VOICES IN THREAD: WOMEN'S CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF A PRIMARY CAREGIVER THAT REMAINED IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH AN ALLEGED OR KNOWN SEX OFFENDER, AN ARTS-BASED INQUIRY

by

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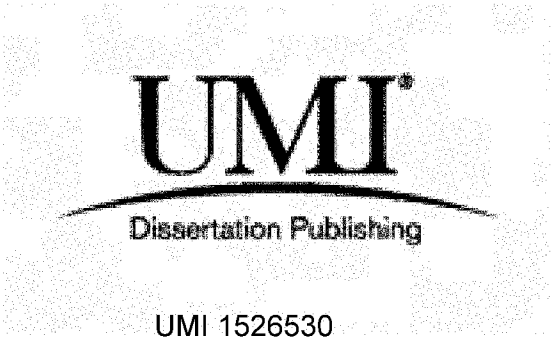

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Abstract

Voices in Thread is an arts-based inquiry that examines the overarching question "What are women's lived experiences of childhood, or young adulthood, when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender?" Using quilting as an art form, women creatively document their reflections of lived experiences. The stories of four women were gathered through participatory fiber-art group sessions, journaling, and individual interviews and analyzed using thematic and metaphoric analysis. The women reflect on their lived experiences, experience of participation in the group sessions, their process of creating their fiber-art, and a description of their finished fiber-art. The women's stories become captured in a collective quilt that serves as a multi-vocal visual narrative of their lived experience. This research creatively provides insight and awareness to generate meaningful discussions that can support and/or enhance social work responses, intervention strategies, and policy to, and for, children and their families.

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Acknowledgements

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Dedicated to:

All those who use their *voice* to break the silence - their own, for others, for change.

Even when our voices are silenced, creatively we can convey the truth.

Fig. 1- *Voices in Thread* by Clarie

Unravelling the Silence

Manipulatively choreographed; an orchestrated silence
The silenced, immobilized marionettes pirouetted on threads
Insidious seeds of self-doubt blossomed in the silence
Mouths sewn shut
Eyes alert, silently pleaded
The choking silence, heavy with impenetrable judgement
Justice scales unbalanced with silenced burden
Lost voices, silent voices, silenced truths
Dense silence blankets us invisible; smothering our true selves
Stifling silence devaluing our stories
Trapping us in the abyss of another's truth
Yet, there in the darkness of untruths
Courage propels us into the void of silence
Tipping the burdened scales
Finding justice, integrity, our voices
Demanding
On our terms, with our hearts
Voiceless no longer
Shattering the deceit
Speaking the truth; unravelling the silence
Voices in speech, in stories, in thread

Clarie Johnson, May 3, 2014

Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose of the Research

Through the use of qualitative research utilizing an arts-based inquiry, this inquiry examined the overarching question "What are women's lived experiences of childhood, or young adulthood,[1] when their primary caregiver[2] remained in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender?"[3] This study provides understanding of the women's lived experiences, the meanings that they have given to those past experiences, and how their lived experiences have impacted their life choices. Through facilitated participatory fiber-art[4] sessions and journaling, participants were inspired to creatively document their reflections of their lived experiences. The participants' fiber-art and journals, as well as an individual interview, became the data that was thematically and metaphorically analyzed.

Over the last decade, the sexual assault centre, Surpassing Our Survival (S.O.S.) Society in Prince George, British Columbia, continues to experience increased requests for services, mostly from concerned child protection workers, to provide child sexual abuse education to non-offending caregivers, primarily mothers, who are choosing to remain in relationships with sex offenders. The concerning situations are varied; some are incestuous, where the mother is remaining in a relationship with the biological father of their children that he has sexually abused

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[1] For the purpose of this research, young adult is determined as 19 to 29 years of age. See Participant Selection (p. 71) for a more detailed definition.

[2] The term caregiver has been used to encompass any non-offending individual in a parental role, including foster parents, guardians, or parents of a child that has been sexually abused.

[3] For the purpose of this research, a known sex offender was defined as an individual who has been criminally charged, and who may or may not have been convicted of child sexual abuse. An alleged sex offender is defined as an individual who has had allegations of child sexual abuse made against them, and although reported to child protection services and/or RCMP, they were not charged. In addition, the term "sex offender" will be used throughout the research to encompass both known and alleged sex offender.

[4] I use the term "fiber-art" to describe an aspect of quilting that is non-traditional in form. For further definition and understanding of the history of quilting see Chapter Three.

or, other situations include a mother being in a new relationship with a known or alleged sex offender who has either sexually abused other children and/or her children. Out of my social work/counselling practice and own lived experiences comes an increased curiosity about mothers who stay in a relationships with sex offenders, how the mothers are perceived, and more importantly to me, how the children perceive their experience of their mothers remaining in these relationships.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) continues to be a multifaceted concern that produces far-reaching effects for the child, their families, and society. The breadth of the literature on CSA comprehensively addresses aspects of CSA in the context of epidemiology, risk factors, intergenerational transmission, trauma and the long term effects, treatment for child victims, clinical features and psychopathology, disclosure, non-offending caregivers' capacity to protect after disclosure, sex offender treatment and recidivism, and prevention education (Putnam, 2003). In comparison, empirical literature that focuses specifically on the non-offending caregivers of children who have been sexually abused appears to be less extensive, especially non-offending fathers. The exception being, that there is an abundance of literature on the non-offending caregiver, primarily mothers, and their capacity to protect after disclosure of CSA. Further, there appears to be even less research addressing caregivers, again primarily mothers, with children still in their care, who are remaining in relationships with sex offenders.

What the limited literature does reveal is that, over the last decade there has been an identified and increased need to provide psycho-educational services to mothers remaining in relationships with sex offenders (Brogden & Harkin, 2000; Hill, 2005; Philpot, 2009). However, with movement towards providing comprehensive psycho-educational services for non-offending caregivers remaining in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender, are we preserving

family or forsaking children? Does supporting the partners of sex offenders mean that adults' needs, such as the biological right to parent, supersede children's rights? Do we adequately understand the immediate and long-term impact on the children when their primary caregiver remains in a relationship with a sex offender? Do we adequately assess children's thoughts and feelings about their living situation with a sex offender? Are children asked what they would prefer and are we, as a society, prepared to support their answers? Are we inclusive of cultural differences? Are adult voices drowning out the voices of children? My professional and personal experiences continue to leave me pondering these questions since there was no literature found that examined the lived experiences of children, now adults, whose primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender. Where knowledge and practice may be at odds, this research creatively provides insight and awareness to generate meaningful discussions that can support and/or enhance social work responses to, and for, children and their families when a primary caregiver remains in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender.

Researcher Positionality

I believe that feminism offers a perspective for understanding the dynamics of CSA as a complex interplay between existing social structures, conventional attitudes, and the socialization of males and females in a patriarchal society. Feminism, as a broad, conceptual, and philosophical framework offers is a different lens to deconstruct patriarchy and women and children's experiences of sexual violence. Feminists are quite clear in their criticisms of approaches which explicitly or implicitly place the blame for CSA on a seductive child or a colluding mother or, approaches that dismiss sexual violence as a gender-based crime viewing women and girls as inevitable victims of male sexuality (Herman, 2000). Feminism draws

attention to the unequal power relationships between men and women and adults and children, thus supporting the presumption that children cannot give consent to any sexual interactions with adults (Herman, 2000). As well, feminism stresses offender accountability for initiating and maintaining sexual violence; girls and women do not bear responsibility for controlling men's sexuality. Feminism acknowledges that a very small number of women sexually abuse their children; however the majority of CSA perpetrators are male[5] (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008), which is further discussed in the prevalence of CSA. Feminism does not deny that some mothers do not believe their daughters, or that a substantial number of male children are also sexually abused, although mainly by heterosexual men. These assumptions are naturally unraveled throughout this research.

I have also approached this study with the belief that children rarely lie about sexual abuse. There is little evidence to suggest that children deliberately make false allegations or misinterpret appropriate adult-child contact as sexual abuse (Finkelhor 2008; MacLeod, 1999). In situations where it appears that a child has made a false allegation, it has usually been the result of manipulation by another adult. False denials of sexual abuse (saying it did not happen when it did) and recanting a disclosure of abuse (denying that it happened after having told someone about being abused) are much more common than false reports (MacLeod, 1999). People, including children, may say things that are not accurate. Inaccuracy alone does not mean that people are lying.

My research focused on adult retroactive expressions of women's childhood experiences. Therefore, I anticipated that participants' perspectives are naturally influenced by their awareness that, as children, their agency was thoroughly compromised by their caregivers'

[5] The pronouns used throughout this research will reflect this, except in any instances specifying a female perpetrator.

decisions to remain in a relationship with a sex offender. Agency can be derived from finding meaning in reconciling the past; how one sees something has an impact on how one behaves (MacLeod, 1999). Children's perceptions of circumstances are often embedded in an intrinsic loyalty to caregivers and an unrelenting belief that parents will love and protect them (MacLeod, 1999). Therefore, there is an assumption that the participants' individual "truths" are subjective; that the story of a childhood event is told from a differing point of view – that of an adult. None-the-less, there is the belief that knowledge creating truths are located within an individual's reflexive perceptions and junctures of their lived experiences and personal realities (Van Den Bergh, 1995).

Lastly, this research attempted to bring childhood experiences to the forefront. However, children's care and well-being, as socially constructed, is inextricably linked to the conduct of mothers (Caplan, 1998). This created a personal dilemma. As a neophyte researcher, how would I study, talk, think, and write about children and mothers in ways that are sensitive to the situations of children, adult survivors, and their mothers? How would I do this research without contributing, even if inadvertently, to the cultural tendency to blame mothers for CSA and child outcomes? In an attempt to avoid obscuring the situatedness of mothers, thereby ignoring the accountability of sexual offenders, I provide an extensive literature review on the social construction of motherhood and mother-blaming in the next chapter. As long as we continue to hold onto the notion that mothers are solely responsible for the prevention of CSA, the problem of children at risk becomes individualized, further silencing women and children's voices.

Conceptual Lens

Social work practice methods require social workers to scrutinize social issues beyond the individual to be inclusive of challenging social, economic, and political structures in order to

improve social conditions and promote social justice (Canadian Association of Social Workers, CASW, 2005). "Feminists underscore the pivotal insight that the 'personal is political'; that is, private interactions and roles are shaped by and reinforce, larger, gendered, dominant institutions and relations of power" (Murray & Hick, 2010, p.8). Social work and research goals and values are noticeably compatible with feminist philosophy.

Feminism refers to evolving philosophical perspectives and theoretical frameworks that attempt to explain the various phenomena of women's oppression and disenfranchisement. Overall, feminist theory centers on examining and exposing the connections between gender, privilege, social class, culture, sexuality, and the concept of self (Mehrota, 2010; Ross & Lovrod, 2010). Feminist theory is neither a singular theoretical framework or simply defined; rather feminist theory and feminist social work has emerged from what is characterized as "waves" of feminism and ideological positionality from radical to liberal feminism (Harms & Pierce, 2011; Ross & Lovrod, 2010). Drawing from each of the waves, all feminist frameworks share recognition in the need for a continued deconstruction of patriarchy.

Resulting from women opposing patriarchal oppressions, feminism theory is located within a critical paradigm with an emphasis on addressing structurally oppressive forces and transformational politics (Harms & Pierce, 2011; Mullaly, 1993). A feminist approach, like structural social work practice, recognizes that private troubles cannot be understood separately from their social or political causes. Contemporary feminist theories highlight the necessity of understanding individuals' diverse contexts by examining the intersections of multiple dimensions and modalities of oppression, while simultaneously exploring individuals' experiences of power, privilege, and acclaim (Damant et al., 2008; Mehrota, 2010; Ross & Lovrod, 2010). Intersectionality, a term first coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, has become

a methodological paradigm to analyze and reveal the complex and multifaceted intersection of individuality, systemic and structural inequality, and informal constructions that reinforce interlocking forms of oppression and uphold privilege (Hulko, 2009; Mehrota, 2010).

What makes feminist research uniquely feminist are the motives, concerns, and knowledge brought to the research process. Feminist theory strives towards understanding individuals, specifically women, in varied contexts and refrains from perpetuating the view of victimhood. Guided by the principle that the participants are the experts and authorities of their own experiences, my intention, embedded within this research, is to honour what Mullaly (2007) reflects: "all participants in the dialogue are equals wherein each learns from the other and teaches the other" (p. 317). We are simultaneously teachers and learners, researchers and the researched.

Researcher in the Research: Weaving Myself In

Every artist dips [her] brush
in [her] own soul
and paints [her] own nature
into [her] pictures.

~Henery Ward Beecher

Arts-based research embraces inescapable subjectivity and calls for self-reflexive practice that involves examination of the relationship between the researcher's social position and research context (Shapiro, 2003; Oakley, 2010). To place the researcher fully within the research is to recognize that we all have stories and it seems a fundamental part of social interaction to tell our story. "Who the researcher is, is central to what the researcher does" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 13). As a woman, fiber-artist, and graduate student, influenced by conventional social science research, I find that my aspiration to incorporate arts-based research has a symbolic emancipatory appeal. It is a reflection of who I am, intuitively,

professionally, and academically – creatively challenging the status quo. As suggested by McNiff, (2011) we can embrace the willingness to go against the grain of current practice in order to improve it.

Researchers are in positions to use their privilege and skills to empower the people they study. By effectively intertwining their autobiography to conduct research, a process of dialogical discussion is created to further understand human experience (Saresma, 2003). Through stories we arrive at an understanding of self and others as described by Witherell and Noddings (1991),

> Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are normally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known (p. 1).

In this abyss of finding my researcher identity I have been reminded that my story and others' stories are the narrative threads linking our experiences, not literally what happened, but what we make out of what happened, always subject to shifting interpretation. My personal connection to this research becomes weaved together with the "voices" of the research participants.

Without question, my experiences as a child have been profoundly life shaping. Growing into a young adult was met with challenges and insecurities fueled by my feelings of shame, guilt, anger, anxiety, and depression. I have spent many years "finding" myself and finding peace with some very unhappy and traumatic childhood experiences. My identity has been shaped and externally defined by a complex trajectory of inherent characteristics and

experiences. Each moment of my past has become part of my identity. By embracing my past I live authentically in the present and dream of the future.

In becoming confronted with how to use this space afforded to me through academia, I come back to the researchers' privileged position to empower, not only the participants, but all survivors who have been silenced. The reality is that my story is implicitly entangled in every aspect of this research and I am compelled to be candid. Embracing my past now includes being the dissention amongst the surreal and palpable silence when we broach the all too real experience of child sexual abuse. In the silence demanded by an apathy borne from patriarchy, survivors are shamed, children are betrayed, and child sexual abuse is perpetuated. It is the elephant in our collective living room.

I speak from the experience of a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, an experienced children's sexual abuse trauma counsellor, and anti-violence activist, and educator. While I reflexively struggled with how much of my story to share in the context of research, I was haunted by the children that I worked with who, during police investigations or court proceedings, did not have personal choice about the details of their sexual abuse becoming known in the public domain. I also struggled with the "glossing" over of the details. The use of desensitizing language that only obscures what really happened and continues to happen. Yet, when asked about my thesis topic by new acquaintances or even colleagues, I have spent the last two years prefacing my answer with "Well, it's a very sensitive topic. . ." While I do believe that societal awareness and critical pedagogy is rooted in the discourse of confronting uncomfortable ideas and experiences, I am not insensitive to one's personal need for self-preservation. To date, my life's work has been encompassed in working to end child sexual abuse. This work chose me. Although I am never completely "comfortable" in bearing witness

to others' stories of sexual violence, I am sacredly compelled to do so. Where I am most often able to find celebration in the unsilenced truths, I understand that there are others' whose hearts and souls cannot carry the burden. The reality is that this research topic is of a sensitive nature and the chapters that follow may be distressing for some readers/viewers. I begin this complex topic with my story of self: the personal, self as social worker, and self in art.

Self: the personal. So how is it that I am here now? When I reflect on myself as an MSW student and neophyte researcher, I do not think it is enough to just state my positionality and identity as a privileged, educated, mature Caucasian woman, mother, married, heterosexual, feminist, social worker, able-bodied, survivor of sexual violence, and fiber-artist. It has been important for me to reflect on how complex interactions with the world have shaped what I bring to the profession of social work and this research. I feel that being a survivor and identifying as a feminist have predominantly affected the course of my life. It is from this perspective that I reflect on the anecdotes of impressionable lived experiences that intersect with my research.

My personal story begins when I was born the eldest daughter of a teenage mother and a father eight years her senior. My maternal grandmother abandoned my mother when she was a young child and my paternal grandmother, an Ojibwa woman, died giving birth to my father. My mother was raised by her father and a female "friend" who I am named after. My father, raised by his French Canadian Catholic father, grew up with multiple step-mothers. As a child, I never knew that we were Métis. My father never discussed our Metis ancestry until I was in my twenties. The significance of this for me is that I always felt like I did not belong in my family. I was the only one with blue eyes, auburn hair, pale skin, and freckles. My sister was always affectionately called the "little Indian princess." I long for a connection to my ancestral culture but in my "whiteness" and the privilege it has afforded me I feel the divide of a cultural void; a

lost cultural identity. Yet every time I hear the pounding rhythm of Aboriginal drumming and singing, I feel like I am being called home.

Connections to identifying as a feminist begin early in my life. A poignant moment begins when I was eight years old, my father came home early from work armed with a shotgun and surprised my mother and her "boyfriend." My mother's boyfriend fled, leaving my mother, my little sister, and myself defenseless. Sitting on the couch, in a small living room with the blue flowered patterned window curtains drawn shut, my father held us hostage at gunpoint. My mother was eventually able to convince my father to let my sister and I leave and to go to our aunt's house. I will always remember the sound of my coat being zippered up to my chin by my mother's shaking hands and the warmth of her breath on my ear as she whispered instructions to tell my aunt that my father had a gun. I still remember walking away, hand in hand, with my sister, worrying with every step. I worried if I would ever again see my mother alive. I also worried about my father getting into trouble. My father was arrested and released on a no contact condition. He was never formally charged with any crime. I am unaware of any support services being offered, and as a family we never discussed this incident again.

My parents separated after the hostage situation and my mother eventually married the boyfriend. Within the year, my mother became pregnant and my step-father began to sexually abuse me, I was about nine years old. Being sexually abused was not something new to me. My father had already been sexually abusing me since I was five years old.

I continued to be sexually abused by both my father and step-father until after my thirteenth birthday. I was also sexually abused on several occasions by my step-father's elderly father who, according to my mother, she had been "warned" about. I also experienced being sexually abused by a stranger. One winter evening when I was about seven years old, I was

playing with other children in snow castles that had been constructed in a local school yard. Sitting on throne at the entrance to one of the majestic castle, a young adult male stranger enticed me to sit on his lap. His cold fingers secretly probed beneath the warmth of my snowsuit, all the while telling me I was his princess. Inconceivably, no one saw. I scurried home and never told anyone, I had learned not to tell. My father manipulated me into secrecy. He told me not to tell. "It" was a secret game. My experiences became the personification of "normal."

I do not remember how old I was the first time my sister bravely told our mother that she had witnessed me being sexually abused by our step-father. My mother still stayed. In fact, together, my mother and step-father told me "it" would never happen again. My step-father was supposedly seeing a psychiatrist, a "special doctor." If he was, the professional and legal duty to report must have been an anecdotal footnote written as an afterthought into his professional code of conduct. It is frustrating that still forty years later, I continue to encounter incidents of individuals in powerful positions who are still not reporting disclosures of child sexual abuse or medical concerns suggesting child sexual abuse. It often feels that I am being put in a position of holding individuals to task. I accept this as my destiny, but it is not without outrage. I have carried much shame and embarrassment for not being the one to tell about my step-father sexually abusing me. I remember the disappointment and anger I felt when the "doctor" was not going to "save" me. Nobody asked me what I wanted; nobody asked me about the sexual abuse. I am convinced this shame, embarrassment, disappointment, and anger strengthened my determination to be a voice for the children, advocating for a system that collaboratively responds to suspicions of child abuse in all its forms. I could not tell then, I can speak out now.

Even after promising me that the sexual abuse would never happen again, my step-father continued sexually abusing me. I do not remember how long it was before my sister once again

told my mother that I was still being sexually abused. I do remember that I had just turned 13 years old. My sister witnessed my step-father calling me into the bathroom while he bathed, on the pretense that he needed his back scrubbed. This time when my sister told, my mother called the police. My mother and two male uniformed police officers showed up unexpectedly at the place where I was babysitting to take my statement about the sexual abuse that had occurred only hours prior. With terror, I told them what had happened. Inconceivable to me then and now, after they took my statement, my mother and the police officers left me alone with the responsibility of two small children. I remember fearing that my step-father was going to come and physically harm me or kill me.

My step-father never told me not to tell, nor did he threaten to harm me if I ever told. He did not have to. Not only did I think the sexual abuse was normal, I witnessed him repeatedly physically assault my mother. The first time my step-father physically assaulted my mother was during her pregnancy and the summer I turned ten years old. Although I never witnessed the assault, what remains poignant is what I came to understand about being female. A few days after the assault, I remember looking at and touching my mother's beautiful pregnant belly, feeling the stir of life beneath my hands, fascinated with the ability of the female body. In that moment, reminiscent with awe, I looked into my mother's battered and bruised face and I realized a paralyzing fear. I am sure it was in this moment of time, while still only a child, that I began to question the patriarchal value that dominates the lives of women and children.

Another time, my mother attempted to escape my step-father's drunken assault by running out the front door, but he followed her out onto the front lawn and began to strangle her. The neighbours called the police. He convinced my mother to let him come back. Back then, an automatic charge policy for domestic violence did not exist. My step-father was an avid hunter

and every day I lived in terror of looking down the barrel of a shotgun, it had already happened once. Another time I found a hidden box full of magazines that must have belonged to my step-father. These magazines contained stories and pictures about women who had been raped, tortured, and murdered. These magazines were marketed as unsolved crimes. It was pure misogyny. No, my step-father did not have to use threats to keep me silent. Society was also informing me that physical and emotional safety depended on gender.

My step-father was arrested for child sexual abuse and entered a not guilty plea. Before we ever went to court he died by suicide, he shot himself. Some days I am relieved it ended this way. Other times, I am mad as hell that he was such a coward. Before he killed himself, he spent months stalking and terrorizing us. We had to go into hiding. Ironically, at the time that we were hiding for our safety, I was learning about Anne Frank.[6] I remember the empathy I felt for this young woman who was hated simply for who she was. I believe that my intolerance to racism was being further developed during this experience, as I had already witnessed and experienced racism for having a friend who was Jamaican and black. As a young teenager I did not understand why I was so hated; why I was sexually abused; why my mother was assaulted; why we were harassed; why was inhumane treatment and disrespect of another human being justified just because they were of another culture, colour, religion, ethnicity, or female; why? I did not understand this violence. I began to inherently believe that somehow I was at fault, that I deserved being mistreated.

A final poignant moment involves the last incident of being sexually abused by my father the summer I turned thirteen, and only months before the sexual abuse by my step-father would end. This last experience of violation by my father remains paramount. In the middle of

[6] Annelies "Anne" Marie Frank is one of the most discussed Jewish victims of the Holocaust, who as a 13 year old girl kept a diary of her thoughts while in forced hiding. Her diary was published by her father, Otto Frank, the family's sole survivor. Retrieved from: http://www.biography.com/people/anne-frank9300892

nowhere, on the side of a darkened highway, in the sleeper of my father's 18-wheeler, he again sexually abused me. I remember terror, I remember whimpering, and I remember the heavy compression of his weight on my chest. Then he abruptly stopped. He told me to go to sleep. I laid there alert to his sleeping breath; silently begging of a god that I did not really believe existed, to protect me. It was in this moment that I hated my body. Long forgotten was the awe of a woman's body as a life giver. I came to view my young developing body as responsible for tyrannical male attention; my body betrayed me. I loathed of my body. I felt disconnected from the parts of my body that made me female, further reinforced by societal sexist attitudes and objectification of women's bodies.

I never told anyone about being sexually abused by my biological father until I was twenty-nine years old. It was a series of events, significantly the birth of my daughter, that lead me to breaking this silence and to eventually confronting my father. When I confronted my father with his betrayal, I felt an eight year olds fear as I remembered *that* shotgun. It was not a completely satisfying experience since he denied his actions; it was, however, the end that birthed the beginning of fulfilling my destiny.

Self as social worker. I have become the vessel for which stories are stored. I know innumerable stories of sexual violence, torture, and murder. I know stories of irretrievable childhoods. My story is but one of many. Yet it is my story that led me to choosing social work, to working with children who have disclosed being sexually abused. Since I was sixteen years old I have known that I wanted to "work" with children who were sexually abused but I did not even know what that meant, what social work was, or how to follow that dream. I also wanted to stop the oppression of women and sexism, albeit I did not know the language for what I was encountering and witnessing. I did not know that I wanted to "do" social work. Interestingly, I

was adamantly discouraged from this endeavour by my mother. She told me I was too sensitive. My mother would highlight my personal traits of sensitivity by reminding me of how inconsolable I would become when, as a young child, I watched old Shirley Temple[7] movies, which characterized the adventures of an orphan. Ironically, since confronting my father 24 years ago, I have never again spoken to him and for the past 12 years I have had no contact with my mother. My relationship with my mother dissolved after she chose to stay with a man, her fourth husband, who was alleged to have sexually abused a young female child. He was charged and found not guilty due to lack of evidence, not a judicially uncommon outcome for crimes against children or sexual assaults.

My empathic and compassionate nature was always viewed as a deficit rather than the quality that today, makes me an effective social worker and a caring individual. It took me years to embrace my passion and personal qualities of empathy and compassion as strengths rather than weaknesses. I have never viewed my personal history as separate from my professional practice, rather I believe that through self-exploration, personally and professionally, I have developed a better understanding of myself as a social worker. My mother blamed my personal counselling, education, and my professional work for the change she saw in me. It saddened me to realize that she did not see that who I was had always been there, I was just buried beneath silence, shame, and guilt.

It also saddened me that she could not celebrate in the shedding of a silence that served a purpose for everyone else at the expense of my own self. I was the good girl, a good daughter, a good student; I did not rock the boat. I was the child that nobody would have guessed at the hell that I endured, that I bore witness to. I would never betray my family, especially my mother for

[7] [3]Shirley Temple, born in 1928, is a legendary child film star of the 1930's who often characterized a lovable parentless waif. Retrieved from http://www.biography.com/people/shirley-temple-9503798

whom I had an intense loyalty too. Instead, I did everything with a feverish determination; perfectionism became my façade to hide behind. I set out to be perfect and silent in order to look "normal." My family never talked about the sexual abuse or the violence. I learned that it was not the sexual abuse that was taboo; speaking out was the taboo. Silence was covertly demanded. When I started to talk about the sexual abuse and violence, my mother and other family members minimized or denied my experiences; thereby denying theirs. It is probably the years of a self-imposed silence and the impact of others attempting to silence me that created a voracious need for women and children to have their voices heard, in whatever way necessary.

As a young child I began to sense that there were gendered differences, as an adolescent there were obvious stirrings of an inner feminist but I had no language for it, as a young adult I started to make connections with a passion to challenge sexism and oppression at its roots. I did not have a particularly developed sense of what that meant, and I did not know anyone else who identified as a feminist. I do remember wanting to be Pippy Longstocking.[8] What I did not know then, is that what appealed to me the most about her character were her autonomy and nonconformity, as well as, her sense of social justice. My mother always told me that women could do anything, but her actions of determining her self-worth through her relationships with men confused me. Post-secondary education provided the theoretical framework for me to develop my own feminist perspective. A perspective that centers on understanding systems of oppression, confronting the ways I have internalized those oppressions, and making choices, for self and others, that disrupt rather than perpetuate those systems. I see my role as a survivor, as a feminist woman, as a social worker to challenge individuals to see the world on different terms – through a systemically and culturally gendered lens. I have witnessed that violence against

[8] Pippi Longstocking is a fictional character in a series of children's books by Swedish author, Astrid Lindgren and adapted into multiple films and television series. Retrieved from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pippi_Longstocking

women, in all its forms, remains the most effective and insidious method of patriarchal control over the lives and spirits of women. Education has provided a theoretical context for the atrocities that women and children experience, yet my heart still does not understand.

Self in art. Aligning with my social work practice principles, I could not ask of my participants, what I myself was not willing to do. To honour their courage is to embrace my own vulnerability. My thesis supervisor, Dr. Indrani Margolin (personal communication, October 30, 2013), reminded me that my own courage is in the asking of this research question and providing the space for others to become courageous. Courage, derived from the root word, *cor*, the Latin for heart, originally meant "to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart" (Brown, 2010, p.12). To speak honestly and openly about whom we are, what we are feeling, and about our experiences is a true demonstration of courage (Brown, 2010). I also believe that the "rage" in courage is the catalyst for speaking out when the heart can no longer bear the burden of injustice to self or others. Rage ignites the audacity to be courageous and live bravely in a world that often tries to silence us.

The following is my story of my mother staying in a relationship with a sex offender; my voice in thread.

Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home
Your house is on fire and your children are alone
All except one
And her name is Ann
She hid under the frying pan

Above is a version of a children's nursery rhyme that I profoundly remember as a child. Whenever I heard this rhyme, I remember being emotionally haunted with fear for the ladybug's children whose house was on fire, and grief for the mother ladybug returning home to find her children dead, all the while wondering why the children were left home alone and in harm's way.

My childhood interpretation of this nursery rhyme metaphorically embodies my childhood experience of my mother who knowingly stayed with my step-father, a sex offender.

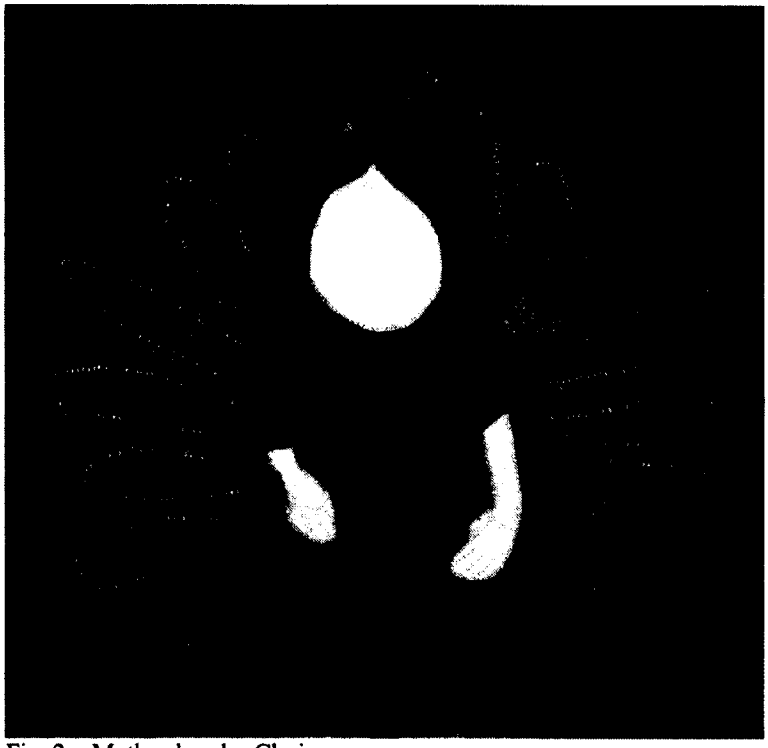

Fig. 2 – Mother-loss by Clarie

In the aesthetically pleasing and serene simplicity of this quilt square, titled *Mother-loss* (Fig. 2), is the trajectory of a mother who deviated from the culturally idealized model of mothering. The ladybug, as it relates to the nursery rhyme, captures the essence of my feeling unprotected and abandoned by my mother when she chose to stay with my step-father after knowing he sexually abused me. I felt like she left me in harm's way, in the fire. The ladybug cradled in the arms of the child, symbolizes my child self as the caregiver to my mother. In the cradling of the lady-bug, there is grief and loss. In my reflexive journal I wrote,

> I grieve for myself, for what my heart longs for, the biological need to have had a mother, the societally reinforced ideology of a mother or mothering; the mother I needed. Instead, I blame myself. What was wrong with me? Why didn't she choose me? Then I blame her for not choosing me. I feel broken open (Johnson, January 26, 2014).

While nursery rhyme is ominous, lady-bugs are thought to be a messenger of promise and a reminder to live life in joy and love. Although this quilt square is a representation of a pained childhood experience, it is also a reflection of the love and another's mothering that found me.

Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of my research detailing the contextual realities as well as the conceptual lens through which I viewed my research. In addition I have provided details of my researcher positionality as it related to my research. These experiences and assumptions were constantly identified throughout the research process and acknowledged while conducting ongoing data analysis. To temper the influence of my positionality, a number of external peer debriefers were used, including my thesis supervisor and colleagues.

Chapter Two – Literature Review: Defining Key Concepts

Definitions and concepts invoke controversy, disagreement, and are subject to interpretation. Debate and discourse is essential to creating awareness through multiple world views. The following literature review is intended to provide a framework of understanding of the crucial concepts and definitions that guided my research. The literature review addresses: defining child sexual abuse; prevalence of child sexual abuse; child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities; sexual violence in Northern B.C.; effects of child sexual abuse; construction of good mother; bad mother dichotomy; mother-blaming and child sexual abuse; and partners of alleged or known sex offenders.

Defining Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a complex life experience, not a diagnosis or a disorder that was historically treated as an anomaly (Putnam, 2003). The sexual abuse of children continues to be a global phenomenon that affects many families and appears to be increasing (Pretorius, Chauke, & Morgan, 2011). CSA knows no cultural or socio-economic barrier and has far reaching effects for the child, their families, their community, and society. The definition of, and response to, CSA varies from culture to culture, era to era, and across professional disciplines and ideologies, suggesting that prevailing social attitudes toward children and cultural constructs affect how adult sexual behaviours towards children are viewed (Philpot, 2009). Some sexual practices are acceptable in some societies but abhorred in others. For example, the masturbation of boys, by adults, to make them manly is accepted in some parts of India, while masturbation is performed on girls to make them sleep well (Philpot, 2009). In some African countries, sex with a female child or young girl who is still a virgin is believed to cure sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, an idea rooted in ancient notions of the purity of children (Philpot, 2009).

What it means to "be" a child will have direct implications for the ways in which the issue of CSA is constructed and defined. The existence of childhood is a socially constructed concept. Rather than being viewed as a global phenomenon, the ideology of childhood is influenced and governed by complex historical, social, and cultural specificities (Pasura et al., 2012). Dominant conceptualizations' of childhood are uncritically premised of viewing the child as innocent and lacking adult power and capacity (Pasura et al., 2012). Discourse in contemporary Western societies suggests a widely held and unquestioned belief that children are fundamentally different from adults and entitled to nurturing and protection (Pasura et al., 2012; Sorin, 2005). Laws constructed to protect innocent and defenseless children from CSA make sense. It seems inconceivable that the protection of children and recognition that children have rights of their own, may not be a fundamental value in all societies and cultures, past or present.

One generally assumes in cases of CSA that the desire for sexual gratification is a significant component in the etiology of the sex offenders' behaviour (Ryan, Gillies, Kent, Baker, Durfee, Winterstein, & Knapp, 2001). While many definitions include "for the purpose of sexual gratification" (see for example: The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect: For Service Providers, 2007, p. 24), other definitions more accurately address the offenders' motivation as power and control and the child's inability to consent to sexual activity (Ryan et al., 2001). When sexual contact occurs between an adult and a child, it is abusive because it is predicated upon an inequality in power and life experience (Russell, 1986). However, as previously discussed, social construction of cultural norms affects how the treatment of children is viewed. For example, in Mexico, the age of sexual consent is 12 years, which is four years below the age determined by the Criminal Code of Canada (Philpot, 2009).

Feminists argue that the assumption that the offender's sexual arousal is an uncontrollable male urge and is seeking sexual gratification, dismisses the reality that CSA and sexual assaults against women and children is a gendered based crime of violence in which sex is used as the weapon (Ryan et al., 2001; Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC), 2012). Satisfaction is gained from the non-sexual needs of dominating, controlling, degrading and humiliating the victim, and in some cases, the desire to inflict pain. Even in situations where sex rather than humiliation is the primary motive, the fact that the child's inability to consent or the woman's wishes to not have sex are completely ignored suggests that sexual violence is an expression of power and control (Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General, Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, 2007).

In defining CSA, key criteria concerning the imbalance of power and trust between victim and perpetrator, lack of consent and the inability to give consent must remain central in addressing this phenomenon. Even in his early research, Finkelhor (1979) maintained that the ethical issue of why sex with children was wrong must be approached from the perspective of addressing the issue of consent. "Children, by their nature, are incapable of truly consenting to sex with adults. Because they are children, they cannot consent; they can never consent" (Finkelhor 1979, p. 692).

Until May 1, 2008, Canada's 1892 "age of consent law" remained in effect which determined that any person 14 years of age and older could legally consent to sexual activity (Pilon, 2001). Prior to 1892, the age of consent was 12 years (Pilon, 2001). The age of consent refers to the age at which Canada's criminal law recognizes the legal capacity of a young person to consent to sexual activity. Below this age, all sexual activity with a young person is prohibited. On May 1, 2008, the federal government amended the Criminal Code of Canada

with "age of protection" legislation, the Tackling Violent Crimes Act, which rose the age of consent to sexual activity from 14 years to 16 years of age (Department of Justice, 2012). The amendment included an exception for 14 and 15 year old youth who engage in non-exploitative sexual activity with a partner who is less than five years older. The legislation maintained an existing close-in-age exception that exists for 12 or 13 year olds who engage in sexual activity with a peer who is less than 2 years older, provided the relationship is not exploitative (Department of Justice, 2012).

This study uses a definition of CSA that is encompassed within the Criminal Code of Canada and addresses the criteria of offender accountability, imbalance of power and trust, and inability to consent. Broadly defined: CSA occurs when an older person who is in a position of trust and authority takes advantage of a child, who is under the age of 16 years and cannot give free and informed consent, for sexual purposes or exploitation (Department of Justice, 2012; EVA BC, 2012; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2009). CSA includes the improper exposure of a child to sexual contact that includes sexualized touching/fondling and/or penile, digital, or object penetration of intimate body parts. CSA also includes any non-contact sexualized activities or sexual behaviours including exhibitionism, voyeurism, exposure to pornography, and luring. A child or youth can be sexually abused by a parent, sibling, extended family member, caregiver or guardian, others known to the family, neighbour, teacher, or a stranger (Department of Justice, 2012; EVA BC, 2012; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2009). Regardless of whom the perpetrator is, child sexual abuse is a misuse of power and a violation of trust.

Since the intended research draws upon a definition of CSA that is inclusive of aspects pertaining to legal statutes and makes reference to known or alleged sex offenders, it is important

to outline child-specific offences in accordance to the Criminal Code of Canada. Children, who are legally defined as anyone under 19 years of age, are legally protected by child-specific offences and include the following:

- Sexual Interference - no one can touch any part of the body of a child under the age of 16 for a sexual purpose.

- Invitation to Sexual Touching - no one can invite a child under the age of 16 to touch himself/herself or them for a sexual purpose.

- Sexual Exploitation - no one in a position of trust or authority over a 16 or 17 year old or upon whom the young person is dependent, can touch any part of the body of the young person for a sexual purpose or invite that young person to touch himself/herself or them for a sexual purpose.

- Incest - no one may have sexual intercourse with their parent, child, brother, sister, grandparent or grandchild.

- Child Pornography - no one may make, distribute, transmit, make available, access, sell, advertise, export/import or possess child pornography. Child pornography is broadly defined and includes materials that show someone engaged in explicit sexual activity who is, or seems to be, under the age of 18 years; or show a young person's sexual organ or anal region for a sexual purpose. Child pornography also includes written and audio material that encourages others to commit a sexual offence against a child, or is primarily a description of unlawful sexual activity with a child that is intended for a sexual purpose.

- Luring a Child - no person may use a computer system, such as the Internet, to communicate with a young person for the purpose of facilitating the commission of a sexual or abduction offence against that young person.

- Exposure - no one may expose their genital organs for a sexual purpose to a young person under the age of 16 years.

- Procuring - it is against the law for parents and guardians to procure their child under the age of 18 years to engage in illegal sexual activity. It is also against the law for anyone to offer or obtain the sexual services of a young person under the age of 18

- Bestiality - it is against the law for anyone to engage in sexual activity with an animal, including making a child do this or doing this in front of a child.

- Child Sex Tourism - it is against the law for a Canadian to travel outside of Canada and engage in any sexual activity with a young person that is against the law in Canada. If the Canadian is not found guilty of committing such a sexual offence in the country where it

> occurred, the Canadian could be convicted in Canada and would face the same penalty as if that offence had occurred in Canada.
> (Department of Justice, 2012)

Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse

Research indicates that children are the most criminally victimized populations and that CSA is a significantly under-reported crime that is difficult to prove and prosecute (Finklehor, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2011). Estimates are based on official records representing only those children who come to the attention of authorities such as RCMP and Ministry for Child and Family Development (MCFD). CSA, under-reported in all cultures, is believed to be even less reported to authorities than any other category of crime; it is estimated that only 5% of victims disclose the abuse to the authorities (Finkelhor, 2008). "Surrounded by great taboo, the problem of CSA may resemble an iceberg: few victims come to the attention of the authorities; the majority remains hidden and silent" (Collin-Vézina, Dion, & Trocmé, 2009, p. 31).

Under-reporting compounded by the lack of a definitive and universally accepted definition of CSA makes it difficult to accurately portray the number of children who are being sexually abused globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence involving physical contact (United Nations, 2006). In Canada, approximately one in three and one in six boys will experience some form of unwanted sexual contact before they reach the age of 16 years (Statistics Canada, 2006). While females are disproportionately the victims of sexual offences, males are disproportionately the accused; in 2007 police-reported data showed that 97% of persons accused of sexual offences were male (Brennan & Taylor-Butts, 2008).

The Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile (Statistics Canada, 2011) is an annual report produced by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics that reports on the nature, extent, and trends of family violence to inform policy makers and the public about family violence issues. This specific report incorporated police-reported data collected in 2009 as part of the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey which covered approximately 99% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011). The police-reported data for 2009 indicated that in 85% of incidences, children and youth under the age of 18 were most likely to be sexually victimized or physically assaulted by someone they knew. The UCR2 reported that nearly 55,000 children and youth, aged zero to 17 years, were the victims of a sexual offence or physical assault in 2009, of which three out of every ten children, or close to 15,000 children, were perpetrated by a known and trusted family member[9]. Of the 15,000 children, 33% of children and youth victims experienced sexual offences. Parents, inclusive of biological, step, adoptive, and foster parents, were responsible for more than half (59%) of all family-related sexual offences and physical assaults against children and youth, while 32% were brothers, 28% were extended male relatives and 2% were female relatives (Statistics Canada, 2011). These findings are consistent with international literature which states that most violent acts committed against children and youth are perpetrated by individuals who are part of the victim's immediate environment (United Nations, 2006 as cited in Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2011, p.20). The 2009 UCR2 report further indicated that the rate of family-related sexual offences was more than four times higher for girls than for boys (Statistics Canada, 2011). This debunks the firmly entrenched stereotypical myth that CSA is perpetrated by strangers and exposes it as a ruse.

[9] Family member is determined as: biological, step, adoptive, and foster parents; biological, step, adoptive, and foster brothers and sisters; all other family members related by blood, marriage, or adoption, such as spouses (current or former), uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents

Statistics Canada recently announced that the rate of police-reported sexual offences against children rose by 3% between 2010 and 2011. In addition, there was a 40% increase in the rate of police-reported child pornography incidents, the largest increase of any Criminal Code offence in 2011 (Department of Justice, 2012).

In British Columbia (BC), by the age of 17 years, about one in four girls in BC schools reported having been sexually abused at some time in her life (Kendall, 2003). It is reported that approximately 50% to 80% of commercial child exploitation in BC occurs in massage parlours, karaoke bars, and "trick pads" and only 20% to 50% of the children being sexually exploited is visible above ground with children being openly solicited on the streets (Government of British Columbia, 2001). In smaller BC communities, the sexual exploitation of children is even less visible, occurring in private homes, back alleys and parks, at public docks and truck stops, and on fishing boats (Hay, 2003).

As part of the Federal Family Violence Initiative, the Transition Home Survey (THS) was developed in order to address the need for improved information about services for victims of domestic violence. In a snapshot taken on April 16, 2008, there were 1,220 residents in transition houses in British Columbia: 61% (746) were women and 39% (474) were dependent children (Statistics Canada, 2007/2008). Women with parental responsibilities who were seeking safe shelter from an abusive situation indicated that they were also protecting their children from forms of violence such as witnessing the abuse of their mother (38%), psychological abuse (29%), physical abuse (16%), threats (13%), neglect (9%), and sexual abuse (5%) (Statistics Canada, 2007/2008).

Child Sexual Abuse in Aboriginal[10] Communities

Collin-Vézina, Dion, and Trocmé (2009) provided a comprehensive review of twenty Canadian studies of CSA rates in Aboriginal communities from 1989–2007. While acknowledging that there is a dearth of research on the scope of the CSA in the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada, many believe that open discussions on sexual violence have just begun in Aboriginal communities. Astoundingly, there are no Canada-wide prevalence studies of CSA in Aboriginal communities, only small sample clinical studies and regional inquiries, which Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) suggest may not accurately represent all Aboriginal communities.

Reports on the rates of CSA among Aboriginal people in Canada differ on the extent of this problem in individual communities, with some studies reporting epidemic rates of sexual exploitation of Aboriginal children. Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) further identified that few studies provided demographics that specified whether the Aboriginal people surveyed were living on or off the reserve, which may have affected CSA rates. In their review of the data on sexual offenses reported to the police in Canada, analyzed by Melanie Kowalski in 1996, Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) revealed that sexual abuse occurs two to three times more often on Aboriginal reserves than in small urban or rural communities. Through review of the literature, Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) determined that it is very difficult to obtain a clear picture of the situation for some Aboriginal groups but surmise that it is realistic to believe that about 25% to 50% of Aboriginal adults were sexually abused before reaching the age of majority. They further concurred with other researchers that, in light of these results, Aboriginal people are more likely

[10] For the purpose of this proposal, the term "Aboriginal" will be used to refer to matters that affect First Nations and Métis peoples. Aboriginal Peoples: Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples -- Indians, Métis, and Inuit peoples (Human Right Watch, 2013).

to have been sexually abused in their lifetime than non-Aboriginal Canadians, although both groups report high rates of CSA (Collin-Vézina et al., 2009).

Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) were surprised to review the incidence studies that documented lower rates of sexual abuse cases investigated for Aboriginal children than for non-Aboriginal youth. They pose that these contradictory results raise several critical questions: Are Aboriginal children experiencing significantly lower rates of sexual abuse than their parents, or is CSA being even more dramatically underreported to the authorities than for non-Aboriginal victims? Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) suggest that more evidence needs to be gathered before drawing firm conclusions in this regard. In the meantime, arguments for both views need to be considered.

Review of the literature by Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) provided a broad context for the lower incidence rates of Aboriginal people reporting CSA. They (2009) noted that the literature identified that some aspects of Aboriginal culture, such as a loyalty to the community and cultural beliefs, may influence whether victims withhold a disclosure of CSA, while other literature suggests that the lowered incidence rates of Aboriginal people reporting CSA could be rooted in intergenerational trauma, unresolved grief, and fear. The literature clearly reveals that a legacy of colonialism and assimilation, lingering effects of the residential school system, and continuing systemic racism prevent Aboriginal people from making a report to the authorities (Collin-Vézina et al., 2009; Human Right Watch, 2013). In contrast, other literature suggests that a decrease in CSA in Aboriginal communities could be resulting from a re-connection with traditional spiritual and cultural practices (Colin-Vézina et al., 2009). The literature also proposes that Aboriginal specific programming and political recognition and acknowledgement

of the residential school legacy and other traumas have contributed to the healing and reconciliation process among Aboriginal people across Canada (Collin-Vézina et al., 2009).

After reviewing the literature pertaining to the prevalence of CSA in Aboriginal communities, Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) highlighted limitations as to the accuracy of the existing research. They noted that there are hundreds of Aboriginal communities in Canada and most of them are not represented in the reviewed studies. In addition, the review of these studies exposes Aboriginal experiences that occurred outside the communities, as in residential schools. Therefore, Collin-Vézina et al. (2009) argue that these numbers are not an accurate indication of what is currently happening to Aboriginal children. Although the studies of CSA rates have so far failed to capture the reality of Canadian Aboriginal communities, it appears that researchers agree that the high prevalence rate of CSA among Aboriginal people cannot be disputed.

Sexual Violence in Northern[11] BC

For over a decade, Northern BC has garnered international attention for the relentless occurrence of gendered-based crimes suffused in sexual violence. This is significant to review as it demonstrates a culture of apathy towards sexual violence and CSA that appears to have become viewed as merely a common occurrence or simply tolerated as a form of violence associated only with the most marginalized individuals who live in northern BC. Due to the fact that there appears to be no literature on mothers who live in the north and are in a relationship with a sex offender, some comparisons can be made with domestic violence that occurs in a northern context. The literature suggests that northern communities can cultivate a "narrow-mindedness" and apathy about issues affecting women and children where they condone

[11] For the purpose of this research proposal, "north" or "northern" is used in conjunction with remoteness and is associated with limitation, isolation, lack of services, harsh weather conditions, and personal hardship as compared to the urban environment (Schmidt & Klein, 2004).

"normalcy" and "non-acknowledgement" of sexism and violence against women and children (Mason, 2008, p. 494). For example, in northern BC, a vast, rugged land where towns are small and far apart, winds the stretch of highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert, which has become known as the infamous "Highway of Tears." This 724 kilometre section of Highway 16 harbors the stories of dozens of unsolved murders and the disappearances of young females (ages 12 – 31 years), dating back to 1969 (Human Right Watch, 2013). Communities have long complained that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) investigators did not take the cases seriously and cited systemic racism. All but one of the missing or murdered young women are Aboriginal and the RCMP held a presumption that the missing and murdered women were engaging in high-risk behaviour by hitchhiking and/or involved in the sex trade (Human Right Watch, 2013). Focusing on the victims' behaviour perpetuates not only victim-blaming, it also discounts offender accountability and upholds patriarchal, sexist, racist, and oppressive ideology.

In the central northern BC community of Prince George, another high profile example of sexual violence involved David Ramsay, a provincial court judge. Ramsay pleaded guilty in 2004 to sexual assault causing bodily harm, obtaining sexual services from someone under the age of 18 years, and breach of trust by a public officer (Human Right Watch, 2013). The plea came after Aboriginal girls came forward to report that the judge had hired them for sex and violently abused them on a number of incidents when they were between the ages of 12 and 17 years (Human Right Watch, 2013). Long after the Ramsay case was publicized, reports continue to circulate in Prince George about connections linking the law enforcement and legal establishments with child sexual exploitation (Human Right Watch, 2013).

Prince George was once again in the glare of publicity in late 2010 when 21-year old Cody Legebokoff was initially accused of murdering a 15-year old girl who was visually

impaired. In 2011, Legebokoff was further charged with three new counts of first-degree murder for the deaths, dating back to 2009, of three other Prince George women who were known to be involved in the sex trade (Peebles, 2011). Prince George now has the notorious label of being the home to one of the youngest alleged serial killers in Canada.[12]

Only days after Legebokoff was charged with a total of four counts of first-degree murder, Maclean's Magazine deemed Prince George as Canada's most dangerous city for the second year in a row (MacQueen & Treble, 2011). The annual rankings are based on their analysis of Statistics Canada's Crime Severity Index (CSI) to measure criminal activity in Canada's 100 largest cities and police districts. With a tally of seven murders in 2010, Prince George had the highest per-capita murder rate in Canada, 486% above the national average (MacQueen & Treble, 2011).

A year later, Prince George once again remains as Canada's most dangerous city for the third year in a row and was also ranked by Maclean's as the fourth highest city for sexual assaults (Neilson, 2012). A month after Maclean's report, Prince George was yet again being scrutinized by the world when a teenage boy was found in a snowbank, unconscious, brutally beaten and sexually assaulted (Neilson, 2012). In January of 2013, six individuals, one male adult, one female adult, and four juveniles, of which one is also a female, faced aggravated sexual assault, aggravated assault, and unlawful confinement charges in a case that the police in north-central British Columbia deemed as horrific and disturbing (The Canadian Press, 2013).

These examples present a picture of a multi-layered social problem that is escalating and suggests an acceptance of CSA as "normal" and inevitable for some children. In conjunction, there appears to be a mounting indifference and complacency towards sexual violence and CSA

[12] On September 16, 2014, B.C. Supreme Court Justice Glen Parrett sentenced Legebokoff, convicted of four counts of first degree murder, to four terms of life without eligibility for parole until November 28, 2035 (Nielson, 2014)

that perpetuates a rape culture of complicity, silence, denial, and a societal and systemic failure to respond with appropriate and collaborative action. Also, these examples demonstrate the cultural and social constructs that normalize aspects of sexual violence, inclusive of gender and patriarchy, which ultimately influences societal response to children and their primary caregiver, when the carer remains in a relationship with a sex offender.

Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

Children's experiences of sexual abuse are often referenced as complex trauma, a term used to capture "a type of trauma that occurs repeatedly and cumulatively, usually over a period of time, and within specific relationships and context" (Courtois, 2004, p 412). The trauma effects of sexual abuse vary and are influenced by several factors such as the age and developmental phase of the child at the onset of the abuse, the relationship of the offender to the child, and the duration of the abuse (Philpot, 2009). Violence, threats and/or coercion occurring at any time during the sexual abuse will also impact how the child is affected by the abuse. As well, individual characteristics of the individual child, such as temperament, strengths, sensitivities, intelligence, will lessen or heighten the effects of the sexual abuse (Ryan et al., 2001).

Sandra Butler (1993), author of one of the first books on incest first published in 1978, introduced the concept of trauma in CSA. She stated that child sexual abuse is "any sexual activity or experience imposed on a child which results in emotional, physical, or sexual trauma" (1993, p. 5). Trauma is the source of tremendous distress and dysfunction and results in the survivor living in a state of high arousal or in continuous survival mode. It is this state of high arousal or survival mode that precipitates the bio-psycho-social and spiritual problems seen in survivors of war, violence, and childhood sexual abuse (Burgess, Watkinson, Elliott,

MacDermott, & Epstein, 2003; van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). Finkelhor and Browne (1985) developed a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of CSA and the developmental consequences it may have for the child. This theoretical framework known as traumatogenic/dynamic model consists of four dimensions: traumatic sexualization, betrayal, powerlessness, and stigmatization. This model suggests that trauma is created through changes in the child's cognitive and emotional system which disrupts the child's self-concept/identity, worldview, and affective capacities (Finklehor & Browne, 1985).

Trauma in children is usually noticeable behaviourally in three areas: (1) re-experiencing the occurrence, which can present as the child experiencing nightmares, sexualized behaviours, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts; (2) avoidant behaviours and diminished ability to respond, which can include such behaviours as denial, disassociation, and regressive behaviours; and (3) increases in arousal, which can result in behaviours such as sleeping problems, physical stress symptoms, aggression against self and others, exaggerated startle response, hypervigilance, hyperarousal, emotional dysregualtion, and difficulties concentrating and completing tasks (Briere, Johnson, Bissada, Damon, Crouch, Gil, Hanson, & Ernst, 2001). In general, if a trauma experience had a secret aspect to it, such as sexual abuse, the child may withhold their emotional responses until they have found assurance in their personal safety so that they can disclose their secret. Children will accommodate to the demands of the trauma as it is happening and simply cope as best as they can until it becomes safe to let their guard down (Briere et al., 2001). In hindsight, parents may recall changes in their child's behaviour prior to a disclosure of CSA, but the more dramatic symptoms of the child's painful coping may not be fully evident until after the disclosure.

Several negative consequences are associated with CSA and researchers seem to agree that an experience of sexual abuse increases the risk of psychopathology at some point in later life. There are a number of longer-term impacts of childhood and adolescent trauma. The most common and significant of these are: anxiety, depression, and/or anger; cognitive distortions; posttraumatic stress; dissociation; identity disturbance, affect dysregulation, interpersonal problems, substance abuse, self-mutilation, disordered eating; unsafe or dysfunctional sexual behavior; somatization; suicidal ideation; and personality disorder (Briere & Lanktree, 2008). Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is often applied to children and adults with a history of childhood sexual abuse to describe emotional, behavioural, and neurobiological experiences of trauma (van der Kolk et al., 1996). However, even with the recent changes to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V), the spectrum of posttraumatic symptoms are not fully captured in the PTSD criteria, and particularly does not capture children's symptomatology of multiple forms of exposure to abuse over critical developmental stages (D'Andrea, Ford, Stolback, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012). Focusing on the interrelated role of childhood interpersonal trauma and psychopathology requires the implementation of future psychiatric criteria that more accurately addresses compromised regulation of consciousness, affect, impulse, sense of self, and physical awareness (D'Adrea et al., 2012).

Briere and Lanktree (2008) caution that there is no universal impact associated with the experience of sexual abuse and it cannot be assumed that the presence of symptoms is indicative of a sexual abuse history. However, feminist scholars point out that presumed disorders pathologize normal and ordinary reactions that are exclusively or primarily children and women's experiences (Butler, 1993; Kaschak, 1992). Briere and Runtz (1987) also

questioned the need for multiple psychiatric labels and instead they suggest a more global notion of "post-sexual abuse trauma" to describe these long-term effects (p. 374). This latter construct refers to "symptomatic behaviours which were initially adaptive responses, accurate perceptions, or conditioned reactions to abuse during childhood, but which elaborated and generalized over time to become contextually inappropriate components of the victim's adult personality" (Briere & Runtz, 1987, p. 374). Post-sexual abuse trauma more accurately captures the experience and resulting interpersonal consequences and does not label behaviour as a disorder. This aligns with a structural social work perspective that looks to systemic roots and solutions rather than pathologizing the individual.

Construction of the Good Mother, Bad Mother Dichotomy

Motherhood, through patriarchy, extols an ideal that is impossible to achieve and often leaves mothers feeling inadequate, deficient, and guilty, yet it remains the mode by which all mothers are regulated and judged. Dominant patriarchal discourse on motherhood constructs a dichotomy of the mother as idealized or denigrated; a duality based on the distinction between "good" and "bad" mothers (O'Reilly, 2006). The good mother/bad mother duality continues to be a major discursive element in the construction of motherhood and the cornerstone of mother-blaming.

The importance of a mother-figure in the life of a child is rarely questioned. Yet the act of mothering remains romanticized, mystified, and obscured with myths, fantasies, and images that misrepresent the lived social realities of women's maternal experiences. The socially constructed meaning ascribed to motherhood, mothers, and mothering is derived from historical, philosophical, religious, political, and popular media influences (O'Reilly, 2006). Since the 1970s feminists have theorized motherhood within the context of patriarchy to challenge

dominant ideology of motherhood that birthing and the rearing of children, is solely a biological imperative (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010).

From a feminist perspective, the concept of motherhood is viewed as being shrouded and structured in conservative patriarchal discourse that normalizes and naturalizes oppressive ideologies which defines how women *must* mother (O'Reilly, 2006). Ideologies, emerging from the motherhood discourses, polarize and confirm gendered differences between men and women whereby motherhood becomes one of the central defining characteristic of women (Bell, 2003; Johnston & Swanson, 2003). Motherhood becomes a dimension to exemplify the differences in men's and women's needs, desires, and talents (O'Reilly, 2006). Idealized patriarchal motherhood limits family to a patriarchal nuclear structure in which a child's parents are married and are the biological parents and the mother is the nurturer and the father is the provider. Conversely, families acknowledged from a feminist perspective embrace a diverse variety of compositions, including but not limited to single, blended, matrifocal, and same-sex families (O'Reilly, 2006). These new family formations have given rise to new social identities of motherhood.

The social and psychological construction of motherhood is rooted in cultural practice that is continuously restructured in response to changing economic and societal factors; its context and meaning varies with time and place and therefore a universal experience of motherhood does not exist (O'Reilly, 2006; Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). O'Reilly (2006) argues that patriarchal construction of good motherhood is re-written whenever re-organization of gender roles requires social transformation. For example, at the end of World War Two, the "stay-at-home" mother was orchestrated and facilitated as the epitome of motherhood to force mothers to concede wartime employment upon the return of soldiers

(O'Reilly, 2006; Struthers, 1987). A good mother's place is in the home with her children. The entry of women into the labour force became a defining characteristic that continues to fundamentally disrupt the social and political construction of motherhood, family, and home. The contemporary era of the working mother continues to endure the scrutiny of a patriarchal ideal of mothers, mothering, and motherhood as suggested by the creation of competing vocations; children, family, or career (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). While the role of women and mothers in society has shifted to include career and work, responsibilities for child rearing remain primarily in the domain of women (Hays, 1996).

Good mother discourses' prevailing attributes are embodied in the framework of being culturally desirable, socially acceptable, and further characterized by class, race, sexuality, and economic status. Patriarchy's ideology of motherhood limits the definition of mother to heterosexual women who have biological children. The concept of the good mother, against whom all others are compared, is further restricted to a homogenous group of women who are white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, married, thirty-something, in a monogamous nuclear family with usually one to two children, and ideally, full-time mothers (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010; O'Reilly, 2006). This narrowly defined and socially constructed definition excludes any other maternal identity which simultaneously and covertly perpetuates a perception of bad motherhood. Furthermore, this narrow definition of dominant ideologies and discourses of mothering and motherhood is racialized, racist, and homophobic which causes other experiences of mothering, working class, Aboriginal, ethnic, gay or lesbian, to be marginalized and delegitimized (O'Reilly, 2006).

To fully understand the landscape of the bad mother and mother-blaming, the construction of the maternal ideal requires further examination. Motherhood and mothering is

imbued with images, symbols, rhetoric, and caricatures of a mythical and idealized character. The building blocks of ideologies are myths; ideologies are born when myths are combined into coherent philosophies and politically sanctioned by the dominant culture (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). Myths, defined, are uncontested and unconscious assumptions that are so widely accepted that their historical and cultural origins are forgotten (Johnston & Swanson, 2003).

The Christian image of the virgin mother is patriarchy's most traditional and influential character imposed on women (de Haardt, 2011; Ruth, 1995). This ideological image of mother is portrayed as self-sacrificing, maternal selflessness, serene, tender, loyal, nurturer, principle caregiver, submissive, serving, and satisfied with her mothering role (Bell, 2003; Ruth, 1995). Mothers are viewed as being responsible for everything that happens within families. Mothers are expected to be the sole protectors of their children. Good mothers are all knowing and all-seeing. Within a woman's prescribed role as carer, a mother's responsibilities and loyalties are to her children. Good mothers put mothering first; they are mothers first and foremost. These prescribed myths become non-negotiable codes of conduct. In contrast, men do not experience the same kind of societal pressure to be good fathers.

Good mother myths persist in public policy, the media, dominant culture, workplaces, and saturate everyday practices and interactions, that unconsciously, women attempt to embody in order to attain the elusive good mother status. The good mother is a formidable social construct, linked to gender roles, that places pressure on women to conform to particular standards and ideas, against which they judge themselves and are judged by others (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). Even when consciously resisted, motherhood ideology subtly forms the framework for self-regulation, societal action, and assessment (O'Reilly, 2006). By social definition, mothers are the center of the family, exposed and vulnerable for any facet of their

personality or behaviour to be criticized. This scrutiny, coupled with dominant ideological notions of motherhood can lead to scapegoating mothers (Humphrey, 1994). For example, within traditional Aboriginal culture, women are revered for their knowledge, experience, and status as a mother. Aboriginal women are honoured for the sacredness of their central position of being life-givers and the mothers of the tribe, as well as healers and spiritual and political leaders for their families (Finn, 1993). This creates juxtaposition within the dominant culture. While the Aboriginal mother is visible and honoured in her traditional community, she is invisible and devalued in the dominant culture and punished for failing to conform to Western ideologies of good mothering (Salmon, 2004).

The ideas of good mothers and bad mothers are moral categories (Morris, 1999). The good mother, along with her virtues, are extolled; or alternatively, she fails and is blamed and labelled as the bad mother. There in the shadows of the good mother is the bad mother, women who, by choice or circumstance, are not the selfless and tireless nurturers symbolic of the idealized mother (O'Reilly, 2006). Constraining women through good and bad mother discourses functions to ensure that women take on child rearing, ties women's identities to their roles as child raisers and nurturers of others, and regulates families and family life (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). The duality of motherhood, good mother or bad mother, exists as a constructed and conservative tactic to render women solely responsible for society's children. The dichotomy functions as a way to pathologize women and avoid acknowledgement of the structural roots of social problems. Society cannot continue to permit the bad mother dichotomy to act as a veil to mask serious social problems such as sexual violence and poverty. Mother-blaming is simply a diversion from broader social and structural responsibility.

Mother-Blaming and Child Sexual Abuse

Fundamentally, the bad mother myth serves as a scapegoat, a source of blame for social or physical ills that resist any explanation or solution (Ladd-Taylor & Umansky, 1998). Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (1985) reviewed 125 scholarly articles written by mental health professionals dating 1970, 1976, and 1982 and found that mothers were blamed for the etiology of seventy-two different categories of problems and psychopathology in their children, such as schizophrenia, bed-wetting, homosexuality, incest, suicidal ideation, anorexia nervosa, and sexual deviation. Blaming mothers when children have problems is systemic and continues to be sustained through the social construction of motherhood (Allan, 2004; Mulkeen, 2012).

Social constructionism originated in 1900's as a theory to examine how social problems emerge, are identified, defined, and responded to, and how a sociopolitical society discovers and invents its problems (Joyce, 2007). The construction of social problems creates images of people, victims or villains, which creates moral outrage (Joyce, 2007). Social constructionism provides a theoretical lens to clarify how the collusive mother came to be the accepted explanation for non-offending mothers of sexually abused children. The collusive mother construct has been created and maintained by the social and political contexts of both, the explanation and etiology of CSA and its treatment despite theoretical disagreement (Joyce, 2007). The majority of cases studied have been father-daughter incest and the non-offending caregivers have been overwhelmingly mothers. The literature appears to primarily describe traits that can only apply to mothers. Most often this literature focuses on the mother's choices and actions prior to and post disclosure, including the mother's psychological capacity to believe their child and respond appropriately and supportively. This research is usually critical of the mother and infused with blaming ideas and beliefs. Blaming criticism encompasses four

categories: (1) the mothers' involvement in the incest; (2) the mothers' personality characteristics; (3) nonfulfillment of their roles as wife and mother; and (4) the mothers' reactions after disclosure of the incest (McIntyre, 1981). Few studies have examined non-offending fathers' reactions and ability to respond, support, and protect following their child's disclosure of sexual abuse (Elliot & Carnes, 2001). This suggests that early theories of non-offending mothers continue to contribute to the oversight and minimization of the role of the non-offending father.

Many of the theories about the etiology and effects of CSA have focussed on the culpability or collusiveness of the mother in permitting the sexual abuse to occur. Mothers have been held accountable for the sexual abuse of their children and identified as co-offenders and accomplices of men. The literature is full of negative examples of ways in which mothers consciously or unconsciously encouraged incestuous relationships between father and child or, at the very least, fail to protect once they become aware of the abuse (Herman, 2000; Humphrey, 1994; Lev-Wiesel, 2006; Tinling, 1990). The "failure to protect" concept appears to be applied solely to mothers and is immersed in gender biases and mother-blaming as the construction of a regulatory regime (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003).

Literature about CSA carries a legacy of almost fifty years of blaming non-offending mothers, either partially or fully, for the sexual abuse of their children (See for example Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale, 1985; Humphrey, 1994; Lev-Wiesel, 2006; Tinling, 1990). Mothers of sexually abused children have been overgeneralized and often described as the cornerstone in the pathological family system and labelled as silent, dysfunctional, neurotic, self-absorbed, immoral, and culpable colluders (Lev-Wiesel, 2006; Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003; Tinling, 1990). The father, as the perpetrator, is viewed as "normatively responding to the mother's

failure to assume traditional family roles" (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003, p. 4). Against the backdrop of the good mother or bad mother myths, understandable responses to the child's disclosure of sexual abuse are interpreted as further evidence of the failure of the mother. The bad mother ignores the sexual abuse or denies the truth; the bad mother lets their child be sexually abused. A mother's failure to recognize the incestuous/sexual abuse of her child often attracts as much, if not more, societal disapproval, anger, and blame than the perpetrator himself.

The myths engulfing motherhood and the good mother are permeated with unrealistic patriarchal constraints. These myths exist for all mothers, but after a disclosure of sexual abuse, they become particularly constraining. The mother's concern for herself or her relationship conflicts with the expectations of the good mother. She is faced with a dilemma; she is expected to be a capable and protective parent making the needs of her child paramount. The good mother myth demands that the mother will always know what is best and how to respond in a selfless and assured way. Good mother myths distort the realities of child sexual abuse and its impact on the mother-child relationship, thereby scapegoating the mother as a failure, as a bad mother (Miller & Dwyer, 1997).

In terms of mothers' abilities to care for their children, the relationship between Aboriginal mothers and child welfare is further clouded by a mainstream ideology of motherhood. Aboriginal mothers are often blamed for any difficulties experienced in child raising without regard for the multi-generational impacts of colonization, residential school abuse, racial oppression, impact of poverty, substandard housing, and violence (Harris, Russell, & Gockel, 2007). For Aboriginal women, who have for generations struggled against the forced removal of their children under the auspices of assimilationist child protection policies, the image of mothers as the source of physical, moral, and cultural contamination remains

particularly relevant (Salmon, 2004). Western European ideologies of motherhood have a significant impact on Aboriginal women, in that evidence of bad mothering, such as maternal substance use, is frequently pathologized rather than locating them within the broader contexts and lived experiences (Salmon, 2004). The negative stereotype of Aboriginal mothers constructed by the dominant society portrays them as inherently unfit (Harris, Russell, & Gockel, 2007).

Mother-blaming theories were challenged by feminists in early research. For example, Herman's (2000) ground breaking volume *Father-Daughter Incest*, first edition published in 1981, deconstructed the two common explanations for incest, the "seductive daughter" and the "collusive mother," and argued that patriarchy is at the root of incest, not mothers and daughters. Herman (2000) asserted that incest is trivialized and minimized because incest is entwined with male hegemony. Miller and Dwyer (1997) reported that there are not any competent studies that have determined that mothers usually knew of the abuse prior to disclosure or that they were collusive. Contradictory to previous perceptions, it has been found that when mothers did learn of the sexual abuse, they tended to notify someone outside the family (Risely-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). Feminist critiques of previous literature exposed the sexist values and attitudes which underpinned the construction of mother-blaming; however this body of literature's mere existence continues to remain a powerful influence on societal beliefs and practices in response to CSA and continues to be a challenge to counteract.

It has also been demonstrated that not believing, or fluctuating in belief, is not a function of maternal pathology, but a normal response to a profound crisis (Miller & Dwyer, 1997). Reflecting on the normalcy of mothers' responses to disclosures of sexual abuse is not to be dismissive of the situations where mothers have intentionally put their children at risk of harm

or, they themselves have sexually abused their children. Rather, it illuminates society's fixation on the mother being the exclusive omnipresent saviour of their child from sexual abuse, a myth that covertly absolves the perpetrator and other influential caregiving adults from taking responsibility for all children's safety. It is unfair to expect mothers to solely protect their children while many services and institutions, that are far more authoritative, fail to protect children (see *Honouring Kaitlynne, Max, and Cordon: Make Their Voices Heard Now*, Turpel-Lafond, 2012).

The majority of the literature focuses on the maternal response as being critical to a child's ongoing protection, physical and psychological well-being, and overall development after a disclosure of sexual abuse (Joyce, 2007). Child protection work is based on the needs and interests of children, but in actuality, the system usually evaluates children's needs based on the mothers' caretaking or mothering ability (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). Patriarchal ideologies about motherhood continues to dominant and influence child welfare research and practice which often accommodates the use of mother-blaming (Humphrey, 1994; Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). This is of particular importance when mother-blaming rhetoric has influenced society's perception of the "protective mother." Even though there is an acknowledgment that theories that blame mothers for her child's incest have lost credence, a mother's reaction to her child's disclosure continues to be observed and scrutinized through the lens of the good mother ideology.

There has been an insidious shift in mother-blaming; it now appears to be disguised in the context of assessing a mother's protective ability after the disclosure of sexual abuse. For example, Coohey and O'Leary's (2008) quantitative research examined why some non-offending mothers did not protect their children consistently after they knew they were sexually abused.

Variable measures of maternal protectiveness imparted nuanced mother-blaming ideologies with a focus on the mother's personal characteristics, mental health, substance abuse, experiences of domestic violence, immediacy of response once sexual abuse was known, believing the offender is responsible for the sexual abuse, and consistency in believing the sexual abuse occurred (Coohey & O'Leary, 2008). While acknowledging that a framework is required for which to determine when a child is need of protection, there is also a need for a framework that is simultaneously considerate to the needs of both the child and the mother. The disclosure of a child's sexual abuse constitutes a major life crisis with varying chronic and long-lasting effects (Levenson, Tewksbury, & Giorgio-Miller, 2012). Women are expected to choose between male partners and their children to demonstrate their protective function (Coohey & O'Leary, 2008). However, this does not address the potential for ambivalence and the inconsistencies and complex allegiances associated with both abhorring the violence perpetrated on the child, and simultaneously valuing an intimate relationship with their male partner (Bolen & Lamb, 2007; Brogden & Harkin, 2008; Coohey & O'Leary, 2008; Levenson et al., 2012).

A mother's ambivalence, which historically was intoned as collusiveness and culpability, is currently reframed as a conceptual measurement of a mother's supportive ability. Ambivalent responses are currently recognized in mothers "who are inconsistently emotionally supportive, inconsistently believe their child's disclosure, inconsistently make active demonstrations of disapproval against perpetrator, or a combination of these" (Bolen & Lamb, 2007, p.191-192). However, Bolen and Lamb (2007) make a concerted effort to depart from the nuanced mother-blaming that is attached to maternal protectiveness by questioning the possibility that maternal protectiveness and ambivalence can coexist. They give further consideration to ambivalence as a normative expression of internal conflict and incorporated a multidisciplinary framework into

their research. To better conceptualize and define post-disclosure ambivalence in mothers' responses, Bolen and Lamb (as cited in Bolen & Lamb, 2007) acknowledge:

> ...the experience of tension, or dissonance, in the parent's positive and negative valences between the perpetrator and child. Ambivalence may be motivated interpersonally (such as when the nonoffending parent has a close relationship with the perpetrator while also wanting to protect the child) or intrapersonally (such as when the parent is asked to choose between the child and perpetrator). Further, ambivalence may be experienced both cognitively (e.g., when the parent is unsure of whom to believe) and affectively (e.g., when the parent has conflicted emotions about the perpetrator and child)....Nonoffending parents who experience postdisclosure cognitive or affective ambivalence [may be] more likely to vacillate in their behavioural intentions or behaviors (p. 193).

This research is significant in that it captures the imperative need to re-examine and reframe normative responses to an extraordinary situation as it intersects with child protection systems, rather than blame mothers and/or assess as failure to protect.

A mother's ability to protect her child from sexual abuse is a complex and subjective experience that is wrought with societal judgement delineated from the construction of good mothering. Blaming women for having somehow failed when CSA occurs is not only disparaging, but is counterproductive in the context of an intervention model based on the centrality of mother in the protection process (Davies & Krane, 1997). A counterpoint to the culpability of mothers is the invisibility of fathers. If all of the attention is directed to the failing mother, the ways that violent and abusive fathers harm their children becomes obscured. Many researchers have commented on the plethora of ways in which violent men are invisible in the

system, while women are held to different standards from men (Humphrey, 1994; Joyce, 2007; Risley-Curtis & Heffernan, 2003). There is generally a greater tolerance in society of men's anti-social behaviour and wrongdoing than that of women, and especially mothers (Philpot, 2009).

Child protection services and family resource services all tend to focus their intervention on the mother, and rarely take account of the father. Women are held accountable for the effects of male violence, even when they themselves are victims of that violence. This is particularly troublesome when Aboriginal mothers are already often deemed unfit based on racist stereotyping and experience removal of their children from their care for unjust reasons (Kurtz, Nyberb, Tillaart, & Mills, 2008). These dynamics are indicative of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out of home care and demonstrate that privileging mainstream ideology undermines and invalidates Aboriginal mothering (Harris, Russell, & Gockel, 2007).

How could a mother fail to protect her child from sexual abuse? It is understandable that in the face of such disturbing realities there is a desire to find someone to blame; scapegoating and vilifying the mother helps make sense of what happened – or does it? What mother-blaming does is obscure the realities of what actually happened; a perpetrator sexually abused a child, betraying the child, the mother, and society.

Child welfare research and practice do not take place in a vacuum; they reflect the ways in which societies construct motherhood, mothering, mothers, fatherhood, fathering, fathers, and families. The theory permeating much of Western societal beliefs is that the mother's behaviour directly, and exclusively, affects the child's behaviour (Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). To serve children and families best, this situation must change. Being aware of and acknowledging the intergenerational impact of colonial policy and cultural genocide on Aboriginal peoples can

assist in eroding the tendency to blame Aboriginal mothers (Harris et al., 2007). Change can also begin with deconstructing such biased, racist, homophobic, and gendered beliefs and developing a new lens to view mothers.

Partners of Alleged or Known Sex Offenders

Caregivers' reactions upon discovery that their partner has allegedly sexually abused their child will vary depending on multiple factors such as how they found out about the sexual abuse, relationship with their children, and their relationship with the alleged offender. Hooper and Humphrey's (as cited in Philpot, 2009) research determined that "...women's support for their children can be categorised [sic] as neither supportive nor unsupportive but tends to fluctuate with their own emotional distress and the way in which discovery has disrupted their lives" (p. 18).

As previously discussed, research on CSA has tended to focus on the victim and perpetrator or on the treatment modalities applied to these individuals, while largely ignoring the lived experiences of non-offending caregivers. Caregivers, predominately mothers, often experience a crisis following their child's disclosure of sexual abuse, but their needs appear to be secondary to the treatment of the child and perpetrator. However, these mothers ability to support their child may be compromised due to their own emotional anguish, love for their partner, fear of abuse or retaliation from their partner, or reliance on the offending partner for emotional and financial support. McCallum (2001) interviewed three mothers whose intimate partners sexually abused their daughters. She found that their responses to the sexual abuse were influenced by their feelings of blame, confusion, guilt, shame, alienation, and helplessness. These mothers experienced the dilemma of having to choose between helping their child or their partner, and they had to carry the responsibility of dealing with extended family, household

issues, and "picking up the pieces" (p. 328). Additionally, Allagia (2001) examined the role of cultural and religious beliefs of non-offending mothers' responses to their children's disclosure of CSA. The results revealed that mothers experienced conflict due to their cultural and religious beliefs which often emphasized patriarchal values and preservation of the family. These mothers also experienced feeling torn between the loyalties to their children and their partners as well as fears about being estranged from their families and communities (Allagia, 2001). Further compounding the situation for partners of sex offenders is society's stigmatization, repugnance, and rejection of the mother who stays with a child sex offender.

Over the last decade there has been an identified and increased need to provide psycho-educational services to mothers remaining in relationships with sex offenders (Brogden & Harkin 2000; Hill, 2005; Philpot, 2009). Wilson (2004a; 2004b) suggests that while CSA evokes a natural revulsion in most of us, some sex offenders do not pose a risk to all children and child protective measures could do more harm than good. However, "it is dangerous to demonise [out of home] care and imply that being with the family is always the preferred option" (MacLeod, 1999, p.151). The one consistent finding across studies on CSA, non-offending caregivers, and child trauma is that primary caregivers are essential change agents in facilitating children's recovery (Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001).

What becomes evident is that there is juxtaposition in the literature. Historically where literature blamed the mother for the sexual abuse of her children, current literature suggests that the primary way incest offenders may be dissuaded from re-offending relates to the key role played by their female partner (Brogden & Harkin, 2000; Davies & Krane, 1997). For example, Brogden and Harkin (2000) argue that intervention emphasizing legal and professional monitoring of convicted offenders in the community have failed to appreciate the importance of

social supports such as the offenders' "nearest and dearest" – female partner relations (p. 86). They (2000) suggest that the social support provided by a significant other (read women and mothers) can be influential in preventing CSA because they can uniquely observe the offender's behaviour in everyday circumstances. Those closest to the sex offender "...are best placed both to observe him and to impose sanctions and express disapproval for any inappropriate behaviour" (Philpot, 2009, p. 27). The literature, albeit limited, also suggests that comprehensive interventions for non-offending caregivers and partners of sex offenders are necessary for creating a safe space for the expression of thoughts and feelings, and developing an understanding of CSA. The literature suggests that the psycho-educational interventions need to be rooted in "...a woman's capacity to move from their position in an 'offender-organized' system to a more protective position in a 'child-centred' system" (Clothier, 2008 as cited in Philpot 2009, p. 135). However, the literature also suggests that psycho-educational programs, or more accurately reframed as "chaperone" programs for partners of sex offenders, are utilized to assess a woman's capacity to further protect her child from sexual abuse (Brogden & Harkin, 2000; Hernandez, Ruble, Rockmore, McKay, Messam, Harris, & Hope, 2009; Hill, 2005; Leveson & Morin, 2001; Philpot, 2009). What is touted as innovative social work practice, may be in actuality imparting a continuation of patriarchal ideology of motherhood where mothers are regarded as moral guardians, child protectors, and the gatekeepers of the family and their male partners' sexuality. Furthermore, defining risk to reoffend is not precisely determined and lacks consistency; therefore, mothers cannot be expected to always understand the risks that their partners may pose or protect consistently as hindsight would have them do (Philpot, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, CSA is a global issue that is well researched; however the literature demonstrates a polarization. There exists a legacy of mother-blaming that permeates the literature while more current literature suggests that mothers are the gatekeepers of their male partner's behavior. It is clear that non-offending caregivers play a central role in CSA cases. Children's emotional and behavioural adjustment following their victimization is associated with the reactions and support they receive from their caregivers, including fathers (Bolen & Lamb, 2007; Elliot & Carnes, 2001; Kouyoumdjian, Perry & Hanson, 2009). However, the non-offending mother is often viewed simultaneously as being not only the object of blame for failing to protect her children, control the perpetrator, and safeguard her family, but also the entity of hope for rescuing the victim and maintaining the home (Tamraz, 1996). Consequently, legal statutes and child welfare policies continue to place the responsibility for protecting the child on the non-offending mother imparting a continuation of patriarchal ideology of motherhood.

This literature review provides a definitional and conceptual framework for this research. As previously noted, there is a breadth of literature that examines CSA. By searching the literature to elicit how this research could contribute to the existing body of knowledge, it became evident that missing from the literature is the experiences of children when their primary caregiver remains in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. It appears that much of the literature is derived from research on adults who were sexually abused as children with a focus on trauma. In addition, search attempts inclusive of key concepts such as child sexual abuse, sex offender, non-offending partners of sex offenders, and reunification revealed a centrality of the issues pertaining to sex offenders and incidence of recidivism, risk assessment and treatment, and sex offender registry, as well as literature with a primary focus on mothers'

protective capacity. Family reunification after child sexual abuse also appears to be limited in the research with Pence (1993) reporting that there were no longitudinal studies of what happens in reunified families. Nevertheless, the available literature provided a context in which to examine women's childhood experiences when their primary caregiver remains in a relationship with a sex offender. This research aims to fill an identified gap in the scholarly information available on an already extensively researched topic.

Chapter Three – Voices in Thread: Methodology

For this methodological framework of this study, I used a qualitative research design using an arts-based approach that borrows aspects of narrative inquiry to capture the storied construction of life experiences, textually, audibly, and/or visually. Arts-based narrative inquiry aims to collaboratively capture participants' lived experiences through a process of gathering their stories to reveal multidimensional meaning and present rich and authentic data (Leavy, 2009; Van Den Hoonaard, 2012). An arts-based inquiry incorporates the creation of visual art into the research process whereby the participants' art serves as, or enhances, the data (Leavy, 2009). In this inquiry, women's "stories" were gathered through fiber-art/quilt making sessions, journaling, and individual interviews.

Arts-Based Research

According to McNiff (2011), the use of art as data has been informally occurring throughout the past century in social science, education, psychiatry, and the humanities as exemplified in the literature documenting studies of art and artists in art history and psychology, children's art, art therapy, and art education. Emerging from the qualitative paradigm, arts-based research grew out of the practice of creative arts therapy taking place in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and arts education. Expressive arts therapies were promoted as being ways of expressing what cannot be conveyed in conventional language and within the profession of expressive arts therapy; researchers began to apply this line of thinking to research (McNiff, 2011). As arts-based research methods began to draw attention from other fields, art therapists began querying the practice of their unique methods of artistic inquiry to shape a new vision of research (McNiff, 2011).

The terms, arts-based research, arts-informed research, and artistic inquiry are frequently referred to as they accurately and inclusively reflect all fine arts disciplines, such as creative writing, dance, drama, music, and the visual arts (McNiff, 2011). McNiff (2008) broadly defines arts-based research as the systemic use of artistic expression as the investigative mode to understanding and knowing as experienced by both, the researcher and the participants of the inquiry. Arts-based researchers "call upon artful ways of knowing and being in the world [which]... relocate[s] inquiry within the realm of local, personal, everyday places, and events" (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 72). As described by Finley (2008), the most salient features of arts-based research include:

> The use of emotive, affective experiences through senses, bodies, imagination, and intellect, as ways of knowing and responding to the world; interpretive freedom for the researcher to create meaning from experience; and an attendance to the role of various artistic forms to shape meaning; and an existence within the tension of blurred boundaries to be inclusive of reflexivity and subjectivity... (p. 72).

Arts-based researchers frequently use multiple methodologies from the social sciences to permeate languages and processes with forms of literary, visual, and performing arts as scholarly inquiry for purposes of understanding the complexity of their topic, creating meaning, and advancing knowledge about life (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). Therefore, as a framework for inquiry, arts-informed research can be either a methodological enhancement to other research approaches, expanding the repertoire of the researcher, or as a stand-alone qualitative methodology (Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 2011). Interdisciplinary collaboration with arts-based practices have been developed and implemented for all phases of social research that sustains the centrality of the art form to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and

representation (Estrella & Forinash, 2007; Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 2011). Some arts-based researchers, such as a/r/tographer Rita Irwin, have argued that arts-based research should constitute its own research paradigm separate from quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004).

A/r/tographical work is a specific category of evolving arts-based research practices within education that has been referred to as a "hybrid, practice-based form of methodology" (Sinner et al. 2006, p. 1224). A/r/tography uses a/r/t as an acronym for artist-researcher-teacher. A/r/tography becomes the practice of examining the personal and professional lives permeated between the self as artist, researcher, teacher and the integration of these roles to elicit new understanding textually, visually, and/or performatively (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Leavy, 2009). "A/r/tographers are living their practices, representing their understandings, and questioning positions as they integrate knowing, doing, and making through aesthetic experiences that convey meaning rather than facts" (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004, p. 31). A/r/tography offers a conceptual and transferable framework to be reflexive and reflect upon self as an artist- researcher-social worker and makes way for generating insightful dialogue to be represented in artistic formats. A/r/tography emboldens personal, professional, and scholarly development by permeating the inquiry with all aspects of self and exposing the nebulous complexities and intersections intrinsic to being the artist, the researcher, the social worker.

McNiff (1998) reflects the research framework of a/r/tography in his early definition of arts-based research in an art therapy context:

> I define art-based research as a method of inquiry which uses the elements of the creative arts therapy experience, including the making of art by the researcher, as ways of understanding the significance of what we do within our practice.... [It] may sometimes

> encourage immersion in the uncertainties of experience, "finding" a personally fulfilling path of inquiry, and the emergence of understanding through an often unpredictable process of explorations (pp. 13, 15).

McNiff (2011) further believes that personal and even intimate qualities of artistic inquiry are what accounts for its unique intelligence and access to universal experience. However, arts-based inquiry is often dismissed by some who say because it is personal, it is not research. Hampered by fixed social science research procedures, arts-based research is limited because personal expressions becomes viewed as self-indulgent and narcissistic (McNiff, 2011). However, there continues to be a growing acceptance that researchers are not disinterested, rather they are deeply invested in their studies, personally and profoundly (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Pelias, 2004).

Arts-based research has further evolved and emerged as a social construction that blurs the boundaries between science and art to revolutionize institutionalized classist, racist, and colonializing ways of experiencing and discoursing about human experience (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Arts-based methods are being recognized for their capacity to engage and transform the practices of individuals, and for their ability to open up public discourse and empathetic understanding (Leavy, 2009). Arts-based inquiry allows exploration of the marginalized, controversial, and disruptive perspectives that are often lost or silenced in more traditional research methodologies (Estrella & Forniash, 2008).

The Essence of Narrative Inquiry

The "language" of art weaves itself into a narrative essence. Like narrative inquiry, the arts are also considered a way of living and telling, enabling us to "see more in our experiences, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routine have

obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed" (Greene, 2000, p.123). Narrative inquiry is closely connected with arts-based research and identified as perhaps the most familiar type of arts-based research (Leavy, 2009). According to Denzin (2001), narrative inquiry is a prime concern of social science today because we live in narrative's moment where self and society are storied productions. For the purpose of this research, I have borrowed the "essence" of narrative inquiry as it embodies the (re) living and (re) telling of the stories that make up people's lives (Clandinin, 2007). The principal attraction of stories and storytelling is in the capacity to reveal understandings and life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways. Our history is storied: narratives that have been passed from generation to generation, which create connection to our past and our future. Through examination of the literature it becomes understood that our narratives are always works in progress, open for re-examination and reconstruction, and that the stories that informed us, are the stories that we reflect upon in order to resituate ourselves in our lives, our professions, and our research.

While stories are instrumental in creating the history of civilization, stories are also imbued with personal context. We absorb stories, our own and others, and tell them back to ourselves and to others in a recursive process that augments our understanding (Lewis, 2011). Instinctively we tell the stories of our lives without being fully aware of storytelling's fundamental premises of forming self-identity, validating experiences, making life mysteries tangible, spiritual, and sacred, and developing universal understanding (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Lewis, 2011). In, *Storytelling and the Voluntary Sector in Canada: Capturing the Individual Collective Stories*, Weaver (2005), quotes Fulford's reflection on the importance of storytelling of self:

> [M]ost of us feel the need to describe how we came to be what we are. We want to make our stories known, and we want to believe those stories carry values. To discover we have no story is to acknowledge that our existence is meaningless, which we may find unbearable... (p. 9).

A story, the narrative of important events or experiences, becomes a method to transfer knowledge in a social context. Social sciences use storytelling as a form of inquiry to give voice to the voiceless, those who traditionally have been marginalized, while providing a less exploitative research method that attempts to provide a more complex and complete picture of social life (Lewis, 2011; Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Within the last four decades researchers have witnessed the growth of arts-based research through the utilization of art forms such as narrative, autobiography, performativity ethnography, reader's theatre, and self-study. A variety of arts-based methodological practices that involve storytelling and writing incorporate a balance between the researcher's voice and the voices of the research participants (Leavy, 2009). This growth suggests a shift from employing dominant discourses within theory and research to practicing alternative qualitative methods of inquiry which acknowledges that, the drama and metaphor of a good story is an equally significant way of contributing to our understanding of human experience (Leavy, 2009; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). "It is in the telling and retelling, as truthfully as we can, and in the genuine witnessing of all the stories of all people that we heal ourselves and the world" (Allen, 1995, p.199). Stories are universal. They bridge cultural, linguistic, and generational divides. They connect us in common, yet simultaneously different, experiences. Storytelling is the root of historical context of human culture and central to human understanding of the lived world (Gubrium & Holstien, 2002; Lewis, 2011; Weaver, 2005).

Quilting as an Art Form in Arts-Based Research

Quilting, as an art form, has an inherently rich and controversial history. Historically, quilting, as an activity for women, became the basis of meaningful social gathering, sense of community, and sacred space; groups of women gathered to stitch quilts in celebration of marriages and births, or commemorate a loved one (King, 2001; Witzling, 2009). Historically, quilting was deemed a socially appropriate activity in which women could communally gather while excluded from most other realms of the male dominated world (Bryan, 2005). Quilting's history has always had a subversive purpose beneath a socially acceptable context for coming together in groups; ultimately breaking the isolation of traditional domestic life and patriarchal oppression (Anderson & Gold, 1998). The social connection that quilting provided, commonly referred to as "quilting bees," were also opportunities for consciousness-raising sessions. In the 1870s, Susan B. Anthony, a suffragette, made her first speech advocating for women's rights and their right to vote at a quilting bee (King, 2001). More recently, quilting has become a platform for women to collectively "document" social and political messages. Many of these quilts, although often constructed using traditional quilting methods, are intentionally non-functional and their only purpose is to convey their creators' artistic visions rather than decorate a bed or provide warmth (Agosin, 2008; Shaw, 1997). Today, quilting is an activity practiced by women, and some men, across many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

Technically, quilting as a verb, is the aggregate of activities that go into the completion of a quilt, such as hand or machine sewing, embroidering, applique, or embellishing with items like beads and buttons (Bryan, 2005; King, 2001; Witzling, 2009). Quilting has become a broad and encompassing term referring to both traditional quilting and to contemporary textile art which has some or all of the basic structural characteristics of traditional

quilting, but incorporates a myriad of contemporary techniques and materials. Quilts can be functional and decorative, mundane and extraordinary, communal and personal, inclusive and individual, imitative and creative (Shaw, 1997). Traditional quilting is ingrained in a history of systematically pieced patterns and the mastering of hand stitching techniques governed by rules of the craft regarding quality of handiwork, assembly, colour combinations, and quality of materials. While still incorporating some techniques of traditional quilting, contemporary quilting techniques are less structured using non-traditional piecing and applique techniques to create one of a kind, unique quilts (Reinstatier & Smith, 1997). Contemporary quilters, who resist the expectations of traditional quilting, consider themselves artists, or storytellers, who use quilting as a medium for their artistic expression and unique creativity. Traditional quilters criticize others' resistance to the historically acquired characteristics of quilting and mourn the disappearance of acclaimed quilt making skills (Shaw, 1997).

Textile arts can be traced back to the beginning of civilization. Textile products have catered to the human need for protection, clothing, and decoration. Fabric has carried important functional and ceremonial uses in cultures around the world and throughout history (Shaw, 1997). In the 21st Century, particularly in Western societies, textiles have had a central place in fulfilling psychological and spiritual needs through differentiating and personalizing space (Riley, 2008). Textiles provides for expression of and maintaining cultural identity, as well as personal identity. Fabrics reflect physical geography, territorial boundaries, familial boundaries, the climate, the natural resources of the land, as well as proclaim social rank and political structure (Bryan, 2005). Textiles are part of community's aesthetic development and richness; identifiable as a unique cultural fingerprint. The layers of complexity relating to quilting begin to emerge as textile handcrafting declined with the Industrial Revolution in the mid 1800's

(Collier, 2011). Women, especially Western women, questioned and rejected stereotypical feminine constructed activities that were perceived to be domestic and oppressive (Witzling, 2009). Later, in the 1970's and 1980's, feminists' re-examination of the domestic realm and gendered roles revived a new appreciation of quilting handwork which, reignited interest in cultural heritage and traditional textile crafts and quilts as art (Chansky, 2010; Witzling, 2009).

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of textile art making in response to a rejection of consumer culture (Newmeyer, 2008). With the resurgence of textile arts there appears to be movement towards identifying quilting as a valued art form, and not just a sanctified gendered domesticated activity reduced to utilitarian necessities or mere crafting (Collier, 2011; King, 2001). Feminist historians began to re-examine the role of women in society and art and bring attention to the largely dismissed work of their foremothers. Quilts are now revered as socio-political and cultural documents, embodying the history and values of their female creators. Quilts, once rejected and devalued as "women's work," are now being displayed in prestigious exhibitions, museums, churches, and art galleries (Reinstatier & Smith, 1997; Shaw, 1997).

Further review of recent literature reveals a reclaiming of textile arts and quilting through semantics. This suggests a newer resurgence of critiquing social construct to transform conventional patriarchal expectations of women's lives and activities (Collier, 2011). In an effort to distance themselves from the nexus of female domestic associations that the word quilt conjures, some artists have suggested alternatives such as fiber-art, fabric collage, fabric constructions, studio quilts, art quilts, or non-traditional quilts to avoid the art-craft-quilt dichotomy (Shaw, 1997). Semantics does not simply redefine or recreate these traditional art forms, but rather, elevates this historically undervalued means of heritage and artistic expression

into discourse in renewed ways (Chansky, 2010; Shaw, 1997). The elevation of quilts to art status contributed to re-defining quilting.

Quilting, as an art medium, is a visual language that has empowered women to artistically express the truth about their lives for over two hundred years (Shaw, 1997; Witzling, 2009). Witzling (2009) theorizes quilting as a model of creativity; as a way of seeing and being in the world and a way of influencing societal change, all of which is reflected in the making and meaning of the quilt. She surmises that the essence of quilting is embodied by three characteristics: 1) quilts are art; 2) quilts are created from the quilters' embodied life; and 3) the piecing together of a quilt is a metaphor for self-transformation and constructive world change (Witzling, 2009). Quilting provides a creative space for personal reflection that becomes permeated into the quilt in symbolic and conscious ways (Creswell, 1998).

Quilting's reflective and cathartic appeal has inspired other researchers to use quilting as an artistic form of inquiry. For example, using autoethnography and quilt making, Rippin (2006) explores both her ambivalence in conducting an arts-based inquiry, as well as the exploitation of conglomerates for commercial advantage. Rippin's (2006) research provides insight into her personal juxtaposition between academic training and personal belief of the rightfulness of arts-based inquiry. Her research is especially interesting as it demonstrates the expansion of arts-based inquiry and autoethnography/ autobiographies into other disciplines besides education and social sciences. I was particularly inspired by the research work of Ball (2002) and Shakir (2008). In Ball's (2002) *Subversive Materials: Quilts as Social Text*, she gathered knowledge through "the creation of quilts as social texts" (p.1). Her participants were women and men dealing with childhood trauma and who were asked to depict their life experiences in quilt blocks and provide a written description. Through a reflexive research process she provided an

alternative representation of voice(s). Shakir (2008) uses occupational science as a theoretical lens to understand quilt-making as an intervention and research methodology to explore and understand the residual impact of the United States Public Health Service Syphilis Study on the lives of elderly African American women, who are long-time residents living in the city of Tuskegee and Macon County. This research, The Bioethics Community Quilt Project, was conducted as a structured group with two separate groups of women over a two year period. The unconventional and interdisciplinary approach of quilt-making, as occupational therapy, and arts-based, narrative, and ethnography inquiry became an effective and respectful method of gathering stories in the midst of a collective silence and unresolved historical trauma (Shakir, 2008). In addition, this contemporary research facilitated individual and community healing.

These research studies demonstrate that quilting is an accessible form of art that can be utilized for expression of experiences that are difficult or impossible to express in words, it crosses the barriers of language and culture; it provides a strategy to "hear" and "see" silences. The process of quilting provides a distance; the quilter does not have to make eye contact to express the untold. The physical act of sewing is central to a cathartic process of articulation; in the simple, repetitive, rhythmic method of the needlework, stories, thoughts, and feelings are stimulated to consciousness. Perhaps it is the slowness of quilting that allows for deeper reflections; this act of sustained contemplation imbued within the artwork provides a space for self-reflection (Clover, 2006; Clover & Stalker, 2008).

Myself as a quilter. Art has always been a part of my life. I drew, painted, wrote poetry and short stories, coloured, and crafted; art offered me purpose, hope, and escape. I wanted to be an artist; I wanted to be Mr. Dressup.[13] I was captivated by his crafty wit. In the summertime I

[13]Mr. Dressup aired on February 13, 1967. For 32 years, Ernie Coombs (Mr. Dressup) delighted children with a world of imagination when he lifted the lid on his famous Tickle Trunk and shared his antics of dressing up in

would lie on the cool grass and stare up at the clouds where I would see a peaceful and whimsical cotton world waiting to be sketched. When I was about 11 or 12 years old, I would have the younger neighbourhood children gather around to watch me draw a fantasy world of the things we saw in the sky. Through these emulated "Mr. Dressup sessions" I found meaning. The children filled me with joy, and momentarily, I could believe in innocence. Through them I think I realized my life was worth more. Children were worth more. In high school, my grade twelve art teacher encouraged me to pursue art through post-secondary education, but I was not interested; art was just something I did.

Eventually a new art form, quilting, found its way into my life, but it had a tumultuous start. As an eighth grade female I was required to take home economics. I desperately wanted to enroll in metal and wood working, but these classes were only available to male students. This was one of the first times I clearly remember being indignant that I was being excluded from something, and forced into a role, simply because I was female. Even then, I knew that I did not want to wear the "pink coat."[14] I hated sewing. The sewing teacher had me rip out seams so often that I created holes in the fabric. As an adult, the glue gun replaced the sewing machine.

Quilts inciting social and political change piqued my interest in quilting as an art form. In 1994 my personal life became affected by AIDS and I became interested in the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt.[15] The AIDS Memorial Quilt became a visual statement of a pandemic; an

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costume and drawing and making crafts with his puppet friends Casey and Finnegan. Retrieved from: http://www.cbc.ca/lifeandtimes/coombs.html

[14] I first heard The Story of the Pink Coat by G. Larouche in 1996 which captures the essence of gendered social conditioning and expectations placed upon females by others; the "pink coat" heritage of meekness, passivity, self-abnegation, and maternal instinct.

[15] The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, founded by Cleve Jones, officially started in 1987. The original purpose of the Quilt was for loved ones to publically remember those lost to AIDS. Given the astounding silence, stigma, and paranoia surrounding the pandemic, the Quilt also became a socio-political instrument during a time of inaction (Jones & Dawson, 2001 & Newmeyer, 2008).

educational work of art to communicate to the world the need to be inspired into action. In 1999, I reconsidered sewing when I was introduced to the Chilean and Peruvian art form known as arpilleras.[16] Chilean arpilleras have a long history of being associated with political activism. During the era of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990) in Chile, thousands of people, mostly men, were determined political dissidents and simply disappeared (Agosin, 2008). When opposition to Pinochet's regime ensured imprisonment or execution, women then created arpilleras as their only means of remembrance, protest, and resistance (Agosin, 2008). Quilting arpilleras became a multi-faceted experience of women gathering for support while documenting a visual and politicized message of dissent. This seemingly domesticated and docile act of the arpilleristas (tapestry weavers) voiced what was happening in Chile to the rest of the world. Even though their voices were silenced, their creative hands told the truth.

My fascination with arpilleras and the AIDS Memorial Quilt as social activism and art inspired me to try quilting as my own creative outlet for self-expression, and a way for me to give voice to social and political injustice. Quilting and quilts used as political and social activism have a profound effect on me. I am mesmerized by the sheer power of visual creativity to create change. In May of 2012, while in San Francisco, I viewed a panel of the AIDS Memorial Quilt that was on display at the Grace Cathedral – Interfaith Chapel. Being in the presence of art work that demanded action and validation in addressing the AIDS pandemic was emotionally overwhelming. I sobbed as I honoured and grieved for the lives that each square represented, the lives of so many that society tried to shun. I admired the details in fabric and thread, and the embellishments that told the story of a life, a loss. I was in awe of the beauty of

[16] Arpilleras (ar-pee-YAIR-as), Spanish for burlap, are small appliqued and embroidered three dimensional, detailed wall hangings made with a backing from burlap or grain sacks. Gathering in grief, the mothers and other female relatives of the "desaparecidos" (disappeared ones) created arpilleras as a means of recording, with fabric and thread, the fruitless efforts of searching for their loved ones (Agosin,2008).

this quilt panel that covertly communicated subversive and ironic messages as it grandly hung in the AIDS Chapel of the Catholic Church.

My first quilt (I refer to my work as storyblankets)[17] titled, *Freedom from Fallacy*, was created for an assignment in June 2000 while taking an undergraduate disabilities course taught by Fred Ford[18] at UNBC. This storyblanket symbolically captures the "stories" of children, their families, and their experiences of being diagnosed with a mental illness. This storyblanket was my first endeavour into quilting and the process of creating it transformed me. I have since made over twenty story blankets. Quilting found me; it feels like the art medium that I was always looking for, it intrigues and fascinates me in a way pencil and paint never did. Quilting is an artistic expression of my womanhood and femininity in cloth, connecting me with all the women who have quilted before me, their stories captured in cloth. I feel an honour in carrying on an art form of our foremothers who gathered together with thread and needles, symbols of their common sisterhood. However, I have struggled with calling myself a quilter, because as previously discussed; I am not a traditional quilter. I have discarded traditional quilting rules as too constricting. This rejection of conformity does not surprise me. I instead, embrace the freedom to grow my artistic skill to reflect my own voice, personality, and personal style. I have found confidence and courage in creating something that is uniquely my own. My storyblankets are not perfectly constructed; the stitches are not precise, the seams are not exact, yet it is in the imperfections that you truly see the beauty of the creation and the message.

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[17] My storyblankets are visual and symbolical retellings of personal experiences, injustice, or hopes and dreams. Unlike traditional quilts, my storyblankets utilize more modern elements and embellishments. Most of my storyblankets are made with recycled clothing, linen, or gifted fabric.

[18] Fred Ford was a UNBC sessional professor from Victoria, BC. I mention him here because his non-traditional approach to education afforded me the early opportunity to begin the exploration of self as artist, researcher, and social worker. It is with gratitude that his path crossed mine.

I quilt because it transcends my cognition and touches my soul. Creating every scene is a search for the right colour, shape, texture of fabric and thread. As I sort through the fabric that will finally convey the overall message to be revealed to myself and the viewer, I am transported to the time I acquired each piece of fabric; the stories within the story. There is a magical feeling of being lost, totally absorbed in the moment, playing, creating. Quilting is a "place" where I can be fearless and where I am reminded that I have something to say. My storyblankets depict the stories, mine and others, in images, metaphors, and symbols that tell the experiences of a world full of endless wounds due to patriarchal obsession with penile rights and powers, ownership and exploitation of all that is feminine and childlike, of colonization and racism, of adversity to diversity, and homophobia. My art reframes the distorted energy of helplessness and hopelessness that I sometimes feel being a social worker. As the stories are stitched and imbued with symbolism, there is a strand of hope that I feel pass through my fingertips. A mystical force that declares justice, that provides clarity of my true self, and there, courage re-emerges. My quilting becomes a documentation of resistance and my hopes and dreams for change.

As a survivor, I feel a need to speak out and insist that my reality be seen and heard, and that I provide a platform for others to speak of their injustices. As an artist, as a social worker, as a social activist, as a voice for the children, I can do no less than use my freed creative passion to envision a world without violence. I have been told that my creative ability to create storyblankets is a gift that I am obligated to share. Maybe it is with indebted gratitude for my artistic gift that I envisioned quilting as the logical form for an arts-based inquiry. Thereby, this research created the opportunity for women to have a voice, so that we could see and feel their experiences through their eyes and hearts.

Naturally, quilting has also become extended to my professional work to end violence against women and children. Whenever I have facilitated quilting workshops for events such as Take Back The Night (TBTN), the Highway of Tears march, and Prevention of Violence Against Women Week, there is a sense of celebrating our right to express ourselves, to be seen, to be heard, and take up space in the world. Intuitively I know that creativity allows for survivors to break the taboo of speaking their truths. As a feminist social worker, using quilting groups continues the work that consciousness-raising groups or grassroots support groups began. The quilting workshops unite women and children with the opportunity to have a collective voice through the power of art to tell their story. When melded together, the quilts become a narrative expression of experiences that cannot be ignored; stories that cannot be silenced. Although these quilting workshops were not intended to be therapeutic in nature, they often developed into spontaneous support groups where stories of violence, personal tragedy, and love were shared, tears were shed, and mutual respect exchanged. There is an unexplained and intrinsic healing power that occurs during these quilting workshops and it is an honour and gift to witness. Women are freed from the paralysis that bound them in silence and inaction. They are now spurred into social action as their quilt squares are joined with others to provide a visual display of truths to the rest of society. This, to me, is the essence of social work. I feel that my role as a politically and socially conscious feminist woman, who is also an artist, is to bring the creative experience into the formation of a collective consciousness. This may have been the intuitive calling to use quilting as an arts-based research approach: not researching on women, or for women, but rather, creatively with women.

The Research Design

The research, Voices in Thread, was not designed to look for cause and effect relationships. Rather, the intent of this inquiry was to capture the experiences of women, to delve more in-depth into those experiences, and reveal the thematic threads that weave the stories together. Before recruiting participants, all methods for recruitment, research procedures, and confidentiality of research data was approved by the University of Northern British Columbia's Research Ethics Board (REB). The following sections provide an overview of my research design and offer a framework for how participants were selected, how the fiber-art group sessions were structured, the use of informal conversational style interviewing, and analysing data thematically and metaphorically.

Participant selection. Purposeful participant selection occurred in three phases: distribution of advertisement letters and posters; selection interview; and selection of participants. During the first phase, I utilized snowball sampling (Creswell, 1998) as a method of expanding sample size by asking peers and agencies to inform prospective participants about my research study. As a registered social worker/counsellor, in Prince George, who has worked to address issues of sexual violence for the past 20 years, I relied on my connections with other service providers in Prince George, B.C. and surrounding areas to assist in dispersing posters (Appendix A) and distributing information letters (Appendix B) to potential participants about my research.

Criterion sampling involves choosing participants who meet a specific eligibility criterion. For this study, the criteria for eligible participation included: female adults, 19 years of age or older, who, as a child (18 years of age or younger), had the experience of their primary caregiver remaining in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. Criteria also

included women who were not in any immediate crisis or had made a recent (within the last six months) disclosure of childhood sexual abuse or sexual assault, and women who were themselves not knowingly in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender.

Due to the sensitive nature of this research topic and specific participation selection criteria, it became necessary to amend and expand participant criteria to also include women who, as young adult women, their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. For the purpose of participant selection, young adult was determined as 19 to 29 years of age. Although it appears that the ideas and definitions of young adulthood are ambiguous and controversial, there is agreement that the transition from adolescence to adulthood is not universal and largely determined by cultural standards and life experiences, as well as socio-political and economic factors. The research also suggests that in a rapidly evolving society, traditional developmental tasks such as gaining independence from parents, acquiring personal living arrangements, orienting to a career, and developing peer and intimate relationships become increasingly compromised thereby affecting attainment of the theoretical "adult status" (Hendry & Kloep, 2010). Modern complexities surrounding the acquirement of developmental tasks results in a prolonged transition into adulthood. The research suggests that young adults are caught between their generational cohort and their lived connection to family, primarily mothers, who are societally deemed to protect and comfort them while trying to acquire developmental tasks (Hendry & Kloep, 2010).

Phase two of the recruitment process involved scheduling a selection interview[19] with interested and potential participants during which, interviewees were informed of the intent of the research, the selection process and criteria, and the requirements of participation (Appendix

[19] With permission and support from the SOS Society, arrangements were made for use of the agency's office space to conduct my research which included participant selection interviews, facilitating fiber-art sessions, interviews, and confidential storage of data collection (see Letter of Support, Appendix D).

C). To assist with both the criterion selection of the participants and gathering of general demographics I created a Participant Demographic Statement (Appendix E). In addition, the Participant Demographic Statement was used as part of a screening tool during the selection interview. Phase three involved the final selection of four research participants, signing Consent to Participation forms (Appendix F), and scheduling the first fiber-art session group.

Fiber-art group sessions. Fiber-art group sessions were held to facilitate discussion and the artistic expressions of women's lived experiences. Individual quilt squares were created and stitched together to become one quilt; Voices in Thread.[20] Guiding my methodological approach to facilitating the fiber-art group sessions, I utilized my professional knowledge of group work practice and the focus group research principles of Cohen and Garrett (1999). They suggest that in social work research, focus group facilitators should integrate their knowledge of group dynamics, values of individualization, and empathy to modify focus group research where appropriate. Prior knowledge of group development, structure, and process can assist the researcher in being adaptive without compromising the integrity of the research methodology while still eliciting rich, meaningful data (Cohen & Garrett, 1999).

Introspectively, integrating self, as a humanistic, feminist, social worker, counsellor, and artist became compromised by the integration of self as an academic scholar and neophyte researcher. I struggled with what felt like a contradiction of what I professionally and intuitively knew about the collective influence of group process and art. I began to feel like I was exploiting the woman for the mere purpose of research. I recognized that it was integrally and ethically important for me to be reflexive about the impact of my perspective on the research. I wrote,

[20] During the selection interviews, participants were informed that I would forever maintain ownership of the completed quilt.

> These are women's lives. Just because what I am doing is in the "name" of research doesn't mean I am not accountable for an experience that continues to create personal transformation. It is this piece that has been so at the heart of my research (Johnson, November 10, 2013).

What Cohen and Garrett (1999) made accessible, were ethical guiding principles for conducting focus group research that celebrated the integrity of social work practice and emphasized sensitivity to the socio-emotional needs of the research participants.

During the months of November, 2013 to February, 2014, eleven fiber-art group sessions and three drop in sessions were co-facilitated by both me and a volunteer, Sandra, who was also a volunteer at the SOS Society, and a quilter. As a volunteer of the SOS Society, Sandra was required to adhere to the professional guidelines outlined in the BC College of Social Workers' (BCCSW) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC). She also completed a criminal record check and signed a Volunteer Co-facilitator Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix G). As the volunteer co-facilitator, Sandra assisted the participants with their sewing. Her presence also provided me with the opportunity to be a participant-observer and record field notes during the fiber-art group sessions.

During the fiber-art group sessions (each lasting approximately three hours), three participants created 12" X 12" quilt squares that represented their childhood experience of when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. Using fabric and thread they narrated their stories. Although the fiber-art group sessions were not formally structured, the sessions were facilitated utilizing a framework with a beginning, middle, and end so that participants knew what to expect, while also fostering a group culture. Each group session began with a check-in while we ate a light brunch or supper. The check-in process was used as a time to transition from life events and settle in together. The middle of the group session occupied the majority of the time and was used for the activity of designing and creating

the fiber-art, as well as contemplative discussions that naturally occurred as part of the creative process. As the researcher, I also used this time in the group to ask any questions that arose as a result of reflecting on the content discussed in the previous group. These questions were either for clarification purposes or were a result of my interest as further analytic insight emerged. The end of the group session included cleaning up, personal journaling, and concluded with a closing round of self-reflection.

On the evening of the first fiber-art group session, I first reviewed confidentiality and its limitations and storage of data (Appendix F). The participants were then given an overview of the research that had brought them together. They introduced themselves, shared how they connected with the research, and collectively created a Group Etiquette Agreement (Appendix H). Creating safety was a critical component of this research considering the sensitive nature of the research topic. Participants' creation of their own group guidelines began to create safety through structure and boundaries that not only defined my role as the researcher, but also enhanced their autonomy as the "knowers" of the research topic (Kralik & van Loon, 2008). It was important to me that the participants understood that they were viewed as the experts of their lived experience. Just an hour prior to the first fiber-art group session started, my reflexive thoughts captured this concern, I wrote,

> I am ever conscientious of the power inherent in my positionality of being a researcher and a seasoned counsellor with an expertise in child sexual abuse. It would be naïve of me to assume that [the participants] will not view me as an expert on the research topic. All I can do is call attention to the fact that I am not the expert of their lived childhood experiences – they are (Johnson, November 10, 2013).

During the first group session, participants also selected a journal to simultaneously maintain a personal reflective journal that included their perspective in regards to three elements: 1) their experience of their participation in the fiber-art group sessions; 2) their creative and

emotional process of creating their fiber-art; and 3) a description of their finished fiber-art/quilt square(s). "A notebook, a diary, or a journal is a form of narrative as well as a form of research, a way to tell our own story, a way to learn who we have been, who we are, and who we are becoming" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.98). During the first group session, I also talked about my own quilting, shared the story of the arpilleras, and showed a collection of my storyblankets as examples. As well, I discussed the quilting workshops that the SOS Society has held and we viewed the quilts that were hanging in the Centre. The first fiber-art group session concluded with some time spent journaling and a closing round of thoughts and comments.

To avoid creating any barriers that could potentially prevent a woman from "telling" her story, alternate arrangements were made for a fourth participant who, due to geographical location, weekly attendance in the fiber-art group sessions was impossible. During the screening interview, alternatives to group participation were discussed and decided. Quilting supplies and a journal were also provided. This participant created her fiber-art and kept a journal independent of the facilitated fiber-art group sessions. I met with her twice during her process of creating her art work. At these informal meetings, we discussed her experience of participation in the research and the progress in creating her fiber-art/quilt square. In addition, we also remained in contact through email. After these meetings, just like after the fiber-art group sessions, I wrote field notes, which included participant observations and my own personal reflections.

Interviews. The interviews were conducted using an informal conversational style that offered flexibility to explore areas that the participants felt relevant to their experiences (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012). For example, during my interview with Mary Magdalene, she provided some historical background for both her grandmother and mother's lived experiences that

emphasized the importance of Mary Magdalene's recollection of childhood experiences as being impacted by intergenerational trauma. I may not have been able to fully understand the depth of meaning symbolized in Mary Magdalene's fiber-art had I used a more formally structured interview with predetermined questions.

Individual participant interviews lasted for 70 minutes to three hours[21] and were conducted after the fiber-art group sessions were completed. Interviewing provided the opportunity, or an alternative to journaling if literacy was compromised or uncomfortable, for participants to provide verbal reflection on the three components that they were asked to journal about: their overall experience of participating in the research and/or fiber-art group sessions; their creative and emotional response to telling their story through art; and the description and meaning they attach to their fiber-art/ quilt square. The inclusion of the interviews was also a method to attain saturation of the data. The interviews were digitally recorded (Appendix I) and transcribed by me into written text for analysis. After the transcripts were checked for accuracy, the audio recordings were deleted from the recording devices.

Participants' journals and their fiber-art were collected when the interviews were completed. Although the participants were provided with the opportunity to blackout any journaling they wanted omitted from being collected as data, none of them chose this option. The original journals were photocopied and returned to the participants.

Data analysis. Making meaning of an arts-based inquiry becomes an integrative process of analytically reviewing data through the lens of a disciplined science, personal creativity and reflexivity, whereby data is disentangled into findings (Patton, 2002). The participants' fiber-art (a visual transcript), descriptions of their fabric-art, photocopies of their journaling, the

[21] Due to the fact that I had less direct, face to face, contact with my fourth participant, I allotted for a longer informal conversational interview. To remain consistent with the research process, her individual interview was conducted only after she completed her fiber-art work and journaling.

transcribed participant interviews, my field notes, and personal reflexive journaling were the data items that became the dataset for thematic and metaphorical analysis. The following sections describe the implementation of thematic and metaphorical analysis.

Thematic analysis. The dataset was analyzed by hand, as well as condensed into meaning using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework of inductive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a foundational method used to identify, analyze, and report on the themes disentangled from within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, the dataset was thematically analyzed using a contextualist method. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a contextualist method as being positioned between the extremes of essentialism and constructionism and characterized by theories of critical realism. A contextualist method acknowledges both the individuals' own meaning made of their experience and the broader social context that impinge on those meanings (Braun & Clarke 2006). For example, how the multiple discourses on the good mother, bad mother dichotomy intrude on the reality of personal experience.

I first conducted a general review of all the gathered information to obtain a sense of the collected dataset. During review of the data, I began to make notes and reflective summaries in my reflexive journal. The collection of the data was an interactive process that moved into an individual action of being actively immersed in the assortment of data. Van den Hoonard (2012) notes that analysis begins as soon as one begins collecting their data, and for this reason, my field notes and reflexive journaling became invaluable in helping me understand my data. For example, in my journal I wrote:

> I've been thinking a lot about the research process and the [analytical] process in and of itself. The fact that I don't know what any of this means and that [the research] just brings up more and more questions. I thought I was supposed to have meaning making. Being the caregiver, which every participant has talked about, makes me think about the

> role of parentification, my own relationship with my mother, and makes me want to understand. Do all mothers who stay with sex offenders put their children in the caregiver role? (Johnson, reflexive journal, December 15, 2013).

For me however, analysis began in earnest with the process of transcribing the audio recordings verbatim shortly after each participant's individual interview. After each initial transcription, I read the interview transcript while simultaneously listening to the audio recording. While checking for accuracy of the transcription, I made note of voice intonation, silences, and emotional disposition. To ensure that the participants regarded their interviews as an accurate account of what they wanted to convey, I met individually with two of the participants to review a printed copy of their transcript, emailed an electronic copy to one of the participants, and the other participant declined to review her transcript citing that she felt comfortable with the integrity of the interview. None of the participants requested adjustments made to their transcribed interviews during this member-checking process. Member-checking was used, not only for checking accuracy of the collected data, but also as a research technique to improve the credibility, validity, and transferability of the study (Creswell, 1998).

I performed repeated readings (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of each of the transcripts and made observational notes, both in the margins of the transcripts and in a my field notebook, of similarities or statements that pertained to the overarching question, "What are the women's lived experiences of childhood, or young adulthood, when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with an alleged or known sex offender?" As I conducted repeated readings, I also coded sections that pertained to two predetermined themes using a deductive thematic analysis. I highlighted sections in yellow to signify descriptions of their fiber-art, while I highlighted sections in green that signified their experience in the research and fiber-art group sessions (see Chapter Five). I used the same process of repeated reading as I sorted through the photocopied

pages of the participants' journals for similarities. I also noted emphasis on words (capitalized letters, exclamation marks, or underlined words) and colour coded sections specific to their fiber-art descriptions and experience of being in the research and fiber-art group sessions. During repeated readings of interview transcripts and journals, I identified areas where I needed more details or clarification. When this occurred, I again reconnected with the participant to ensure accuracy of my interpretation.

I fondly reflect on this next aspect of the analytical process as "threadmatic" analysis, a term I borrow from my committee member, Dr. Si Transken (personal communication, February 24, 2014). For me, threadmatic embodies my analytical process of "disentangling the threads" into segments of meaning. Going beyond the surface meanings of the data, I also chose to use a latent level of analysis to identify themes through the interrogation of the ideologies and assumptions, such as mother-blaming, that underpin what is explicitly stated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Leavy (2009) argues that "*using theory explicitly* during data analysis is one way to generate new interpretations and alternative meanings" which situates individual stories in the larger social context (p. 19).

I worked systematically through the entire dataset and began to identify interesting aspects (such as words, phrases, subject, behaviour, events) and recurring regularities in the data items that began to form the basis of repeated patterns, or threads, as I "untangled" the data. Codes became identified based on features that I identified and considered pertinent to the overarching research question, participant participation, and fiber-art descriptions. The coding process consisted of cutting apart a photocopied set of the participants' transcripts, copies of their journals, my field notes, and my reflexive journaling into unit sections and then separating them into labelled envelopes according to each code.

Subsequently, the next level of analysis involved combining coded data into themes. I searched for salient themes by merging codes with similar aspects and collated the coded data into a more coherent pattern of themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I did this by gluing the coded paper sections onto corresponding poster boards labelled with central candidate themes. To assist with this process, I used thematic mapping (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as a means to visualize the links and relationships between the themes (Appendix J). Thematic mapping refers to creating a visual representation to assist with sorting codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic mapping also assisted with my process of reviewing and refining candidate themes into distinctive and coherent overarching themes supported by the extracted codes. Any themes that did not have enough data to support them, were too diverse, or were interesting but not specifically related to the research question, were discarded. Broader themes were created when potential themes were collapsed into a more prominent theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this juncture of coding the data, I was able to clearly define the themes and accompany them with a detailed analysis using extracted data supported with relevant quotes. In addition to the participants' fiber-art descriptions, the final themes are: reflections on participation, caregivers' accountability; personal experience; child as caregiver; the adult child caregiver and the mother: a strategic relationship; and childhood experience of inadequate response. These themes were analytically reflected upon with consideration for the story told within each individual theme and how these themes related to the data of the collective story, the voices in thread (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

"Seeing" with metaphors. Metaphorical analysis is an emerging modality of analysis that still requires an established methodological framework (Todd & Harrison, 2008). Although

there appears to be an undertaking of structuring a methodological framework for linguistic metaphoric analysis (see for example Kimmel, 2012), ambiguity still exists with regards to the methodical use of metaphorical analysis of visual art within arts-based research. The obvious or abstract use of metaphors in visual arts, as in the spoken or textual language, is incorporated to emphasize or add description to thoughts, emotions, or experiences. Metaphors become a covert language of imagination that assists us in communicating unique and personal aspects of our experiences, thoughts, perceptions, and actions (Lakaoff & Johnson, 1980). Imagination involves "*seeing* [emphasis added] one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 193). A metaphor, while simultaneously true and untrue, provides profound reflective depth. For example,

> When we speak of falling "down the rabbit hole" as an adventure into the unknown, the rabbit hole is not a literal description but nonetheless captures the embodied experience of losing rational control and plummeting into the unfamiliar; as such it retains an *experiential* thread of truth (Morey, 2011, p. 18).

Metaphors in visual art can convey intense visceral meaning, not because they are literal truths, but rather because they resonate in experience.

A/r/tography, as a form of arts-based educational research, embraces the artistic use of metaphors as a creative adjunct to illuminate insight in ambiguity and reveal experiences as understandable (Given, 2008). "Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 193). The metaphor is a multifaceted and adaptive communication tool that can enhance the comprehension of complex concepts or meanings that become conveyed in a single phrase (Todd & Harrison, 2008; Patton, 2002). It is for these reasons that I draw upon metaphorical analysis,

not necessarily as method of analyzing, but as a form of seeing. As both a children's counsellor who uses expressive arts therapeutically and a fiber-artist who stitches subversive metaphorical imagery into my storyblankets, I was keenly aware of the likelihood that the participants would incorporate metaphorical and symbolic images into their own fiber-art. My metaphorical process in this arts-based research was to be observant of possible metaphorical analogies and images that the participants innately used to creatively "story" their experiences, their voices in thread. This attentiveness was paramount to ensuring that I "heard" their lived experiences in the way they intended and in the context of how metaphorical meaning was to be conveyed. For an example, I reflect on an experience during the fiber-art group session when one of the participants was searching for a piece of black material. I made the assumption that she was searching for black to represent darkness, like the darkened night sky. As I assisted her in finding the right shade of black, I found a piece of black fabric textured with small shiny raised dots that I thought symbolized a starry night sky. When she emphatically told me that it was not the "right" black, it was in that moment that I realized that my artistic self was infringing on the creative process of her telling her story. As I reasserted my researcher's hat and we engaged in further discussion, it became evident to me that the colour black was not to be associated with the night sky, but rather she identified the "blackness" as a metaphor for suffocating in merely trying to, as a child, survive. Suffocating in the atrocious terror; suffocating in the silence; suffocating in not being chosen or helped. That poignant moment of researcher reflexivity became a cadence of clarity and I devised a methodological framework to capture metaphoric analysis for Voices in Thread.

There were six main aspects to my methodological process of "seeing" with metaphors that I used within the context of my research: 1) A metaphor was defined as a symbol or image

used as a visual descriptive comparison to a feeling, thought, or lived experience; 2) During the fiber-art group sessions and discussions I obtained clarification of meaning when any metaphorical references were made to their lived experience and I recorded this information in my field notes; 3) During the interviews, the participant's fiber-art was displayed while they gave me a verbal description of their art so that I could visually connect to any nuances contained within their use of metaphors; 4) Thematic analysis included content coding for the theme, *Descriptions of Participants' Fiber-art* and contained the sub-categories of each participants' individual description of their art. I created a poster board for each participant and then glued the sections of the coded extracted data onto each corresponding poster board. Then, I reviewed the sections of descriptions for any metaphorical references. Each separate metaphor and the meaning attached to an identified metaphor were highlighted in the same colour; 5) Using the colour coded metaphors identified in the participants' descriptions of their fiber-art, I then re-analyzed the overarching themes and sub-categories for any content that pertained to the specific metaphors described in their fiber-art and highlighted them with the corresponding colour; and 6) I ended with making observational notes about any similarities between the participants' visual use of metaphors in their fiber-art. This analytical process was laborious, yet ensured that I had sufficient and detailed descriptors of the participants' intended metaphorical meaning.

Quilting as a medium has an appeal that beautifully lends itself to the use of metaphor analysis because of the social, cultural, and personal meanings and metaphors inherent in the activity and the created art (Shakir, 2008). It was also through the process of creating my own fiber-art imbued with metaphorical images that allowed me to explore multiple facets of my research experience and better understand my own subjectivity. Creatively exploring the layers

of my own unconscious knowledge facilitated transparency through researcher reflexivity (for example see *Otherhood*) and expanded my research into a realm of greater comprehension.

Research design and ethical considerations. Ethical issues must be considered when topics of an extremely sensitive nature are discussed, exposing the vulnerability of participants who have self-disclosed for the purpose of research. The research design of Voices in Thread, as an arts-based inquiry, allowed for participation in a creatively different way. While self-expression through art simultaneously engages our senses, our emotions, and our intellect, it has the potential for a heightened experience of distress. As the researcher, it was my ethical responsibility to provide advance knowledge of the potential for emotional distress and have a plan in place to respond to participants who require debriefing and/or support. Prior to the start of the fiber-art group sessions, I met with the participants individually to sign the Consent to Participation forms (Appendix F) and discussed the potential risks of the research, including emotional distress due to the nature of the topic under study, as well as the ability of art to evoke powerful feelings. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without judgement (Appendix F). Participants were also provided with the contact information of local counselling services and/or encouraged to see their counsellor if there was a need for support to debrief their experiences while a research participant. Participants were frequently reminded and encouraged to access outside supports and counselling resources, as well as to practice self-care and journal about their creative and emotional process of creating their fiber-art.

Confidentiality and anonymity were other ethical considerations in the context of the research being conducted in a group format. Although I was able to reassure the participants of my ability to maintain the privacy of their identity, I was unable to give absolute assurance of

strict confidentiality being maintained in a group setting. This was addressed in the Consent to Participation form (Appendix F). This ethical consideration was also addressed during the first fiber-art group session and participants defined for themselves, confidentiality as etiquette to participation in the group (Appendix H).

Weaving quality and rigor into the research. Leavy (2009) asserts that arts-based research, as a new genre of methods, "comprises new theoretical and epistemological groundings that are expanding the qualitative paradigm" (p. 3). However, as a novel approach to inquiry, arts-based methodological practices, like qualitative research, seems to be challenged by the fundamental and traditional scientific standards of evaluation criteria in regards to authenticity and trustworthiness. Leavy (2009) notes that although arts-based research does not have a standardized criteria for the evaluation of trustworthiness, methods for achieving trustworthiness still need to be considered and built into the research. I referred to arts-based research scholars, such as Leavy, McNiff, and Pelias, to evaluate my own research process and motives. The integral strategies that were built into my research design were done with integrity to authenticity of the data and trustworthiness of the analysis. These aspects were addressed through a variety of methodological considerations and more specifically through the use of evaluation criteria which included aesthetics, reflexivity, and triangulation.

Aesthetics. Aesthetics is central to arts-based research and embodies the evaluation of research quality and pedagogical functions (Leavy, 2009). While aesthetics is often ensconced in the idea of outward beauty, beautiful art is never the aim of arts-based research, rather "...beauty comes forth and discloses the truth that is obscured by the triviality..." (Løgtrup as cited in Jacoby, 1999, p. 60). Similar to expressive arts therapy where art is used as the mode to voice chaotic flux, the art produced in an arts-based research design is often an expression of

suffering that becomes a sensory experience of reciprocity for the artist and viewer (Knill, 1999; Levine, 1999). The "beauty" that resides in the creation of the art must be epistemologically considered for the interpretive sensory response beyond the tangible piece of artwork (Knill, 1999).

Aesthetics refers to the "reconfiguring" (Given, 2008, p.31) of the data into an aesthetic form designed to promote new knowledge and understanding of the phenomena under study. The aesthetic dimension of arts-based research is in the creation of a "re-visioning" of the social world through subjective realities that are only revealed through works of art. The reader/viewer is enticed or compelled to reconsider underlying meanings as their own lived reality becomes disrupted (Given, 2008). For the purposes of this research, aesthetics has been achieved through the creation of the quilt, Voices in Thread (Figure 17), a creative visual exemplar that gives breadth and depth to the findings of this study. During the writing of this thesis, the final quilt was revealed to only a few individuals.[22] Even though these individuals had heard me describe my research countless times before, after viewing the quilt, they eluded to a more profound understanding or a new ability of "seeing" the complex layers and "hearing" the women's voices in thread. The quilt captures what cannot be said without losing precision. Inspired by the work of Shakir (2008), *Women's Narratives, Stitches That Bind, Stories That Heal: The Syphilis Study and the Tuskegee Bioethics Community Quilt Project*, I will be using the Voices in Thread quilt to encourage continued dialogue. Whenever the quilt is on display, I will make a journal available for viewers to record comments, thoughts, feelings, and reactions to what they are viewing, or what comes up for them. The Voices in Thread quilt is an artifact of this research

[22] Due to multiple factors, the research participants were not going to be able to view the completed quilt until after a defence date would be set. However, they would be the first group to view the quilt and hear a practice of my defence. The individuals I did choose to share the quilt with were four women who journeyed alongside me in the discovery of self as a researcher and whose support extended to ensuring the participants' voices were heard.

that will continue to promote empathy, understanding, and new knowledge through vicarious participation.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity is a methodological strategy in which to critically appraise, and make transparent, the subjectivity of the self that affects our research. Reflexivity, influenced by feminism, is firmly embedded within contemporary qualitative research (Leavy, 2009). There is a perfunctory acceptance that the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection, and interpretation of the data. Instead of attempting to eradicate the researcher's presence, subjectivity in research is transformed from a problem to an opportunity (Finlay, 2002). Pelias (2004) expressed his desire to write from the heart, "to put on display a researcher who, instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, brings [the self] forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice can place us closer to the subjects we study" (p.1). Displayed within the contents of this research is my own heart. Throughout the research process, I used both journaling and artistic expression (see Figures 2, 6, and 14) for the purpose of critical reflection. This reflexive process not only revealed my biases, value-laden struggles, and analytical insights to me and the reader/viewer, it also held me accountable to being engaged in the research.

Triangulation. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources to provide a comprehensive examination of the research question. This was accomplished through the gathering of participants' storied fiber-art (a visual transcript), verbal and textual descriptions of their fiber-art, photocopies of their journaling, transcripts derived from digitally audio recorded interviews with individual participants, participant member checking and verification, field notes, my personal reflexive journaling, as well as feedback from my supervisor and committee members.

Conclusion

The arts are posited to offer alternative ways of producing and communicating research findings and best practices in social work. By incorporating fiber-art as an art form in the research process it was possible to evoke emotional responses and construct alternative forms of representation that promoted dialogue and shared storytelling. Visual inquiry approaches are a means for understanding phenomena by "listening visually" and creating space for the research process to elicit meaning that may have remained elusive (McNiff, 2011). Quilting is a valuable art form for the telling of stories when voices are silenced; especially when the subject of CSA fosters a pervasive culture of silence entrenched in shame, secrecy, and denial.

Non-traditional forms of research, such as an arts-based inquiry and methodologies, expands and opens up a wider lens on the world and challenges what constitutes meaningful and useful research (Ellis et al. 2011). Arts-based research becomes effective in creating emotional authenticity for the research participants, the researcher, the readers, viewer, and listeners (Denzin, 1999). Using an arts-based modality and research design that incorporated the use of fiber-art group sessions, journaling, and interviews was an effective method for acquiring rich and thick data. Through the use of thematic analysis and metaphors as a way of seeing women's retrospective accounts of their lived experiences, their stories became voices in thread.

Chapter Four – Methodology Meets Participants

The following chapters from this point forward address the overarching question of: What are the women's lived experiences of childhood, or young adulthood, when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with an alleged or known sex offender? In this next section, I narrate a brief glimpse into the individual herstories[23] courageously shared by the participants. Cassie, Katalyn, Justina, and Mary Magdalene's herstories provide context to their descriptions of their fiber-art, their overall experiences of participation in the research and fiber-art group sessions, and the research findings.

The Artists: The Fragments of Their Lives

A Crazy Quilt

....And what is life? A crazy quilt;
Sorrow and joy, and grace and guilt,
With here and there a square of blue
For some old happiness we knew;
And so the hand of time will take
The fragments of our lives and make,
Out of life's remnants, as they fall,
A thing of beauty, after all.

Douglas Malloch (n.d.)

Each woman's story involved multiple facets and layers and was varyingly different from the next. Although these women had not met before this study, their experiences connected them. Stories weaved together and their seams bumped up against one another, and in some cases, overlapped, becoming an interwoven tapestry that revealed common threads and became a collective visual voice. Contextualizing their story was done in collaboration with each participant. Due to the extremely sensitive nature of this study, pseudonyms were used and

[23] "When women in the feminist movement use herstory, their purpose is to emphasize that women's lives, deeds, and participation in human affairs have been neglected or undervalued in standard histories" (Miller & Swift, 1976).

identifiable characteristics were removed to provide reasonable anonymity and confidentiality to the women who bravely volunteered.

Cassie

Cassie was a young adult, Caucasian woman who lived in a northern community in Western Canada. At the time of the research and her participation in the fiber-art group sessions, Cassie was in the process of a divorce and had just begun a new relationship. As a child, she lived in a very small and remote community where she was homeschooled by her biological mother, who she addressed as Margie.[24] Cassie had a childhood history that included experiences of child sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse, perpetrated by her biological father, who she referred to as Ken.[25] Cassie witnessed Ken physically and emotionally abuse her siblings and physically assault Margie. Cassie recalls that as a child, she attempted to tell Margie about the sexual abuse by Ken, but said that "my mom was blind to what he did to me." In her journal she wrote:

> She CHOSE not to see what was going on or to protect me...her child. It is funny because she has said a couple of times that if she knew that my father was molesting me she would leave. But she was unable to see. Sometimes you choose not to see something because you do not have the capacity to deal with it.

It was not until Margie left her abusive relationship with Ken that, as a young adult, Cassie reported the sexual abuse to the RCMP. Initially after Cassie informed her siblings and Margie that she had gone to the police, Margie was still briefly in contact with Ken. During the time of this research, Cassie's allegation of child sexual abuse against Ken was under investigation. Cassie has not had any contact with Ken since she reported to the RCMP.

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[24] Margie is a pseudonym used to provide reasonable anonymity and confidentiality. To respect Cassie's decision to address her biological mother by her first name, I have used Margie when referring to Cassie's mother.

[25] Ken is a pseudonym used to provide reasonable anonymity and confidentiality. To respect Cassie's decision to address her biological father by his first name, I have used Ken when referring to Cassie's biological father.

Cassie rarely referred to Margie as mother or any other maternal terms of endearment. She purposely referred to her biological mother by her first name. "I do not call [Margie] mother, because she was not and never will be again." Cassie described her relationship with Margie as:

> We have a very close relationship and she calls me her baby. It's more like just close friends but it is obviously more than close friends because we are related and she is my mother but it's not that kind of relationship [mother-daughter]....Margie and I are at a place where we can both respect each other and both allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

She further described her current relationship with Margie as being in "new territory" because, for the first time, Cassie had been leaning on Margie for support while going through a divorce.

Katalyn

Katalyn was also a participant in the fiber-art group sessions. She was a young adult, Aboriginal/Caucasian woman who lived in a northern community in Western Canada. Katalyn described being married to her soul-mate and that they had two young children. As a child, Katalyn grew up in a small community. When she was a young teenager, her biological father, Will,[26] was charged and convicted for the child sexual abuse of her two older sisters after suspicions of child sexual abuse were reported to child protection services. During the time of the investigation, Katalyn had disclosed that she was sexually abused by her father as well, but recalls that she recanted her disclosure after her mother commented to her that "your father would never hurt my little angel." Will was never charged for sexually abusing Katalyn and she mentioned that no further support services were ever offered to her as a child. During the time that Will was incarcerated, Katalyn's mother maintained that she and her children would support him, and as a family, they visited Will while he was in jail. After Will returned home from jail,

[26] Will is a pseudonym used to provide reasonable confidentiality. To respect Katalyn's decision to address her biological father by his first name as noted in her journal on November 28, 2013, I have used Will when referring to Katalyn's biological father.

Katalyn sought out opportunities to avoid living at home; she became a nanny and lived with her older sister.

Katalyn's mother died of breast cancer when Katalyn was still a teenager. Prior to her mother's death and while Will was working out of town, Katalyn had returned home to take care of her mother during her chemotherapy treatments. Shortly after Will returned home from working, Katalyn got into an argument with Will and her mother. Telling Katalyn that they were going on a vacation, her parents moved her to another town and left her to live with family friends. One month later her mother died. As a child, Katalyn's mother taught her how to sew. Katalyn wrote in her journal about the creation of her most powerful quilt:

> I worked alongside [sic] of my mother and family and friends to make my mother's casket. On the outside my dad and great uncle designed and made a cedar wood casket. Inside, my mother and I quilted together squares from family and friends. See, she wanted to be surrounded by love when she died. My square was an embroidered native eagle head I used to draw along with a script from the bible. My square was placed above her head as she always called me her little angel. She wanted me to help guide her way in the dark.

During the interview, Katalyn said that her mother kept journals before she died and her mother's dying wish was that "we never cut our father out of our lives....there's an anger that I have with the plain old fact that she could ever have considered asking that of us." Katalyn has fond memories of her mom being her best friend when she was growing up. Katalyn also noted that she is angry because she has unanswered questions and knows that her mother knew about the sexual abuse.

Katalyn did not have any contact with Will for approximately two years before their paths crossed again when he was in her home town visiting other family members. Will's presence in Katalyn's home town was unsettling for her. At the time of the research, Katalyn was contemplating reporting Will to the police for sexually abusing her.

Justina

Justina was also a participant in the fiber-art group sessions. She was a middle-aged Caucasian woman, who was in a long term relationship and they had two young adult children. As a very young child, Justina's mother moved herself and her children to a northern community in Western Canada where Justina has continued to reside. When Justina was a toddler, her mother met and later married her step-father who physically and sexually abused and tortured Justina and her siblings. As a child, there were multiple reports made to child protection services and the RCMP. Investigation into allegations of physical and sexual abuse led to Justina's step-father being charged and convicted. While Justina's brother was removed from the home, Justina and her sister remained in the care of her mother and step-father, who was never incarcerated. Justina wrote in her journal "I told my mother many times (kinda) what was happening and I was labeled a troublemaking liar." As a young teenager, Justina left home and made various alternate living arrangements and focused on graduating from high school. When Justina was a young adult, her step-father was once again charged and convicted for the sexual abuse of Justina and her brother. During the time of the court case, Justina's mother supported and remained in a relationship with Justina's step-father. When asked how she connected herself to this research, Justina wrote:

> My mother stayed with my offender for years after all 3 of us kids had left. [T]he police contacted me about charges against my stepfather (my mother was still with him)....My mom found out about the pending charges and called me and told me that if I went through with the charges she was going to call the ministry and tell them that she has seen me beat my children and get them taken away (which was not true). I then told her to go ahead, they could talk to my kids and find out it was not true and proceeded to hang up on her and did not talk to her again for 10 years when I had to see her at my grandma's funeral. The thing that shocked me the most was that she was still defending him. Why???

About a year after the court case, Justina's mother left Justina's step-father and moved to another province only after he admitted to her that he had sexually abused Justina and her brother. Justina described her current relationship with her mother as conflictual and that she has had minimal telephone contact with her.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was from a small northern community in Western Canada. Due to the geographical challenges, Mary Magdalene did not participate in the fiber-art group sessions. Mary Magdalene was an older Caucasian woman who was in a long-term relationship and had two adult children. As a child, Mary Magdalene was sexually abused by her biological father and was physically and emotionally abused by her mother. She told a priest about the sexual abuse when she was teenager and the disclosure remained confidential within the church and was never reported to child protection services. As young adults, Mary Magdalene and her brother made a report to child protection services as they suspected that their father was sexually abusing their younger sister who was still a child. Mary Magdalene's father was arrested and her sister was apprehended and placed into the care of Mary Magdalene's oldest sister. Mary Magdalene's father was never convicted with child sexual abuse and has since deceased.

When Mary Magdalene reported her suspicions about her younger sister being sexually abused, she also had to provide a statement of her own experiences of childhood sexual abuse by her father. She remembers being,

> ...extremely traumatized and vibrating for days. And my mother didn't call me for days and when she did it was over the phone and she said it's time for you to put that behind you and I was just so disappointed in her response....I felt really hurt, upset, and then really angry.

Mary Magdalene's mother remained in a relationship with Mary Magdalene's father for several years after the disclosure. Mary Magdalene described her mother's decision to remain in the

relationship as "my mom didn't choose our dad, she chose herself." During that time, Mary Magdalene described her family as living in a "charade" and that "it [the disclosures of child sexual abuse] all kind of went underground and I was the voice of dissention." Mary Magdalene described being excluded from family functions because she spoke the truth about the sexual abuse. At the time of the research, her only contact with her mother was through facebook.[27]

Conclusion

This section provided the stories of real life and real individuals and describes a person in context, rooted in real experiences (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). Cassie, Katalyn, Justina, and Mary Magdalene's herstories provide context to their descriptions of their fiber-art, their overall experiences of participation in the research and fiber-art group sessions and the research findings.

[27] Facebook is a free online social networking service that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family, and colleagues (Retrieved from: www.facebook.com).

Chapter Five – Reflection on Participation: Weaving Together the Personal and Political

The participants' engagement with the research and participation in the fiber-art group sessions was voluntary. While I was aware of my own invested interest in the particulars of the research, I was always curious about what prompted participants to voluntarily disrupt their lives and schedules to engage in personal discussion of such a sensitive topic. I noted that:

> People don't want to hear about it, they don't want to know. I say my research is about sexual abuse, sex offenders, and mothers staying in relationships with sex offenders and people put their hands up – warding away the topic. Backing away-physically removing themselves away – away from what? And yet, I am asking individuals to come forward, to tell their stories, to re-live their experiences, bear their soul, break from the silence – all the while others want them to remain silent. Why would they want to? It is no wonder I am having such a difficult time recruiting participants (Johnson, August16, 2013).

At the heart of my research is the "knowing" of the collective power of women sharing, remembering, creating, and stitching their experiences into an art that subversively refuses to be silenced. Like the revolutionary arpilleristas who gathered to visually document their otherwise silenced voices, Cassie, Katalyn, and Justina came together to creatively stitch their childhood experiences into an artistically visible and collective voice. Bringing the women together to discuss this particularly sensitive research topic provided the opportunity for in-depth discussions that elicited new strands of meaning. The philosophy of ethical feminist research asserts that reciprocity occurs for, and is determined by, the participants by using consciousness-raising as a methodological tool to empower participants (Kralik & van Loon, 2008). As evidenced by the themes that emerged from participants' reflection on their participation, the experience was mutually valuable.

As previously discussed and described, thematic and metaphoric analyses was used to analytically review the data. For this section of the research, thematic analysis was used to deduce and extract data from the interview transcripts, participants' journals, and my field notes

for the predetermined theme, *Reflection of Participation.* The extracted data coded as "participation" was then further analyzed and re-coded for sub-themes. A "threadmatic" process produced six sub-themes that reveal participants' participation as being experienced as personal and/or social. These findings are consistent with former research. Previous research demonstrates that motives and benefits of an individuals' participation in research are noted to be distinctly characterized as resonating on a personal level and those that appeal at a more social level (Tarpey as cited in Clark, 2010). The following presents the findings of participation experienced as: voices for change; collective unity; intrinsically therapeutic, threads of hope, and attachment.

Voices for Change

The phrase, "the personal is political," was intended to draw attention to the broader social, political, and economic causes, consequences, and constraints that derive from women's everyday gendered experiences of their personal and private lives. Meaning originates from the development of a collective consciousness-raising to reinterpret lived experiences in order to influence the development of new ways of theorizing and effecting individual and social change (Hughes, 2002). Clark (2010) found that participants' engagement in research was motivated by the hope that the research would inform policy makers or professional practice, in order to exert social change for individuals' perceived to be in similar contexts. "This motivator for engagement requires an explicit recognition that there are others in similar circumstances that will, however indirectly, benefit from the research outcomes" (Clark, 2010, p. 413). The Voices in Thread research participants were inspired to actively voice the issues that affected their lives. The personal is political was embedded in their collective expectation of change; they were compelled to participate and make a difference for another child or woman. Katalyn wrote, "I

want those who have been hurt or are being hurt to find their voice. If I can help just one person then I am happy to share my story." In the introduction of Justina's journal which she titled, *This is Me, Heart and Soul: Real and Raw*, Justina wrote,

> If even one person learns from this and it leads to children being helped out of similar situations then it was all worth it. Awareness needs to be made. Please don't just feel sad and close your eyes. Do something about it!! So other children don't feel like this- "HELP ME."

All of the participants talked about "breaking the cycle" and "making a path for other women – a path to freedom to talk about their experience" (Johnson, November 10, 2013).

Collective Unity

The fiber-art group sessions offered a unique opportunity for individuals to relate a particular aspect of their lives with others who have had a similar experience. The research group developed an essence of community and became a sacred space for the women to voice their experiences of both being sexually abused as a child, as well as, their experiences of childhood when their caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender. Clark (2010) also found that participation in research offered "a unique opportunity for individuals to compare a particular aspect of their lives with the experiences of similar, but unconnected, others" (p. 407). Justina reflected this in her comment that the group provided the opportunity to:

> ...Meet other people, not the same as you, but with similarities and their own stories, was very healing in itself to share with others and just be ourselves and be unique but at the same time [share] similarities so that you don't feel so abnormal and damaged."

The collective aspect of the group offered validation and a reprieve from the isolation, secretiveness, silence, and shame that are central to childhood experiences of sexual violence, as I noted from various comments on the evening of the first fiber-art group session:

> There is a bond in the room that exists in the very words of "I am a survivor." "You know what I am talking about." "I'm not alone, it's a good feeling and sad feeling at the same

> time." "It's a validation of my own feelings and provides understanding" (Johnson, November 10, 2013).

As well, Cassie noted that "I felt supported 100% as soon as I started the group process and felt safe...I feel like I connected with the ladies on a level that no one else will understand." Katalyn also connected herself to this research through acknowledgement of the opportunity to shift the insidious familial and societal silence that shrouds sexual violence. Katalyn's self-expression of relief in experiencing collective unity comes through in her journal. She wrote, "To have been told I am lying for so long and now [I] finally have people [who] believe me and my story, who are helping me discover what truths I have been hiding for TOO LONG!"

Intrinsically Therapeutic

Collective unity, created within the flexibility of this arts-based inquiry, implicitly provided a non-judgemental space for the participants to utilize for a therapeutic function (Clark, 2010). From a feminist and critical theoretical perspective, intrinsic to the fiber-art group sessions were validation, consciousness-raising, and transformative action (Harms & Pierce, 2011). Although this study was not promoted as a therapeutic counselling support group,[28] what quickly became evident was that for the participants, on a personal level, their participation in the research and fiber-art group sessions was described in the context of being therapeutic. Justina wrote:

> I find group was very healing. To be around others that have been through similar things to me and to see them thriving in life was very inspiring and empowering. It was also a struggle at times (remembering things and dealing with them) but this was healing as well because I was dealing with them."

Cassie also described her experience as a participant in a therapeutic context, she said "I look at this research project and my participation in this research as part of my healing journey and just

[28] See Information Letter: What are the potential risks and benefits if I participate in this research? (Appendix B)

moving forward...it is so exciting that I am able to have so much growth." Katalyn described healing as "I feel complete....I'm done that chapter and I feel ready for the next."

The fiber-art group sessions exuded an atmosphere that was non-judgemental and decreased participants' reluctance to discuss personally similar experiences and feelings. It became a space where the women wanted to voice their ideas and express their feelings, in dialogue and in thread. The energy of the group inspired creation. It also became a space where the women saw the group as providing social strength and communal support when expressing anxiety-provoking, triggering, or socially unpopular ideas. Katalyn reflected that when she shared with the group her distress that Will was in town, she noted that the group "gave me feedback, guidance, and support, from people who don't even know me...it [the group] gave me confidence when I didn't realize I needed it." Cassie commented that through the sharing of stories, "this group has been powerful to reclaim this experience." The group sessions became a safe space to "bear witness" to each other's stories and journeys (Anderson & Gold, 1998).

"Social research often gives participants an opportunity for self-expression and people will often derive satisfaction from having the chance to express an opinion in subjects that they have an interest in" (Warwick as cited in Clark, 2010). Even though Mary Magdalene did not participate in the fiber-art group sessions, she iterated that her individual experience of participation in the research alone provided the space and opportunity to have a voice, to be heard, and to heal. She expressed that,

> It's a privilege to be listened to. It's a privilege to tell your story....When we can't tell our story we do people a disservice...I think there was always resistance to people having me tell my story and sometimes especially when I was first in counselling, I was very protective of other people, I need to protect you from my story, it's like I'm going to contaminate you, so for me this has been very good. It's just difficult but it's good.

Mary Magdalene also referred to her participation in the research as being "cathartic" because as a participant, "it got me thinking about it more and more actually, with my mother, and how I saw that [referring to her childhood experience of her staying with a sex offender]."

At the outset of the selection interviews it became apparent to me that, in the choosing to become a participant, participation became an act of creative resistance that further embodied "the personal is political" as self-empowering, transformative, and healing action. Richardson (2008) identifies that creative resistance is an action of protest against mistreatment to preserve or reassert one's dignity and spirit. She delineates creative resistance in the myriad "...of gestures grand or subtle, flagrant or delicate" that affirms respect and equality for self or on the behalf of others (p. 123). Creative resistance was particularly observed in some of the participants' adamant opposition, either verbally or with a questioning look, to the use of pseudonyms for themselves. One participant spoke of "working too hard on this issue to be ashamed of who she is. No more secrecy. She's proud of who she is" (Johnson, September 8, 2013).

Many acts and stories of creative resistance, both as children and as adults, were witnessed. What remains profoundly paramount about this particular gesture of not wanting to use a pseudonym is the reciprocity of acquired knowledge that I experienced as the neophyte researcher and experienced social worker. There, in the midst of an ethical quandary, was the reminder that I am always in a position to silence and oppress others, even if unintentionally and in the name of ethical and confidential research or the upholding of practice principles. In my reflexive journal I wrote, "How to navigate through the use of [actual] names versus pseudonyms? I don't want to dishonour any woman's opportunity to talk about her experience to survive, to heal, to be the warrior woman she is" (Johnson, September 12, 2013).

The Common Threads of the Creative Process

There are some things that will always be sacred only to the experience of the fiber-art group sessions, the individual interviews, and the participants' personal experience. Observing the process of the participants creating their fiber-art was interesting, thought provoking, and inspiring. For example, without prompting from me, all of the participants began the research process by starting with what appeared to be the most difficult artistic expression of their childhood experiences. Yet their determination to convey the poignant and significant aspects of their childhood experiences was evident in their attention to details. Even though I did not observe Mary Magdalene creating her fiber-art, she told me about finding just the right shade of red to illustrate a womb. In fact, she cut apart a newly purchased shirt just for the colour of the fabric. Two themes emerged specific to the creation of the fiber-art, optimism and attachment.

Threads of hope. The participants were not prompted to create a quilt square that reflected optimism, yet all of the fiber-art group participants narrated a square that represented moving beyond their childhood experiences. This is suggestive of an innate desire and capacity to heal our trauma and dis-ease (Levine, 1997). The core essence of who we are is filled with optimism. Un-layering the emotional herstory and silence creates the freedom to connect with our emotional truth, to hope, and to dream of a future. Moving beyond their childhood experiences was metaphorically observed in the participants' fiber-art[29] through images depicting open arms, open road, blossoming tree with roots, sunshine, and wings. During the interview Cassie noted moving forward as "breaking out of a cement block" and "away with this rubble." Justina also metaphorically described moving beyond her childhood experiences as, "breaking out of her rock... bursting out of the sadness and the chaotic-ness and the darkness." It

[29] Pictures of participants' fiber-art and their descriptions are interspersed throughout Chapter Six: Un-layering Meaning, beginning on page 107. Fiber-art descriptions were drawn from all specific instances within the dataset where the participants made reference to their art and its meaning.

was important to the participants to leave the message for others in similar situations that the experience is not your truth. Katalyn said, "I think if anybody could hear anything from me is that it doesn't make you who you are, how you were brought up doesn't make you who you are, it's who you decide to make yourself." Even Mary Magdalene, who did not make a second square, left parting words of optimism and hope, "it doesn't have to define your life."

Threads of attachment. All of the participants acknowledged that there was a visceral and emotional reaction to viewing their fiber-art upon completion; bearing visual witness to their own story. The power of art invites an intense contemplation to connect and interpret with new senses: visual and tactile. For Justina, her response to her art work was an unpredictable and a deeply personal reaction to her images of childhood. Justina developed a connection with her creative expression and was reluctant to turn them over to me, she explained:

> I didn't know I was going to get so emotionally attached to my quilt squares. That was kind of surprising actually. I don't let myself get attached to anything. I experienced a lot of hurt in my life... I lost my mother, my brother, my sister, my father... so I don't get attached to stuff because I have a big fear of losing anything close to me. It's my lost childhood, maybe that's what I was attaching myself to.

Justina's fiber-art became a visual record of her childhood, her survival, of healing her past and inventing her future. Maybe through her art, Justina reclaimed what was lost.

Sandra also expressed being surprised and empowered by the therapeutic nature of creating art. Sandra, as the co-facilitator, was an invaluable resource to the participants and me. As the eldest woman engaged with the research, she had a nurturing and welcomed maternal presence. Sandra identified that the participants' openness and honesty both surprised her and inspired her to be more reflective of her own herstory and to "go back to the beginning." The following is the description of Sandra's voice in thread.

Sandra's Voice in Thread

While Sandra's[30] own story does not include the experience of her caregiver remaining in a relationship with a sex offender, she is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse by a family member. During the fiber-art group sessions, and in between assisting the participants with their fiber-art, Sandra collected material and embellishments and drafted templates for her own fiber-art. After the fiber-art group sessions ended, Sandra began working on her own quilt squares at home. She noted that she became immersed in the creative process and expressed that the fiber-art "took on a life of its own." Sandra made three quilt squares. Her first quilt square, titled *Secrets Behind Closed Doors* (Fig. 3), depicts traumatic childhood experiences.

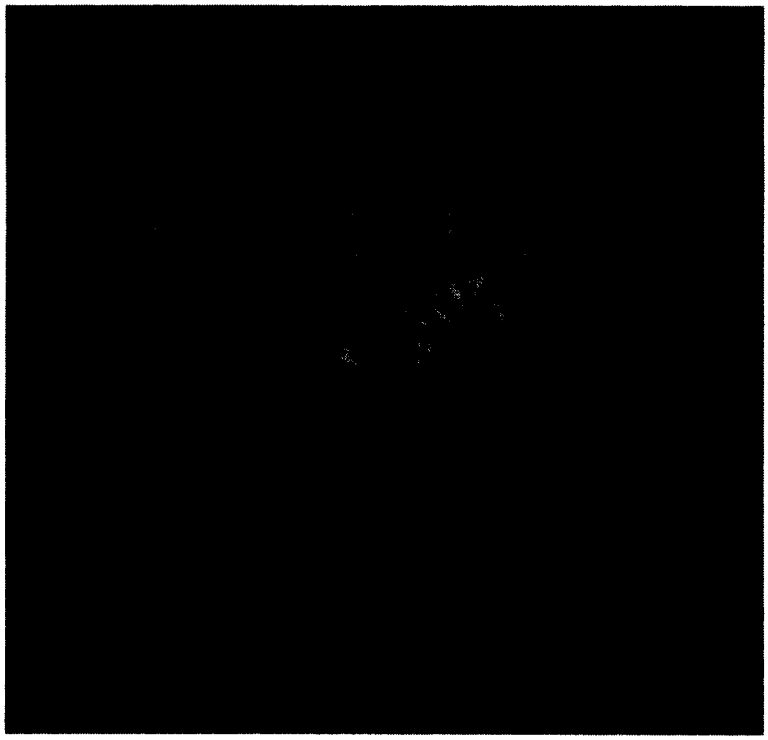

Fig. 3 – *Secrets Behind Closed Doors* by Sandra

[30] Sandra is a pseudonym. Sandra's fiber-art was not included in the data analysis.

Fig. 4 – *I Just Want to be Loved* by Sandra

Sandra's second quilt square, *I Just Want to be Loved* (Fig. 4), depicts the emotional effects of being sexually abused.

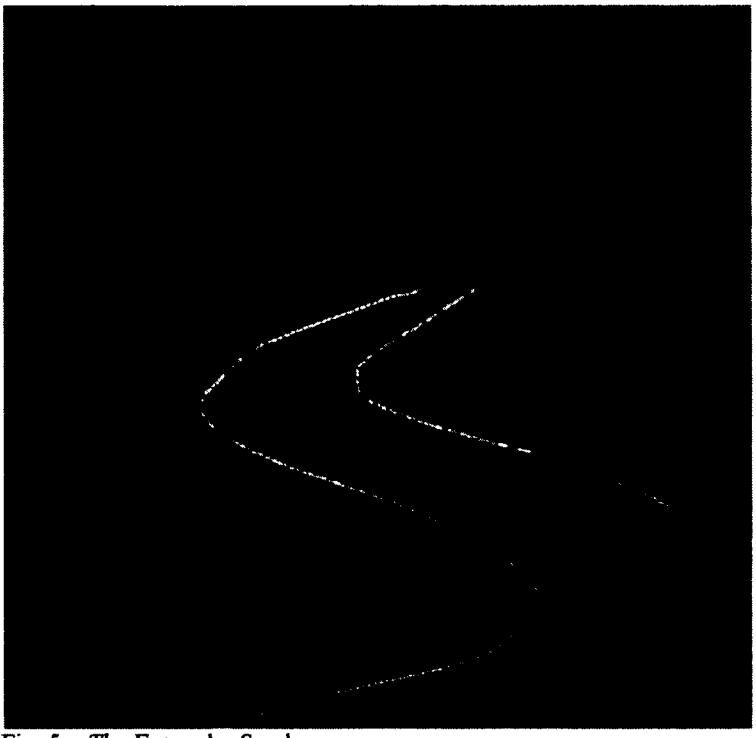

Fig. 5 – *The Future* by Sandra

Consistent with the thread of reflecting optimism, Sandra also created fiber-art that reflected moving beyond childhood trauma. Her third quilt square, titled *The Future* (Fig. 5), is a representation of a future that is open to possibility. Sandra described her experience as a co-facilitator as being both personally rewarding and healing.

Conclusion

In creative resistance and motivated by their desire to create change, the participants gathered in collective unity nurtured by a common connection. The personal and social insights and therapeutic benefits experienced through participation in the research and fiber-art group sessions were varied and individual. Some were revealed while in the research process, and others are still waiting to be revealed to the participants themselves, the reader, and the viewers of the quilt. I will likely never know the full extent that participation in this research has had, or will have, on the lives of the participants; nor will I know of the full impact this research will have on future readers, or viewers of the quilt.

Chapter Six: Un-layering Meaning

In the previous chapter I discussed the research findings of the participants' experiences of participation. This next chapter focuses on the findings that addressed the overarching question, "What are women's lived experiences of childhood, or young adulthood, when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender?"
With a creative and diligent mindfulness, the participants selected the perfect colour and texture of fabric to artistically, symbolically, and metaphorically convey a three-dimensional representation of their lived experiences. Pictures and descriptions of their fiber-art, their voices in thread, will be interspersed as part of the research findings. Using thematic and metaphorical analysis of the dataset as previously described in Chapter Three, five major themes were arrived at: caregivers' accountability; parentification; common characteristic of experiences, specifically loss of voice and safety; strategies of being an adult daughter in a relationship with a mother who remained in a relationship with a sex offender; and experiences of inadequate judicial and societal response. This next section highlights what I heard in the women's stories and what it meant it them.

Caregivers' Accountability

The common thread of caregivers as accountable permeated throughout the women's fiber-art, the fiber-art group session discussions, participants' journals, and their interviews. Caregivers as accountable became an overarching theme that encompassed the participants' conceptualization of their caregivers as responsible for aspects of their childhood experiences. Alongside identifying caregivers' as accountable, participants simultaneously recognized their offenders as accountable for the sexual abuse, and described understanding of their caregivers' situatedness. Caregivers' accountability was also characterized as multi-generational.

Caregivers as accountable: *Otherhood.* Before I detail the women's insights of their caregivers' accountability, it is necessary to illuminate the complexities and uneasiness that arose for me as I sifted through their stories pertaining to this theme. As previously discussed, I pondered how I would study and write about children and mothers in ways that are sensitive to the situations of children, adult survivors, and their mothers who remained in a relationship with a sex offender. How would I do this research without contributing, even if inadvertently, to the cultural tendency to blame mothers for CSA and child outcomes? With the emergence of this theme I used the proponents of a\r\tography, self-observation and reflexive investigation, to explore my intellect, feelings, and practice principles to expand my conscious learning and understanding. The following is my reflexive process that I wrote after creating my fiber-art.

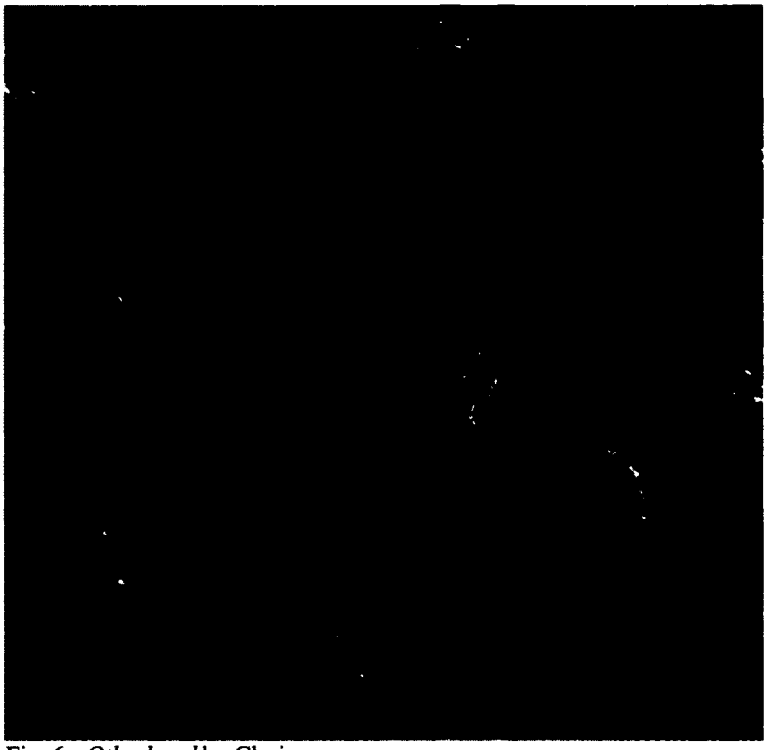

Fig. 6– *Otherhood* by Clarie

What coalesced into meaning was the metaphor of "otherhood"[31] as depicted in my fiber-art square, titled *Otherhood* (Fig. 6). Otherhood characterizes the dichotomy of lost childhood while acknowledging mothers' intersecting experiences of motherhood performed within the constraints of patriarchal ideology and the social construction of motherhood. My fiber-art depicts this incomprehensible abyss that compromises the lives of women and children, families, and community.

> I recognize that no child is ever raised in perfect circumstances, yet these women tell their stories of an absent childhood; ~~child~~hood-it's an otherhood. This abstract concept that captures an experience not contained within society's ideological views of motherhood, mothering, or a mother. Culpable mothers; ~~m~~otherhood (Johnson, February 6, 2014).

I do not fully extend the experience of fatherhood within the metaphor of otherhood as fatherhood is not the central defining characteristic of men, nor are fathers held accountable to,

[31] After I created the concept of "otherhood" to contextualize self as artist, researcher, feminist social worker and the theme of caregivers' accountability, I searched the internet for already existing uses of otherhood. It appears that "otherhood" is also a term used to refer to women who are childless either by choice or circumstance.

or judged by, a paternal ideal. However, otherhood encompasses the invisibleness of fatherhood as it exists on the edges of the abyss, obscured from view in the shadows of the social construction of motherhood and mother-blaming. What remains paramount is that all of the participants experienced being sexually abused by a father figure (three were biological fathers and one was a step-father); a child's lived experience of ~~father~~otherhood.

The story contained within my fiber-art is also representative of feminism revisited. The owl sits in the dark abyss of ambiguity, a symbol of self as a feminist, researcher, and a child centered social worker. In this darkened space, I can see and hear; I am torn by contradictions as I hunt for new knowledge, for wisdom, for answers that remain elusive:

> Using a feminist lens to see, to contextualize or theorize our own childhood experiences through the story of their, my, mothers' lived experiences misconstrues the complex specificity of our childhood experiences. Otherhood becomes an ominous menacing storm that can either provide meaning and understanding or minimize our experiences (Johnson, February 26, 2014).

Is the child's plight ensconced in a frenzied feminist storm? Motherhood rooted in patriarchy, her intersecting branches swaying with vulnerable children clinging to idealism. The howling wind silences the children's cries, disempowered, in the midst of the storm of otherhood.

The iridescent sky is expansive and impresses a sense of pervasiveness symbolic of an exerted power, which creates an unjust, vulnerable, and oppressive environment for the child and the mother. The sky's variegated hue reflects societal values, moral ambiguity, and dilemmas. The iridescent fabric, representative of multi-faceted oppressions and situations that are only illuminated depending on the angle or point of view. A kaleidoscope of shimmering colours captivate and entice examination of the intersecting complexities of children's voices and mothers' choices; a mother and child's lived experience in a convoluted storm of otherhood.

Caregivers as accountable. As previously discussed, understanding women's experiences of mothering, otherhood, within oppressive and often extremely personal and abusive contexts is integral to shifting the social construction of mother-blaming. While conceptualizing understanding of the mother's lived experience are the, often invisible, competing needs of the child. The unfolding dilemma is to balance the interests of the mother and child and not assume that the woman and child's interests always coincide (Damant et al., 2010).

Weaved throughout the participants' fiber-art descriptions is the essence of caregivers' accountability. Before I expand on this theme, it is important to note that all of the participants identified their offenders as being solely accountable for their experiences of sexual abuse and the violence they perpetrated against them as children. In addition, some of the women also identified their offenders' accountability for the loss of their mothers. Justina wrote, "My step-father not only took away my dignity, emotions, thoughts and feelings but he took away my mother and that hurt most of all."

All of the participants discussed how they viewed their mothers as accountable for various disparaging events that further exacerbated their experiences of childhood or young adulthood when their mother remained in a relationship with their offenders. The women were clear about their mothers' actions, reactions, inactions, and behaviours that contributed to their grief and loss of childhood and sometimes, compromising their ability to move forward. These were not easy discussions. By acknowledging their experiences of otherhood there was a sense of implicating their self-worth; worthiness of a mother's care and love.

Justina reflected on her mother's accountability for the occurrence of physical abuse that was separate from the abuse already perpetrated by her step-father, "she's the one who told him

to do it a lot of the times. That's the same thing as doing it yourself, that's just like using a weapon…he was her weapon." Justina recounted her mother's accountability as also compromising her ability to move forward,

> …[it is] hard to get over because to me, that was doing it yourself, because if you loved your children you would try sparing them that. You wouldn't tell someone to do that and then sit there while we got our asses kicked. Especially when it's supposed to be your protector.

Mothers as accountable was also noted when participants talked about their mothers' personal needs superseding theirs, as the children. During one of the fiber-art group sessions, Justina shared that when she was in her early twenties, Justina's mother used Justina's disclosure of childhood sexual abuse as blackmail against her step-father. If Justina's step-father did not end an extramarital affair and remain in the marriage, Justina's mother was going to report the sexual abuse to the police. Justina said that she was very angry and "just wanted her to act responsibly."

Cassie talked about Margie's needs as prevailing hers in regards to being homeschooled even though Cassie begged to go to public school. Cassie said,

> She kept me at home and would not let me go to school so I could be a buffer between her and [Ken] and she admitted that, and she stated that. It was selfish and again I understand the situation it's so frustrating.

Justina and Cassie's experiences demonstrate that their mothers had agency and that their position as adults and caregivers enabled them to exercise power over their children; as suggested by Damant et al., (2010) their actions can be seen as an extension (or abuse) of this power.

Mary Magdalene talked about caregivers as accountable by referring to her mother as culpable,

> ...[S]he wasn't innocent...I got over it [the sexual abuse by her father] easier than what happened with mother because no one has given voice to that piece... it's like we want to ride over it with feminist analysis and say she wasn't culpable for the abuse... the harm, the emotional abuse and mental abuse for joining in the sick twisted pattern with my father....my mother was culpable.

While contemplative of her childhood experiences, Mary Magdalene scrutinized caregivers' accountability and proposed that there is:

> ...a tendency to actually error on the side of the mother as not responsible...and then the mother continues to harm, like in my case...it feels like my mother harmed me more, even though my dad offended against me....I am having more problems with female relationships than I am with male relationships...I pick women who are emotionally unavailable...it seems like the work with my mother is lingering longer.

Mary Magdalene believes that her mother's abusive behaviour became hidden in feminist analysis which created space for her mother to be absolved from any responsibility, "it's not just about dad the pedophile, my mom has hidden in that for years."

Recognizing caregivers' situatedness.

While acknowledging their mothers' individual accountability for their childhood experiences, the participants simultaneously acknowledged their mothers' situatedness as a contributing component to them remaining in a relationship with a sex offender. For the purpose of this analysis, I have used situatedness to refer to a context that provides multiple perspectives of a lived experience. For these women, their childhood experiences occurred within their mothers' lived experiences. How they "see" the environment that they simultaneously inhabited provided greater understanding of the layered complexities and gives voice to what perhaps their mothers could not.

As already previously discussed in Cassie's quilt description of her second quilt square, she identified Margie's situatedness as an immigrant woman in Canada with no rights over her four children. Cassie talked about "finding that place of understanding that [Margie] was also a

victim." She further explained that her mother did not have any friends and lived in a remote and isolated community. In her journal, Cassie wrote that her mother would say "I made my bed and now I have to lie in it." All three of the fiber-art group participants referred to either: living in small communities with lack of services, living isolated from family and friends, or continuously moving to "hide" the sexual abuse.

There was discussion of "hiding behind the veil of religion" and "using" the religious sanction of marriage for the wife to remain married to her husband. Fundamental religious beliefs are imbued with oppressive and gendered attributes reinforced within the church, society, and family. Cassie described her experience of church as "twisted Christianity and cultish" and she believed that the church community reinforced her mother's decision to remain in an abusive relationship with a sex offender. Katalyn wrote about her reflection of the church as a component of her mother's situatedness in her journal:

> If I put myself in my mom's shoes, I see myself scared. Going to the church and her family for guidance only to be reminded of her marriage vows before God. I just don't think my mom had the courage to be the first woman in our small community to leave her husband and be shun [sic] from the church.

Katalyn further reflected understanding of her mother's situation when she stated that her mother "didn't have anybody safe to go to, she didn't have that person to say to her that it's ok to leave....he's off to jail now and it's okay if you don't let him home....everyone was from the church." Mary Magdalene also reflected on religion as being a determinant of her mother's choices, "She's Catholic so you don't leave your husband." For Justina, her mother and step-father told her they were atheists and that Justina could not attend church. This was a different way of "hiding" and further creating the absence of community. Justina said that when her step-father found out she was sneaking to church with a friend, she was beaten. Justina's mother never worked and Justina viewed this economic situatedness as "trapped." Justina also said that

"it probably wasn't easy, he did lots of stuff to her too, and I understand that, but in my mind I can't get past the point that [she] made the choice to stay there." The complex underpinning of the caregivers' situatedness highlights the importance of understanding the intersection of oppression and power.

Accountability and the intersection of multi-generational trauma.

"I am my mother's daughter and my mother is the daughter of my grandmother. And both their stories and silences speak through me."
(Mary from the movie Precious)

Many familial and cultural histories are layered with acts of immorality and experiences of trauma that remain closely-guarded secrets and maintained with long-held denial and silence. Subsequent generations are left a legacy to endure the cumulative effects of trauma, including maladaptive parenting (Thurston et al., 2012). Multi-generational or intergenerational trauma[32] refers to the transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations even if the descendants of survivors have not experienced the trauma of abuse themselves (Thurston, et al., 2012). Three of the women made reference to a multi-generational familial history of trauma related experiences that contextually adjoined caregiver accountability and situatedness.

Before describing characteristics specific to caregiver and the intersection of multi-generational trauma, I provide a description of Mary Magdalene's voice in thread to emphasize meaning.

[32] A term more commonly used to refer to the generational impact of Aboriginal people's experiences of assimilation, residential school, and loss of culture and first applied to Holocaust survivors (Lev-Wiesel, 2006 & Thurston, et al., 2012).

Mary Magdalene's Voice in Thread

Fig. 7 – Mary Magdalene's quilt square

Mary Magdalene's fiber-art is stitched with covert and layered symbolism. She created one quilt square (Fig. 7) that portrays a fetus in the womb to symbolize her experiences in childhood and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Mary Magdalene articulated that the fetus represented a seed; "sowing the seeds of suffering, like Thich Nhat Hanh[33] talks about...that all parents should deal with their suffering otherwise you sow the seeds of suffering onto the next generation."

The white fetus, "the purity of the child" is in the womb, surrounded by an ominous black background to represent "the darkness – not only of the womb, but the darkness I believed my mother carried in her when I was born." The fetus does not have ears, "the child doesn't hear and the eyes are closed, the child doesn't see what is going on...just busy sucking its finger [for

[33] Thich Nhat Hanh is a respected Zen master, poet, and peace and human rights activist and is most known for his prolific writing on meditation, mindfulness, and peace. (retrieved from: http://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/)

comfort]...but a noose around the neck because that is what is in store." The umbilical cord becomes a noose to represent the "harm that was passed down generationally" and the feeling of being "orphaned right from the word go." The umbilical cord is also representative of "feeding toxic shit into the fetus." In the interview, Mary Magdalene acknowledged that,

> It's [umbilical cord] attached to the mother in a way that it gives life right...and in my case I felt like my attachment with my mother was something that gave more of death and more toxicity, more like adoption. I never felt like I was from her.

The umbilical cord is twisted to also symbolize what Mary Magdalene identified as distorted thinking intrinsic to child sexual abuse; the belief that she, as a child, was "special" while "...being used, manipulated, and sexually abused... it's so twisted."

Mary Magdalene described the womb as being poisonous and is red to symbolize the generational bloodlines. The circular shape of the womb denotes "the static...conservative Catholic idea of a womb" and religious repression. Mary Magdalene said that "religion is a huge part of my mother's life, it's what defends what she does; stay with your husband." She also suggested that the quilt square could be an image of an abortion and noted that she felt her mother "probably would have had an abortion if she ethically and morally could have but because of her Christian image she didn't."

Mary Magdalene described that while the fetus is surrounded by a lot of negativity and death, "this fetus can become anything...it's not destined to be killed, but the noose is around the neck and how to get that noose off...or how to live with the noose" becomes the challenge. Black and white stitches outline the circular womb which Mary Magdalene described as yin yang,[34] "the balance for this child." She wrote in her journal that the white and black threads "represent the possibility to either succumb or overcome the abusive family systems." Mary

[34] The ancient concept of yin yang is associated in Chinese thought, the two complementary forces that make up all aspects and phenomena of life; light and dark (Retrieved from: http://www.britannica.com

Magdalene reflected on her belief that "I don't think children that are disowned by their mothers are destined to not do well in life, but I think it makes it really difficult... I'm still struggling."

As already previously discussed in Mary Magdalene's description of her quilt square, she described feeling that her own childhood experience was profoundly impacted by intergenerational trauma and stated, "I don't think this happens in one generation." Mary Magdalene revealed a maternal family history, beginning in upper-class England, which included her grandmother becoming motherless at the age of four and her mother becoming motherless while only nine months old. Mary Magdalene's mother was then raised by an abusive step-mother while her father was fighting in the Second World War. After the war, Mary Magdalene's grandfather abandoned his second wife and children and Mary Magdalene's mother was placed in a Catholic orphanage. Later, Mary Magdalene's mother married Mary Magdalene's working-class father and they immigrated to Canada and started a family. During the interview, Mary Magdalene emphasized that she believed that her mother's "inability to look beyond anybody but herself" was a result of traumatic childhood experiences. Mary Magdalene wrote, "My mom was a broken person before she had children and she [continued] to be a broken person after she had children, she is still a broken person."

Cassie expressed the generational impact as "repeated patterns" and noted Margie's "inability to deal with past trauma" as compromising her ability to protect Cassie. Cassie wrote in her journal that "I am still angry-to this day. And still so confused. She [Margie] was molested by her step-father and [Margie's] mother knew about it and did nothing." Cassie further reflected that "in [Margie's] mind, she said she would never let this [sexual abuse] happen to her daughters and I think that that has been one of the difficult things to come to terms with for her."

Katalyn referred to the intergenerational transmission of trauma as being an excuse and apology for Will's behaviour. During one of the fiber-art group sessions, Katalyn talked about "the last supper" with all of the family the evening before Will went to jail. With a tone of sarcasm, she described how he talked about his own childhood sexual abuse and how he used his disclosure of sexual abuse as a way of apologizing and excusing his behaviour (Johnson, January 26, 2014). Katalyn also said that,

> ...before he [Will] went to jail, he stated the fact it [his sexual offending] was a generational thing, he was abused by his uncle...there was always that question in my mind if I was going to be an abusive person...it creeped me out for a long time to even think or consider.

Although, Katalyn's experience of multi-generational trauma is identified through the experiences of the father, it is important to note that his apology created additional space for her mother to accommodate his behaviour.

Unravelling the Silences of Personal Experience

For the participants in this study, their experiences of childhood encompassed multifaceted dimensions of trauma making it difficult to specifically separate out cause and effect. All of the participants shared and described affect behaviours, thoughts, and feelings both, as a child and as an adult, that are consistent with the trauma effects of child sexual abuse as previously discussed in Chapter Two. There were, however, common characteristics that emerged pertaining to the women's personal childhood experiences when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender: loss of voice; loss of feeling protected; not belonging and feeling unwanted; and influences on personal parenting. Highlighting this section is Katalyn's voice in thread.

Katalyn's Voice in Thread

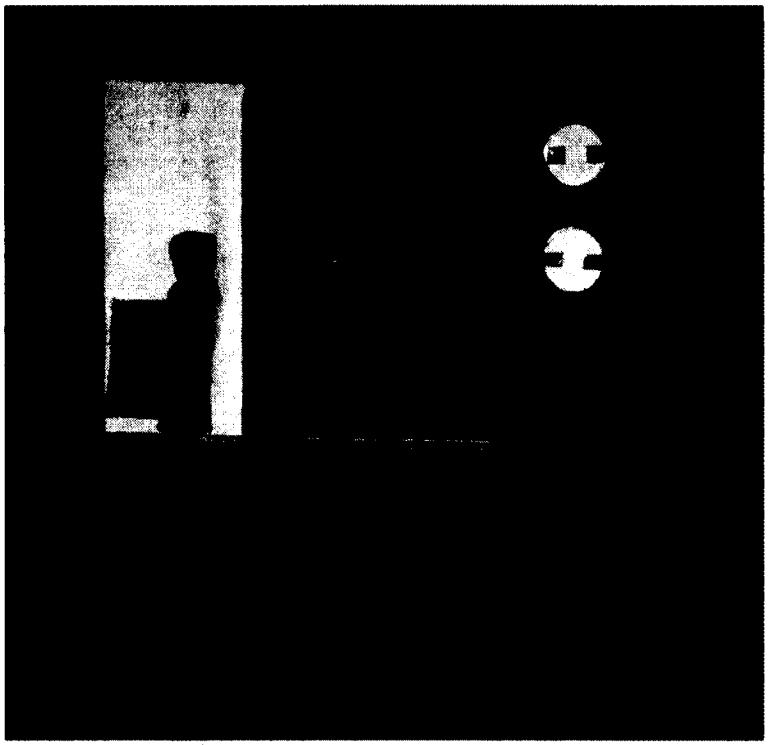

Fig. 8 – Katalyn's first quilt square

Katalyn created two quilt squares. The first square (Fig. 8) depicts a scene that is conveyed as though watching a movie on TV, which is how Katalyn described remembering her experiences of sexual abuse, "...like I am watching a movie." She replicated a bedroom scene from her childhood home, "the door was left open a crack and we could see each other being molested...and just down the hallway is my mom doing the dishes in the kitchen." Katalyn journaled about what she wanted her fiber-art to include before she began sewing, she wrote:

> When I picture my childhood I see me watching a movie of a girl in bed with her father and her mother outside the door. And while I am sitting there I am screaming as the little girl's lips are sewn shut. The room I am sitting in is dark and no one can hear me (November 10, 2013).

For Katalyn, this square incorporated shame, which she demonstrated symbolically through the image showing the back of her head. In our interview, she described it as "...it's me almost ashamed that I never said things that I felt maybe I should of, or could of....and now [as

an adult] I still get those same emotions of feeling soundless, speechless, voiceless." Also during the interview she said that the image of the back of her head represents her watching the "old school television" and "the voice waves going through the dark room, it's me today in the group telling my story of me living with my mother who chose to stay with my father."

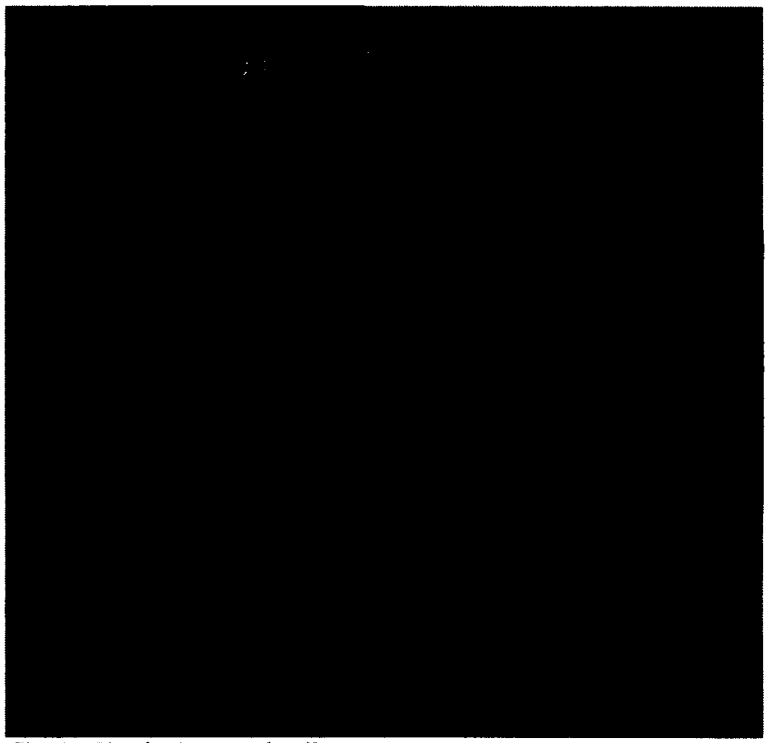

Fig. 9 – Katalyn's second quilt square

Katalyn's second quilt square (Fig. 9) is a representation of her healing journey. In her journal, she described her quilt square as:

> ...[a] dark cloud with rain in the background with a sun shining bright. Rain is the tears I have shed and the sun is working to keep the rain away. My family tree with roots, as my boys are the roots of my life. Mountains in the background, river running through it all the wind blowing in my hair. It is me free of my father. Enjoying life as it is.

Katalyn incorporated symbols, like the snowflake and the blossoming apple tree that represented her life, her lifestyle, and who she is as a person. For Katalyn the apple tree had multiple meanings, not only a symbol of her family, her husband and boys, but also a representation of the sense of "home," of being truly "accepted into" a family; belonging. Katalyn expressed that this

quilt square also represented the now and the future and "not what the past has done." For Katalyn, this quilt square embodied, "...who I want to be and at the same time letting go of the past to push towards my future...towards what I can have."

Loss of voice. Loss of voice was noted in multiple forms: being silenced, perceived as not being heard through the inaction of others, denied the telling of their truth, and the fear of losing ones' voice. Loss of voice was also symbolically represented and observed in the participants' fiber-art in multiple forms: doll's mouth stitched shut, faceless doll, mouthless, and thumb in fetus' mouth. Although feeling silenced may be a common experience for survivors of multiple forms of violence or oppression, loss of voice was repeatedly identified by the women as a specific aspect of their childhood experience.

Katalyn' fear of losing her voice was entrenched in what she perceived as her mother's inability to use her voice and protect her. Katalyn's fear became intensified with Will's presence in her home community and she felt unheard when her husband gave permission for Will to be on their property. Katalyn wrote:

> I am so disappointed and pissed off right now. I feel as weak as my mother was. She had to know and yet she could not find her voice to speak her mind. She could not find her own strength. Am I my mother? I sure feel like it. Why can't I find my voice? I had it not long ago. Where has it gone? So much is jamming in my head right now it hurts. My chest aches. I feel trapped in my own body. I am dizzy with frustration. I just want to go to sleep and forget. I want to skip today. Can I have a redo? Can I wake up tomorrow with my voice again? Please.

Katalyn shared the recent experience of Will being on her property and her fear of being unheard and voiceless was palpable. I witnessed her intense process of gathering, collecting, organizing, and re-organizing the art materials while she talked and sewed. I noted that:

> Katalyn worked on her quilt square and seemed even more particular about the colour and texture of the fabric and placement of the objects. I felt like the fiber-art took on a new meaning for Katalyn tonight. It appeared like it was empowering.... It's ironic that while we were talking about her feelings about becoming her mom – loss of voice –

silenced – she was working on sewing the worry doll's mouth shut. That's the "story-ing" – telling in a visual art that can't be silenced (Johnson, January 22, 2014).

Fig. 10 – Stitching a mouth silent

The process of stitching a mouth silent (Fig. 10) is Katalyn's visual dialogue, her voice in thread, an act of creative resistance. As she stitches, she tells her secrets, she unravels the fragments of the story that have silenced her. While potentially unaware of the subtle symbolic and cathartic attributes in the activity, there is still resolution of inner conflict, the development of personal strength, and a healing of invisible wounds.[35]

Bearing witness to Katalyn's process of stitching a mouth silent is an excellent example of "seeing" as metaphor which expanded my analytical insight into the loss of voice as personal experience. Loss of voice was also identified by the inactions of others, including the caregivers' remaining in the relationship with the offender. Mary Magdalene reflected "Don't speak the truth, nothing changes...just the same old status quo" and Justina said that they have "never talked about [it] to this day...I felt helpless and like nothing was ever going to change." Cassie also spoke about experiencing loss of voice as inaction:

[35] Expressive arts therapy is based on the theory that one's most fundamental thoughts and feelings reach expression in images or movement rather than words (Anderson & Gold, 1998; Margolin, 2014; McNiff, 2004). Even without conscious thought, the "inherent curative power of the creative process" assists healing by externalizing one's inner life and facilitates the integration of the authentic self (Anderson & Gold, 1998, p. 24; Margolin, 2014). The effects of sexual violence can be contained within the body, mind, and psyche and exist beyond verbal expression making expressive arts particularly therapeutic (Levine, 1997).

> How you don't matter, how your story doesn't matter, you know, you are going to hint things about your past but we aren't going to take any of those hints, we aren't going to talk about it, we aren't going to acknowledge that there is something wrong with you, we are going to cover it up and say that you are a baby, and you think too much of yourself and you had a great childhood and why aren't you just thankful for the things that were given to you.

Being denied the telling of their truth, or in essence being forced to lie or omit, demonstrated a loss of voice. Mary Magdalene talked about being silenced, for appearances sake when her uncle came from England for a visit. She noted that, "my mom kept up the façade. She didn't want him [the uncle] to know what was going on, so everybody had to kind of lie." Loss of voice was experienced by Katalyn in the recanting of her disclosure and denying her truth. CSA research acknowledges that children feel pressure to recant because of how their disclosure is affecting the family or because of a lack of family support (Bolen & Lamb, 2007; Elliot & Carnes, 2001). Katalyn's voice was silenced when her mother dismissed her disclosure by commenting that Katalyn's father would never hurt her angel. Katalyn's silence was further assured when, during the previously mentioned "last supper," Will thanked Katalyn for being the "truthful one." All the while, Katalyn lost her voice by speaking untruths. Justina described having experienced the loss of voice when her mother said she did not believe Justina's disclosure of sexual abuse and called Justina a liar. Justina said that she views not being believed and being called a liar as the underlying cause of feeling like she has to "prove herself to others."

Loss of feeling protected. The combination of being sexually abused as children and their mothers remaining in a relationship with the sex offender further compromised the participants' personal sense of safety. Justina wrote, "When I am alone and going to bed I sleep with a knife under my pillow and phone in my hand always!! I was not able to protect myself back then but I have made it a priority to protect myself as an adult." Katalyn also noted that her

ability to create a sense of security in her own home for her and her children was not what she experienced in her own childhood home,

> I know my mom always had the protective mama bear angle when it came to schooling... things like that, or issues with being a child and having a fight with a friend... mom always taking hold of the situation... I commend her for all of that but where she failed was having a [safe] home.

Katalyn also reflected on the loss of feeling protected when the small community she lived in demonstrated an acceptance for Will, "they all accept what he has done... it's just disappointing to me... I didn't feel the protection or the support as a child and I sure don't as an adult, from any of them."

When a mother's societally prescribed role as sole protector and nurturer is inconsistent with a child's lived experience, otherhood, it is not surprising that the participants viewed their mother's behaviour as indicators that they were not good enough to love. For the child, feeling that there is something wrong with them, that they are somehow bad or deficient, lessens the emotional pain of realizing the truth of being abandoned and preserved the illusion of the good mother. Mary Magdalene talked about internalizing her mother's lack of protection and care and blamed herself for being unlovable. She reflected that,

> When you look to someone for love and protection and a sense of yourself, which you do with your mother...and it's not there, there's the place children will go, and it's to that place that I'm no good, there's something wrong, not even my mother can love me.

Justina also related her experience of not being protected by her mother as feeling unloved which was exacerbated by witnessing her mother's caring capacity for animals, she said,

> ...that's how she is to animals...I grew up just resenting all those animals because she loved those animals so much, always made sure they had food and everything...we're the ones packing their food and doing the hay...I was so jealous of them... she loved them so much and didn't love us. We had horses, and you couldn't use a bit, you had to use a hackamore, which goes over their nose so it doesn't cut at their mouths, never were we allowed to use a bit or spurs on the horse but you could beat the shit out of your children all the time.

Cassie's description of being incriminated provides another view of experiencing the loss of protection. Cassie spoke about the times that she would intervene when either Margie or her siblings were being physically abused and afterwards, Margie would accuse Cassie of being disrespectful to her father. In her journal, Cassie wrote,

> There was this expectation that I would stand between [Ken] and the rest of the family, yet I was most often "shamed" and demonized for standing up to [Ken]. This would happen with [Margie] most often. She would look to me to act as a buffer, and then would side with [Ken] and also yell at me. I was similar to a scapegoat in this regard....this support was not reciprocated.

Not belonging and feeling unwanted. Three of the participants expressed a sense of not belonging or having experienced the feeling of being unwanted. Katalyn reflected,

> I feel, you know as a kid how you always joke around that your sibling was adopted...I can't even tell you at what age it felt like it was really true for me, other than I look like and sound like my siblings. I feel like an alien at times.

Mary Magdalene wrote "my belief is that I was not wanted by my mother....In my childhood I was called the milkman's daughter, I was not seen as one of them [because] I was not wanted." She further reflected that:

> When a child is loved and touched in a loving way they know for sure that they are meant to be here. When a child is harmed in physical abuse, sexual abuse, whatever, they know that with every cell of their being they shouldn't be and I think it's more like that."[36]

As previously discussed, Mary Magdalene also identified that this feeling was embodied in her fiber-art and symbolized by the fetus with a noose around its neck and depicting being orphaned in utero.

Similar to Mary Magdalene's description of her fiber-art's depiction of an abortion, Justina also described feeling unwanted and unloved after her mother told her and her siblings

[36] Mary Magdalene related her feelings of being unwanted to the work of Deepak Chopra. Deepak Chopra is an Indian-American physician and expert in the field of mind-body healing and a prominent alternative-medicine advocate in the holistic-health movement. He is an author, public speaker, and founder of the Chopra Foundation and of the Chopra Center for Wellbeing (Retrieved from http://www.chopra.com)

that "she never wanted children, and if abortions would have been legal, she would have had one." Although Cassie expressed that she did not feel unwanted, she did state that "there were times when I felt like she [Margie] was being selfish for having us."

Influences on self as parent. Three of the participants were parents. Although there was not a lot of detailed discussion specific to their own parenting, there were some significant aspects of how their childhood experiences of their primary caregiver remaining in a relationship with a sex offender impacted their role as caregiver.

Katalyn's conscientious resolve to ensure that she is not silenced influences her own role as a caregiver, which she believes is "chosen purposefully, not just because of my experiences as a child, but because of the experience I saw my mom in." She noted that she makes sure she has relationships with people, who she knows,

> ...will speak up for my kids or protect them when I can't....if they ever saw anything, even while I'm alive, I know that they would stand up and tell me. And that's a big thing for me that I didn't even realize I was looking for until I was in this group.

Katalyn also expressed being influenced by her mother's silence and finds that she constantly worries about having the strength to protect her own children:

> I just hope and pray on a regular basis that, even though he [referring to her husband] is my best friend and my true love...that should anything ever happen [and] I feel I have to protect my children and run, that I will have the strength to do it....[People] may think I'm weird, or not understand where that came from, but it comes from the fact that my mom didn't have the strength and the thought process to ever take the kids and run. And it goes through my mind on a fairly regular basis where I almost have to do a self-check-in to know that if I have to, am I willing to pick them up and run? And it's a weird process to go through but it's my process.

Justina also stated that "when I had children I made a conscientious effort that I wasn't going to let them feel like I felt when I was a kid and I wasn't going to bring alcohol and stuff around them because I wanted them to have normal lives, although what is normal?" She also

acknowledged her parenting as an accomplishment, "I'm very proud of myself and the things that I have accomplished, I've given my children a normal life."

Mary Magdalene also talked about her role as caregiver and expressed being worried about the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Mary Magdalene expressed being fearful for what she has passed onto her own children. "If we do not deal with certain aspects of ourselves it shows up in the next generation...inter-generationally we pass shit along."

Child as Caregiver

Child as caregiver was not specifically discussed in the literature review, nor was it identified as a specific effect of CSA, yet this theme called for further examination to contextualize the idea as an emergent theme and more importantly, provided a framework to understand the participants' lived experience.

The child as caregiver is most often referred to as parentification and can be considered a form of neglect (Hooper, 2008). Parentification, a psychology term, identifies the process of a parental figure distorting the boundaries of caregiving, and facilitating a role reversal where children assume instrumental and emotional roles and responsibilities usually reserved for adults (Fitzgerald et al., 2008; Hooper, DeCoster, White, & Voltz, 2011). Instrumental parentification refers to performance of daily duties that involve caring for parents and siblings, while emotional parentification refers to behaviours relating to serving as a confidant, companion, or mate, mediating family conflict, and providing nurturance and support (Jurkovic, Morrell, & Thirkield as cited in Hooper, 2008). Children, in their role as caregiver, become involved in developmentally inappropriate tasks that can potentially restrict other opportunities and experiences that are crucial to child development (Earley & Cushway, 2002). Boundaries that are blurred can expose children to events and circumstances that they are emotionally and

physically unprepared to handle (Hooper, 2008). Evidence suggests that parentification often occurs within families that experience major stressors, such as parental illness, divorce, domestic violence, and substance misuse (Fitzgerald et al., 2008). In the research study, *Child Sexual Abuse, Early Family Risk, and Childhood Parentification: Pathways to Current Psychosocial Adjustment,* Fitzgerald et al., (2008) found that "[CSA] and family risk independently predicted psychosocial maladjustment; however, contrary to expectations, CSA was not directly related to parentification" (p. 323). Other studies indicate that mothers with a history of CSA have a predisposition to parentifying their own children (Earley & Cushway, 2002). The process of childhood parentification, characterized as a traumatic event, can lead to the parentification across many generations; unmet needs in one generation are contented in the next, and result in children, yet again, as the caregiver (Castro et al., 2004 & Hooper, 2008).

Although parentification may promote the development of socially acceptable attributes such as interpersonal competency, responsible behaviour, and resourcefulness (Hooper, 2008), there are recognized adverse consequences, including internalized emotional distress, externalizing behaviour problems, and interpersonal difficulties (Fitzgerald et al., 2008). All of the participants identified as having experienced parentification coinciding with their childhood experience of their primary caregiver remaining in a relationship with a sex offender. The following are the categories inherent to the child as caregiver: caregiver to mother; caregiver to siblings; raising of self; and the child caregiver in otherhood. To highlight this section, I begin with a description of Cassie's voice in thread.

Cassie's Voice in Thread

Cassie created three quilt squares that represented what she described as her childhood experience and the stages of her healing and her relationship with Margie.

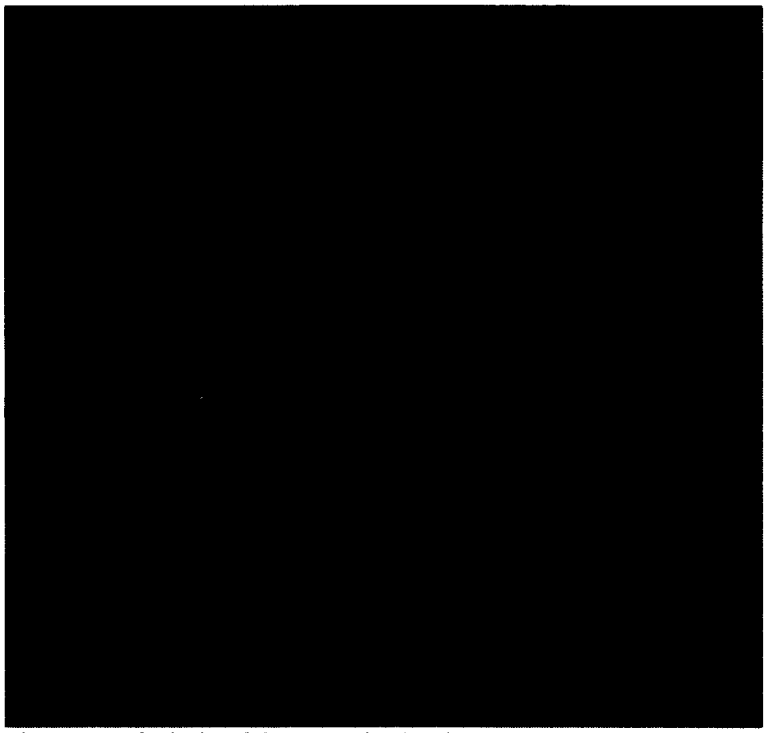

Fig. 11 - *Little Girl and Caregiver* by Cassie

Cassie's first square, titled *Little Girl and Caregiver* (Fig. 11), is a representation of the first stage of her relationship with Margie. Cassie described this quilt square as being whimsical, "the fairy tale feel is meant to represent the 'not real' and dreamlike feel of my childhood...surreal... the colours are dull to represent that it's a dark fairy tale." The Worry Dolls[37] represent Cassie and Margie. In the interview, Cassie described the Worry Dolls' dynamics and representation as:

> The first one is of a lady and that is [Margie]. She doesn't have a face and that is to represent the fact that [Margie] had no voice, she had no rights, she really had nothing because....she didn't have her Canadian citizenship. She had four children and she could not leave [Ken] because he had rights to the children over her. [The] little girl looks really sad and she was going to have her mouth stitched [shut]...but [I] decided that the sad look on her face could represent just the sadness that I had as a child and this overwhelming sense of responsibility for my mother...and this secret that I could tell no one, and this feeling of something being wrong but not knowing what it was.

[37] Worry Dolls are tiny (typically about one inch tall) handcrafted dolls from Guatemala. The dolls are clothed in colourful, traditional Mayan costumes. According to Mayan legend, if you tell your troubles to a Worry Doll then place it under your pillow, your worries will be gone by morning. Retrieved from http://www.tc.umn.edu

Upon personal reflection about the creation of her first quilt square Cassie wrote:

> Margie was an amazing mother when I was a child....During the early part of my life I put my mother on a HUGE pedistle [sic]. To me, she was an angel-the most important person in the world. Sometimes I wish I could go back to this stage in my relationship with my mother....she was still the mother and I was still the child. There was softness between us that will never be able to happen again....Our relationship at this point was the most 'Mother-Daughter' relationship we would have.

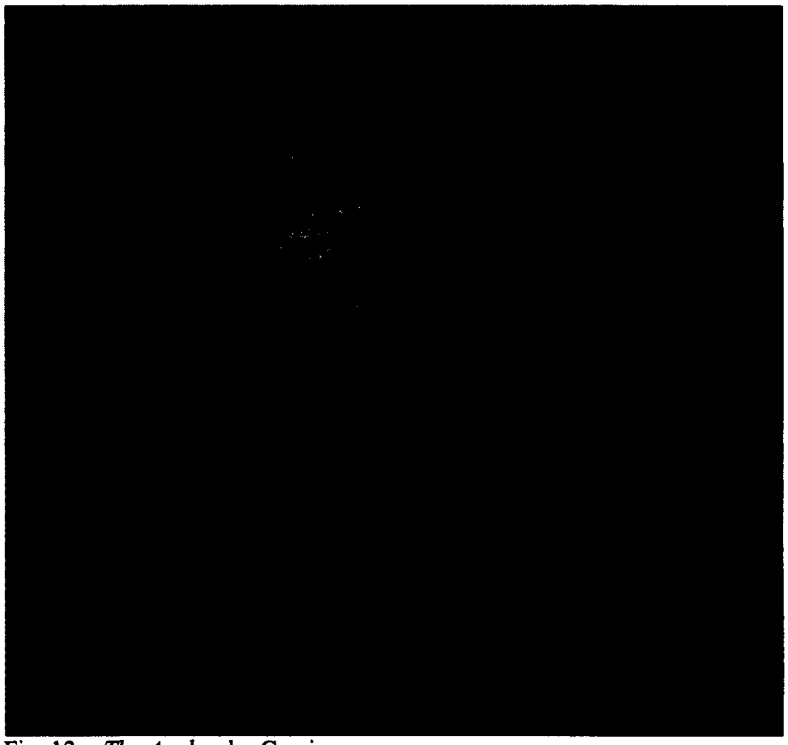

Fig. 12 – *The Anchor* by Cassie

The second square, titled *The Anchor* (Fig. 12) is described by Cassie as the most complex and distressful part of her relationship with Margie and she noted that "it was the hardest one to make." She wrote that "the simplicity of the square is meant to be ironic due to the messy and complicated part of our relationship." In her journal Cassie noted that her relationship with Margie changed significantly after Cassie attempted suicide at the age of 12 years. She wrote: "I CONSTANTLY felt as though I had to be the 'mature' one and act like the parent....She would look to me to act as a buffer...between [Ken] and the rest of the family." In the interview, Cassie talked about becoming Margie's protector. Cassie reflected on how even

Margie herself defined Cassie as her anchor, "She said that I was a child but I was her anchor and that I was her friend and I protected her and kept her grounded and...basically I kept her alive." Cassie further expanded on the layers of complexities this quilt square embodies. She commented that the anchor also represents:

> Margie's need for survival and inability to stand up for herself and her inability to deal with past trauma...the weird dynamic between the rest of my family, this [the quilt square] represents the shitty part of my family....it represents my family using me as an anchor for so long and me letting myself be used as an anchor."

While Cassie acknowledged that most people have positive associations of an anchor, for her personally, the anchor symbolizes an omniscient sense of being drowned. Tearfully, she quietly commented "she [Margie] drowned me as a person, as her daughter." In her journal she wrote "I was her anchor – her – child – was her complete sanity and support...I was drowning...it is painful to think of this time in my life."

Fig. 13 – *Love and Growth* by Cassie

Cassie's third quilt square is titled *Love and Growth* (Fig. 13). She described this piece of fiber-art as a representation of her present relationship with Margie. Cassie said the green dragonfly represented Margie:

> ...Green is my mother's favourite colour and it represents to her, renewal. The dragonfly is really important because... it signifies new beginnings and when [Margie] and [Ken] separated...she completely changed and made a new beginning for herself.

For herself, Cassie chose the symbol of a butterfly and described the significance as:

> ...All of the changes that I have gone through in my life and how I put up boundaries with my family...I was able to get over my pride and allow my family in and I was able to go to university and take control of my life and not let my past, and my family, and the abuse that I have had, get in the way with what I have made of my future.

For the blue sky, Cassie chose a type of wrinkled material that could not be ironed flat. Upon sharing a picture of her quilt square with Margie, the wrinkles, for them, became a metaphor for their relationship, an acknowledgement that:

> ...We are going to have our ups and downs, there will be grief and loss...there is not going to be horrendous things in our life, they are going to be normal and manageable, a few wrinkles her and there. It's not going to be perfect.

Cassie wrote that this quilt square "speaks of the hope we have for the future and the love we have for each other." The bright colours were purposefully chosen to represent happiness.

Child as caregiver to mother. As a child or adolescent, several of the participants described being a caregiver to mother in the context of providing protection or intervening. As just previously described in Cassie's fiber-art, she reflects on her experience of parent-child role reversal. During her interview, Cassie described her experience as, "[Margie] was like my child." Writing in her journal, Cassie further noted her role as a protector, "I remember even as a child, trying to protect my mother when [Ken] became violent. I was always so scared for her....I lived in constant fear for my mother, not really for myself though." When Cassie was 20 years old, she abandoned her promising career and lifestyle in another province to relocate in a small northern community in order to rescue her mother emotionally and financially and assist her mother and her younger siblings while exiting the abusive relationship with Ken. Cassie wrote, "Margie was very manipulative to me for a very long time. She was my everything and I did everything for her."

Katalyn also talked about protecting her mother when she was a teenager:

> I had no problems holding a knife to [Will's] throat when he and my mom argued. I had no problem doing my mom's battles...I had no problem speaking up to him time and time again. For whatever reason though I never ended up being the voice to say you did this to me and put him in jail for what he did to me. I just never found that part of it. But I did find [that] I was enough of my mom's voice when she needed it, when she was dying. So her choice to stay with him frustrates the crap out of me.

Both Cassie and Katalyn demonstrate how children, as the caregiver, sacrifice their own needs in order to take care of the needs of their parents (Castro, Jones, & Mirsalimi, 2004).

Carer of mother also extended to being the confidant and taking care of, or fulfilling the mother's emotional needs. Cassie wrote that:

> Even at this early stage of my life [before 11 years of age], my mother and I had a weird and maybe different relationship. We did lots of things together and [she] often talked to me like a friend. This "adult like" conversation that would take place would often happen after a fight or after [Ken] would do something terrible, like when [Ken] would cheat on mom or spend all the money we had on alcohol or drugs. Even at this age I felt responsible or tried to "keep the peace."

Cassie also talked about the re-creation of her role as caregiver in her married relationship and putting her feelings and expectations aside. Cassie connected her experience of being a caregiver with her struggles of self-doubt, low self-esteem, and loss of identity even though to others she appears to be confident. Cassie metaphorically described the effects of being an impressionable child caregiver as, "trying to find yourself when you don't even know who you are... it's like this big cement block surrounding you that you have to find some way to break out of." Similar feelings were noted by Katalyn. She wrote: "Many feel I am powerful and outgoing, inside I am still a little girl looking for guidance" and "I am nervous to show the inside of me that even I might not know is there." What is significant about Cassie and Katalyn's insight is that children as caregivers often struggle to develop an independent sense of self and realistic sense of their true abilities. In addition, they struggle with feelings of inadequacy born out of the inability for any child to fully meet the needs of a parent (Castro et al., 2004). Cassie's fiber-art, *The Anchor*, is again, an eerie metaphor for the child as caregiver; anchoring a child down and back from growing into her own true self.

During one particular fiber-art group session, the topics of conversation were especially difficult and a lot of the conversation centered on mothers, mothers as accountable, and as a child, not feeling mothered. Immersed in grief and loss of childhood, these were difficult conversations for all of us; I could only imagine how difficult these discussions were for Katalyn

whose mother had died. On this particular evening, Katalyn said that she always felt like her mother was "a mother" just that "she chose him over me." She became very emotional and started to cry and said "I can't help it I loved her" (Johnson, January 29, 2014). Katalyn noted that her experience of being her mother's caregiver did not happen until her mother was dying when Katalyn was 15 years old. Katalyn reflected on taking care of her mother on their last camping holiday together:

> It'd be pitch black dark and she would be scared and she couldn't find comfort in her husband...that is a very foreign thing to me now...to lie there in a trailer and have your mom crying five feet away from you and her own husband can't comfort her and make her feel safe. It took for me to start singing hymns to calm her and put her to sleep. So every night I was singing to her and there were nights when she would get a cough because her lungs were collapsing... I'd have to lay there and karate chop on her back and sing to her to get her to fall asleep without coughing. And not once could her husband fulfill those needs. So to know that if I had chosen to cut him [Will] out [of her life] back then, I think it would have killed my mom sooner.

Child as caregiver to siblings. All of the participants described being put in the role of caregiver for their siblings. As already noted, as a young adult, Mary Magdalene also took on the role and responsibility to protect her youngest sibling when she reported her suspicion of her sister being sexually abused by their father. Mary Magdalene, who had seven siblings, said that she and her other two older siblings took care of the younger children. "We took care of everything and everything really has become about taking care of my mom. When I look back, I think it was everyone who was taking care of her." Justina also described acting in the position of caregiver for her siblings. Justina noted, "I felt like the mother because she [mom] was so immature, she was selfish." Justina said that as children, her and her siblings were locked out of the house from morning until supper time without supervision, and reflected that "I was pretty much the mother...I was always the sensible one." Katalyn is the youngest child of four siblings and reflected that she always has and continues to be the caregiver to her siblings. Katalyn

wrote, "As a child I was raised to put the needs of others first. And most of my life I have done that and now I'm feeling used."

Raising of self. Both Justina and Katalyn described parentification in the context of being responsible for raising themselves. For adolescents, they were very astute and strategic about their living situations. Justina described how she left home as a young teenager and utilized opportunities such as: a summer job with room and board; staying in town with a friend's family so she could attend school; and making alternate arrangements with a supportive high school principle so that she could leave school early in order to provide afterschool care for room and board. Justina also shared her story of being a young teenager and having to ask to move back home after her friend's family moved away:

> I knew that I was never going to finish school if I didn't live at home because it was too hard taking care of yourself and going to school. So, as much as I hated it, I did not want to go back into that environment but I really wanted to finish school, I asked my mom...if I could come home...and she told me no...because I was responsible to take care of myself....I was too busy taking care of myself to complete school and to this day it still really makes me angry that I wasn't able to do more with my life because I spent the years just getting through life, getting through the days, getting through the horror rather than actually living life or having a life.

As a young teenager, Katalyn had to move out so that her father could come home after being released from jail; she then lived with her older sister who made her pay rent. To earn money, Katalyn became a nanny while also attending school.

While I identified Justina and Katalyn as being astute and strategic, it is not without the recognition that central to their ability to be responsible and resourceful is the quest for personal safety and mere survival. To demonstrate the significance of unravelling silence, Justina aptly gives voice to her experience and described herself as being "overly responsible" and wrote:

> I have lost the ability to be carefree. I don't think that I have ever done <u>anything</u> without thinking about it first. (Choices and consequences) which is a good thing but I have missed out on a lot of carefree fun things....being too structured is not good.

The Child caregiver in otherhood. The commonality of the child as caregiver was an unexpected outcome in this research that intertwined with the experience of lost childhood exemplified in otherhood. Once again I was struggling with self as a feminist, researcher, social worker, and survivor, I wrote,

> Their stories, my story, the entangled gendered experiences of childhood, sexual abuse, mother in relationships with sex offenders and not chosen or protected, but left to survive. We did survive, when our mothers weren't able to make different choices –we still survived (November 10, 2013).

As the theme of the child caregiver emerged, my own childhood experiences began to re-emerge. I have visited this place before, I have told my story before, I have written my story before, yet this time I saw angles that I did not know existed. To remember and feel a young daughter's tenderness of love towards her mother has long been forgotten, complicated by hurt and survival. I wrote:

> Distrust in self which compromises my trust in believing my truth, that my voice has value. I am angry that my role in my family was to meet the needs of my mother and siblings at the expense of my own self-identity. To have my needs met-as a child-it should never have been an expectation-it is an inherent right. As the adult child, I do have expectations and when I voiced my expectations, set boundaries, my mother manipulatively attempted to orchestrate my silence through shaming me. When her carefully choreographed drama script did not elicit the response she wanted, she planted seeds of self-doubt. And there, I am left questioning who-the-hell-am-I? Then, a seed of worthiness drifted by on the slightest of breeze and settled, rooted into the core of my being, the assurance in the knowing that I voiced my truth (Johnson, February 3, 2014).

As I look through the window of research and into the participants' lived experiences, there is a reflection of me; the child as caregiver and the recognition of lost childhoods.

Fig. 14 – *The Child Caregiver in Otherhood* by Clarie

My fiber-art titled, *The Child Caregiver in Otherhood* (Fig. 14), is a depiction of the child as caregiver and ultimately a survivor. The dandelion symbolizes the lazy days of innocence, an innocent child. The innocent joy of clutching a fistful of freshly picked and prized golden yellow flowers to be bestowed to someone special; a bouquet of innocence. The child does not see a weed; they are mesmerized by the dandelions' beauty. The enchanted essence of childhood, found in the fragile dandelion puff, the magic contained in each tiny, parachute shaped seed beholds a precious wish, a dream, waiting to root and blossom. On a gust of wind the seeds twirl and scatter, the wish they contain floats into the perils of a forgotten childhood love. The once loved yellow flower is now but a weed; a golden blemish that wreaks havoc in a sea of green. Vanished is the virtue of childhood. The dandelions sleep as the golden hue of the setting sun casts long shadows, the innocence of the child, eclipsed by adult responsibility and experiences of otherhood. But wait; a dandelion seed is adrift on the evening wind. With the courage of a lion, this tiny seed settles itself into a slight crack in the asphalt. The blackened tar,

still warm from the evening sun offers little sustenance for existence, but this speck of courage prepares to flourish and thrive. This brave seed carries a precious hopeful wish and reminder - you are worthy, take up space, and speak your truth.

The Adult Child Caregiver and the Mother: A Strategic Relationship

The participants' reflection on their childhood experiences ultimately encompassed conversations about the complexities and impact on their relationships with their mother. Some of the participants identified that there is still an internal calling to take care of mother. For example, during a recent conversation with Margie about Ken, Cassie described dismissing her own feelings in order to protect her mother. Cassie wrote,

> [Margie] asked me if I was okay. I was not, but I said I was. It is funny that my first reaction was to protect her. I said a cheerful good bye and hung up the phone. I [then] screamed and cried for most of that day. I was angry."

The experience of having been the caregiver as the child alters the perception of their, the adult child, role. What became prominent were the strategies that the participants engaged in to manage the relationship with their mothers. I have purposefully used the word strategies as it more accurately captures the tone of the intended purpose and is suggestive of a carefully thought out plan of action. Strategies summon a form of self-preservation when there is still a recognized familial effort to silence. The strategies that were utilized were: minimal contact; active avoidance; and renaming.

Minimal contact. Mary Magdalene talked about having the freedom to distance herself from her family after her mother said "we don't want you here because it will make [Mary Magdalene's sister] uncomfortable." Mary Magdalene said that she had decreased her contact with her mother and some of her other family members because she has had enough, "I'm not going to any more family functions at all and I'm not talking on the phone at all, I'm done."

Mary Magdalene has not been around her family for almost a decade. Mary Magdalene maintains minimal contact with her mother through facebook and the exchange of Christmas packages in the mail. Mary Magdalene said that she was re-evaluating her contact and relationship with her mother,

> I'm still looking at that. With me it's like what am I doing, what am I wanting, she's still pissing me off, am I ever going to be able to get to that place of not being pissed off or triggered...it's good to look at this...I'm still wondering about it. It's toxic. I wouldn't go see her. I will not see her before she dies I know that.

Active avoidance. Children who are parentified are taught that boundaries are permeable and not to assert or define their true self (Hooper, 2008). Thereby, active avoidance becomes a strategy that is reminiscent of evading or dodging a situation for emotional self-defence. Justina has had experiences of both, having no contact with her mother and actively avoiding her mother. It was 10 years after the second court case before Justina had any contact with her mother again. Since then, with her mother living in another province, contact has only been through telephone conversations and emails. Contact has been minimal as Justina tries to avoid talking to her mother by ignoring her phone calls. Justina further described how her partner acts as a buffer by answering her mother's phone calls:

> I kind of like it because then I don't have to talk to her....He'll talk to her and then it's like, ok now she knows stuff and she doesn't need to phone again for a while....but then sometimes it hurts me when he talks to her too....It's conflicted feelings when it comes to my mother, there is never just a feeling, there's a million emotions running around and then it gets overwhelming....She crumbles me for some reason. Every time I talk to her...it takes a while to get over it.

The dominant discourses about mothers and the romanticized mother-daughter bond, as constructed within the ideal of patriarchy's perfect motherhood, exerts societal expectations and judgements about being a good daughter. Justina's avoidance of contact with her mother leaves her feeling guilty, "I feel like a total evil child for not talking to her...no matter what happens

you feel like a real bad person for not talking to your parent because you are supposed to forgive them for everything." While Justina ashamedly avoids contact with her mother, she concurrently experiences a loss of the idealized mother as nurturing and protective. Justina asked the fiber-art group the question, "How do people cope on Mother's Day?" When Justina worked at a major department store, she identified that she would be triggered with sadness and jealously when she would see mother-daughter pairs shopping together. Justina also expressed that being born on a Mother's Day is yet another challenge that emphasizes her loss of mother.

Katalyn also alluded to the societal expectations of being a good daughter replete with the idealization of a mother-daughter bond and honouring her mother after death. Faced with disapproval from family, friends, and even strangers for exposing any of her mother's misgivings and Katalyn's own belief that, "it felt wrong to have anger towards her because she was dead," Katalyn's strategy of managing her remembered relationship with her mother included developing the confidence to freely express her anger. Katalyn spoke about the counselling that assisted her with knowing that "it was ok to be angry with your dead mother, it's not going to burn you in your sleep or anything." In her account of finding peace with her anger, Katalyn described feeling satisfied that she could finally admit that she was angry with her mother and "not feel ashamed to think that way [even though] she is dead." Katalyn described her anger as resulting from unanswered questions, "I don't get to ask her [mom] why she stayed even after he went to jail and admitted to it [the sexual abuse of her siblings]."

When I asked Katalyn how she managed her mother's dying wish of not cutting her father out of her life, she recounted an event that happened over two years ago when she was passing through Will's home town and she saw him driving by. Katalyn said that she felt like she wanted to kill him and in that moment she knew having no contact with him was solely for

her, "It was like a validation that it was okay to cut him out and it's okay that I do not communicate with him, it was that moment in time that it just kind of made it ok." While reflecting on her healing journey, having a voice, and making a decision to end any kind of relationship with Will, Katalyn noted that if her mom was alive today, it makes her sad to think that her mother would not support her and that she chooses not to think about that.

Active avoidance was also extended to avoiding specific topics of conversation or thoughts. Cassie identified that:

> Education is something that we still don't talk about because she [Margie] feels like she did her best. However, I feel like one of the main reason I lost my childhood was because I was home schooled and isolated...it was so difficult trying to go to university.... Having the courage to even apply to university.... I can barely talk to her about it. So I have left that out of the picture and I focus on the present because...if I go back to that place I am pissed [and] angry that she kept me at home...so I could be the buffer.

Renaming. As previously discussed, Cassie made a conscious choice to no longer address her biological mother as mother. Cassie noted that addressing her mother using her given name Margie is a strategy to remind herself not to have any expectations of Margie's ability to mother. She commented that "[Margie] is never going to be a mother to me; she never will be able to be a mother to me because of how much I was a caregiver to her. It just will never happen." After Cassie shared her renaming strategy with the fiber-art group, Katalyn was inspired to adopt the strategy for herself and thereafter began to address her biological father as Will. It was not until I was reading the participants' journal entries that I connected Katalyn's choice of addressing her biological father by his first name, with her participation in the fiber-art group sessions. My curiosity became piqued after I read Katalyn's journal entry where she wrote, "After [Will] (my dad who I will now not admit is my father) was released from prison...." For clarification of my assumption, I contacted Katalyn and asked her about any

significance related to her decision to address her biological father by his first name. During our telephone conversation, she commented that she had been motivated by Cassie's decision to call her mother Margie. Katalyn identified that by calling her biological father by his first name solidifies, for her, that he has never been a father. Katalyn also noted that listening to the women's stories in the fiber-art group sessions "normalized" her decision of severing any relationship with Will and further freed her from the constraints of her mother's dying wish. As the researcher I was elated with this discovery. This is a poignant example of fulfilling my commitment to working "with" the women and creating opportunity for the participants' construction of new possibilities, of consciousness -raising.

Childhood Experience of Inadequate Response

The focus of this research was not on the specifics of the participants' CSA experiences or sexual offender sentencing or treatment. What became evident through the women's childhood stories was the impact of inadequate responses and how it has continued to impact them in their adulthood. What is described as an inadequate response will ultimately depend on a multitude of factors from the victims' perspective and professional services roles. Although key service providers, such as RCMP, child protection services, mental health, and sexual assault centres are drawn together in service delivery, they often act in a solitary and uncoordinated manner (Trute, Adkins & MacDonald, 1996). In the following section, the participants' childhood accounts of inadequate societal response to their experiences of both, being sexually abused and their primary caregiver remaining in a relationship with a sex offender, are presented. These inadequate responses can only be described as missed opportunities for a different individual and societal outcome for children and mothers in relationships with sex offenders.

Their narratives can be divided into three categories: child protection services; judicial; and societal. To highlight this section it begins first with a description of Justina's voice in thread.

Justina's Voice in Thread

Fig. 15 – Justina's first quilt square

Justina participated in the fiber-art group sessions and created two quilt squares. The first quilt square (Fig. 15) represented Justina's childhood. She described the black background as, "my whole childhood felt like darkness, never any happy light...just grim and scary and violent and angry and mixed up." The fringe of grass was originally appliqued onto Justina's fiber-art for aesthetic reasons. As Justina shared the symbolism of her artwork with the women, she developed an awareness of how the grass was connected with remembering the time frames of being sexually abused. She reflected that "maybe the grass is more than I thought because it is actually a big significant part of my memories. Weird because I don't see trees always the grass, and always the colour of the grass."

The rock is symbolic of Justina's "protection mechanism" of masking her feelings and turning herself, and others, into an inanimate object to survive the "horrendous violence." She wrote, "Objects have no feelings, emotions, or [intimate] connections and the only way to stay sane is to not feel." This survival strategy could not be sustained. Justina wrote, "those feelings of mine would not lie dormant no matter how hard I tried...I had to find another way to 'numb'." The acorns symbolized Justina's subsequent strategy of dissociation. "The little acorns in the corner are my eyes watching down...I remember it was like I was floating in the corner and was watching what was happening to me [getting beaten or sexually abused] but I felt nothing, no pain." The words "help me" loom in the darkness. Justina wrote:

> My rock does not have a mouth as I feel "help me" stayed in my head and was never to be said out loud. If I said it out loud I would be in big trouble and I was constantly told no one would ever believe me anyways.

Justina has always wondered why she was never good enough to help, "Why were our lives so insignificant?"

In reflection, Justina also identified that the rock had a poignant metaphorical representation of possessing an inner strength, "the strength of a rock." She wrote, "...I survived all this, I did it with strength, courage and dignity. What a woman and child. I need to honour her. I never give up."

Fig. 16 – Justina's second quilt square

The second quilt square (Fig. 16) that Justina created is indicative of survival and "bursting out of the sadness and the chaotic-ness and the darkness." She wrote "it is the survivor in me leaving it all behind." Justina reflected that as a little girl she always loved and searched for four-leaf clovers which represented an Irish heritage, good luck, and fond memories of her maternal grandmother. Justina reminisced about "feeling free, with nothing on your mind" when, as a child, she was searching for the prized four-leaf clover. Justina described this quilt square as symbolic of her accomplishments and "overcoming the odds" and her desire to thrive instead of just surviving. Justina said, "I am surviving...I'm just getting through the days...in the end I just want to be that girl throwing clovers and be free from it all...I don't think I'm there yet...but I will be." Justina remarked that "I will strive to make my life 'coming up clovers'".

Inadequate response: Child protection services. Three of the participants gave multiple accounts of experiencing inadequate responses from child protection services. As previously discussed, in Justina's case, there were multiple reports made to child protection

services and the RCMP. Investigation into allegations of physical and sexual abuse led to Justina's step-father being charged with the sexual abuse of her brother and her brother being removed from the home. Justina and her sister remained living with, and in the care, of her mother and step-father. Justina reflected on this in her journal. She wrote:

> There was a period of time when I thought it was OK to abuse me.... Two other kids got apprehended out of the house by the ministry for the abuse but me [sic] and my sister got left there. [They were] both boys.... So, [in] my young mind, trying to make sense of this, I decided it must be ok to abuse girls but not boys. Why else would they have left me and my sister in this situation not once, but twice? Help me!!

During the interview Justina reflected on another occasion that she felt like she received an inadequate response from child protection services. As previously mentioned in the discussion of child as caregiver, Justina was providing afterschool care for room and board. In her final year of school, a new principal was appointed to her school and he was not supportive of the previous arrangement made for her to leave class early. This is Justina's story of that experience:

> I went to [child protection services] and said I can't do this job [afterschool care]. I'm going to get kicked out of school. I just want to be able to finish school.... Can you not help me finish school and find a place to live? I'm not sure if I told them about the sexual abuse, I did tell them about getting beat and how bad it was... I told that guy at [child protection services] and his answer to me was in order for him to help, I had to go home and get a note from my parents to say that they wouldn't support me...That's the only way that they could help...I remember crying and saying that they [her mother and step-father] beat me and they aren't going to write that note...please, please... Nope, no help what-so-ever...[child protection services] should have been responsible for getting me out of there...It's not like [child protection services] didn't know. People had called in, stuff had happened, my brother went to court...It was [child protection service's] responsibility to get me out of there and to keep me safe. Then I got out of there myself and [child protection services] couldn't even help me...so I could graduate from high school and be on my way.

Mary Magdalene was a young adult when her and her brother contacted child protection services to report their suspicion that their youngest sister was being sexually abused by their father. Mary Magdalene expressed frustration that:

> [T]hey [child protection services] allowed him to continue on in a family environment with my mom [supervising] and...he lived in an apartment for a while, then he lived in a van outside of the house...I vaguely remember the ministry talking to him...but it was never enforced.

Katalyn also described a situation of inadequate response following her disclosure of child sexual abuse and then subsequent recanting of that disclosure. When Katalyn's biological father, Will, was charged and convicted with the sexual abuse of her two older sisters, Katalyn says she was never offered any support services, nor was she re-interviewed about her original disclosure of sexual abuse. Katalyn described having to leave the family home so that Will could come home, from jail, for 48 hour visits. Katalyn does not recollect any counselling support services being offered or received for reuniting the family after Will returned home from incarceration.

Inadequate response: Judicial. There were frequent discussions about lack of consequences for the sex offender and paltry sentences. Justina and Katalyn both reflected on feeling that the judicial response was inadequate. Justina wrote:

> So the court case was in early December. My siblings and I were not even told about it and did not have the opportunity to go. I phoned the [crown counsel] and asked them why... as part of my healing process (when you are always called a liar) [you want] to hear your offender say he's guilty (he plea bargained and pled guilty)... they let me know that he apologized very sincerely to the courts. I am so glad [crown counsel] got an apology because I never. In the end he did no time, had a court ordered firearms prohibition and a year of sexual offenders counselling. And I have a lifetime of memories and grief. Good trade off.

Justina further described her dissatisfaction with the judicial response and inadequate sentence compared to the lifetime of effects she will experience. She asserted that "If you ask me, that's like murder, [he] murdered my childhood." Katalyn reflected that while Will was incarcerated, Katalyn's mother took her and her brother there to visit Will and she remembers thinking that it was like going to bible camp.

Inadequate response: Societal. At the societal level there were several notable, and previously discussed, experiences of inadequate response to the women's experiences and situations including, but not limited to, school district, church, and government. Mary Magdalene shared her experience of disclosing her own sexual abuse when she was 16 years old to a priest that was never reported to child protection services. She also reflected on the abrupt ending of family counselling services for her family after the inception of the Bill Bennett government[38] and the dismantling of social programs.

Cassie reflected on Margie's attempts to receive help and being turned away from women's transition houses because she did not have her Canadian Citizenship and no legal authority to her children. Cassie also talked about the real issue being the lack of support, both as a result of no services in small communities and as constructed by the perpetrator and abusive partner.

Conclusion

By calling upon other ways of gathering knowledge insights are revealed about the lived experiences of women when, as children or young adults, their biological mothers remained in a relationship with a sex offender. Arts-based methodology permitted the space for a research design that provided an alternative for the telling of stories by using quilting as an art form to create a visual text. For the participants the "telling" of their lived experiences also became a visual, tactile, and physical experience as they stitched their voices into the creation of their fiber-art. The participants' fiber-art are the stories that they wanted to be seen and respected. As the researcher, honouring their voices involved being immersed in the visual data, to be

[38] Member of the Social Credit Party and 27th Premier of British Columbia, 1983 – 1986 (Retrieved from http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/william-richards-bennett/).

creatively reflexive, and develop an aesthetic response that permitted the integration of deeper themes and derive conclusion to the notion of "Otherhood."

As the knowers, the participants' courageously shared their stories for the purpose of research. Using a "threadmatic" analysis and "seeing" with metaphors as a way to disentangle the themes amongst their stories was an arduous task sustained by curiosity. The task of analysis generated significant themes, understanding, and insight which emphasized the context in which the participants' lives were lived. A reflective understanding of caregiver accountability resulted in revisiting a tension in the discourse between feminist practice and mother-blaming. "Otherhood" became a metaphor to envelope the tension and complexities between mothers' choices and children's voices. Ultimately this suggests that intersectionality becomes a framework for future research and practice in addressing a mother's situatedness and agency. Parentification emerges as a common experience for all the participants and is suggestive of a lost childhood. Loss was also described as experiencing loss of voice and personal safety. Inevitably, the participants discussed the difficulties of being adult daughters in a relationship with their mothers who stayed in relationships with sex offenders. They identified common strategies to maintain self-preservation within the mother-daughter relationship. Finally, the participants recounted childhood experiences of inadequate responses to not only their sexual abuse, but also their mothers' choice of remaining in a relationship with a sex offender.

Voices in Thread: The Quilt

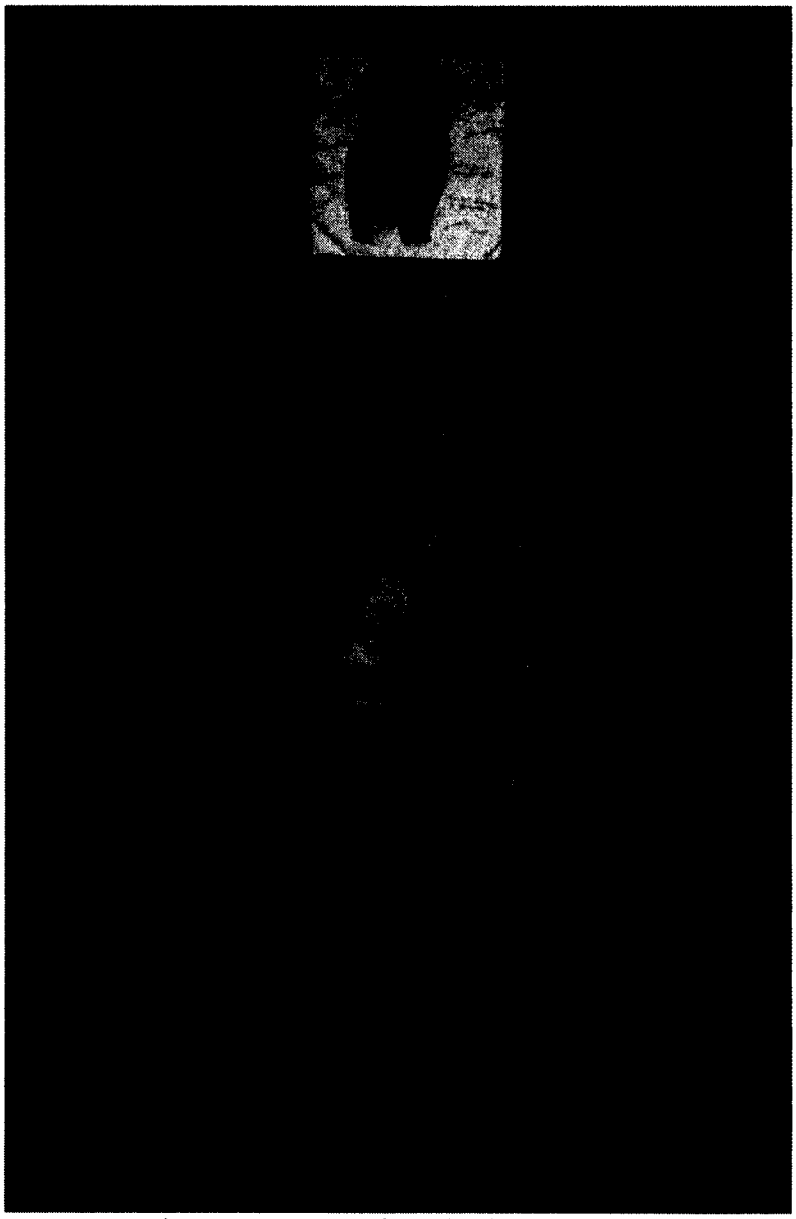

Fig. 17 *Voices in Thread: The Quilt*

The finished quilt, a collection of individually lived experiences stitched together in collective unity, entices viewers to take a closer look, to see the parts, as well as the whole, to note details not visible from afar. If a visual image of the quilt imprints on the viewers' mind, or the viewer thinks about the quilt when it is no longer visible, the research will have been aesthetically successful in the "hearing" of voices in thread.

Chapter Seven– Discussion and Recommendations: Sew What Now?

In the last twenty years, I have witnessed complacency in believing that the issue of sexual violence, and specifically, CSA, has been adequately addressed. My sexual abuse ended when I was 13 years old, yet here I am almost 40 years later, still bearing witness to women and children being humiliated, sexualized, objectified, oppressed, silenced, raped, beaten, murdered, degraded, tortured, exploited, and disfigured.

CSA is a global and deeply rooted cross-cultural, cross-economical epidemic that requires a dramatic shift in how we envision children, family, social responsibility, power relationships and dynamics, sexuality and sex education, and systemic oppression. Mothers are extolled as a socially constructed ideal of self-sacrificing, maternal selflessness, nurturer, principle caregiver, and protector. Through the upholding of these romanticized virtues, mothers become individually held accountable for the well-being of children. Mother-blaming when a child is sexually abused, obscures the realities of CSA. Mothers are often caught straddling the love, loyalty, and dependency on their partners with the love, loyalty, and responsibility to protect their children while faced with societal abhorrence. The children, they remain powerless. The very enormity and complexity of CSA creates a social paralysis.

As previously noted, this research was not intended to provide answers of cause and effect relationships. In fact, this research raises more questions than provides answers. Voices in Thread captures the shared meaning of these particular women's lived experiences of childhood, or young adulthood, when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. What, on the surface, appears to be a non-threatening and even insignificant activity, a fiber-art-making-process, has demonstrated that this method of inquiry can be informatively and richly valuable. Sew what now?

Value in the Group Experience

The fiber-art group sessions gathered participants together in a safe and supportive environment that facilitated the creation of a bond in a shared common experience and purpose. Inherently, a trust developed among the women and created the space for deep self-reflection and visual and verbal dialogue, not only for the research, but for personal growth. As an artist, researcher, social worker connecting with these participants within the context of arts-based research, I learned something about each woman, the women learned about each other, and we learned about ourselves. What became evident was the value of art and the group process,

> [The fiber-art group sessions] makes me think about the grassroots movement of sexual assault centres, women supporting women. Now we spend so much time on clinical/medical model of practice, measurable outcomes, short term intervention, funding cuts to women and children's programs. Groups at the [SOS Society] were so empowering for the participants, sitting at the table with other survivors normalized the experience. It seems that as funding is cut, the wait lists for services grow, making it difficult to manage a caseload and do groups (Johnson, December 15, 2013).

As previously discussed in Chapter Six, all of the participants acknowledged the value of the fiber-art group experience and identified that there should be more group facilitated services. As a recommendation, there needs to be a re-focus of resurrecting the format of group structured support services specific to survivors of CSA. It may be advantageous to facilitate support groups that are even more theme specific for survivors, such as survivors of CSA whose primary caregivers remain in relationships with sex offenders. With the occurrence of a social and judicial shift to support mothers who remain in a relationship with a sex offender, such a support group may be especially required. As well, there needs to be consistent funding that supports the position of a trained group facilitator and counsellor to avoid adding to the already existing tasks and extensive caseloads of individual counsellors. Skilled facilitation is necessary to ensure that therapeutic support groups, especially those incorporating the use of expressive arts, are

psychologically safe enough "to see one's own and others' images of abuse" (Anderson & Gold, 1998). Additionally, group support services would most likely reduce the wait list and individual counsellor caseloads.

In addition, there is a continued need to utilize expressive arts as a therapeutic tool to heal the body, soothe the mind, and transform the spirit. Art becomes the "tool to facilitate movement from internal to external expression, from silence to voice, from disconnection to connection, and from disempowerment to empowerment" (Anderson & Gold, 1998, p. 29). The deliberate use of art-making and inviting clients to participate in diverse art activities creates an opportunity for multi-layered self-discovery. Where words alone may be inadequate to fully explore, express, and process individual and/or community experiences, art becomes the catalyst for cathartic release and lasting change.

Mothers, Accountability, and Agency

Un-layering participants' experiences and my own interwoven personal experiences as it related to caregivers as accountable became an overwhelming and personal endeavour. I experienced a dissonant unease develop between my findings and my own philosophical and practice principles as caregiver accountability emerged through. "Otherhood" morphed into a contextual understanding of the duality of children's lives and women's lives.

All of the participants shared painful experiences of their mothers as accountable even while simultaneously acknowledging their mothers as "trapped" and their offenders as accountable. What became evident is that, caregivers of sexual abused children is still a topic that requires more thorough research, especially as it relates to mothers who remain in relationships with known or alleged sex offenders. It appears that there is existing research that

addresses the intersectionality of women's abuse of their children in the context of domestic violence and I borrowed from this body of research for further discussion.

Restricted within the mother's lived experience are the, often invisible, competing needs of the child. The dilemma becomes how to balance the interests of the mother and child and not assume that the woman and child's interests always coincide (Damant et al., 2010). Although women most often intervene for their children's well-being, it cannot be assumed that they always do, and there is a further problem in developing policies which assume they will (Damant et al., 2010). There is a reluctance to address the harm of children caused by their mothers as it collides with our foundational beliefs about mothers; mothers as natural carers, who love, nurture and protect their children.

While acknowledging the intersecting forms of oppression that mothers experience, we also have a responsibility to conceptualize some women as active agents who can and do make clear choices to perpetrate violence against children (Damant et al., 2008; Damant et al., 2010; Hulko, 2009 & Mehrota, 2010). "Mothers may be victims in relation to their partners, while holding a position of power in relation to their children: they can therefore be both victim and victimizer and these positions themselves shift" (Featherstone as cited in Damant et al., 2010, p. 14). Part of being powerful is the ability to create harm, whether intentional or unintentional. In order to understand abusive or neglectful mothering in complex circumstances, Damant et al., (2010) suggest that the conceptualization of power be inclusive of the interaction between gender inequalities and inequalities based on age and generations. Addressing the powerlessness of children thereby gives them a voice.

There may be mothers who truly are not able to step outside of their need to be in the relationship with a sex offender in order to have a perspective of the need to protect their

child/ren. How do we support mothers in their staying? How do we keep children safe? Non-existent or very limited services are available for these mothers and children. Theorizing abuse in its various forms seems to be less convoluted than comprehending the failure to act, respond, or protect. It seems that it is a complex endeavour to absorb how one can avoid acting in response to someone harming a child, especially if the person is the mother of the child. So how do we define a parent who is otherwise loving and warm but has knowledge of the abuse and does not intervene or leave the relationship? Is the failure to act a form of abuse in itself, or is the non-offending parent a victim as well? In my opinion, the issue of how to balance the needs of the children and the mother staying in a relationship with a sex offender remains unresolved. What we do know is that the plights of a mother and her children are inextricably linked and more must be done to protect the interests of both.

Caregivers' Situatedness

All of the participants identified that their mothers were in situations that compromised their ability to leave the relationship. The participants' experience of the their mothers remaining in a relationship with a sex offender, as influenced by their religious beliefs, was consistent with the research of Alaggia (2001) who found that mothers experienced conflict due to their cultural and religious beliefs which often emphasized patriarchal values and preservation of the family. As a social worker in the role of counsellor or child protection worker, assessing for the situatedness of the mother could provide valuable insight into the lives of the mother and child. As Cassie so eloquently said:

> If I were to think about my mother's particular situation and many mothers that I know, the best way for her to be supported was to have help. She just needed support. She was not happy in that situation... he was abusive in many ways, not just sexually molesting me and potentially my sister, she just needed someone to support her to leave that lateral violence that she experienced through her own mother, through the church... not having supportive friends and not having anything that she could turn to and just being fed this

> bullshit about being a respectful wife.... I feel like as someone supporting that type of person you would really have to go to them on an individual basis. Are you actually safe? Are you really safe there?... and if you aren't let's talk about that... and if you are safe there how do I support you? I would say the best thing is safety for you, safety for your children, and safety for your partner who has done these things in the past and so there is obviously an issue there.

As previously discussed in Chapter two the protective capacity is imbued with mothering typology. If we take into consideration the situatedness of the mother as a barrier to act protectively, then true social work requires a structural response to create a more just and equitable society, for the women as mothers and their children (Hemingway, Johnson, & Roland, (2010). Blame becomes the veil that creates missed opportunity to resolve, do differently, and create change.

For further discussion, there is a need to address who is missing from the research. Feminist research emphasizes voice; "who is being heard and who is being excluded" (Kralik and van Loon, 2008, p. 37). I did not purposefully select participants whose primary caregivers were their mothers. In my professional experience, I have only provided educational services to mothers, with the exception of a few maternal grandmothers. I have never had a father, as the primary caregiver, referred to me for services because he was remaining in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. In fact prior to this thesis endeavor and while sifting through the literature, I have not given much thought to fathers, as a primary caregiver, in a relationship with a sex offender. I have provided support services to non-offending fathers whose children have been sexually abuse by a family member or stranger. In fact, when I did a quick internet search of "non-offending fathers of sexually abused children" my search was automatically corrected with "Did you mean: non-offending *mothers* of sexually abused children" (Google, August 5, 2014). This says a lot about the social construction of mothers and fathers and the insidious perpetuation of mother-blaming. How are fathers obscured from the conceptualization that they

may be in relationships with a sex offender? Is it because the literature suggests that some women who sexually offend against children are usually co-offending through coercion of a male accomplice (Goldhill, 2013)? We cannot just assume that a father is in a heterosexual relationship. These questions demonstrate the continued need for further examination of, not only fathers as non-offending caregivers, but also fathers as non-offending caregivers who are in relationships with sex offenders. Previous research has emphasized the importance of a caregivers' response to their child's situation in determining the course of the child's recovery after sexual abuse (Bolen & Lamb, 2007; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2009). By focusing only on the traits of mothers as the non-offending caregivers, fathers' roles in their children's recovery process will continue to be minimized.

Parentification: The Child as Caregiver

Parentification was a common thread that emerged significantly early in the research. As already previously discussed, the research of Fitzgerald et al. (2008) found that CSA was not directly related to the cause of parentification. They (2008) do suggest the possibility that parentification may be more likely to result from father-daughter incest and intrafamilial abuse, and even more likely to occur in when a child experiences prolonged sexual abuse within the family. Fitzgerald et al. (2008) recommend future research be conducted that examines CSA in the context of frequency, severity, and duration, as well as the victim-perpetrator relationship, and how these factors influence parentification. To expand on this, I would recommend conducting research that further examines the connection between caregivers who remain in relationships with a sex offenders and parentification.

For social workers and child and youth mental health counsellors who are supporting families where the mother is remaining in a relationship with the sex offender, I would

recommend assessing the child for parentification. With consideration that not all children who are parentified experience negative effects, assessment should include assessing for level and duration of the parentification roles and responsibilities carried between the caregiver and child; consideration of cultural and familial context; assessing to determine what extent the client feels the experience of parentification process was fair; and involve the family (Hooper, 2008; Hooper et al. (2011).

Responding to CSA and Mothers in Relationships with Sex Offenders

Integrated services responding to CSA have been difficult to implement and maintain. Many communities are aware that there is a lack of coordination amongst service provides in the response to not only CSA but, any reports or incidences of child abuse in all its forms. Victims and their families, as well as service providers, have experienced the "deleterious effects of fragmented and disjointed efforts" of investigation, collection of evidence, ensuring child and family safety, assessing risk to reoffend, treatment, and reunification (Trute et al., 1996, p. 238). The lack of coordination is often due to differing evidence required for criminal and family court. Additionally, many treatment service providers focus on different family members which can delay proceedings of criminal investigation and procedure through the judicial system (Trute et al., 1996). This research is a reminder that there continues to be a need for a collegial, multi-disciplinary, and collaborative response to child abuse in all its form.

Limitations of the Research

This research is preliminary in nature and is an area of inquiry that must continue to be pursued. As with any type of research there are limitations of this arts-based inquiry. It is supposed that recruiting participants for the Voices in Thread research was challenging due to the sensitive nature of the topic and a very specific selection criteria. Another possible limitation

of the research relating to the sample is that there were no participants included who, while their mother remained in a relationship with a sex offender, the offender had not sexually abused the participants themselves. This scenario could provide very differing results and should be considered for future research. Although not included in the selection criteria, all of the participants selected for the research were women whose primary caregivers happened to no longer be in relationships with known or alleged sex offenders. Although the reasons varied, this could be considered to limit the results.

The use of the fiber-art group sessions, although recognized as informatively and richly valuable, could still be considered a limitation when considering the potential for self-censoring or silenced voices because of group composition. The individual interviews provided an alternate venue for self-expression. What could also be considered a limitation of the research was not audio or video-recording the fiber-art group sessions. As a result, I had to rely on my field notes of recorded observations and recollection of the group sessions. Although some may view my decision of not audio or video-recording the group sessions as limiting, I suggest that my decision strengthened the research. Some personal sharing and participant interactions, sacred only to the group, occurred and elicited new meaning that may not have occurred if they were being recorded. From previous experiences of facilitating quilting workshops and intuition, I felt that recording the fiber-art group sessions would not be a valuable experience for the women.

One potential pitfall influencing the research may be in the showing of an exemplar of my storyblankets and providing a history of the arpilleras to the participants before proceeding with their own creative process. While my intention was to provide a framework for the fiber-art group sessions and self-disclose my own personal interest in fiber-art, it could have had a

confounding effect. However, what I did observe was that showing my storyblankets motivated the participants to engage in active conversation about the images that they might include in their own fiber-art. Ultimately, as they discussed the imagery and symbolism of their proposed fiber-art, they provided reflective meaning as their stories began to unfold.

The participants' fiber-art was collected at the end of the individual interviews and therefore, the quilt was not pieced together before the fiber-art group sessions ended. The research participants will not view the quilt in its entirety until this thesis is complete. They will however, view it prior to the research defense date. It would have been interesting to hear and observe, and include in the data analysis, the participants' thoughts, feelings, and reactions upon viewing their collective voice weaved together.

Conclusion

The challenges of this thesis enriched me not only personally, but also professionally as a structural social worker and counsellor, and academically as a student and life learner. Most challenging was finding a balance of selves between social worker, counsellor, and neophyte researcher within the research and especially within the fiber-art group sessions. While my gender and a similar childhood experience might locate me as an insider, I was always acutely aware of who I was professionally and academically, which simultaneously located me on the fringes of the participants' unified collective. Thrust into the throes of research created tension between my values as a social worker and a new social science researcher. Cohen and Garrett (1999) state that "there is inherent potential for role conflict between the role of social researcher/data gatherer and the role of social group worker" (p. 370). Contradictions in my "role" had to be reworked as I undertook fieldwork. I reflected upon this in my reflexive journal, I wrote:

> Even though I am here as a researcher, there is a natural acceptance of my presence and I am included as part of the group. The challenge is being "in the field" opposed to the familiarity of being the counsellor. I want to "slip into" what feels more normal, a counsellor.... The role of researcher transposes me into the unknown and there is fear in not knowing and crossing a scientific boundary. In my heart I am not a "detached" observer, it's (being the researcher) so hard (Johnson December 15, 2013; Johnson January 5, 2014).

As a social worker and counsellor of twenty years, I could not abandon my ability to be sensitive and empathic to the needs of my participants; despite focus group's preference to avoid addressing the socio-emotional concerns of group members and researcher detachment (Cohen & Garrett, 1999). The fiber-art group sessions were often laden with emotion, especially with the activity of art making. While I certainly utilized my group counselling skills and responded with humanity and professionalism, I feel that I did not abandon my role as a researcher. Rather, I feel that my counselling skills enhanced my role as a researcher and assisted in setting the boundaries and parameters of my researcher role in the fiber-art group. Even though I found the focus group research work of Cohen and Garrett (1999) extremely validating, I often felt like I teetered on a paradox.

So what did my research achieve? Some would argue that artistic inquiry is not a new approach or even a new methodological genre at all, but an old way of knowing that predates scientific logic (McNiff, 2004). The methodological research design of Voices in Thread can be likened to that of an old-fashioned quilting bee. An intuitive design idea conceptualized from the premise of women's inherent need to gather and share stories and the inherent power of art to convey the unspoken. Voices in Thread, as an arts-based inquiry, created a safe space for discourse on a topic that is sensitive and often silenced.

What does Voices in Thread contribute to the field of social work? This research creatively provides insight and awareness to generate meaningful discussions that can support

and/or enhance social work responses, intervention strategies, and policy to, and for, children and their families when a primary caregiver remains in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. The Voices in Thread quilt illustrates the complex nature of individually lived experiences stitched together into one complete composition of women's stories about a common experience. This quilt has the aesthetic power to make us pause and take note of a deeper reality, a deeper truth. These women's stories are both our hope and conscience. Their art speaks when their silence was demanded.

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Appendix A

Participants Needed for Research

Study Title:

Voices in Thread:
Women's Childhood Experiences of a Primary Caregiver that Remained in a Relationship with an Alleged or Known Sex Offender, An Arts-based Inquiry

Purpose of Study:

The purpose and goal of this research is to creatively bring together the thoughts and voices of women whose caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender after being reported to the RCMP or Ministry for Children and Family Development. This proposed study aims to provide understanding of the women's lived experiences, the meanings that they have given to those past experiences, and how their lived experiences have impacted their life choices.

Eligible Participants:

- Women who are 19 years of age and older
- Women who have had a childhood experience of their caregiver remaining in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender
- Women who are not in any immediate crisis or have made a recent (within the last six months) disclosure of childhood sexual abuse or sexual assault
- Women, who, themselves, are not knowingly in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender
- Women who agree to attend a confidential selection interview with the researcher

What Will Participants Be Asked To Do:

Participants will be asked to attend six weekly fiber-art group sessions (maximum of 3 hrs. for each session) to create a 12"x12" quilt square(s) that is a picture of their childhood experiences when their caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender. Participants will also be asked to keep a journal that includes their thoughts about their experience of their participation in the art group sessions; their thoughts about creating their quilt square; and a description of their finished quilt square. Alternate arrangements can be made to create quilt squares if participation in the group art sessions is not possible. Participants will also be asked to give a one hour interview to talk about the story their art tells.

*****Please note that sewing skills are not required*****

Interested in participating or would like more information please contact:

Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participation in Research

Information Letter

Research title: Voices in Thread: Childhood Experiences When a Primary Caregiver Remained in a Relationship with an Alleged or Known Sex Offender, An Arts-based Inquiry

Principal Researcher: Clarie Johnson, Masters of Social Work Program (MSW) student, University of Northern British Columbia

Research Supervisor: Dr. Indrani Margolin, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, University of Northern British Columbia

I am providing an information letter to explain a few details about this project before you make a final decision about participating. If you require more information, contact Clarie Johnson.

What is the research *Voices in Thread* about?
The purpose and goal of this research is to creatively bring together the thoughts and voices of women whose caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender after being reported to the RCMP or the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD). This proposed study aims to provide understanding of the women's lived experiences, the meanings that they have given to those past experiences, and how their lived experiences have impacted their life choices.

What will participants have to do?
Selection interview: To help with selecting participants you will be asked to be interviewed prior to agreeing to participation. During this interview I will use a questionnaire to gather specific personal information and family history relating to your childhood experience. This is an opportunity for me, as the researcher, to ensure that you know what my research is about, that there is not a conflict of interest, and if you really want to participate. The information collected during this interview will remain confidential. If after the interview you are not selected or you chose not to participate in this research, your information will be shredded immediately. A copy of the questionnaire can be obtained prior to the selection interview.

Art group sessions: If you volunteer to participate in this project, you will be agreeing to take part in six-weekly art group sessions for six to eight women, to create at least one 12"X12" quilt square. You will be asked to use quilting as an art form to create a picture of what your experiences, thoughts, and feelings were when your caregiver stayed in a relationship with a sex offender. As well, you will be given a journal to write about your experience of participating in the art group, what you thought about and felt during the creation of your art work, and a detailed description of your finished quilt square(s). Please note that sewing skills are not necessary in order for you to participate. A volunteer will be available to help out with any sewing and provide me with time to take observation notes.

Individual interviews: After completing your quilt square and journaling, I will schedule a one hour interview to talk with you individually about your experience of creating your art and the

story that your art tells. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy.

Following the art group sessions and interviews I may need to contact you briefly for further information or clarification of information already received.

Where will the art group sessions be held?
Weekly, three hour art group sessions will be held at the Surpassing Our Survival, (S.O.S.) Society, 193 Quebec Street. Dates and times will be determined by availability of participants, facility, co-facilitator, and researcher. Individual interviews can also be held at the SOS Society.

What if I am uncomfortable participating in the group?
Not all individuals will feel comfortable participating in this research while in a group setting. I will make art supplies and journals available to participants who want to create quilt squares and record their journaling in private. To be consistent to the research process, individual interviews will be conducted after you have completed your quilt square(s) and journaling.

How will participants be chosen?
Participants will be chosen because they are females, 19 years or older and who as a child, their caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender after it was reported to the RCMP or MCFD. Also, participants will be chosen only if they are not in any immediate crisis, have not made a recent (within the last six months) disclosure of childhood sexual abuse or sexual assault, and are not knowingly in a relationship with a sex offender. To help with selecting participants I will use a questionnaire during a selection interview to gather specific personal information and family history. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and have any information you contributed withdrawn without consequence.

What happens to my personal information, art work, journal, and interview?
The screening interview questionnaire, quilt squares, journals, and transcribed interviews will become the information that I will use to write up my final report. I will collect and forever keep the quilt squares which will be sewn into one quilt and displayed at future presentations. Since your art work will be publicly displayed, I would suggest not including any identifying information in your artistic creation. The journals will be collected and photocopied and originals returned to the participant. Before photocopying the journals, participants will have time to blackout any part of their journaling that they do not wish to share. Audio recorded interviews will be transcribed into a written transcript.

Only my supervisor and I will have access to all of the original information collected for the final report. I will be presenting my final report as the requirement for the completion of my educational degree and I may attempt to publish my report or present it at conferences. In all cases I will do so without identifying any of the participants. I will only use quotations from my notes, participants' journals, interviews, or quilt squares after removing identifying details so that quotes cannot be connected to any single person. Participants can choose, or will be given, a pseudo-name. All written information, verbal conversation, or email contact will be kept strictly confidential. Since a volunteer, who has signed an Oath of Confidentiality, will be helping with the art group sessions, she will know who has created which quilt squares and will hear any discussion that occurs during the sessions; however, she will not have access to your journals,

the recorded interviews, or my notes. Your privacy and confidentiality will be respected and we will both follow our professional guidelines outlined in the BC College of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice which can be made available or viewed at: www.bccollegeofsocialworkers.ca/members/documents/StandardsofPractice.pdf

Participants will also be requested that the identities of who participated in the research and what was discussed during the group art sessions be respected as confidential and not repeated in any other situation that could purposefully or accidentally reveal another participant's identity. Please note that I cannot assure strict confidentiality in a group setting.

Where will my information be stored and for how long?
All the photocopies of the participants' journals, audio recordings (until erased), transcripts, screening interview questionnaires, and my hand written notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my personal office at the SOS Society, or occasionally when necessary, in an individually locked file cabinet in my home. Both my work and personal lap tops are password-protected. All information will be kept for no longer than five years after the final research report is completed. After this time, all original documents related to the research will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting. Participants will have the option of receiving a final copy of the report and/or an opportunity to meet with the researcher.

What are the potential risks and benefits if I participate in this research?
Sharing one's story about this specific topic may carry with it the risk of experiencing emotional distress. With this possibility in mind, a list of counselling resources in Prince George has been attached to this information letter for your assistance. The art group sessions are not, in any way, meant to be a counselling group. Please seek out counselling/support services when necessary.

There may be many benefits related to your participation in the research and art group sessions. The creative sessions will provide a beneficial and shared opportunity to have a voice through the power of storytelling with art. The final quilt becomes a visual statement of all of your experiences. In addition, your participation will create awareness about the experiences of children and their families when a caregiver remains in a relationship with a sex offender.

What if I have a complaint about the research or researcher?
Any complaints regarding this research or researcher may be directed to the Office of Research at the University of Northern British Columbia, email: reb@unbc.ca or 250-960-6735

I am grateful for your time and consideration, and thank you in advance for your participation in this important research.

Sincerely,

Clarie Johnson
MSW Student

Appendix C

Selection Interview: Confidentiality Agreement

*I understand that all matters pertaining to the research, Voices in Thread: Childhood Experiences When a Primary Caregiver Remained in a Relationship with an alleged or Known Sex Offender, An Arts-Based Inquiry, is confidential, including information collected during this selection interview.

*I understand that the exceptions to maintaining confidentiality extends to the researcher being legally obligated to share information and report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the child welfare authority or RCMP in accordance with the Child, Family & Community Service Act.

*I have been informed that the purpose of this selection interview is to assist Clarie Johnson with selecting participants for her research.

*I understand that she will be using a Participant Demographic Statement questionnaire to gather specific personal information and family history relating to my childhood experience.

*I understand that this interview provides the opportunity for Clarie Johnson to ensure that I know what her research is about, that I meet the pre-determined criteria for participation, that there is not a conflict of interest, and that I can make an informed choice to freely and voluntarily participate in her research.

*I understand that I may not be selected as a participant based on:

- Child sexual abuse was not reported to RCMP or MCFD
- Under 19 years of age
- In a crisis as determined by self or researcher (i.e. recent death in family; experiencing violence in current relationship)
- Recent (within the last six months) disclosure of childhood sexual abuse
- Recent (within the last six months) sexual assault
- Living with a known or alleged sex offender
- Conflict of interest
- Researcher and/or interviewee determines that participation in the research could be detrimental to interviewees' well-being

*I have been informed that following the final selection of research participants, any interviewees not selected will be contacted and provided with an explanation for not being included in the research. I can be contacted at:_____.
It is okay that Clarie Johnson can identify herself at this contact.

*I understand that if I am not selected to participate, all of my personal information obtained during the selection interview, the Participant Demographic Statement, and this signed

Confidentiality Contract will be shredded immediately after informing me that I was not selected for the research project.

*I understand that if I am selected to participate in Clarie Johnson's research, the information obtained during the selection interview using the Participant Demographic Statement questionnaire, will be used to provide an anonymous overview of the participants in the final research report.

*I further understand that if I am selected as a participant, the information gathered during the selection interview, along with the data gathered during the art-fiber/quilting sessions and post fiber-art\quilting session interviews, will be stored in a locked file cabinet in Clarie Johnson's personal office at the SOS Society, or occasionally when necessary, in an individually locked file cabinet in my home.

*I have been informed that all information will be kept for no longer than five years after the final research report is completed. After this time, all original documents related to the research will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting.

*I have been provided with a copy of the Selection Interview Confidentiality Contract

*I am signing to indicate that I understand confidentiality as it relates to the selection interview, the exceptions to maintaining confidentiality, the purpose of the selection interview, selection of participants, and management/storage of information gathered during the selection interview.

Print Name	Signature
Researcher's signature	Date

Appendix D

Letter of Support

Surpassing Our Survival – S.O.S. Society

Sexual Violence Prevention and Counselling Services

193 Quebec Street – Prince George, BC V2L 1W1
Phone: (250)564-8302 Fax: (250)564-8303 Email: ltozer@telus.net

February 12, 2013

To whom it may concern,

RE: Clarie Johnson

This letter is written in support of Clarie Johnson's proposed research project, *Voices in Thread: Voices in Thread – Childhood Experiences When a Primary Caregiver Remains in a Relationship with an Alleged or Known Sex Offender, An Arts-based Inquiry.* Over the past decade the S.O.S. Society has observed an increase in requests for services, made by concerned northern child protection workers, to provide child sexual abuse education to non-offending partners, primarily mothers, who are choosing to remain in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender. This proposed research has the potential to provide valuable insight and generate meaningful discussions that can support and/or strengthen the Centre's service delivery.

Since 1984, the S.O.S. Society has been committed to the Prince George community, and surrounding area, in addressing all aspects of sexual violence, therefore, S.O.S. will assist Clarie Johnson, MSW candidate, with her research project by providing office space to hold fiber-art sessions. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the proposed research, the Society will ensure that research participants will have accessible confidential support/counselling services should the need arise.

Clarie has been an employee of the S.O.S. Society for the past 19 years. Her initiative is a result of her direct practice and we expect to be able to utilize the findings of this project. Due to Clarie's dedication, passion, and professionalism in addressing child sexual abuse, the Society is pleased to support her and the participants on this research project.

Sincerely,

Leslie Tozer
Executive Director – Trauma Counsellor
Surpassing Our Survival – S.O.S. Society
(Formerly Prince George Sexual Assault Centre)
193 Quebec Street
Prince George, BC - V2L 1W1

Appendix E
Participant Demographic Statement

Please fill in this form to best of your ability. If you do not want to answer any of the questions/statements, please cross out and initial.

1. How old are you? _____

2. I have completed this level of education:
   - ☐ Elementary school
   - ☐ Middle school/ Junior High
   - ☐ Some high school
   - ☐ Graduated from high school
   - ☐ Some college or university
   - ☐ Graduated from college
   - ☐ Graduated from university – 4 years
   - ☐ Technical or vocational school
   - ☐ Other _____

3. My significant relationship status is:
   - ☐ Single
   - ☐ Common-law
   - ☐ Married
   - ☐ Separated/divorced
   - ☐ Widowed
   - ☐ Other _____

5. My ethnic/cultural background is: (check as many boxes that apply)

   - ☐ Aboriginal
   - ☐ White/Caucasian
   - ☐ Inuit
   - ☐ Métis
   - ☐ Asian
   - ☐ East Indian
   - ☐ African
   - ☐ Other, please specify

     _____

6. How long have you lived in Northern BC? Where?

_____

7. I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse: ☐ Yes / ☐ No

8. I have been for counselling to talk about the sexual abuse I experienced as a child: ☐Yes / ☐No

9. My offender was: (check as many boxes that apply)
   - ☐ Male family member
   - ☐ Female family member
   - ☐ Family friend (male)
   - ☐ Family friend (female)

- ☐ Stranger
- ☐ Other _____

10. When I was a child (under 19 years of age) my primary caregiver was in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender:
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
11. When I was a child (under 19 years of age) my primary caregiver, who was in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender, was my:
    - ☐ Mother
    - ☐ Father
    - ☐ Grandparents
    - ☐ Extended family member _____
    - ☐ Other _____
11. Were you aware of any Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) or RCMP involvement because your primary caregiver was in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender?
    - ☐ Yes. If yes, was it RCMP_____ MCFD_____ or Both_____
    - ☐ No
12. The person my primary caregiver was in a relationship with was:
    - ☐ Alleged to have sexually abused a child and reported to MCFD or the RCMP
    - ☐ Charged with sexually abuse of a child but not convicted
    - ☐ Convicted and sentenced
13. Did you go into foster care because your primary caregiver was in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
14. Was the person your primary caregiver remained in a relationship with your offender?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
15. Have you accessed counselling services for your experience of your primary caregiver remaining in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
16. Are you currently experiencing anything in your life that could be made more challenging by your participation in this research? (If yes, please explain)
    - ☐ Yes, _____
    - ☐ No

Any additional information that you think is important for me, as the researcher, to know:

_____

_____

_____

Appendix F
Informed Consent to Participation in Research

Research title: Voices in Thread: Women's Experiences When A Primary Caregiver Remained in a Relationship with a Known or Alleged Sex Offender, An Arts-based Inquiry

Goals and Purpose of the Research

- I understand the purpose of this arts-based research project is to gain awareness, insight, and information about women's experiences when their primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a known or alleged sex offender.
- I have read and received a copy of the attached information sheet for my records and reference. I am also aware of the benefits and risks of participating in this research.

Expectations in the Research: Option One

- I understand that by agreeing to participate in the art group sessions being held at the SOS Society, I am agreeing:
    - To take part in six to ten-weekly art group sessions
    - To create at least one 12"X12" quilt square that becomes a picture of my experiences, thoughts, and feelings when my caregiver stayed in a relationship with a sex offender
    - To journal about my experience of participating in the art group, what I thought about and felt while creating my art work, and a detailed description of my finished quilt square(s)
    - To an audio recorded one hour individual interview to talk about my experience of creating my art and the story that my art tells. I will be requested to sign an Audio Consent Form.
- I agree to a volunteer assisting Clarie Johnson during the art group sessions. I understand that the volunteer Clarie Johnson has selected is also a volunteer at the SOS Society who, as a volunteer of the Society, is required to adhere to the professional guidelines outlined in the BC College of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and the Ending Violence Association of BC. I also understand that the volunteer co-facilitator has had a criminal record check. In addition, I have been informed that she has signed a Volunteer Co-facilitator Confidentiality Contract and I can request a copy.
- I have been informed that Clarie Johnson will be taking detailed observation and reflective notes during the art group sessions.
- I understand that all aspects of others' participation and all information shared verbally during the art group sessions be respected as confidential and anonymous and not discussed in any other situation that could directly or indirectly reveal or compromise another participant's identity or privacy. I have been informed that Clarie Johnson cannot assure strict confidentiality within a group setting.

Participant signature if participating in option one: _____

Expectations in the Research: Option Two

- I understand that by creating a quilt square and journal in private, I am agreeing:
    - To pick up the art supplies and journal that I will require to create at least one 12"X12" quilt square that becomes a picture of my experiences, thoughts, and feelings when my caregiver stayed in a relationship with a sex offender
    - To journal about my experiences, thoughts and feelings while creating my art work, and a detailed description of my finished quilt square(s)
    - To an audio recorded one hour individual interview to talk about my experience of creating my art and the story that my art tells. I will be requested to sign an Audio Consent Form.

Participant signature if participating in option two: _____

Selection of Participants and Voluntary Participation

- I understand that I was chosen as a participant for this research study because:
    - I am a female, 19 years of age or older
    - When I was a child or young adult (19 – 29 years), my primary caregiver remained in a relationship with a sex offender after it was reported to the RCMP or MCFD.
    - I am not in any immediate physical safety, health, or emotional crisis
    - I have not made a recent (within the last six months) disclosure of childhood sexual abuse or sexual assault
    - I am not knowingly in a relationship with a sex offender
    - I have completed the Participant Demographic Statement questionnaire during the selection interview
    - I have consented freely to voluntarily participate in this research. I have been informed that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and have any information I contributed also withdrawn without consequence or judgement

Maintaining Confidentiality While Gathering, Storing and Reporting Findings

- I understand and agree that:
    - All matters pertaining to the research, Voices in Thread: Childhood Experiences When a Primary Caregiver Remained in a Relationship with an Alleged or Known Sex Offender, An Arts-Based Inquiry, is confidential
    - I understand that the exceptions to maintaining confidentiality extends to the researcher being legally obligated to share information and report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the child welfare authority or RCMP in accordance with the Child, Family & Community Service Act
    - Clarie Johnson, who is a graduate student in the Masters of Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, is conducting this research project as a completion requirement to obtain her degree. Only her and her supervisor, Dr. Margolin, will have access to all of the original information collected for the final report
    - I can choose, or will be given, a pseudo-name
    - Clarie Johnson will forever maintain ownership of my quilt square(s) which will be sewn into one quilt and displayed at future public events. It has been

suggested to me that I do not use any identifying information in my artistic creation
    - My journal will be collected and photocopied and my original returned to me. Before Clarie Johnson photocopies my journal, I will have time to blackout any part of my journaling that I do not wish to share
    - The audio recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy
    - All the photocopies of the journals, audio recordings (until erased), transcripts, selection interview questionnaire, and Clarie Johnson's hand written notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in her personal office at the SOS Society, or occasionally when necessary, in an individually locked file cabinet in her home
    - Both of Clarie Johnson's work and personal lap tops are password-protected
    - All of the gathered information will be kept for no longer than five years after the final research report is completed. After this time, all original documents related to the research will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting
    - Clarie Johnson may attempt to publish her report or present it at conferences. I have been informed that she will do so without identifying any of the participants. She will only use quotations after removing identifying details so that quotes cannot be connected to any single person
    - My consent has been given on the understanding that Clarie Johnson will use her best efforts to guarantee that my identity is protected and my confidentiality maintained, both directly and indirectly
    - Participants will have the option of receiving a final copy of the report and/or an opportunity to have a final meeting with the researcher.

Potential Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Research

- I understand that sharing my story about this specific topic may cause emotional distress and I have been:
    - Informed that the art group sessions are not meant to be a counselling support group
    - Provided with a list of counselling resources in Prince George
    - Advised to seek out counselling/support services when necessary
- I understand that there may be many benefits from my participation in the research and art group sessions, including but not limited to a shared opportunity to have a voice through the power of storytelling with art. The final quilt becomes a visual statement of all of our experiences. My participation will create awareness about the experiences of children and their families when a caregiver remains in a relationship with a sex offender.
- I understand that if I have any comments or concerns, I can contact the Office of Research at UNBC at 250-960-6735 or email: reb@unbc.ca
- A copy of this agreement will be retained for all participants.

Name _____ Signed _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix G

Volunteer Co-Facilitator

Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____ acknowledge that as a volunteer co-facilitator assisting in Clarie Johnson's research study, *Voices in Thread: Childhood Experiences When a Primary Caregiver Remained in a Relationship With an Alleged or Known Sex Offender, An Arts-based Inquiry*, I will have knowledge of who the participants are, the fiber-art that they have created, and personal information shared in confidence during the group sessions. As a registered social worker and due to the confidential and anonymous nature of this research project, I intend to adhere to the British Columbia College of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Thereby, the identities of all participants and their fiber-art work will remain anonymous, and any personal information disclosed during the fiber-art group sessions will remain in confidence. I will ensure that participants' anonymity and confidentiality is respected and their identity not revealed directly or indirectly.

Name_____Signed_____Date_____

Witness_____Signed_____Date_____

Appendix H

Voices in Thread

Group Etiquette Agreement

*What is said here, stays here

*Respect need for space

-Nothing is personal

*If you have a complaint, call UNBC at 250-960-6735

*We all have our own "herstories" – we agree to disagree

*We are all creative

*We are all committed to the group even when we have conflicting schedules

Appendix I

Audio Recording Consent Form

The research titled *Voices in Thread: Women's Childhood Experiences When Their Primary Caregiver Remained in a Relationship with a Known or Alleged Sex Offender, An Arts-Based Inquiry,* involves the audio recording of your interview with the researcher, Clarie Johnson.

Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or the transcript. Only the researcher, Clarie Johnson, will listen to the recordings.

The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy.

Use of quotations from your transcriptions will only be used after removing identifying details so that quotes cannot be connected to any single person.

The audio recordings (until they are erased) and transcripts will be kept strictly confidential and stored in a locked file cabinet at the office of the SOS Society, or occasionally when necessary, in an individually locked file cabinet in my home.

The transcripts will be kept for no longer than five years after the final research report is completed. After this time, all original documents related to the research will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting.

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher, Clarie Johnson, to audio record me as part of the research study.

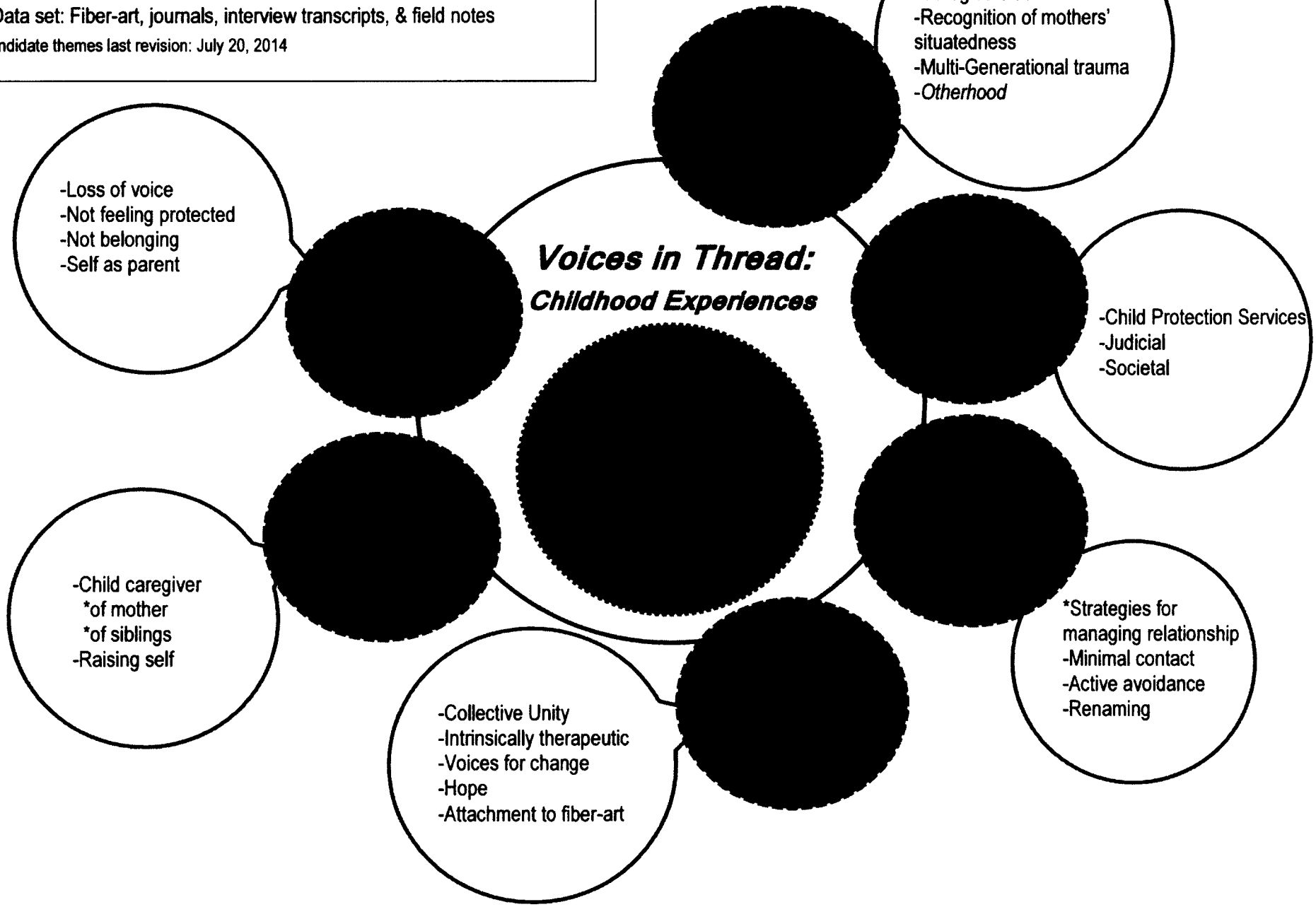
Participant's Signature: _____ Date:_____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date:_____

Data Analysis Mapping Diagram: Voices in Thread

Notes:
* Contextualist thematic *(threadmatic)* & metaphoric analysis
* Intersectional lens
* Data set: Fiber-art, journals, interview transcripts, & field notes

Candidate themes last revision: July 20, 2014



Appendix J