey of trying to identify with myself as a biracial child". As articulated in chapter one and the work of Ramesha, Jayden raises the implicit question of ontological shifts and the role of visual art. Jayden is clear there is an interrelationship between her threshold crossing and transformations but is not explicit in identifying the nature of the role of visual art. I have been establishing the importance of the semiotic element of visual art making and its relationship to the liminal space. As I consider the nature of ontological shifts within the young women it becomes clear that the navigation of the affective element was essential to the development of these young women.

Aline's case study is explicit in her lack of trust with adults and disdain for the mental health profession. Therefore, this excerpt is suggestive of an ontological shift that involves an ability to trust and accept help from others, as well as engage and

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regulate her emotional struggles. Aline is clear in that her emotional and mental health struggles continue but she is more capable of maintaining a healthy awareness.

As Aline said: *"Well, I finally found a therapist that I can communicate pretty well with... And, I'm just honest with her, well, I'm honest with her about how I feel, about how my parents affect me, I guess, about my substance use, and just I'm pretty open to her. And, like we have a pretty trusting relationship, where she understands, I know, my breaking points, and I know how to get help when I reach that".*

It is significant that Aline is experiencing trust with an adult in the mental health profession and that she is willing to be honest in communication. This observation is based in the complete lack of trust Aline described when I first met her and her willingness to become vulnerable and give voice to her experiences through her art work.

The excerpt from Aline also suggests acceptance and healing in regard to self; my position as recovering addict informs the observation that one must have willingness to recover (W., Bill, 1976). I argue that Aline has experienced some level of acceptance and healing in order to foster the sentiments in the excerpts. The following exchange indicates that Aline is looking forward and not subject to her past experiences (Kegan, 2009) or held prisoner by them. She seems to have accepted the reality of her past and the associated feelings as being a part of her ontological state.

M.R.: Are you honest with your therapist now?

Aline: I am. Yeah. I've definitely formed a lot more trust than I've ever had before. I feel very capable of like

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surviving. M.R.: Is that hope? Interviewee: It is hope. Aline continues: "Feeling is interesting... Having emotions again whether they are good or bad, or I don't want to say good or bad, but positive, negative, happy, sad, at least they're there".

Emotion is complex with Aline because cutting was her primary means of engaging feeling for a long time. The embracing of feeling is profound change for Aline as it suggests healing and acceptance of past trauma and the understanding that feelings will be a part of the self. Furthermore, the willingness or ability to engage in dialogue about her feelings and experiences is also a transformation in Aline. As has been discussed, any representation of her past trauma was extremely difficult and counter to her socialised nature (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Moreover, Aline is explicit in the semiotic and self-dialogic element to her art making process that fostered her ability to perceive and understand her experiences differently than before her art experience.

As Aline said: "I had gotten a little bit more positive. That was more towards like, the middle of the year, I just kind of, I guess I opened my mind a little bit more. And I kind of matured a little bit... And, I guess, just taking an image out of your head and then actually creating it, it puts things in a different perspective and it makes you look at what you're thinking in a different way".

Rene describes a change in perspective through her art making process as well. Describing her mural piece, Rene, describes visual art as a means of acceptance of the complexity of feeling and its

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liminal nature. The re-subjectivity in both of these young women is their ability to embrace the fluidity of feeling and understand the affective is inherent and changing element to self.

"So these two sort of go together. And it just sort of shows how when you're in different states, you can think differently And even though sometimes you might be ashamed of yourself, there are other times that you can be very proud of yourself"
Rene.

The interwoven element of voice is significant in all of the young women and Aline describes the semiotic dialogue with self as a means of re-subjectivity (Meyer and Land, 2003; 2005). Aline is describing an empowerment of semiotic voice that fostered a navigation of the affective liminal experience and the making of meaning or reordering experience to arrive at meaning. The art making process allowed Aline to experience the emotions of profound trauma allowing the self to experience and process what had been denied to her.

As Aline said: "But after going through all of this, it helped me to realize certain things. And it's helping me heal a lot. I can definitely express a lot more than I've ever done, have been able to".

Aline and Jayden both discuss decisions or observations about their physical appearance or behaviours that are indicative of transformation and ontological shifts. "A lot of it had to do with my past abuse with a friend. And like, I didn't really make any connection to mannerisms I have now" (Aline). Jayden, in her

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liminal experience with being a biracial child demonstrates ontological shifts in her art work which results in changes in attitudes towards physical appearance. "And it just seems interesting that in a nation today where race and identities so proud and we should be so proud of it that African women can't even accept their own natural hair. And so, that's why I took personally, I decided to stop using chemicals to straighten my hair and I decided to let it go all curly. But most of my friends won't do the same thing. Because they just don't agree with that I will be taken seriously-And this was kind of a different take. Because I've always tried to say like, I accept you. Or kind of say, and you're black and white, that's awesome" Jayden. Obviously the change of hairstyle is more than preference but an embracing of self and a re-identity.

All of the young women have exhibited ontological shifts in regard to acceptance and healing of self. These shifts manifest in different ways which have been highlighted in this section. However, voice is an important element for all of these young women highlighting an important role of visual art and the semiotic elements.

Chapter 8 Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The thesis addresses the research question; to what extent can engagement in the visual art making process foster the navigation of the liminal space? The basis for this research question was originated in observations of my students that were engaging with troublesome life experience with the art making process. This was indicative of transformation or ontological shifts. Therefore, I pondered a fundamental question: what role does art making have in transformations that are evidenced in the art making process? The implications of this research are intended to foster whole reflection upon pedagogy and learning environments, which may account for the epistemic element of visual art and the threshold concept theoretical framework. As a result of contextualised reflection the role of art education may become more than mere ornament (Eisner, 2008) and realise the essential element in education that it can be.

My continued participation in art education in-services and trainings also gave me familiarity with common approaches to art education. The issue of transformation and the aforementioned observation on art pedagogy led me to a point of departure. I recognized that I was approaching art education with a less conventional pedagogical approach. As addressed in chapter two, many conventional approaches to art education focus upon skill development and facility in the use of material. However, the arts are often credited with developing critical thinking skills without acknowledging nuance or distinctions. It is oversimplified to

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credit any "art making" as developing critical thinking. It is a potential outcome when the pedagogy and learning environment foster learning experiences that employ epistemic elements of the art making process. The threshold concept framework provides a lens that can bring such issues into focus through reflection upon pedagogy and learning environments as well as the nature of learning in visual art. Therefore, I became interested and curious in understanding this critical observation more deeply and pursued my research into Threshold Concepts and arrived at the significance of the liminal state as a necessary element to critical and human development.

The case studies presented document the liminal journey of Rene, Aline and Jayden while employing a form of participant observation and action research. The case studies and thematic analysis of interviews highlight several larger themes along with several subthemes which provide insight to the affective and cognitive dimensions of subjective experience of the liminal space. The interviews and thematic coding enhance insight into the respective art work of the each of the young women. More specifically, the interviews with Rene, Aline and Jayden give us explicit access as to the intention of meaning and connections to their life experience; moreover, their affective state and cognition. The art work is a form of visual data that provides a deeper understanding of the subjective states and experience of the young women.

As previously mentioned, this thesis provides a focused glimpse into the art making process, pedagogy and learning environments through the lens of threshold concepts. By extension larger

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implications can be drawn about the domain of art education in the twenty first century. A counter issue of this discussion is to ask: what do the arts bring to the thresholds framework? This thesis demonstrates several issues to this point. The case studies demonstrate unique and inherent qualities of visual art that are effectively understood through the semiotic lens. Especially when the liminal space clearly involves profound affective elements the ability to form or express linguistic signs is quite difficult if not impossible. The art making process was clearly discussed by all of the young women as providing an ability to engage troublesome knowledge and liminality without the reliance upon the formation of linguistic signs. The dialogic element extends beyond the use of visual signs for self-expression and communication with others; more importantly, for introspective reflection to engage experiences and make meaning from them. In short the arts can act as a unique vehicle to traverse the liminal space and provide a unique means to glimpse subjective experience of the liminal state. The visual arts can provide a visual record of the felt experience of individuals as they cross thresholds and traverse the liminal space with context provided when linguistic signs are able to be formed and articulated in the act of personal reflection.

In order to answer or effectively address the research question the discussion will focus on several key observations from the research process. The discussion must address the role of visual art in relationship to the liminal state. In order to address this part of the inquiry there will be discussion about the issue of navigating the affective and cognitive dimensions of the liminal state and about the implications this holds for pedagogy and the art

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learning environment. The semiotic element of visual art as dialogic is an inherent element to this discussion which also holds implications for the learning environment. Furthermore, the discussion needs to clarify the threshold concepts that are associated with the aforementioned liminal state and troublesome knowledge which also clarifies the ontological shifts experienced by the young women.

8.2 Visual Art and the Complex Threshold Concept of Self and Voice

"Meaning making, therefore, is not an abstract idea. Meaning making is impossible outside of the individual and therefore the knowledge gained is 'embodied' knowledge. It is for this reason that Mezirow (1991) suggests that the self-image of the learner should be considered as part of the learning context" (Blackie, Case & Jawitz, 2010, p. 4).

The opening quote is succinct in explicating issues relevant to self as a complex or thorny threshold. Land (2014, p. 2) places emphasis upon the role of transformation in threshold concepts as being "superordinate and non-negotiable" and making meaning of our experiences is an underpinning assumption of transformative theory (Mezirow, 2000). However, transformations or ontological shifts occur within the self and involve the self. Moreover, the liminal journeys, for these young women, involve affective elements connected to their own troublesome life experience. This affective involvement has proven to complicate and even impede the progression of these young women.

In the cases of these young women it was their sense of self being interrupted due to their respective experienced trauma. The

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self is understood as an internal experience of intimate feelings that are integral to the subjective understanding of self (Cooley, 1902). This represents troublesome knowledge as well as the vessel in which the liminal state is experienced and the threshold in which a re-identity occurs. "In a preliminal stage, a learner's tacit views are interrupted as she is introduced to and begins to grapple with a threshold concept" (Adler-Kassner, Majewski & Koshnick, 2012, p.2).

The art making process always involves the self and this is true in these case studies. In the cases of Rene, Aline and Jayden, the making of meaning is a highly personal manner of "opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (Land, Cousin, Meyer and Davies, 2005, p. 53). However, the vehicle through which these new understandings are reached is the art making process, and the vessel in which this navigation occurs is the self. The newly articulated understandings reside in the art work and involve the epistemic, expressive and dialogic elements of their art work. Within the self the understandings originate in the cognitive and affective dimension but are given form through semiotic aspects of art making. All three of the young women reflected upon their inability to employ linguistic signs and the affective involvement as powerful and consistently present; without a transformed understanding, of self, the young women could not progress (Land, Cousin, Meyer, Davies, 2005). In fact the young women described self-destructive behaviour and feelings of self-hatred, anger and fear.

These young women demonstrate profound courage and strength in their ability to persevere and ultimately progress toward

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transformation after prolonged status of being stuck. Moreover, the ability of the young women to employ art as a means of navigating the liminal highlights complexity of self as a threshold. They had to engage the art making process with enough depth and sincerity that the tacit was given form despite the power and presence of the affective dimension. The young women had to be willing to interpret and reflect upon the expressed content of their work; possibly generating feelings of being vulnerable and reviving the troublesome and its affective elements.

As an educator this highlights the importance of the threshold lens and semiotic pedagogy as these liminal experiences are psychological and emotional. Therefore, the ability to understand and facilitate cannot be offered through lecture or in a role of gatekeeper. I have to empower the individual to reflect on the self and assist in interpreting and creating meaning. As an educator I am not trying to develop artists, I am trying to develop human beings and challenge them to engage troublesome feelings and experience. I hope to foster the ability of each young person to understand media and material as a vehicle to represent their psychological and emotional selves.

The idea of art as meaning making can be articulated as 'voice'. Rene, Jayden and Aline reflect upon the importance that 'voice' provided in their liminal journey toward healing the self. In documenting their liminal transformations and re-identity I find that art as 'voice' is not only a way to gain insight into liminal experiences but has become a kind of threshold in itself.

"Threshold concepts are defined as concepts that bind a subject together, being fundamental to ways of thinking and practising in

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that discipline (Land, Cousin, Meyer & Davies, 2005, p.54)." It was understanding this that helped them unlock other things or make other transformations.

"as students acquire threshold concepts, and extend their use of language in relation to these concepts, there occurs also a shift in the learner's subjectivity, a repositioning of the self... What is being emphasised here is the inter-relatedness of the learner's identity with thinking and language.

Threshold concepts lead not only to transformed thought but to a transfiguration of identity and adoption of an extended discourse (Meyer and Land 2005 as cited in Land, Cousin, Meyer & Davies, 2005, p. 58)."

The quote by Land et al (2005) makes the assumption of language as being linguistic signs. The cases presented in this thesis, clearly demonstrate that art is a visual language that is comprised of personal visual signs that are injected with emotion and experience. Rene, Jayden and Aline all extended their use of language in the only manner or media they were capable of utilising. As a result their identity or self-evolved with the clarity of their visual language. Rene, Aline and Jayden all stated that visual art did not solve their issues or fix anything. But they did say that visual art was the only manner in which they could engage or wrap their heads around their troublesome knowledge. The difficulties and anguish were always present but until they experienced the potential of the art making process they had no means to understand their thoughts and feelings. The art making process was a means to give voice to the self in their liminal state and evolve to ontological shifts.

8.3 Visual Art Navigating the Affective Dimension and Stuck Place

This section will discuss the impact of the affective dimension upon Rene, Aline and Jayden and its relationship to the liminal experience and the navigation of the liminal space. Walker (2013) describes the impact of affective elements of the liminal state which is clearly relevant to the case studies of Rene, Aline and Jayden. For example, Walker (2013) describes the power of the affective element being capable to hold an individual in a stuck place (Ellsworth, 1989, 1997; Meyer and Land, 2005).

"Here they will experience the strong affective component of TCs. There will be 'cognitive dissonance', a motivational drive to reduce unpleasant feelings of uncertainty, and 'perseverance', in which more familiar courses of action will continue to be employed despite evidence to the contrary. Too much uncertainty in this liminal state and the learner will not be able to progress beyond a surface understanding"
(Walker 2013 p.250).

All of the young women were overwhelmed by the affective element of the liminal state and were incapable of progressing until they found a means of engagement that provided an ability to process the emotions that were inextricable from troublesome experience. Rene, Jayden and Aline experienced an interruption of the self (Adler-Kassner, Majewski & Koshnick, 2012) which impacted the cognitive abilities for linguistic knowledge and signs.

Stuck places can be conceptualised as epistemological obstacles "that block any transformed perspective" (Brousseau, 1997 as cited in Meyer and Land, 2005, p.377). The stated remedy for these epistemological obstacles is constructive feedback that gets to the

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source and overcomes such barriers (Meyer and Land, 2005). However, the idea of constructive feedback is oversimplified or understated in the full context of learning environments. Biggs (1999) and Ellsworth (1989, 1997) argues for the necessity of pedagogy and learning environments that embrace the uncertainty and complexity of the affective and social aspects of students subjectivity. The observations of this research inform my argument as to the importance of semiotic pedagogy and the inherent dialogic of visual art as a means of facilitating the navigation of the affective component of stuck places.

Cousin (2003) argues there is an ontological dimension in stuck places which puts emphasis upon the reality of the internal experience of a stuck place, particularly in regard to the affective element. A pedagogy that attempts through instruction a means to navigate these feelings is assuming there is potential for an understanding (by the individual) of the complexity of the affective experience in the liminal state. There is an interrelationship of the affective and cognitive dimensions that impacts the formation of language and presumably clarity of thought. The inherent advantage of the art making process is the construction of knowledge that can simultaneously involve the affective and the cognitive dimensions. As I documented the young women's liminal journey through their portfolios, there is a clarity of visual language that is progressive and suggests the increased involvement of the cognitive dimension.

The learning environment that I attempt to foster embraces the semiotic element of art making and allows me to be sensitive to meanings that may be tacit for the students. This was certainly the

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case for Aline and Jayden, while Rene intentionally engaged me through visual signs. The point is that constructive feedback can involve sensitivity to the affective and cognitive dimensions by focusing upon the art work as an expression of knowledge. If emphasis is placed entirely upon visual qualities then I am ignoring the essential motivations for creating the art work. The constructive feedback primarily comes in the form of questions to which the student responds. This is a one on one discussion. This process allows the student to have a visual sign to put context, form or meaning to their underpinning intentions. Quite often this leads to more personal discussions and clarity of intent in both the work and the individual. The young women were able to eventually put words and cognitive understanding to their liminal journey because it is less threatening to talk about or through their art work. The work can convey the power of non-linguistic knowledge and feeling (Langer, 1957)

At points the young women were able to progress further into their liminal tunnel and this seems to coincide with changes in the sophistication and clarity of their visual language. "In a liminal stage, the learner begins to enact that knowledge; at the same time, she becomes aware of her work with the concept and her interactions with it (Adler-Kassner, Majewski & Koshnick, 2012, p.2)". The more substantive work suggests the young women developing awareness and employing visual art as a vehicle for navigating the liminal space. Land, Rattray & Vivian (2014, p.6) discuss the necessity that "learners need to engage with and manipulate conceptual materials i.e. the physical means of describing, discussing and exploring

concepts". I argue this thesis is an extension of this claim with more profound circumstances.

8.4 Visual Art as Semiotic Dialogue

There is a unique interrelationship between linguistic and non-linguistic language. The students do not have the words to convey and process their respective troublesome ontological states but the art making process can facilitate a means to understand these associated feelings and understand aspects of self. The semiotic aspect of the art making process provides an opportunity for internal dialogue that is safe and private. This section will focus upon the element of semiotic dialogue as it relates to the young women and threshold crossing.

"As learners move through these liminal stages, their knowledge also becomes less tacit and more explicit, discursive, and conscious, at least for a time – they not only know what they know, but they are also more likely to recognize how they know it "(Adler-Kassner, L., Majewski, J., & Koshnick, D., 2012, p.2). The young women all highlight a dialogic component of the art making process. There is the expressive element as well as the introspective element of this dialogic process. In the cases of Rene and Aline, I argue that both have the ability to give voice to hidden pain and the ability to hold conversations with the self were of equal importance in navigating the liminal space. This is particularly relevant to the healing aspect of accepting their past experiences, as well as, ontological shifts. In the case of Jayden the dialogic element is most relevant to her dialogue with the self. Jayden describes herself as split and embracing different attributes as social

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situations dictated. As a consequence Jayden experienced many racist interactions that perpetuated troublesomeness with the concept of self. The art making process facilitated the processing of feelings about self and the meeting of her birth father.

In the case of Rene she intentionally exploited the semiotic element of visual signs with the initial intention of provoking me, with her silhouette piece. Rene used art as a means to give voice to the troubling affective elements of her experience but also as a means of engaging me as a participant in her liminal journey. As her portfolio evolved, the visual signs that Rene chose to employ focused on inviting others into a semiotic discourse. For example, the use of literal doors and her cast hand and the public mural were all attempts on her part to involve others with her internal dialogue; but there is a safety in the semiotic discourse of visual signs. There is a vulnerability without the embarrassment of confessing intimate details.

Aline's semiotic dialogue is extreme and powerful. In her case she involved a performative element which was a form of reliving horrible experiences or reengaging troubling mind spaces. In the making of her piece "Institution", Aline literally re read excerpts from a journal about her most painful experiences. While her piece uses linguistic signs, the power and meaning of her voice lies in the more visual or performative aspects of the work. The words fall short of expressing what the marks and application of the material convey. The clawing and smacking of the walls with ink in combination with the language begins to express her internal experiences. More importantly, the performative element of the work is astonishingly brave and indicative of commitment to voice. The

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mere act of going through this psychological and emotional action is quite moving. Aline stated that she revealed past experiences in the making of this piece that she had never been able to convey. Similar to Rene, the public display and warm reception by visitors to the exhibition was a healing experience for Aline. She was fearful of how others may judge or perceive her work and she did not expect such a positive and empathic response. Therefore, the actual doing or making, public presentation and viewer response were all elements to the dialogic for Aline.

Jayden evolved her visual language from loose references to African culture into explicit commentary on racism and racial identity in America. This developed sophistication required a cognitive element and a clarity of intention. Her final video piece "Transformation" uses simple reference to skin colour. However, similar to Aline, the action of the application and removal of the paint provides visual signs of her struggle in the affective dimension of the liminal journey. Jayden refers to the piece as a reliving of a long transformative experience in the acceptance of self.

The visual arts performed as a vehicle for navigation of the liminal space through its inherent semiotic and dialogic elements. The young women do not credit the art making with moving beyond their troublesome state or the crossing of thresholds. But they do credit art making with providing a means to engage troublesome knowledge and involve the cognitive dimension more completely and with depth. The semiotic dialogue was internal and a form of voice that engaged others as to the nature of their lived experience. This dialogic reveals the affective experience but does not rely on

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the use of linguistic signs, which had proven to be difficult or frustrating. The affective dimension of troublesome knowledge and the liminal state was a part of their waking and tacit knowledge; visual art making provided an opportunity to engage these feelings and give them form and shape. A more tangible entity. As something is given form it can be named and understood allowing for a cognitive element to transition to awareness and understanding.

8.5 Pedagogy Informed by Semiotic Theory

"No thought exists without a sustaining support" Mel Bochner. The case studies of the thesis document the liminal journey of Rene, Aline and Jayden with the intention of addressing implications for the classroom environment. The quote by Mel Bochner highlights the importance of art educators to reflect upon the relevance of the epistemic elements of the art making process. I argue that art educators must understand art through the lens of semiotics in order to assist students in their use of art for making meaning and movement through the liminal space. Art educators can arrive at a means to access the more intrapersonal aspects of the student's art making process by asking pointed and relevant questions informed by semiotic awareness.

This section will discuss the relevance of selected constructs of Pedagogical Content Knowledge and discuss their association to the liminal experience and the role of art making in the case studies presented. I will also clarify some of the PCK constructs where I believe relevant to better describe the experience of the young women from the pedagogical perspective.

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The threshold literature introduces pedagogical content-knowledge (Shulman, 1987; Land, Rattray and Vivian, 2014) which provides pedagogical constructs that are informed by semiotics and discussed in this section. According to Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014, p.5) "A teacher draws on PCK when putting him or herself in the position of the learner". Shulman (1987, p.4) states that PCK demonstrates an understanding on the part of the educator as to how "particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction".

Land, Cousin, Meyer & Davies (2005) identify nine implications of threshold concepts upon curriculum implementation, several of which hold particular relevance for this thesis: engagement, listening for understanding, reconstitution of self, and tolerating uncertainty.

Engagement is described as the need for students to manipulate conceptual materials which often involves graphic representation or communication (Land, Rattray & Vivian 2014). Engagement directly involves the affective dimension which arguably is a launching pad for the visual representation and manipulation of conceptual materials. In the case of Rene, Jayden and Aline the manipulation of conceptual materials is a form of reflection and making meaning through the art making process. It is important to highlight the meaning of the art work was at first tacit and the decision to make art about their previous experiences was not a conscious one. As the year progressed and I probed with the intention or meaning of the art work, with each young woman, clarity evolved. More specifically, as the young women analysed the meaning of the art

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they were creating they began to understand and perceive the art works' relationship to their past experiences and their feelings about those experiences. Moreover, as the students obtained this clarity the art work became increasingly potent and deliberate.

Listening for understanding is another relevant implication of threshold concepts. Land, Rattray & Vivian (2014) state that crossing thresholds will result in a new dialect but signifiers can remain the same, therefore the new understandings may not be evident. In other words, the knowledge may have evolved but the individual will still rely upon existing signs to convey meaning which can be flawed (Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014). There must be new signifiers to match new knowledge or understandings. However, the art making process is personal and expressive visual language involving a form of signs and symbols that arguably fosters the individual's ability to arrive at a point of clarity and communication. More specifically, threshold concepts have a cognitive element but they can be affective in nature and visual art provides the young women the ability to arrive at the cognitive element by navigating the affective. Therefore, listening for understanding is also meant as interpreting images and discussing their potential meaning with students. In many cases the visual representations may exceed the limitations of words in their understanding of experiences. However, as the student moves through the liminal space and crosses thresholds the linguistic aspect of the understanding becomes more prevalent.

Reconstitution of self is another construct identified in PCK which is discussed in this section. While the essence of the construct is applicable to my arguments there are some differences

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that I need to clarify that make them more interrelated to this thesis and the case studies presented. Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014) describe reconstitution of self as resulting from the acquisition of a concept. Meyer and Land (2003, p.9) identify multiple characteristics of threshold concepts; one being integrative in that "it exposes the previously hidden interrelatedness of something". The relevance of this is that as Land, Rattray & Vivian (2014) argue the acquisition of a concept can possess an integrative effect and ultimately change the perception by the individual toward many concepts and ultimately affect their worldview. However, it is important to highlight the distinction between the discussion in the literature and this thesis. The aforementioned literature suggests that a reconstitution of self is a possible outcome of the liminal journey. However, the reconstitution of self is the core of the liminal journey and threshold crossing for Rene, Aline and Jayden. I find it important to explicate this issue because the young women engage with much more powerful emotions than uncertainty or conceptual difficulty. Moreover, due to the role of the art making process the issue of boundedness becomes more relevant than integrative in the context of this thesis. As previously discussed, in the literature review, the art making process acts as a "bridging function" which "refers to ongoing, two-sided actions and interactions between contexts" (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; p.136). As previously stated, the art making process acts as an epistemic vehicle that provides a unique ability to navigate the liminal space and therefore the issue of boundary crossing is more relevant to a reconstitution of self than previously hidden conceptual relatedness of concepts.

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Tolerating uncertainty is the next construct of PCK whose relevance to this thesis will be discussed. Tolerating uncertainty is a relevant construct but is also understated in Land, Rattray & Vivian (2014), as it pertains to this thesis and the experience of Jayden, Aline and Rene. The discussion shall describe the construct and explicate its importance to the young women's liminal experience.

Land, Rattray and Vivian (2014) describe tolerating uncertainty with the assumptions of academic learning and the vacillation between certainty and uncertainty on the part of students in regard to new concepts. The reflective process informs the student's ability to move beyond the acceptance of teacher suggestions at face value and exercise judgement that requires prolonged inquiry (Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014; Dewey, 1997). While reflection is certainly an element of the semiotic aspect of this thesis the young women have struggled for many years with powerful feelings and experiences and their impact upon their sense of self. Therefore, the construct of vital experience (Dewey, 1916) is also on point. More specifically, Dewey (1916) argues that the role of education is to foster the desire, in young people, to engage troublesome knowledge. Rene, Aline and Jayden moved beyond reflection upon concepts and used art as a means to engage troublesome knowledge making the art education experience one of relevance and vital experience.

There is some literature specific to the domain of art education that addresses semiotic pedagogy. Specifically Smith-Shank (1995) introduces the construct of collateral experience which also holds relevance for the art making process in the case studies presented.

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The argument being raised is that the construction of knowledge and understanding is subjective and that conventions of school subjects can be artificial and overly constraining when rigidly adhered.

Smith-Shank (1995) argues that the diminished value of art education, in the curriculum of schools, is due to its comfort to remain within its own artificial boundaries and any enhanced relevance in education relies on the ability of art educators to remove the aforementioned constraints which can be informed by semiotic pedagogy.

Smith-Shank (1995, p.235) conceptualises collateral experience as "previous experience which makes a novel situation accessible". In essence collateral experience is the deliberate empowerment of students to employ their own life experience as context in the classroom. This construct holds similarities to schema (Piaget, 2013) and the recognized importance of prior knowledge in constructivist views of learning. However, an important distinction is that prior knowledge in the education context can imply a domain specific association with the learning of new concepts. According to Smith-Shank (1995), collateral experience in the semiotic framework implies a vast array of experiences and can be of value in the construction of knowledge and expression of meaning or understanding. The implication being historically determined discipline boundaries can constrain learning: "when learning is understood as thinking, it is a process and not a product. It becomes an ongoing process of inquiry which cannot be defined by the limits of subject matter" (Smith-Shank, 1995, p. 236).

The discussion as to the relevance of semiotics intends to substantiate observations within this thesis to relevant literature,

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as they pertain to pedagogy and learning in the art environment.

The opening quote, from Mel Bochner, in the context of art education highlights a need for consideration of the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning and particularly within the threshold concept framework. The affective complexity becomes an element in understanding the liminal space (Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014; Rattray, 2016); and pedagogy that is sensitive to the liminal experience must involve elements of subjective experiences within the learning environment. Smith-Shank (1995) argues the need for the subject of art to expand beyond its conceptual boundaries and exploit inherent constructivist and semiotic nature for more compelling and authentic learning. I argue that pedagogy informed by semiotics can embrace individual students and their unique prior experiences in a manner that allows the media to make meaning out of existing and new knowledge.

An important implication of PCK and art learning environments that are informed by semiotic theory is the building of relationships with students. The case studies presented and the discussion on semiotic pedagogy suggest the likelihood of students creating highly personal and expressive art work. I argue the issue of positionality becomes important when an art learning environment fosters a semiotic approach to the art making process. The issue of positionality is discussed in the next section.

8.6 Pedagogy and Positionality

This section builds upon the previous section by describing how semiotic informed pedagogy occurred in my work with the young women. An important element of these interactions and the learning

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environment were important experiences from my personal life and education that shape my perceptions and became an important element in my building relationships with the young women.

Rogers (1983), Barnett (2007) and Blackie, Case & Jawitz (2010) discuss student centeredness as the involvement of "being" and "self"; with emphasis upon the genuine relationships formed between teacher and student. The teacher should always be represented by his genuine self with concern about the development of the being of the individual. This is particularly relevant in the art learning environment; I consider the student/teacher relationship as rich fertilizer for personal engagement with the art making process that addresses relevant and experience genuine visual expression. The nature of genuine results is not based on the formal qualities of the art work but on the visual signs or visual language of the young person and the conviction and substantive use of visual language and authentic expressive purpose.

In the process of conducting this study the importance of positionality has become increasingly clear. As discussed in previous chapters, there can be ethical implications in working with young people that venture to engage troublesome knowledge. As is the case with Rene, Aline and Jayden, I hold a moral and ethical duty to maintain the safety of the young people with which I work. These efforts were explicated in chapter three.

However, within the daily activity of the art learning environment the issues of emotional and psychological safety (Catherall, 2006) are also essential; more specifically, the need for creating an environment that fosters security in being vulnerable and authentic. The title of the thesis "bringing the

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apple and holding up the mirror" is suggestive of the role of the educator challenging students to engage troublesome knowledge that may be tacit. However, the nature of challenging the students and facilitating profound engagement does not occur through confrontation or a stated list of expectations. Instead, the issue is empowerment through relationships founded on trust and respect. I do not require students to make art work about emotionally complex experiences. The nature of assignments and the depth of discourse about the creative process empower students to employ the art making process in ways they find rewarding. There are many students that create powerful work that is not biographical or drenched with angst or pain. However, the emotional safety provides the opportunity for those who are able to perceive it as such.

My experiences as a visual artist and a recovering alcoholic and drug addict play a profound role in the learning environment and relationships established with the students. It can be argued that my interest and understanding of the threshold concept framework are directly related to these experiences. My extensive studio art background underpins my teaching of visual art as being inherently epistemic. In this sense it expresses knowledge and acts as a form of knowledge construction. Therefore the creative process and the struggle of conceptualising and expressing one's ideas or feelings is the most important aspect to education in the arts. Many art learning environments are reduced to a list of creative instructions that provide a means for a visually impressive result. The difference being the authenticity of the forms being represented and the meaning of the experience to the student.

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Furthermore, my intense involvement in the art making process familiarised me with a conceptual understanding of different art media and materials. As a result, I can perceive and understand intentions in the art work from the student's perspective. My interpretation of student work is informed within a semiotic context and not an aesthetic and skill based lens. Art education that considers students work through the latter can disregard the expressive element of the work and focus upon the exercise of aesthetics. Confidence in visual language of media and material allows me to perceive meaning and intention which can be refined and clarified. This distinction is an essential element in fostering the emotional safety previously mentioned. More specifically, the ability to understand the semiotics of visual language informs my ability to ask questions that can slowly uncover deeper and complex meaning that may be held tacit by the student. Therefore, the arrival at clarity is established through discourse and observation as opposed to a pointed discussion.

My struggles with drugs and alcohol (which resulted in sobriety) is something that is well known in my classroom. In general, this reality has been a source of help (although often futile) for students, parents and other teachers during my years as an educator. However, I learned in the course of this study that the struggles I experienced became a source of credibility and relationship building with Rene, Jayden and Aline. In different moments each of the young women had brought up my willingness to share my struggles with them as being important. The implication from the different conversations (some of which occurred after the students graduated) was that I had already engaged a form of

troublesome knowledge and transformed as a result. This allowed them to feel empowered to do the same and that the complex experiences could be understood or navigated. The next section will evolve the discussion by focusing upon issues associated with curriculum and learning.

8.7 Curriculum and Learning in the Visual Art Classrooms: Holding Up the Mirror and Bringing the Apple

This section focuses upon issues of curriculum and learning in the context of visual art learning environments as is relevant to this thesis. As mentioned in the previous section Holding up the mirror and bringing the apple is a part of the title. This phrase refers to the role of pedagogy and the art educator which I argue is to facilitate engagement with the liminal experience and supporting young people in its navigation.

Contextualized within this research, Elgin (2010) discusses important distinctions between imitation and understanding which can be considered in the context of art education. Quite literally, art education can often be limited to a means of imitation or is mimetic (Elgin, 2010). Imitation in secondary art education (in my experience) is more accurately conceptualised as a perpetuation of art only as a demonstration of skill and pleasing aesthetics reducing the learning tasks to sets of unusual instructions to be followed. However, the art making process is a means of understanding as evidenced in the cases of the young women. As previously discussed, Rene, Aline and Jayden, experienced ontological shifts and re-subjective through the semiotic dialogue of visual art making. Therefore the metaphor of holding up the

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mirror is meant as seeing the self or self-reflection; more importantly engaging relevant and authentic experience. Considered in conjunction of the discussion of positionality, I attempt to facilitate this process but through trust and emotional security.

The issue of gatekeeper and the curriculum as a living entity (Irwin and Chalmers, 2007) become highly relevant, in this discussion. The opportunity to engage relevant life experience with art making would not present itself if I dictated terms of artistic engagement. The distinction being made is summarised in the following quote:

"Curriculum-as-plan is often concerned with a subject-based approach and attends to experiencing the visual. Curriculum-as-lived is often concerned with a student- or society-based perspective, and attends to visualizing experiences" (Irwin and Chalmers, 2007, p.179).

Holding up the mirror and bringing the apple manifests as an empowering of students to express themselves with bravery and without preconception. In this expressive process one begins to perceive a self that may be less familiar but all too present. The semiotic pedagogy and embracing the dialogic nature of visual signs is crucial in this context of challenging students to experience expression and voice as a threshold. In the case of these young women my facilitation of their learning, in large part, occurs through a semiotic discourse. In other words, my ability to perceive, interpret and inquire about their visual signs slowly unpacked meaning and its interrelationship to life experience and tacit knowledge.

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Irwin and Chalmers (2007, p.179-180) further explain "Both interpretations of art education curricula involve a visual component and an experiential component, though one interpretation understands curriculum (and art) primarily as a noun (plan), while the other understands curriculum (and art) primarily as a verb (lived)." This articulates an essential issue in the consideration of art learning environments through the threshold concepts framework. As an education process, art is often misconstrued as an end point that students need to prove themselves worthy or deserving by following along a teacher prescribed path. In reality, art is a mechanism or vehicle for the navigation of complex thoughts, feelings and experiences. And by giving form and representation to lived experience and feeling individuals engage in the making of meaning that may only be accessible through a visual art making process.

8.8 Assessment of Learning in the Art Environment

The previous discussion informed by Irwin & Chalmers (2007) focuses on lived experience of the curriculum which holds roots in Dewey (1916) and vital experience. While such literature is absolutely important and insightful it does not address practical challenges of art educators: more specifically, the current assessment driven climate of education and the culture of mastery, results and quantified data. When one considers the artwork produced by Jayden, Aline and Rene it is impressive in some regards but its power is realised in the context of the student and their experience. The students did fine in their IB assessment but they

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did not get top marks as their learning may indicate they should have. Although not a true concern for the thesis (nor myself) it does raise questions. The work is a mature and sophisticated journey through complex aspects of the liminal space. Do we place prescribed visual standards on students in regard to assessment? Where is the true value of the art experience; the visual result or the conveying of complex experience? This issue is increasingly frustrating as many current assessment practices place value upon concrete rubrics and scoring. However, as this thesis indicates the value of the art experience is messy and less concrete than what public education prefers. As discussed throughout this thesis there are many learning environments that remain a form of mimicry and lack a substantive engagement with the art making process. However, these types of learning environments may actually represent the types of tasks and indications of learning that any American schools desire. The next section evolves this issue in addressing implications for policy.

8.9 Implications for Education Policy and Learning Environments

In the course of conducting this research I have clarified and arrived at a deeper understanding of pedagogy and learning in the visual art environment. As a result, I hope and believe that I have become a more effective educator to my students, as well as, in a broader sense. Obviously, this thesis was written simultaneous to my continued employment in the public schools; where I have continuously encountered experiences that have become increasingly troubling and a likely consequence for educators that work with students in a personal and intensive manner. In my area of the

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United States there is a great deal of discussion on the necessity of building relationships with students as a means of fostering intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). An element of this thesis, as discussed earlier, is the importance of establishing relationships and trust with students so the learning environment becomes a space of emotional safety for students. I believe I am successful (as many teachers are) at creating this type of space and as a result students begin to express feelings, thoughts and experiences that matter to them. As the thesis presents, this is not necessarily a conscious decision and obviously there is no manner of task to be assigned that directly results in the types of art work presented in this thesis. In other words I do not assign for students to make work about their most painful experiences in life. Instead, the semiotic element of visual art can act as a vehicle for non-linguistic navigation of liminal space and tacit knowledge can be given form and ultimately linguistic signs.

A problem arises in the hypocrisy of differing entities involved in or surrounding the educational systems and its over simplified use of the word "(in)appropriate". More specifically, I have had quality student art work removed from exhibition or the need to defend a student's use of images or words. While the thesis demonstrates (and my personal views fully support) a code of ethics that prioritises the safety of students, above all else, these types of interventions most often have nothing to do with student safety. Instead they are about protecting a school system or not wanting to deal with the reality of some of the young people in the school. When I present in conferences I often encounter art teachers that get angry at the rawness of the student work I present or I get

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asked why I am allowed to let students make this kind of work. In a summer program, I frequently teach, parents and teachers will complain at the disturbing nature of some of the work and administrators will come and remove work from the walls. While my main school is not like this, the climate is always such it is a possible reality. But the reality is the students are not upset or disrupted by such work, it is the surrounding adults that possess the issues and the schools are somehow compelled to keeping these darker realities from being seen.

I fully agree relationships are key in learning environments but when one succeeds at establishing these relationships, students will express what they think and in the art environment these expressions can be quite powerful. As formerly discussed, the Arts Based Educational Research literature is predicated upon the ability of visual art to convey powerful internal experience making it possible for us to gain some understanding of how others may feel. As a result, the art work made by students can challenge those around them and it is not always met with celebration and intrigue; rather it can evoke outrage, fear and difficulty.

The previous context is meant to raise an argument in regard to schools policy and the need for nuance because complexity in the classrooms are often only judged in terms of black and white and not with any context. Therefore, I have proposed, with no success, that there be an adoption of additional policy that targets the arts specifically. Currently, most administrators only have a standardized set of rules that dictates behaviour, appropriate dress, drugs and alcohol, violence and other related topics. These are necessary but they are blanket policies that disregard the act

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of self-expression in a creative environment designed to foster such activity. This is the primary problem in the aforementioned summer program. Administrators or parents are not used to visual arts that go beyond aesthetic exercises and nice design. As a consequence, it is perceived as a threat and or danger of some sort. Obviously, the truth of the issue is the vital experience (Dewey, 1916) for some students is quite troubling and its visual representation quite challenging. In fairness, these types of stress are not daily occurrences and there are many that understand and celebrate the value of these learning experiences. However, the negative elements do occur and they are quite stressful; they often cause me to question my own judgement on a deeper level if it had not already been called into question by another individual.

As a response, I wish to highlight the need for school systems to adopt policy and nuance in their understanding of visual expression. For example, a drawing of a weapon is not a weapon nor a sign of a desire for violence. In fact it could (and often is) an image used to make statements about peace. Nudity is not pornography or sexually explicit content. A painting of a body clawing at its face is not necessarily a literal desire to perform this action. There are many personal examples I can provide but it would require lengthy explanation; therefore, I wish to simply get the point across. Even in the case of supportive administration, when issues are taken with the student art work, the principals only have these generic sets of rules as guidelines for response. Therefore, simple issues of reason can evolve into larger and more stressful experiences.

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As previously discussed, this thesis intends to present visual art learning environments and pedagogy through the lens of threshold concepts and semiotic theory. As a consequence, I hope this provides an opportunity for reflection upon one's own approaches to the utilisation of visual art in respective learning environments. Furthermore, I hope to present increased relevance and significance of the visual arts in education during the twenty first century. In addition, I have realized that there are unique elements to art education that embraces vital experience which requires an enhanced understanding and support from other facets of the school community. In my experience, these approaches have resulted in young women that engaged in authentic and relevant learning that has transformed and deepened an understanding of self. I argue the thesis presents learning that is as important if not more important than any of their schooling; for each of these young women and the others like them that were not a part of this thesis.

8.10 Limitations of the Study

The limitations section discusses the scope of the study. I have presented three case studies that provide an in depth documentation of the liminal journey of Aline, Jayden and Rene. An aim of the study is to provoke art educators into reflecting upon their pedagogy through the lens of threshold concepts and semiotic theory. As a result of this reflection upon pedagogy new insights and discussion about the epistemic potential and role of art education in the twenty first century may evolve.

I focused upon three case studies with a thick and rich description (Geertz, 1973) that employs writing, art portfolios and

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two interviews as data. Within this data there is compelling documentation of the young women's liminal journey and ontological shifts associated with identity, acceptance of self and healing. I argue these case studies provide substantive contribution to the threshold literature and the related aims toward art education. However, I cannot generalise this study to all young people experiencing identity issues. The highly subjective and personal nature of the case studies is a glimpse into larger issues but it is important for me to acknowledge the contextual limitations of the research. Future research should involve building a bank of case studies that address the liminal experience associated with identity. The benefit of more case studies would be to shed further light on the claims I have made about liminality. As previously mentioned, in this section, I argue the case studies and this thesis as a whole give us valuable insights to the liminal journey and the epistemic potential of the art making process as a vehicle for the navigation of the liminal space. There are important implications that can be drawn and that have been discussed but these are not definitive.

8.11 Consideration for Future Research and Recommendation for Art Education

The thesis makes the argument that to maintain or establish relevance as an important contributor to education we must turn to the epistemic potential of the art making process. The construct of semiotic pedagogy establishes a series of concepts that can provide art educators with a means to understand the value and opportunity

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to establish deeper relationship and understanding of student's experiences and tacit knowledge. The aim of the thesis is to provoke reflection in art educators upon their own pedagogy and understand where obstacles that prevent students from engaging relevant life experience. As educators begin to understand the epistemic nature of the art making process and the benefits of relationships established through semiotic pedagogy our ability to involve liminality and troublesome knowledge will become increasingly clear and affective.

My future research begins with a book that focuses upon understanding art education through the lens of threshold concepts. The book continues my research in that it builds upon the argument (in the thesis) that art is a form of linguistic knowledge and acts as a unique vehicle in the navigation of the liminal space. Future research should also explore the potential of semiotic pedagogy as it integrates threshold concepts into the learning environment in ways that can benefit pedagogy in many different subject areas. Continual effort to understand the liminal experience is also an important direction for continued research. A focus upon case studies and the use of art work can be a valuable means for continued in-depth study of the students learning experience. Furthermore, future case studies may involve students from a wider range of experience that may or may not be as difficult as the case studies represented in this thesis. In addition, there is always interest in interdisciplinary uses of the visual arts as a means of traversing troublesome knowledge and the liminal space in different academic contexts.

Appendix A

Declaration of Informed Consent

- I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to study interrelationships of visual art and states of liminality.
- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I have been informed that the investigator will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. Matthew Ravenstahl, School of Education, Durham University can be contacted via email: mjravenstahl@fcps.edu or telephone: 571-246-3403
- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the Ethics Sub-Committee of the School of Education, Durham University via email (Sheena Smith, School of Education, tel. (0191) 334 8403, e-mail: Sheena.Smith@Durham.ac.uk).

| | | |
|------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Date | Participant Name (please print) | Participant Signature |
|------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|

I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

| | |
|------|---------------------------|
| Date | Signature of Investigator |
|------|---------------------------|

Appendix B

Context and Intentions of Art Work:

What can you tell me about your pieces?

What's important for me to know?

Could you just sort of simply paraphrase again? What your body of work was about?

In our previous interview, did we talk about some of your personal experiences and story?

Would you be willing to give us some background on sort of what your life experiences had been?

Art Work and Meaning:

And when you said you realized that they are more, that there is something more to it than just a sort of stylized thing that you like. How did that occur?

And can you tell us about the different facets in what you were after?

What is it like to try to convey all those aspects of yourself and your ideas visually?

So was this something you intentionally expressed about? Was it something you sort of discovered along the way? What was it like going through that process? Can you shed some light for us on that?

Art and Affective Elements; Troublesomeness and Liminality:

What did it take for you to be able to do that?

What is art a way for you to do something you've been wanting to do? Or was making art something that brought that out of you? Maybe none of those things? Why do you think that was able to occur?

You attributed it back to that moment as the earliest you remember that?

So, these are things that are prevalent at that time. As well as, so this is all stuff you remember thinking at that time? Thinking and feeling?

Art and Semiotics and Dialogic:

So can you tell us about the symbolism of this and why the obsessive layering and things like that?

Was that a sort of self-reflective process?

How does video and photography work for you in terms of a medium?

How did you, what occurs in the art-making process?

In artwork, are you talk, are you talking to somebody else when you're making the artwork? Are you, who do you express to, who are you expressing for?

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Art and Ontological Shifts and Navigating Liminality:

What role did the art play in that for you?

So, where do you think you started this year and where do you think you are now? Have you moved any sort of emotionally and conceptually?

What was it that allowed you to break through or recognize or acknowledge something?

What, what about the making the art helped you realize and can you define that for me a little bit more?

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