

**SAFETIES: MULTIPLE WAYS OF THINKING/FEELING/BEING SAFE: EXPLORED
THROUGH ARTS-BASED RESEARCH**

by

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Abstract

This research incorporated qualitative arts-based research to determine the perceptions of safety from nine female students attending the University of Northern British Columbia. The participants were invited to attend a focus group discussion on women's safety. Based on that discussion, the women created art to showcase their perceptions of safety. The art was displayed a month later, and the local community was invited to view it and comment, sharing their thoughts and feedback.

Several common themes emerged, including how safety is expressed externally and felt internally, what safe spaces look like, and the dangers that exist threatening feelings of safety. The participants in this research stated that safety involves feeling authentic and true to oneself, feeling calm and safe, living in a welcoming and predictable environment, feeling accepted and respected, and being protected from harm. The women's perceptions of safety in this research were gathered, and an alternate definition of safety was created that encompassed their thoughts and beliefs. This research showcased that while many themes connect women's perceptions of safety, ultimately, safety is uniquely experienced by each person.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statistics and studies exploring women's safety have been conducted for decades. While necessary, these studies often focus on the negative safety experiences women have. Examples of these negative experiences include risks posed to women's health or violence against women in the community, workplace, or campus. This negative view is centred around fear and violence directed at women. In my research, I want to contribute to changing the narrative surrounding women's safety by directing the conversation away from the negative. I want to contribute something that inspires hope or positivity regarding women's safety.

The definition of safety needs to be clarified to start the conversation surrounding women's safety. The Oxford English Dictionary (2023) defines safety as "The state of being protected from or guarded against hurt or injury; freedom from danger" (para. 1). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2024) states that safety is "the condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injury, or loss" (para. 1). The APA Dictionary of Psychology relates safety to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, defining safety as "a desire for freedom from illness or danger and a secure, familiar, predictable environment" (American Psychiatric Association, 2018, para. 1). However, I believe that words alone do not describe the feelings or experiences of what safety means for a woman. Creativity and art are tools that allow for an abstract term such as safety to be visually expressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Malchiodi, 2017). I plan to use these tools to invite women to showcase what safety means to them.

Research Question

My research question is: How do female students currently studying at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) use art and creativity to define the concept of safety?

Research Significance

This research is unique because it uses a strengths-based approach and arts-based research to study women's safety. A strengths-based approach is "characterized by practice that centers on competencies, capacities, and courage; promise, possibilities, and positive expectations; and resilience, reserves, and resources" (Timberlake et al., 2008, p. 139). Arts-based research is "deeply rooted in a holistic worldview; a paradigm that values imaginative thinking and gives credibility to the unfolding creative process" (Margolin et al., 2024, p. 1). Arts-based research "involves adapting the tenants of the creative arts to social research projects. ABR values aesthetic understanding, evocation, and provocation" (Leavy, 2017, p. 191). Both tools are underutilized for exploring women's safety; therefore, utilizing them in this research will provide a new perspective.

My research offers insight into the perceptions of women's safety from a northern perspective. For my research, I recruited nine participants, all current students at UNBC, who were 19 years or older and self-identified as women. I was interested in learning how female students in northern British Columbia could use art and creativity to define their personal meaning of safety. I gathered the women together on an October evening to facilitate a focus group where we would discuss the meaning of women's safety and create art based on that discussion.

It was important to me to include aspects of empowerment and promote social justice on behalf of the research participants. My research required active participation and interaction between myself and the participants. I ensured that my participant's voices and perceptions were captured so that they could be highlighted in my thesis. I displayed that art in an exhibit as part of the Inspiring Women Among Us Conference on November 18th, 2024.

This research is relevant across several disciplines, including social work, psychology, counselling, and medical professions. Understanding the factors and feelings that allow women to feel safe is important for developing strategies and policies to meet those needs. Overall, my goal was to encourage creativity and self-expression to discuss and learn about women's perceptions of safety.

Researcher Positionality

This brief background description will provide context surrounding my history, education, and work experience that has led me to where I am today. I am 29 years old and am a heterosexual cis-gendered female of white/European descent. I was raised in a farming community of roughly 10,000 people in northern British Columbia. I have a large extended family. Growing up, I often took on a caretaker role, which instilled in me values of patience, responsibility, and compassion that have continued into my professional life. I have always valued artistic expression, which is an important part of my daily life. For example, music, crocheting, sewing, gardening, and painting are valuable because they bring me peace and enjoyment. I am sure many of my professors have witnessed me crocheting during their classes, and I am thankful that they all accepted my explanation of "it helps me focus!"

without question. I was diagnosed with ADHD at 27 years old, and so many challenges I have faced and the quirks I possess now make so much more sense! The way that I integrate art and creativity into my everyday life is very important to me, and I believe creative expression is powerful. I think it is amazing to witness the expression and passion that is conveyed through art. I think using art to communicate is an opportunity to share experiences with the wider community. This is why I wanted to incorporate art and creativity into my thesis.

I am mindful that while my family did not have much money, I grew up with privilege and opportunities where I was always supported to express myself creatively. My family would often give me materials from their hobbies, for example, yarn, and support me in learning new skills. I recognize that everyone's experiences are different, and I need to be careful not to impose my experiences, beliefs, or biases onto others.

My educational and professional background combines early childhood education and social work professions. I graduated from Northern Lights College with an Early Childhood Education and Care Diploma in 2014. For the next several years, I worked with children as a preschool teacher and as an early childhood educator in an infant/toddler daycare. I also spent a year working at a small art gallery as the Children's Education Program Coordinator, organizing and facilitating after-school and summer art programs. As a social worker, I volunteered at an art therapy program in an elementary school and loved it! I am excited to expand my education and work experience with this thesis by expanding my love of art and children into working with women.

Definition of Terms

This section will outline a set of definitions listed alphabetically for terms relevant to the study.

Advocacy: “engaging in purposeful actions that will help people advance their rights, opportunities, causes, and human dignity” (Cox et al., 2019, p. 58).

Art: Any piece of work that is creatively produced.

Arts-Based Research (ARB): “Arts-based research is deeply rooted in a holistic worldview; a paradigm that values imaginative thinking and gives credibility to the unfolding creative process” (Margolin et al., 2024, p. 1) ABR “involves adapting the tenants of the creative arts to social research projects. ABR values aesthetic understanding, evocation, and provocation” (Leavy, 2017, p. 191).

Current Definition of Safety: “The state of being protected from or guarded against hurt or injury; freedom from danger” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023, para. 1)

Empowerment: “a process whereby the social worker or other helping professional engages in a set of activities with the client aimed at reducing the powerlessness stemming from the experience of discrimination because the client belongs to a stigmatized collective” (Solomon, 1976, p. 29)

Generalist Social Work Practice: An eclectic approach to social work practice in which social workers consider and adapt approaches based on situational context and expertise (Collier, 2006)

Gender-based violence: experiencing violence because of gender, gender identity, expression of gender, or how others perceive gender (Perreault, 2020)

Northern British Columbia: Starting at the city of Prince George and any community located geographically north of the municipality.

Strengths-based Perspective: an approach to social work practice “characterized by practice that centers on competencies, capacities, and courage; promise, possibilities, and positive expectations; and resilience, reserves, and resources” (Timberlake et al., 2008, p. 139)

Woman: Any person who self-identifies as a woman.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic of women’s safety, describes the research question and significance, and the researcher’s positionality. Chapter Two is the literature review. Literature covered in the chapter includes the history of violence against women, women’s perceptions of safety, and the history of art and social justice. Chapter Three describes the methodology and uses qualitative arts-based research and strengths-based research. Chapter Three also details the sample selection, data collection, analysis, and research method. Chapter Four outlines the research findings and showcases the demographics of the study as well as the themes that emerged from the research. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the research findings, challenges, and recommendations that arose from this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Qualitative arts-based research is underutilized as a tool to explore women's perceptions of safety. Therefore, this literature review will explore topics related to women's safety on a broader level. To understand the ways in which women feel safe, it is also necessary to explore areas where women are unsafe. This chapter will begin by reviewing violence against women both globally and within Canada as well as a review of trauma-informed perspectives of safety. Then, women's perceptions of safety in the areas of health, relationships, community and school will be summarized. The unique social work practice in northern and remote communities will be explained. Lastly, the utilization of social justice and empowerment in the social work field and the incorporation of art as a form of social justice will be reviewed.

Violence Against Women

Violence against women is experienced throughout the world and is not limited to any one geographical area, culture or society. Instead, violence against women stems from a history of unequal power dynamics between men and women, systemic discrimination and patriarchal norms (United Nations, 2006). Progress supporting women's safety against violence worldwide has been slow. It was not until 1992 that violence against women was recognized internationally as a violation of human rights (World Bank, 2022).

Violence against women is experienced under many circumstances and is thus challenging to quantify. The report *Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action* (United Nations, 2006) describes violence against women, stating:

Women are subjected to violence in a wide range of settings, including the family, the community, state custody, and armed conflict and its aftermath. Violence constitutes a continuum across the lifespan of women, from before birth to old age. It cuts across both the public and the private spheres.

(p. iii)

There are some forms of violence directed at women that are more common than others. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of violence against women worldwide (UNICEF, 2022; United Nations, 2006). The following most common forms of violence against women include non-partner violence, both physical and sexual, and state-perpetrated violence against women (UNICEF, 2022; United Nations, 2006).

Certain factors exist which increase a woman's risk of experiencing violence in her lifetime. The United Nations (2006) notes that social and economic status, a person's history and exposure to violence, individual influencing factors (education level, substance use) and family dynamics (marital conflict, division of wealth) are all risk factors surrounding violence against women. Canadian statistics specifically mention the increased risk of violence for women who are part of a visible minority, women with disabilities, women who identify as 2SLGBTQQIA+ and women living in northern and remote communities (Statistics Canada, 2022, 2024).

Canada

Most Canadian statistics and reports refer to violence against women as gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is defined as experiencing violence because of gender, gender identity, expression of gender, or how others perceive gender (Perreault, 2020). In Canada, statistics show that gender-based violence is prevalent, and women experience violence in greater numbers than men (Perreault, 2020). IPV, as discussed earlier, is also the most common form of gender-based

violence in Canada. Police reported data from 2019 showed that 79% of people over 15 years of age who had experienced IPV were women, and in the case of IPV homicides between 2014 and 2019, 80% of the victims were women (Statistics Canada, 2024).

Gender-based violence in Canada is not limited to IPV. Self-reported data showed that women were also more likely to experience violence from a non-intimate partner. This included disproportionately high numbers of sexual assaults, harassment in the workplace and harassment online for Canadian women when compared to men (Statistics Canada, 2024). These statistics show that women are at risk of violence in Canada from both intimate partners and others in their community.

Canadian history has a dark history of colonization, assimilation, and abuse of Indigenous peoples. This systemically abusive history is one of the contributing factors to how, across Canada, Indigenous women are disproportionately at higher risk for all forms of gender-based violence. In response to risk factors and the dangers Indigenous women face, Lavell-Harvard and Brant (2016) state, “Our women are born “at-risk” in First Nations communities, with no housing, no clean water, no healthcare, no education or employment, living in Third World conditions in the middle of one of the richest countries in the world” (Lavell-Harvard & Brant, 2016, p. 5). Statistics show that in their lifetime, 63% of Indigenous women will experience IPV, Indigenous women are almost twice as likely as non-Indigenous women to be physically assaulted, and 42% of Indigenous women have been

assaulted as children (Heidinger, 2022). These rates of violence that Indigenous women face are much higher than those experienced by non-Indigenous women.

In addition to the higher risks of abuse in Canada, Indigenous women and girls are also at higher risk of going missing or being murdered. Though Indigenous women and girls had been reported missing or murdered for decades, it was not until 2016 that the Government of Canada established the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The final report concluded that the systemic racism, both historical and current, directed at Indigenous peoples by the Canadian government is directly responsible for the cause and disappearances of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and labelled it genocide (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Canada), 2019). The National Inquiry also published 231 Calls to Action, mainly addressed to different levels of government. A CBC report in 2023 found that only two of the Calls to Action have been completed, and over half have not even been started (Carreiro, 2023). This type of inaction by the governments of Canada is devastating and allows violence against women to continue.

British Columbia

British Columbia has two significant events related to violence against women. These events are the numerous women who have gone missing along the Highway of Tears and Vancouver's downtown Lower East Side.

A 750km stretch of Highway 16, from Prince George to Prince Rupert, is called the Highway of Tears. This dark namesake is because of the dozens of women who have gone missing or been murdered along the road (O'Connor et al.,

2010). Many of the women who disappeared along the Highway of Tears were young Indigenous women who were said to have been hitchhiking. Even though many women went missing over several years, most of their cases seemed largely ignored by the police. In 2005, the RCMP developed a specialized task force called E-PANA with the sole focus of investigating the cases of missing and murdered women along the Highway of Tears. E-PANA consists of 18 cases: 13 murders and five missing persons cases (RCMP, 2012). However, to date, no convictions involving these cases have been made.

In Vancouver's Lower East Side between 1980 and 2002, women were going missing at an alarming rate. However, because many of the missing women were Indigenous, were sex trade workers, and were known to have used drugs, the Vancouver police force ignored the pleas from friends and family of the missing women and refused to investigate the disappearances (O'Reilly & Fleming, 2016). In 2002, discoveries made at Robert Pickton's pig farm revealed that many of the missing women had been the victims of a serial killer. Police linked Robert Pickton to 26 murdered women, though many believe the number to be closer to 50 (O'Connor et al., 2010; O'Reilly & Fleming, 2016). In the end, Robert Pickton was only tried and convicted for six murders.

The tragic events that occurred on the Highway of Tears and the women whom Robert Pickton killed are so recent and still being felt and grieved in British Columbia. The danger and threats to women feel much more imminent with such fresh tragedy occurring so close to where many of us call home.

Trauma-Informed Approach to Safety

Trauma-informed approaches to safety involve an in-depth understanding and consideration of “the ways in which violence, victimization, and other traumatic experiences may have impacted the lives of the individuals involved and to apply that understanding to the design of systems and provision of services so they accommodate trauma survivors’ needs” (Carello & Butler, 2015, p. 264). Trauma-informed approaches recognize that safety is not static but is influenced by many areas of a person’s life including emotional and spiritual factors (Boynton & Margolin, 2025). Social workers and other professionals can use a trauma-informed lens to safety to recognize content that may be traumatizing for an individual and brainstorm ways to create a safer space to work and practice in. A safe space that is trauma-informed allows both professionals and their clients to show up in a way that is both authentic and wholly represents who they are. The creation of a safer space includes recognizing that “an environment is more than physical space; it can hold energy, emotions, and memories, as well as meaning, and it can offer hope” (Boynton & Margolin, 2025, p. 186). Trauma-informed perspectives on safety include recognition and the response to physical, emotional, and physical aspects of trauma to create a safer space for both practitioners and clients.

Women’s Perceptions of Safety

Qualitative research “seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it” (Hatch, 2002, p. 6). This literature review section will examine qualitative research in which women were asked about their perceptions of safety in different scenarios. These studies typically focused on one form of safety at a time.

The forms of women's safety fell into four categories: safety in women's health, relationships, community safety, and campus safety.

Safety in Women's Health

The literature showed that women were frequently asked about their safety perspectives from a medical perspective. Many studies asked women to reflect on how safe they felt during a particular health event. By far, the most common health event reflected in the literature was childbirth. When women were asked what contributed to feelings of safety during childbirth, the most common answers were feeling informed and involved with every step of the birthing process, having the ability to express one's needs, and having those needs be heard and respected (Chin et al., 2011; Kaphle et al., 2013; Rönnerhag et al., 2018; Salgado et al., 2019). Kaphle and colleagues (2013) also explored the conflict between current medical perceptions of risk and how the medical field differs from women's cultural and traditional childbirth practices. Their study revealed that many women feel safer during childbirth when cultural and spiritual needs are respected. While there are many qualitative studies in the healthcare field, many studies solely asked women knowledge-based questions about safety rather than asking women's experiences or perceptions of being safe. For example, how safe is it to do [behaviour] during pregnancy? So, while the studies in this literature review section focus on a singular form of safety, they still offer valuable information. They reflect lived experiences showcasing women's perceptions of safety from a medical perspective.

Safety in Relationships

Intimate partner violence is prevalent around the world. Therefore, it makes sense that there were many studies where women were asked about their views on safety from violence in relationships. This category tended to focus on perceptions surrounding safety from perpetrators and safety in programs related to family violence. When women were asked about their perceptions of safety from violence in relationships, they mentioned trust and allyship and the presence of both physical and emotional safety as being important to them (Madoc-Jones & Roscoe, 2010; Westwood et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2016). When discussing women's feelings of safety, Madoc-Jones and Roscoe (2010) describe "assisting women in the areas of personal and emotional development, including dealing with confusing and conflicting feelings, while – or despite – living with fear was also significant [to feeling safe]" (p. 268). Studies relating to women's safety in relationships were the only ones that mentioned counselling and personal growth as measures related to feelings of personal safety.

Women stated that being included in safety planning and creating plans based on their strengths is necessary when they were asked about leaving abusive relationships (Westwood et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2016). In addition to feeling involved and respected in safety planning, culture and familial support were also described as important safety factors involved in leaving an abusive relationship. Wilson and colleagues (2016) studied Māori women's experiences of safety concerning intimate partner violence. They described safety as a holistic concept that involves "the interplay of social, physical, cultural, and spiritual factors that

contribute to a sense of safety and well-being” (p.715). They suggested that all the interconnected areas of a woman’s life must be considered and supported to feel safe. The interconnected view of safety is important to consider. It does not focus on one ‘problem’ area, such as violence a woman may be facing, but instead views the whole woman.

Safety in Community

Safety in the community involves women’s perceptions of personal safety in urban, industrial, and green spaces. Women reported several factors that increased their feelings of safety in their community. In urban settings, well-lit, populated areas with easily accessible transportation options were described as the safest (Gargiulo et al., 2020; Juckes & Terashima, 2023). In green spaces, women reported that well-lit, maintained, urban spaces felt safest, whereas industrial, wild, or densely vegetated spaces felt the least safe (Gargiulo et al., 2020). Women’s perceptions of safety in their community also involved discussing the measures women take to keep themselves safe. These measures include tactics such as avoidance of travelling alone, travelling with a male, being mindful of patterns and routines, and brainstorming ways to protect themselves against threats physically (Almanza Avendaño et al., 2022; Gargiulo et al., 2020; Juckes & Terashima, 2023).

Women’s socialization to fear was discussed in some studies, but there did not seem to be a clear agreement on whether their fear was justified. For example, Gargiulo (2020) mentioned that women’s fear in their community often did not match the crime statistics reported in the area. It seemed to imply that media and socialization caused increased and unnecessary fear in women. Almanza

Avendaño's (2022) study was conducted in an area with higher reported violent crime and focused on the need for prevention of future crime. Regardless of whether a woman's fear in the community coincides with reported crime statistics, these studies reveal the strategies that women use to help themselves feel safer and the physical characteristics of the community that promote feelings of safety.

Campus Safety

An American report on campus safety found that violence against women on college and university campuses has been trending upwards since 2014 (Hidalgo Bellows, 2023). Because of the large numbers of young women on campuses and the high rate of violence present, many studies were found where women were asked about their perceptions of safety on campus. Women stated that unsafe areas of the campus included unlit, densely vegetated, and isolated locations (Klodawsky & Lundy, 1994; Linder & Lacy, 2020; Roberts et al., 2022). These views reflected the studies on women's perceptions of community safety in general. Some factors were unique to the campus experience. Women reported feeling less safe in campus areas that had unregulated access to the public, such as the library and outdoor spaces, but felt this could be mediated by accessible and responsive security personnel (Hidalgo Bellows, 2023; Linder & Lacy, 2020; Roberts et al., 2022).

The women in Linder and Lacey's (2020) study also reported confusing and conflicting messages surrounding safety from campus authorities. For example, "Students are explicitly told that most sexual assault happens between two people who know each other, but then the safety strategies recommended by experts focus on protecting themselves from strangers" (p. 442). The conflicting messages about

safety contributed to confusion, not knowing what to do and, therefore, feeling unsafe. Overall, women reported that to feel safe on campus, they wanted well-lit, maintained, open, and monitored physical spaces, accurate information from authorities regarding safety, and programs that place accountability on perpetrators of violence as opposed to sole responsibility on protecting oneself.

Social Work: Advocacy, Empowerment, and Social Justice

Social work is a helping profession in which social workers interact with their clients in various settings. Different social work settings could include working with individuals, couples, or groups or in a shelter, school or hospital. Regardless of where a social worker practices, the core values of advocacy and the promotion of social justice unite them all (BCCSW, 2009; CASW, 2024).

Advocacy is one of the main tools social workers use to meet the diverse needs of their clients. Advocacy is defined as “engaging in purposeful actions that will help people advance their rights, opportunities, causes, and human dignity” (Cox et al., 2019, p. 58). An important factor that works alongside advocacy is empowerment:

Empowerment is defined as a process whereby the social worker or other helping professional engages in a set of activities with the client aimed at reducing the powerlessness stemming from the experience of discrimination because the client belongs to a stigmatized collective. These activities are specifically aimed at counteracting such negative valuations. (Solomon, 1976, p. 29)

Empowerment aims to hear a client’s voice and allow them to make changes and decisions that influence their lives (Cox et al., 2019). In social work, there may be times when clients do not feel comfortable speaking for themselves or are unable to. In these situations, the social worker advocates for their client. In other cases, a

social worker may encourage and support clients to speak up for themselves and be the sole changemakers in their lives. In situations like this, the social worker empowers their clients and advocates alongside them.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (2024) define social justice as:

The belief that people from all identity groups have the same rights, opportunities, access to resources, and benefits. It acknowledges that historical inequalities exist and must be addressed and remedied through specific measures, including advocacy to confront discrimination, oppression, and institutional inequalities, with a recognition that this process should be participatory, collaborative, inclusive of difference, and affirming of personal agency. Social justice is a foundational value and aspiration of the social work profession.
(p.33)

Empowerment and advocacy are important tools social workers use to promote social justice. When social workers strive to promote social justice, they work to dismantle the barriers in a client's life, big or small. Promoting social justice is one of the most important and rewarding parts of the social work profession.

Social Work in a Northern Context

For this research, northern and remote areas of British Columbia are considered the city of Prince George and communities located geographically north of the city. Social work in northern and remote regions is often practiced through a generalist lens. This means that due to the small number of professionals in northern and remote areas, social workers are rarely specialists in one area (Collier, 2006). To ensure as many services are available as possible, a vast amount of knowledge and varying services need to be provided by each worker (Mackie et al., 2016). While generalist practice does mean fewer professionals are available in an area, there are benefits to generalist practice as well.

Social workers in the North often have more creative freedom to provide care for their clients. Creativity may include networking with outside communities, organizing natural helping solutions within the community, and organizing support services for clients that may be viewed as unconventional from an urban perspective (Daley, 2015). It is important that social workers practicing in northern and remote communities recognize the strengths that already exist within a community and collaborate, listen, and learn to build from those strengths.

Creative social work could also involve meeting a community's needs in a meaningful and unique way. For example, a social worker could create a program for boys utilizing hockey to bring them together, speak about issues that may be affecting them, and build a sense of community and belonging. Alternatively, Margolin (2019), used dance and creative movement to connect with young women who had experienced dating violence. With a facilitator available for guidance and a space with enough room to move, creative dance and movement is an accessible form of therapy that could be incorporated in a variety of locations. This type of creative intervention provides the opportunity for participants to safely explore the connections between their body, their feelings and their experiences from the depths of their inner consciousness (Margolin, 2019). Social workers in northern and remote communities can view their communities and find creative ways to meet their needs.

Incorporating Art into Social Work, Social Justice, and Activism

There is a common misbelief that for something to be considered 'art,' it must be a beautiful product created by a professional artist. For this research, art is considered to be any piece of work that is creatively produced. Examples of art

include visual art, such as painting, sculpture, and collage; movement-based art, such as dance; lyrics and music; and poetry and story writing.

Art offers incredible insight from two different perspectives: the process of creating the art, and the process of reviewing and reflecting on art. The process of creating art is sensory, and tactile, and provides the opportunity for unconscious thoughts and emotions to transform into something physical and visible (Weinfeld-Yehoudayan et al., 2024). The process of transforming thought and emotion into something physical can offer therapeutic benefits to the creator but also offers empowerment when sharing the experience with others. When viewing art, be it art created by oneself or another, “examining and analyzing one’s experiences, feelings, and thoughts through reflection on the artmaking process and product can then be performed to gain insight and self-understanding” (Weinfeld-Yehoudayan et al., 2024, p. 4). Art showcases and provides the opportunity to reflect on how people feel and view their worlds, beliefs, and surroundings.

The impact of art may be hard to identify or define quantifiably (Duncombe, 2016; Keifer-Boyd, 2011). Because art is such a powerful display of personal experience and emotion, it is an effective tool in social justice and activism movements. Duncombe (2016) states, “Activism moves the material world, while art moves a person’s heart, body, and soul” (p. 118). Pairing art and activism together creates the opportunity for change-making to occur in the material world because a person feels personally motivated and moved to make it happen.

Examples of Art in Social Justice and Activism

The *REDress Project* is described as an “aesthetic response to the more than 1000 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada” (Black, 2020, para. 1). Metis artist Jamie Black began the project, which involves a visual display of hanging red dresses representing the missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. The REDress project gained attention and momentum; now, May 5th is recognized as Red Dress Day across Canada. This project shows the power of activism and art and how they unite people and impact an entire country.

The relatively recent addition of social media into the social justice movement introduces a new aspect of activism. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter allow the incorporation of art, speeches, education, dance, skits, and other forms of creativity with a tool to spread a message across countries and audiences quickly (Carlson & Berglund, 2021). Searching #idlenomore or #blacklivesmatter shows thousands of examples of activism across social media platforms.

University of Northern British Columbia

Located on the traditional unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) is an example of the advocacy and empowerment of a local northern community. Traditional thought stereotyped northern British Columbia as a predominantly trade-focused workforce with little need for post-secondary education (Swainger, 2016). The belief was that anyone in the north who wanted to attend post-secondary education could leave for southern British Columbia or east to Alberta. Changing this narrative proved to be challenging. Community members from Prince George and the surrounding area

banded together to fight for the opportunity to learn and gain post-secondary education in the north.

[UNBC] was a university created by ordinary people who cared to an extraordinary amount about their own society and its future. Who cared enough and had courage enough to commit themselves to a task which experts said was impossible and the authorities repeatedly disparaged and openly opposed.
(McCaffray, 1995, p. 16)

In 1988, 16,000 people pledged five dollars in a public campaign to support the creation of UNBC (UNBC, 2014). Over the years, UNBC strengthened its bonds with rural and remote communities across northern British Columbia and adapted to meet the changing needs of those communities.

UNBC's recruitment from northern and remote regions of British Columbia holds strong today. My educational journey is a direct example of this. Very few women in my family attend post-secondary school. UNBC offered me an educational opportunity close to my hometown and offered social work as an accredited, successful program that fits my area of interest. If UNBC did not exist and I wanted to complete a Master of Social Work at another university, the next closest school would be the University of Calgary (840km southeast of my hometown), then the University of British Columbia (1,196km south of my hometown). I feel grateful to the community members who advocated for the creation of UNBC, the school where I can now conduct research myself and where I also found my participants as fellow students.

Summary

This review of previous literature offers context into the topic of women's safety and its connection to the field of social work. The statistics on violence against women showcase the reality of the dangers women face around the world. Previous qualitative research exploring women's perceptions on safety reveals that women are most often asked about safety from a lens of healthcare, safety from abuse, and community safety. The social work profession uses advocacy and empowerment when interacting with clients to promote social justice. Social workers could use these skills when working with women to promote safety throughout their practice.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This research examined how women studying at the University of Northern British Columbia define the concept of safety. The study aimed to take a strengths-based approach when discussing safety and then use art and creativity to encourage women to express what safety means to them. Elements of activism and empowerment were included when the women's art was displayed, and the local community was invited to view it.

Qualitative Arts-Based Research

This research combined qualitative inquiry and arts-based research to create a qualitative arts-based methodology. Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to explore complex issues and include variables that are not easily measured (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In my research, the complex issue being researched is the concept of safety, and variables include feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Qualitative inquiry allows detailed information and experiences to be collected with direct involvement from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of my research was to learn how women perceive safety. It was very important that the participants be present and involved in the research for this to be achieved.

Arts-based research (ABR) incorporates art and creativity into the research process. ABR is unique in the sense that it "is deeply rooted in a holistic worldview; a paradigm that values imaginative thinking and gives credibility to the unfolding creative process" (Margolin et al., 2024, p. 1). ABR utilizes creative arts as a tool in every step of the research process to understand, provoke, disrupt and transform traditional ways of knowing and thought (Malchiodi, 2017; Margolin et al., 2024). The

use of ABR in my research encouraged the creative exploration of women's perceptions of safety and provided insight into how safety affects every area of their lives.

While traditional or patriarchal ways of thought may not have valued art as data, ABR recognizes the power of creativity and highlights the value of incorporating it into research (Malchiodi, 2017; Margolin et al., 2024). Leavy (2020) describes that when ABR is used, participants not only create art, which is cathartic and empowering in itself, but they also create data. Art captures concepts that are too complex to describe with words. In the case of my research, the concept was women's perceptions of safety, and art was created on canvas. Active involvement of the participants in creating their artwork and representations of safety was important to me. I think ABR was the most meaningful way I could collect the participants' worldviews as data while also providing an opportunity for the participants to showcase their perceptions to the UNBC community in a hopefully empowering manner.

Adding visual representation, such as artwork, makes the research more accessible to a general audience, which in turn allows for a greater reach of social justice and advocacy movements (Weber, 2008). Art is an added form of communication that is often more memorable or meaningful than just the written word. ABR presents the opportunity to showcase new thoughts and share information in a way that challenges social norms, practices and policies (Margolin et al., 2024). I was drawn to the idea that I could use ABR to present my research

findings in a format that would reach as many people as possible and share the participants' creativity with the larger community.

Feminist Lens

Feminism began with examining and disrupting the traditional status of women and girls, but it has progressed to include much more within the past hundred years (Leavy & Harris, 2019). Feminism now includes the status and lives of all marginalized groups in society. Feminism intends to question social issues, provoke inquiry, and inspire change for a more equitable society for everyone (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Leavy & Harris, 2019). Viewing research through a feminist lens “is not just about scholarship that analyzes how things are, but rather it suggests ways forward to a better world” (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 6). Feminism pairs well with ABR because of the shared intent to question, disrupt, challenge, and transform societal norms (Margolin et al., 2024). My research aimed to learn about women’s perceptions of safety, but also suggest new ways forward based on the themes that emerged from the data to promote a safer, more equitable world for women.

Strengths-Based Perspective

Quite often, researchers focus on the negative aspects of women’s safety and miss the opportunity to empower their participants through the research. Approaching research through a strength-based model can offer empowerment because it “is characterized by practice that centers on competencies, capacities, and courage; promise, possibilities, and positive expectations; and resilience, reserves, and resources” (Timberlake et al., 2008, p. 139). It was important to me, particularly during participant recruitment, that the potential participants knew I

would be exploring women's safety from a positive lens and would not be seeking trauma stories. I also wanted to present the results of the study using a lens of positivity and empowerment. Therefore, I made it clear that my research utilized a strength-based perspective to focus on empowerment and positivity while we discussed women's safety.

Advantages and Challenges

There are advantages and challenges to every methodology. In ABR, incorporating the artwork as data presents the largest challenge. Traditional forms of evidence-based research rely on formal measurements and standardization of results that can be challenging to apply artistic values to (Malchiodi, 2017). However, the advantages of including art as data are numerous and far outweigh the challenges. For example, incorporating art as data encourages participation and creates evocative and transformative data that could not be attained through another method (Leavy, 2018). Throughout this thesis, I have included several moments where I relied on reflexivity to ensure my use of the artwork as data were interpreted fairly with as minimal influence of my own biases as possible.

Sample Selection

I began recruiting participants using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling where "the goal is to sample cases or participants in a strategic way, selecting participants on the basis of the kind of information they can provide" (Clark et al., 2021, p. 378). I used this form of sampling because I was looking specifically for women who were current students at

UNBC, who were willing to discuss their perceptions of safety and who were willing to make art.

I recruited participants by sending a recruitment email through several departmental mailing lists at UNBC. The recruitment email included a message explaining the research, the recruitment poster, and the information and consent form. Recruitment emails were sent on my behalf by the administration assistants from the Department of Social Work, the Department of Women and Gender Studies, and the Department of First Nations Studies. The first ten participants who expressed interest and met the inclusion criteria were selected for the focus group. The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: Participants must be current UNBC students, 19 years of age or older, self-identify as a woman, and be able to attend the focus group in person.

I received many emails from students who had received the recruitment email. I learned that I should have bolded the part of the email stating that participants must attend the focus group in person. Several participants were excluded because they did not live in Prince George or could not attend the focus group in person. Additionally, two participants were excluded because they were recent graduates and were then considered alumni and not current students.

I successfully found five participants from the recruitment emails who expressed interest and met all the inclusion criteria for the focus group. The final five participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is defined as “identifying some members of the population and having those individuals contact others in the population (Marlow, 2011, p. 148). Several women who responded to

my email asked if they could bring a friend to the focus group. I agreed and contacted each woman to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. Though ten women were recruited, only nine participants came to the focus group.

As the participants arrived, I could immediately tell which ones were friends and who had been recruited through snowball sampling. The women who knew each other sat together at one end of the table while the others arrived one at a time and sat at the other. Once all the participants arrived and were settled, I reviewed each page of the Information and Consent Form and asked that the participants follow along with me. I wanted to stress group confidentiality. UNBC is a small university, and students may know and see each other around campus. I also hold many roles in the university, and the participants may know me from other places. After explaining confidentiality as a group, I asked each participant to choose a pseudonym to ensure that personal anonymity was respected and protected while writing my thesis. I ensured that all participants knew and understood what would happen in the study and knew when and how to withdraw. I explained how member checking worked, and they would receive an email asking for review, edits, and confirmation. I explained when and how their artwork would be displayed, that they would have 30 days to collect it after the display was finished, and that unclaimed art would be disposed of.

Data Collection

Data was collected from several sources. First, data was collected from a focus group discussion, which was recorded for transcription. Focus groups are valuable in qualitative research because of “the insights that arise during the

interaction among the participants. These discussions can clarify not just what participants think but why they think the way they do” (Morgan, 2019, p. 6). The three main questions asked to generate discussion in my focus group discussion were: 1) What does safety mean to you? 2) What does safety look like? 3) What does safety feel like? While participants were talking, I also wrote answers on a prepared poster board. This created a visual representation of the conversation participants could refer to while making art.

A final question was asked as a transition into artmaking: If you woke up one morning and knew with 100% certainty that you were safe, what would you do? What would that look like for you? This type of question is known as the ‘miracle question.’ The miracle question was originally developed by a social worker and was popularized in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (Franklin et al., 2011). The goal of the miracle question is to guide clients to imagine that a miracle has happened overnight. When they wake up, their problem no longer exists (Miller, 1997). The miracle question is important because it “magnifies and exposes minute glimpses of solutions not apparent when viewing the total puzzle” (Sklare, 1997, p. 30). Miracle questions allow clients to imagine scenarios that may not have been accessible before, and solutions can be developed with direction from a facilitator.

Participants then made art while reflecting on the focus group discussion and the miracle question. I requested that each participant create a small handwritten description to accompany each canvas. The second area where data was collected was the participants' art and written descriptions.

Lastly, I displayed the art and description in the Bentley Centre hallway as part of the Inspiring Women Among Us conference. Displaying the art offers empowerment by showcasing the participants' voices but also acts as a form of social justice through community engagement:

The social action exhibit serves as one crucible in which first-person experience comes alive for visitors in rich, encompassing, and evocative ways. The ensuing insight can potentially move people to action, helping them come to see themselves as part of a greater solution, or even enacting their own actions to bring about meaningful change (Moxley et al., 2012, p. 207)

Part of the exhibit asked viewers to add their feedback and thoughts by adding sticky notes to a display board. Only five people added sticky notes with feedback to the board. However, the entire box of chocolates I left out was eaten, so I suspect many more people viewed the exhibit than commented! The community feedback was the final place from which I collected data.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method for thematic analysis was closely followed to code my data. The six steps are: 1) familiarization, 2) initial coding, 3) identifying themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining themes, and 6) evidencing themes. Other than the recorded focus group transcript, the data in this research were collected from physical items: the participant's artwork, handwritten descriptions of the art, and sticky notes collected from the art exhibit. I uncovered several emerging themes from the various data sources.

Method

I had a very small sample size, and no funding was associated with this research. So, I chose to do all the transcribing myself and did not hire anyone to assist with the process.

Step 1: Familiarization

I created an Excel spreadsheet with three tabs to familiarize myself and organize the data. In the first tab, Column A listed the participant's pseudonym, Column B showed a photo of each art piece, and Column C was the participant's written description of their art. The second tab included a transcription of the focus group. The third tab listed the transcribed feedback from the sticky note board. Then, I printed off an 8.5 x 11 photo of each piece of artwork and printed the transcribed written components from the Excel spreadsheet. I spread all the printer material across a table to see everything together and began to familiarize myself by reviewing everything on the table.

Step 2: Initial Coding

After reviewing all the printed materials, I began to create initial codes. I used two forms of coding: In Vivo and visual thematic analysis.

I used In Vivo coding for the text, which “uses words or short phrases from the participant’s language in the data records as codes” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). I again reviewed the printed-off copies of the transcribed focus group discussion, the artwork's written descriptions, and the sticky notes included on the feedback board. I began by grouping together similar words and phrases from the data’s text. For example, participants used the phrases “worry-free” and “stress-free” repeatedly

when asked what safety felt like. At first, worry-free and stress-free were separate codes, but I eventually grouped these phrases together.

Visual thematic analysis was used to code the physical data. Visual thematic analysis involves reviewing the material multiple times, reflecting and creating notes, and then developing initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I began by circling and listing all the commonalities I noticed in the artwork. This included both images within the artwork and the materials used to create it. For example, all the artwork was created with multiple forms of materials, and all referenced nature in some way. Common images included butterflies, moths, keys, animals, faces, and people. I then listed similar words and phrases in the transcribed text.

Step 3: Identifying Themes

I used the list of initial codes to begin searching for themes. I had various coloured markers, which I used to colour-code similar messages and ideas. I identified ten emerging themes in the data: authenticity, peace, nature/outdoors, expressing emotions, societal expectations vs reality, growth, family/friends, worry/stress, and freedom. I ensured that each of these ten themes included representation from both the physical artwork and the text.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

I found the step of reviewing themes to be the most challenging. Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest asking the following question to develop and review themes: “Is this pattern a viable theme – a pattern that has an identifiable central organizing concept as well as different manifestations of that idea?” (p. 98). I realized that, in my case, the answer to that question was no. Many of my initial themes were quite

vague and needed improvement. After reviewing the data again, I noticed that my ten initial themes fit into four concise categories: 1) External expressions of safety, 2) internal feelings of safety, 3) spaces that feel safe, and 4) societal expectations vs reality. These categories became my final themes.

Step 5: Defining Themes

Defining the theme and giving it an informative and catchy name is the final step to ensuring the quality of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I renamed each theme with a more interesting title: Freedom to Express, The Feeling of Safety, Places and Spaces, and Danger Still Exists. Then, I wrote up a brief description for them. After creating the description and title, I felt the themes were well-crafted and complete.

Step 6: Evidencing the Report

With the themes complete, I had all the information I needed to write a report on my data. And thus, all steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method for thematic analysis was complete.

Methodological Integrity

There are many ways to increase the validity and methodological integrity of qualitative research. Researcher reflexivity aids the validity of research by ensuring the researcher is continually reflecting and monitoring for bias. In my research, this was achieved through utilizing self-supervision with a research journal, involving participants to confirm data analysis, and integrating peer feedback methods (Berger, 2015; Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Throughout his research, I kept notes to record my thoughts, impressions, and opinions and regularly reviewed them throughout the research journey as I progressed. A reflexive journal is “a space to reflect on and interrogate expectations, assumptions, and research practices, and how these, alongside design choices, shape research” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 294). The research journal allowed me to self-supervise and monitor my thoughts and my work. An example of when the reflexive journal was helpful was evaluating my feelings around what became the fourth theme: Danger Still Exists. After reading through my notes, I realized that I had been so focused on approaching safety from a positive lens that I was unintentionally discounting some of the feelings the participants were revealing surrounding danger. The reflection I experienced from reviewing the journal notes helped me refocus and accurately represent the participant's perceptions in the fourth theme.

Member validation is the process of “submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied so that they can confirm that the investigator has correctly understood what they saw and/or heard” (Clark et al., 2021, p. 364). This is an essential step in ensuring the validity of a qualitative study. To implement member validation in my study, I emailed each of the participants and asked them to review the information and email me with any questions or changes required. If I did not hear back from them within one week, I would assume the information was acceptable and proceed with my research. Each participant was emailed a chart with their code number/pseudonym, a photo of their artwork, and a typed copy of their art description. I also included a summary of the emerging

themes I derived from the data. Only one participant responded with a request to change a sentence in their artwork description, which I changed immediately.

I implemented peer input by inviting the local UNBC community to add their thoughts regarding the artwork and perceptions of safety to the sticky note feedback board during the artwork display. This allowed me to check my findings and compare my interpretations of the research to the outside perspective of UNBC community members. While only a few people added their feedback, their thoughts did align with my interpretations.

I recognize that it might not be possible to remove my personal bias and influence entirely. However, I made every effort to be mindful and reflexive and analyze and interpret the data to represent the participants' perspectives surrounding women's safety as accurately as possible.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Nine female students from UNBC participated in this study, contributing their perceptions of what safety means to them. The three parts of this study, the focus group discussion, the art creation process, and the art exhibit, generated considerable data on women's perceptions of safety. This chapter will review the participants' demographic information and then review the research findings that arose from the data. Research findings will be supported by quotes from the focus group and written descriptions of the art, images of the artwork, and feedback from the artwork exhibit.

Demographic Information

The inclusion criteria for this research required that all participants identified as women and were current students at UNBC. Each woman chose a pseudonym so that their real identity would be protected. A very basic demographic information form was provided to participants. The form asked for the participant's age. There was a range of ages in the participants. The youngest participant was 20 years old, and the oldest was 37 years old.

The participant demographic information form also provided a list of ethnic backgrounds, and participants were asked to select all that apply. Seven participants identified as European/White, two participants identified as Indigenous, and one participant identified as South Asian. Because UNBC is a small university, I did not collect any other information, for instance, a program of study, because I felt it would make the participants too easily identifiable within the institution.

Themes

Four final themes emerged from the collected data: Freedom to Express, The Feeling of Safety, Places and Spaces, and Danger Still Exists.

Freedom to Express

This theme concerns the external expressions participants can show when they feel safe. This includes expressing emotions and self-expression through choice of clothing or hobbies. This theme is about the desire for these external expressions to be safe in the sense that they are both possible and accepted.

Participants discussed how when they feel safe, they are able to express their emotions without filtering them. When they feel safe, they can share their emotions as they are and be accepted without fear or judgment. Rosie shared,

Safety also means I can express my emotions however I want and this is what I really based my painting on. The colours represent emotions and the drawings of people are expressing those emotions. Safety is really big on emotions for me. Safety allows me to be whoever I want to be and express myself however I want.

Clara discussed how her feelings of safety influence her ability to express and share her interests and hobbies openly.

To me, safety is a feeling that dictates my ability to express myself in my entirety ... If I could do anything knowing I'd be 100% safe, I believe I'd choose to express my inner interests/hobbies openly – something I struggle with for the fear of embarrassment and being negatively perceived

T-Rex connected safety to actions and self-expression through her appearance, stating, "I would dress and act in ways genuine and comfortable for me." Jeev shared that safety is "Feeling free to think or feel however I want and to communicate it. To feel protected like a queen bee. Being able to learn/grow however I want."

A comment from the community feedback board stated, “To me, being safe is feeling SEEN as an individual person and not as a representative of a group (“women”) first.”



Figure 1: Rosie's Artwork



Figure 2: Clara's Artwork



Figure 3: T-Rex's Artwork

The Feeling of Safety

This theme describes how participants feel safe internally. This includes descriptions of peace, warmth, feeling in control, and feeling free of worry and stress. This theme involves more abstract feelings of safety that are individual and internal.

Two participants connected feelings of safety to the colours blue and purple. Cali stated “To me the colour purple represents a happy feeling and is bright and cheerful which can be a state I am in when I feel safe.” Mary shared “My art piece is what I imagine peacefulness as. It is an inner image of what I imagine safety as. The purples and blues are a calming/reassuring colour to me.”

Several participants connected internal feelings of safety to a sense of security where they could let go of worry and stress and be content. During the focus group, after I asked what safety feels like, one participant responded:

It feels like there's room to make a mistake, like if you don't know something or if you mess up, it'll be OK. Not walking on like a tightrope or something, yeah, you've got like room to operate. It's like being able to ask for support, ask for help. Being able to be yourself - not like worry.

Other participants echoed this in their artwork and descriptions. Elizabeth shared “Safety to me is mainly the ability to stop worrying. When I’m safe I can start thinking, learning, feeling, being, instead of worrying. I can be human instead of worrying about being a person all the time.” Rosie stated, “Safety to me is when I am feeling the most comfortable, the most myself, and when I have to think the least.” Simply stated, Calico Cat said, “To me, safety is about feeling like you’re okay.” T-Rex also shared her thoughts about safety and being worry and stress-free, stating,

"If I knew with 100% certainty that I was safe... I would take some time to treat myself. I would put the stress of work and school out of my mind."

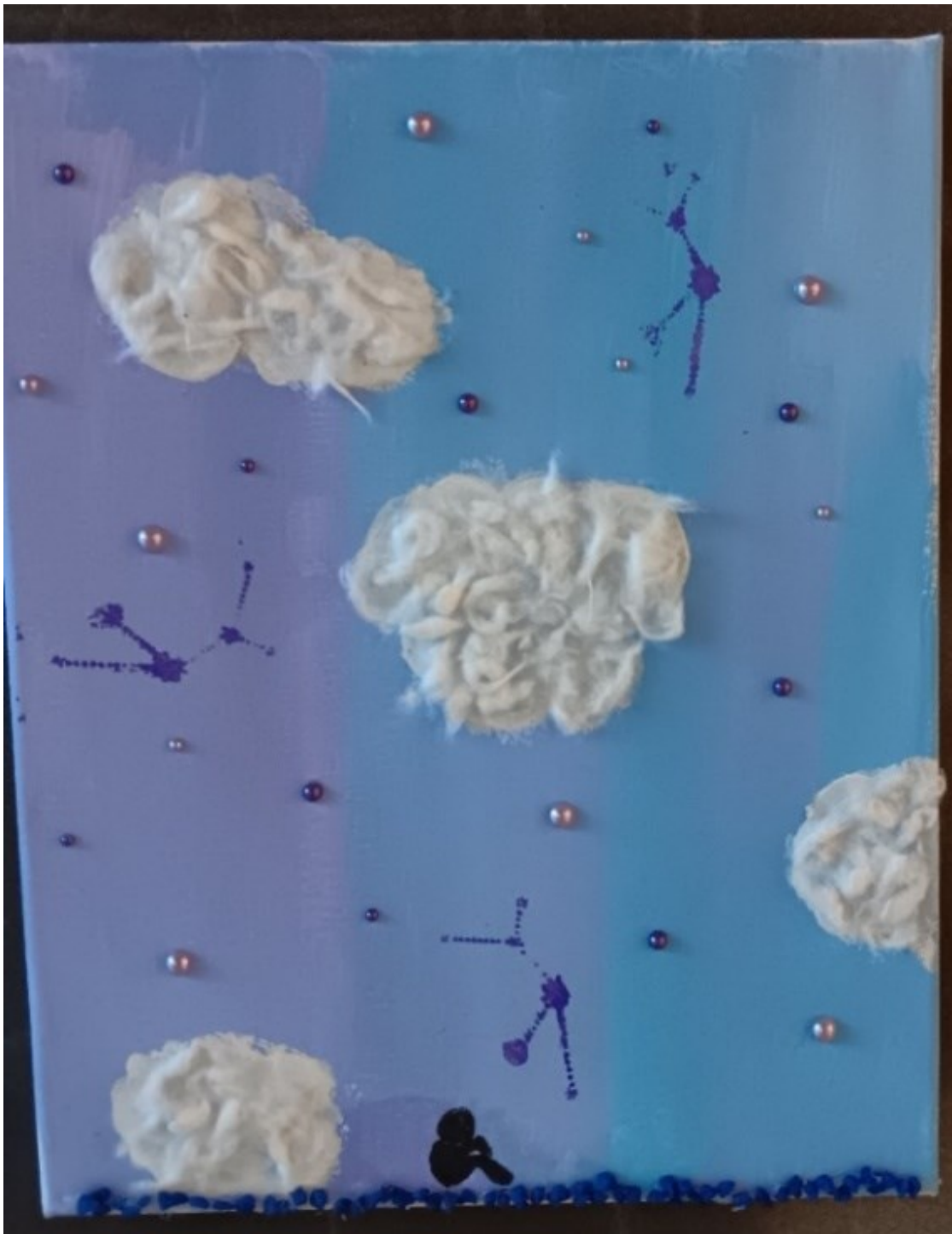


Figure 4: Mary's Artwork



Figure 5: Cali's Artwork

Places and Spaces

This theme is about the environment that surrounds a participant when they feel safe. This includes the people surrounding a participant and places such as nature or the university environment. This theme is defined by physical people, places, or things that affect the participant's feelings of safety.

In all the participants' artwork, nature was somehow included. It was a prominent in some pieces, such as a large flower, moth, butterfly, or landscape. The inclusion of nature was more subtle in others, such as small flower gems mixed into a larger image. Participants described the connection between safety and nature in different ways. Jeev wrote, "Watching the sunset alone in the environment. Flying with the butterflies and having wings to be free." Cali described, "As I look at the blue sky at the top of a mountain, being in the openness allows me a sense of freedom and peace which connects with feeling safe."

Physical characteristics of safe spaces were discussed during the focus group. Some common descriptor words included certainty, familiarity, and predictability. The characteristics of the physical space helped create the necessary environment for the internal feelings of safety discussed in the Feeling of Safety theme. This was demonstrated in the focus group when I asked a participant to expand on what they meant by predictable environments being safe.

Participant: I guess it's just like kind of knowing what to expect or kind of like not feeling like you have anything up in the air or, you know, like, you know how something's gonna play out.

Me: And that's what creates that feeling of safety for you?

Participant: Yeah, like when it comes to like uncertain things, it, really gets kind of underneath my skin and it gets like to a point where you're worried about things that you wouldn't necessarily. And you're kind of like that until you have the certainty, you're kind of making stuff up in your mind

Another participant joked, “Not Costco,” when asked what environments feel safe, and then further explained that she meant open, inviting spaces felt safer for her.

Participants also described how it is not only the places that create a feeling of safety but the people inside those spaces as well. Mary stated, “To me safety is familiarity, outside, and friends.” During the focus group, the women discussed how trusted and safe people can influence situations that may otherwise feel unsafe.

Participants shared:

I think having really supportive friends makes me feel very safe, and I could be in a not necessarily safe place like downtown PG, but when you’re with people you trust, you know, usually you don’t have to worry about things as much.

During the focus group, participants also brought up an important point about friends and family. While surrounding oneself with friends and family was undoubtedly important to the participants, setting boundaries was ably brought up. Participants spoke of how it is important to feel secure enough with the people around them that they felt safe to set boundaries, but safety was also a part of the strength needed to uphold boundaries. Participants also mentioned that they felt the safest when they were able to set boundaries with their family members and friends, and those boundaries were respected.

Clara was the only participant who specifically mentioned the university as being a safe space:

The university is one of my safest spaces – here I am supported both by the people around me and the learning environment as a whole. In my piece I’ve incorporated aspects of the people I love, the people that make me feel safe.



Figure 6: Jeev's Artwork

Danger Still Exists

This theme describes the participant's conflict of wanting to feel safe but knowing that danger still exists for women in many forms. This includes risks to safety, mental health, and the reality of being a woman in the world. This theme is about the contradiction between safe and unsafe for women.

Ocean beautifully described the juxtaposition of safety and the dangerous reality women face in the world

My artwork is inspired by how you feel safety on the inside vs the outside world. The dark edges represent how women truly are at a higher risk of harm. The darker pieces represent different form of harms that women face in any form. The lighter inside represents inner peace and beauty that we all have and the warm light feeling of being truly safe. However the dark black splatter on the light parts show that although we may feel safe we never completely are. From society constantly throwing blame on women for things we experience and things that happen to us, that had nothing to do with our own doing. It may feel as though we are drowning, represented by the blue colours, by the way society is always throwing blame on women and it is our own fault that we are not safe.

Calico Cat discussed how she feels safe in conjunction with the reality of living with an anxiety disorder:

A lot of my fears stem from my anxiety disorder. I often get random panic attacks and had a hard time coping with this when I was younger. As I've gotten older, I have learned to calm myself down when they happen. I often think to look for 3 new things I've never seen before, 3 things I haven't heard before. It helps me see things in a new perspective and that even though things seem overwhelming, they aren't always. This octopus is chaotic looking, but I think her individual components and her as a total are beautiful. This relates to safety because I have learned how to make myself feel safe. I guess she represents my world.

Risks to women's safety were discussed by some participants. This included going on walks at night, being alone and feeling unsafe. When discussing what she

would do if she felt 100% safe, T-Rex stated, “I would travel and take myself places that I would otherwise be afraid to go.” Elizabeth described her art, saying:

An activity I really love to do is get a little stoned and go for a walk at night, but I never do it without another person. What if I get lost? What if I meet someone who wishes me harm? I don't walk at night with headphones on. If I knew I was 100% safe I think I'd do that and I wouldn't do it furtively for fear of judgement...The woman [in the painting] is displaying some femininity which you need a certain amount of safety to do. She's off the path, outside the street lamp – symbolically and literally.

There was one note from the community feedback board that fit into this theme. A sticky note with a little +1 in the corner read: “To be dead is to be safe.”



Figure 7: Ocean's Artwork



Figure 8: Calico Cat's Artwork



Figure 9: Elizabeth's Artwork

Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter will engage in discussion and reflection surrounding the research findings outlined in Chapter 4. The chapter will begin by discussing the areas where my research connected to previous literature on women's safety as well as areas where it differed. An alternate definition of safety is posed based on the participant's perceptions. Then, the challenges and limitations of the study will be explained and suggestions for future research will be explored. Lastly, I will provide a reflection of my experiences in the study and conclude the paper.

Discussion of Themes

Of the four themes that emerged from my research, two of the themes connected back to research previously conducted on women's safety, while two differed. The results of my research that are connected to previous research and the pieces that differ offer valuable insight into the participants' perceptions of safety, which will be discussed here.

External Expressions of Safety

Some of the findings from my research echoed the sentiments of the previous research into women's safety. The literature reflected women's desire to be included, heard, and respected to feel safe. The participants expressed a similar view in this study. This was particularly important in the discussion during the focus group about personal boundaries, setting boundaries and having those boundaries respected.

Participants in this study showed a strong connection between safety and being authentic and accepted by their peers for their authenticity. I think the desire to truly express oneself and then to be accepted and loved for that expression is a

sentiment that most people can relate to. Connecting this feeling of authenticity and acceptance to feeling safe is an interesting concept which differs from the dictionary definitions of safety but does connect to themes from trauma-informed approaches to safety (Boynton & Margolin, 2025; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024; Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Most dictionary definitions of safety referred to being protected from danger and harm and seemed to imply that protection was mainly required from physical harm. Adding a trauma-informed approach to the traditional definitions of safety would create a more accurate representation of safety that included feelings of acceptance.

Places and Spaces

The literature, particularly from the category of safety in communities, explored women's perceptions of safety and had a strong focus on places and spaces. While my participants did not comment on the specifics of physical space, such as lighting or vegetation, they did comment on characteristics of spaces where they felt safe. Comments like "not Costco" and "not downtown PG" allowed me to ask questions about the places they did feel safe. This allowed me to learn about the comfortable, predictable spaces where the participants felt safe.

The APA Dictionary of Psychology (2018) mentions that safety includes environments that are secure and predictable. The participants in this study were able to expand on this and give examples of what secure and predictable environments look like to them. For instance, participants spoke of having people they trust around to make them feel safe and the safety they felt in places like nature or the university. Participants explained why predictable and secure spaces were

important to creating a sense of safety. It was interesting to see an area that is so well researched and evidenced be reflected and explained in detail through the participant's voices in this study.

Internal Feelings of Safety

I specifically asked participants to tell me about what safety feels like to them when it is expressed both internally and externally. Because of this question, I received an in-depth answer about their perspectives of internal feelings of safety, which was rarely explored in any of the previous literature I found.

One area to note and reflect upon is that many of the participants in this study remarked on the feelings of stress and worry and how they would be gone if they knew they were 100% safe. It would be interesting to learn if these feelings were replicated among women in different locations and situations or if choosing participants who are current students who are likely balancing other life roles made these sentiments more prominent. Regardless of the reasons behind the worry and stress, I think these feelings demonstrate that threats to women's safety are not always physical violence and may come from a variety of circumstances.

The participants in my study described safety as an internal sense of peacefulness where they were free from worry and stress. I think it is important to differentiate between this internal feeling of peacefulness from other topics that may seem related. For example, I think that connecting safety to inner peace is separate from the ability and freedom to express emotions, and I think it is distinct from dictionary definitions of being "free from hurt," if one were to interpret hurt as an internal feeling rather than a physical threat. Participants responded to the miracle

question, asking them what it would feel like to be 100% safe with a sense of inner peace. I think that feeling of inner peace represents the ideal sense of safety and security where a person knows they are safe and are free to simply exist.

Danger Still Exists

My research differed from previous studies on women's safety because I was not asking women to connect feelings of safety to times when they felt unsafe. For example, previous research asked about feeling safe after an abusive relationship, being in a dangerous space, or having a medical emergency. I had hypothesized that if I strictly asked about feeling safe from a strengths-based perspective, I could discover a more hopeful sense of safety. This hypothesis was only partially correct. While I did gather a lot of strengths-based perceptions of safety, there were also some participants who highlighted the opposite.

The theme Danger Still Exists surprised me the most. It showcased the ways that some women feel lasting pressure and danger from various sources. These perspectives seeped through even when attempting to discuss safety from a positive angle. Some of the participants highlighted the simple things they would do if they knew they were 100% safe, like going for a walk at night or dressing however they wanted. Another participant described feeling like no matter what they did or how they acted, it would never be enough to counteract the dangers in their life and feel safe.

Additionally, Calico Cat brought up the important topic of mental health and feelings of safety. She described the connection between living with an anxiety disorder and learning how to feel safe. While other participants described threats to

their safety as physical people or places that aimed to hurt them, the threats to Calico Cat's safety were internal, coming from her own mind. She described safety as an internal process she had to learn. This was a unique perspective that differed from other participants and the previous research into women's safety that I had read.

There was one comment on the sticky note feedback board that really stood out to me: "To be dead is to be safe." There is a possibility that this was written as sarcasm or as a joke. Even if the comment was not intended to be taken seriously, I think it reflects a pessimistic perspective of safety that is very real for many people.

I think it is important to recognize that it may not be possible to take an entirely positive perspective on women's safety and that my initial hypothesis was a bit naive. The women's perceptions highlighting the realities of danger and stigma that women face was enlightening, and I am grateful that they shared these feelings with me.

The Artwork

The artwork was a unique addition to my research that added additional understanding to research on women's safety. Adding images to the written components of the data was powerful and showcased the topics the participants were talking about in a physical and interactive dimension.

The participant's use of colour added dimension I never could have imagined without the visual factor. For example, some participants used colour to represent emotions. Some participants used the colours blue and purple to represent peace and calm, while others seemed to associate blues and purples with drowning and

being out of their depth. Jeev's artwork seems to radiate warmth, while the green in Clara's artwork seems to be associated with growth and acceptance. Alternatively, the way that T-Rex chose not to paint the background of her canvas draws attention to the items she chose to add to her collage. Sitting with a piece of artwork and absorbing what it is saying is a gift that I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience in this research.

The artwork showcased how the feelings of safety are deeply personal and unique to each person. While the themes that emerged from the data highlighted some similarities, looking at the art highlights the individuality.

Reflection on Themes

It is interesting to reflect on the themes that emerged from this study and wonder about the themes and messages that did not emerge. Participants mentioned some topics briefly but not in enough detail or frequency to develop themes. Money and culture were two themes that did not emerge that caught my attention.

When thinking about safety, money can have different meanings and implications. A lack of money could mean danger, hunger, or homelessness, whereas having money could mean access to resources and an increased sense of security. Money is visually represented in T-Rex's artwork but is not mentioned by participants anywhere else in the study. I find this interesting. Everyone who participated in this study is a student, a population stereotypically not known for having much money. However, I did not ask specific questions about the participant's socio-economic status on the demographic forms or about possible

connections between safety and socio-economic status during the focus group. I can not help but wonder if I had asked a question about safety, security, and money, would the prompt have generated conversation supporting or dismissing the importance of money and feeling safe? Additionally, if I had selected participants who were students but also identified as low-income, would that have generated different results? I suspect it would have.

The literature review highlighted the important link between culture, tradition, and feeling safe. I had expected it to show up more in the voices of participants in this research. It is interesting to note that spirituality was mentioned briefly, but religion was not mentioned at all. Expressing oneself could connect to expressing one's culture and practicing traditions freely; no participants in this study explicitly mentioned culture. This could be due to the small sample size. Perhaps participants felt unsafe discussing culture in a group setting or with me as a facilitator. I also did not ask any specific questions prompting discussion about culture, hoping for organic discussion from the participants.

As a first-time researcher, I am reflecting on the questions I used during the focus group and wondering if open-ended questions were the best choice. Overall, I am happy with how the focus group discussion progressed. However, the two topics of money and culture are areas that I wish I had explored more and asked follow-up questions for while the focus group was happening. They are also areas that could be explored further in future research.

Reflection on Space

I was fortunate to have a space available at UNBC to conduct the focus group and art-making session. My supervisor, Dr. Si Tranksen, developed the art room and regularly uses it for her professional practice. She has made the accessible for others interested in art, ABR, and art therapy to use.

The art room at the university is set up and actively used for art therapy. There are long tables set up end to end in the middle of the room's main area, which is where the participants sat. Along the wall to the left are two more long tables, which are mainly used for larger materials and supplies, for example, a paper cutter and glue mats with hot glue guns. To the right of the main tables is a large utility sink. Windows at the top of the walls offer natural light, and the electric lights have settings allowing control over the room's visibility and mood. Every spare inch of space in the art room is packed with shelves of art materials. Along one wall are paper, stickers, and stencils sorted categorically, there is a shelf full of boxes and envelopes, and there is a storage unit with shelves of miscellaneous materials such as feathers, keys, rubber bands, and gems. There are shelves of paint and glitter and a cubby with books and magazines that can be ripped up and collaged. Any material that a client or participant could want is likely somewhere in the room.

I was worried that the space might overwhelm the participants, but everyone seemed comfortable. They explored the room and chose materials that called to them. The only problem with the art room at UNBC is that it is just a bit too small. I had ten people in the room, and I would consider that to be the maximum capacity.

Additionally, if a participant had mobility concerns, the room would be quite difficult to alter for accommodations.

I think it is important to recognize how fortunate I was to have this room available for my research needs. Having a vast assortment of materials available would not have been possible for me in any other circumstance. I want to recognize that the images and themes in the participant's artwork, such as the many references to nature, were possible because the materials were available for the participants to find and use. I set up the main table with general art supplies, such as paint, pencils, paintbrushes, glue, trays and canvases. It was important to me that the participants found the other materials they wished to use themselves to ensure that their artwork was representative of their own perceptions and my influence was minimal.

If I attempted to recreate this study in another location, for example, downtown Prince George, I would have to guess which materials would be relevant to the participants and bring them to another location. While I think replicating this study with other populations holds value, the circumstances of holding the original focus group in the UNBC art room were incredible, and I am very grateful.

An Alternate Definition of Safety

An alternate definition of safety was created to answer the initial research question from this study: How do female students currently studying at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) use art and creativity to define the concept of safety?

The alternate definition of safety I have created began by reflecting on the social work values of advocacy and the pursuit of social justice (BCCSW, 2009; CASW, 2024). I wanted to ensure my definition captured the feminist perspective of intersectionality and showcased how all areas of women's lives interact to create a sense of safety (Ackerly & True, 2020). I wanted to create something with the potential to be transformative and challenge social norms. This definition aims to share the women's perception of safety from this study in a positive and empowering manner that will hopefully benefit others.

Safety:

Safety is a mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical experience unique to each person. Safety affects all areas of a person's life. The following list are conditions that affect a person's ability to feel safe:

- The ability to be authentic and accepted for who one is without judgment or ridicule.
- Feeling secure and free to experiment, make mistakes, and grow.
- The ability to think and express oneself freely.
- The ability to make choices, set boundaries, and have these decisions be met and respected.
- Existing in an environment that feels predictable, comfortable, and secure.
- The ability to be protected from physical danger and harm.

A sense of inner peace and freedom is felt when a person feels truly safe.

Challenges and Limitations

My sample size in this research was small, which is typical in qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to “dig into an issue, in-depth, and provide rich data that examine what it is like for people experiencing a phenomenon, smaller sample sizes are appropriate and will vary with the specific methods being employed” (Given, 2016, p. 63). However, it is worth noting that while the participants in this study provided in-depth information about their perceptions of women’s safety, these perceptions do not speak on behalf of all women. The perceptions of safety from women currently attending university may be very different from those of women living in a shelter downtown or women who are single parents working several jobs to make ends meet.

An important part of reflexivity is reflecting on the researcher’s positionality and considering how this may affect the relationships and responses of the participants (Berger, 2015). I did not perceive a close relationship with any of the participants. However, because UNBC is a small university, some participants may have met me before. They could have met me because I work at the library services desk at the UNBC Library or because of my roles within the social work department. For example, I held a role as a teaching assistant and several student representative positions. Additionally, if the participants didn’t have a connection with me, they may have had a connection with my little brother, who is very involved in the hard sciences at UNBC. While I tried to mediate these possible dual relationships there is a possibility that the participants acted differently than if I were a stranger.

Unfortunately, dual relationships, even in the most minor sense, are a reality of practicing social work in a northern community.

I also recognize that my positionality as a white, heterosexual woman may have influenced some participant's feelings of safety and, therefore, responses in the research. Some of the participants shared a similar background with me. These participants may have felt more comfortable with me as the researcher and felt safer sharing their thoughts. There is a possibility that there were aspects of my positionality that made some participants feel uncomfortable or unsafe and, therefore, less likely to share and contribute. It is worth considering that this research may yield different results depending on the makeup of the group and the safety and connection between the participants and the researcher.

Recommendations for Future Research

I think this research offers a good starting point for future research. I would love to see this study conducted with different populations. I think it would be interesting to ask other genders, such as men their perceptions of safety, have them make art, and compare it to the women's perceptions from this study. Exploring men's relationship with safety would be interesting because they often are stereotyped on two separate ends of a spectrum. For example, men are often stereotyped as either the perpetrators of harm or alternatively as protectors from harm. It would also be interesting to compare the perceptions of safety from this research to women's perceptions of safety in another location. A different location could be a larger university or a shelter downtown for women living in small, remote northern communities. The statistics on violence against women in Canada showed

that Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people experience more harm (Heidinger, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2022, 2024). In response to those statistics, I think it would be valuable to explore the perceptions of safety of Indigenous women, and people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. I also think Calico Cat's perceptions of safety, connecting mental health and feeling safe, were very interesting. Exploring the connection between feeling safe and mental health would be a fascinating study, and the art created would be fascinating to see.

Implications for Social Workers

I view this research as an opportunity for social workers to reflect on practices and policies from a structural perspective. Policy and social work are intertwined because “social workers become aware of policies and the lived experience of people with whom they work; this makes them well-placed to play a vital role in evaluating the impacts of policies and in advocacy aimed at modifying them” (Laing, 2016). Policymakers need to be aware that safety is not static. Social workers can educate and advocate for women's safety and policies that are either directly related to safety or may affect feelings of safety.

Whether it be through policy, media, or commonly perpetuated stereotypes, women's safety is often described as protection from physical harm. It is then implied that the responsibility is placed on women to keep themselves safe. I propose that we move away from this belief. Instead of asking women to keep themselves safe, we should look at ways to incorporate safety into society. The views of safety that the women shared in this study reflect areas where safety can be incorporated into society. For example, promoting accepting spaces where

people can feel free to be themselves, educating people on respectful relationships and boundaries, evaluating physical space, and working to counteract the existing bias and stereotypes surrounding women's safety. Incorporating these views would improve safety for women and make the community a safer space for everyone.

Incorporating art and creativity into social work practice is not new, but I think it still needs encouragement to become more widely used and accepted. This research shows the level of detail and expression that can be obtained when creative options are presented to clients. I genuinely believe I received far more information and much more powerful data from the art than I could have possibly received from an interview alone.

Creativity reaches across ages and can be incorporated through all the different areas of professional social work professions. I have previously used art as a tool when working with children, and I was so pleased to see how well it worked with adults. The process of creating art becomes a cathartic form of physical self-expression. It empowers clients/participants, but I think it was also special for me as the facilitator. I feel privileged to be a part of this process as a social worker and student. I highly recommend and hope to encourage other social workers to consider adding art and creativity into their practice.

Researcher Reflection

An important part of qualitative research is taking the time as a researcher to pause and reflect on the study. Reflexivity is defined as "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the

research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). Throughout the research process, I ensured I took time to reflect on my role and influence on the study.

After reflecting, I noticed many areas where my role as a first-time researcher affected the study. There were many moments when, after completing a particular step of the research, I would reflect on all the things I would do differently now that I had tried something and learned from the experience.

I have facilitated groups in the past, but historically, I have always worked with groups of children. Logically, I knew that facilitating a focus group with adult women would be easier than with 20 five-year-olds. However, when I completed the discussion portion of the focus group and asked the women to make art using whatever materials in the room they felt drawn to, I was so stunned when they just did it! They did not need my help with anything. This may seem obvious, but it is contrary to working with children. There was a moment when I felt lost and unsure of what to do with myself. At this moment that I realized I had been so focused on organizing the space for the participants that I had forgotten to leave myself a place to sit. So, I ended up having to adapt in the moment. I had always planned to make art alongside the participants but then adapted and chose to make the art on the move, interacting and chatting with the participants as I moved around the room. Everything worked out well, but this experience showed me how my past role as an early childhood educator influenced my expectations and experiences in my current role much more than I had anticipated.

The other moment where I reflected and learned from my mistakes was the art display. I had no previous experience with organizing or creating an art exhibit. I

was so grateful and excited when Inspiring Women Among Us agreed to let me display my art alongside the activities of their conference. I had naively assumed that the traffic generated from the conference activities would be plenty and would organically direct people toward the exhibit, where they would observe and comment on the art. That is not quite how things worked out in reality!

Reflecting on how I designed the exhibit, I have several recommendations on what could be improved upon. It would have been wise to advertise the exhibit and incorporate more interaction between myself and the community. For example, my presence could have counteracted some barriers to accessibility or engagement. If I created an art exhibit again, I would ensure that it was displayed for several days in a highly travelled area to encourage engagement and decrease time constraints. Lastly, if I created another exhibit, I would integrate a digital method of gathering feedback alongside the sticky notes. This would incorporate a more subtle method to contribute outside of writing notes. Like the focus group, the experience of the exhibit was not purely negative. It did technically work. I see room for improvement and how my lack of experience impacted the study's outcome.

Overall, I am proud of the research and the completed study. I am very grateful to all of the participants involved and thankful for their perceptions and the artwork created. I learned a lot in this process and have grown as a professional, scholar, and person.

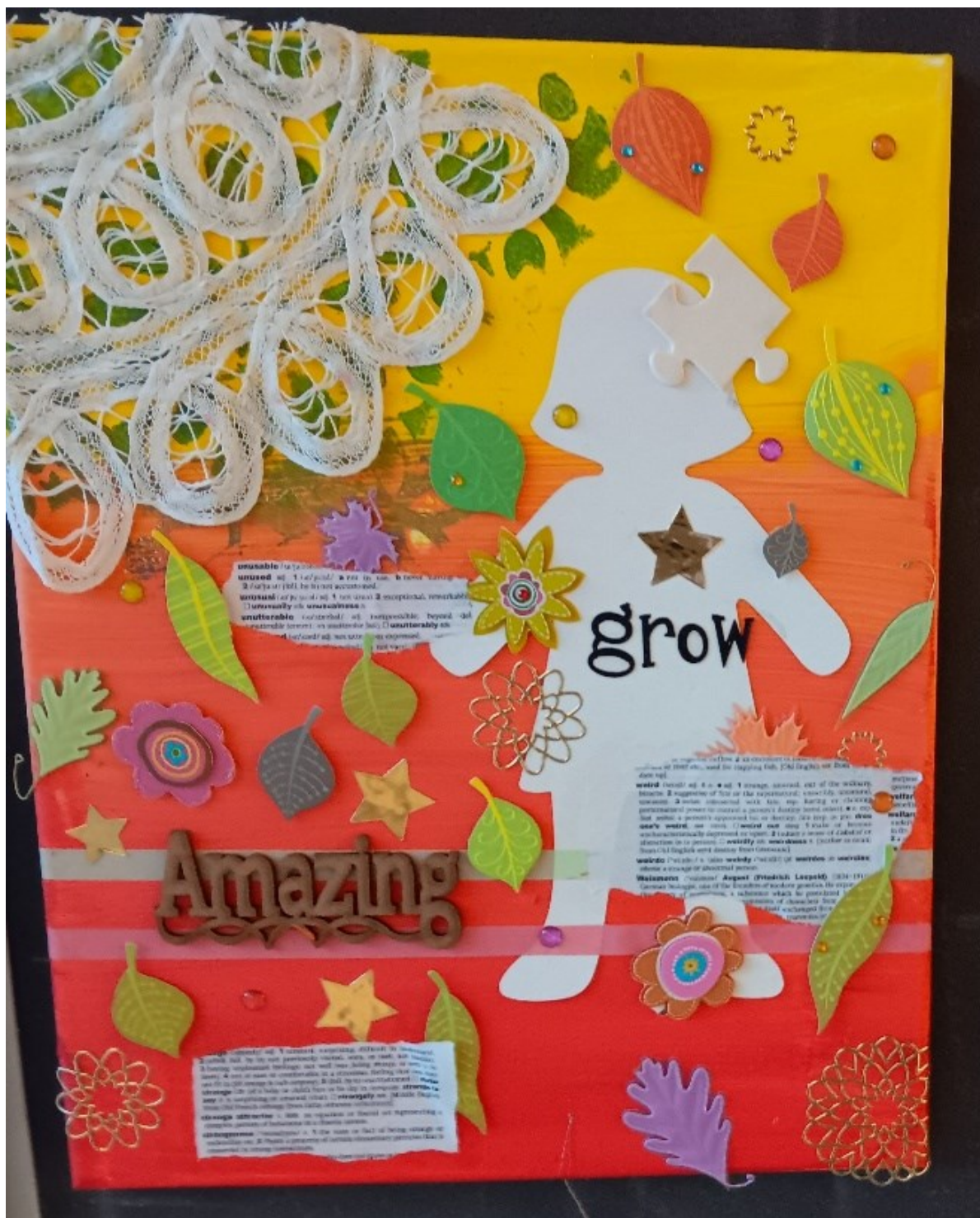


Figure 10: My Artwork

Conclusion

Women who are current students attending UNBC shared their perceptions of safety through discussions during a focus group and the creation of art. Several common themes emerged, including how safety is expressed and felt internally, what safe spaces look like, and the dangers that exist threatening feelings of safety. Additionally, this research showcased that while many themes connect women's perceptions of safety, ultimately, safety is uniquely experienced by each person. One of the sticky notes from the feedback board summarized this sentiment wonderfully.

It read:

While some of the art pieces mentioned safety as a physical thing, most if not all focused more on safety in a mental/emotional way.

- safety to be themselves

- safety to go places/do things

- safe to just ... be

And that was interesting!

This research concluded by incorporating the participants' perceptions of safety into an alternative definition of safety that more accurately reflected their views.

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Appendix 1: Research Ethics Approval Form



August 06, 2024

Ms. Ashley Aarts & Dr. Si Transken c/o

University of Northern British Columbia

Faculty of Human and Health Sciences\Social Work

Dear Ms. Aarts & Dr. Transken,

File No: 6009549

Project Title: Safeties: Multiply ways of thinking/ feeling/ being safe

Approval Date: August 06, 2024

Expiry Date: August 05, 2025

Thank you for submitting the above-noted proposal to the Research Ethics Board ("REB"). Your project has been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for a period of twelve months from the date of this letter. To continue your proposed research beyond August 05, 2025, you must

submit an Annual Renewal and Study Progress form at least one month prior to that date. If your research has been completed before the form is due, please submit a Study Closure form in order to close the REB file.


Throughout the duration of this REB approval, all requests for amendments and renewals, or reporting of unanticipated problems, must be submitted to the REB via the Research Portal.

Please refer to the Chair Bulletins found on the REB webpage for updates on in-person interactions with participants during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions or encounter any problems when working in the Research Portal, please contact the REB by email to reb@unbc.ca.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Dr. Neil Hanlon, Chair,
Research Ethics Board

Appendix 2: Information and Consent Form

Information Letter / Consent Form

Date: 12Aug2024

Safeties: Multiple ways of thinking/feeling/being safe

Who is conducting the study?

Student Researcher:

Ashley Aarts

School of Social Work

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

aaarts@unbc.ca

Academic Supervisor:

Dr. Si Transken – Associate Professor, School of Social Work

250-960-6643

si.transken@unbc.ca

This research is being conducted for a degree fulfillment of a Master of Social Work.

This research will be published in a thesis. The thesis will be published through

UNBC, making it available in print and digital format through the UNBC library.

Purpose of Project

I want to learn more about women's perceptions of safety. I am inviting women to participate who are willing to discuss and explore their ideas of safety using art and creativity.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time up until the report's completion. You are also free not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

What will happen during the project?

I will invite a group of 10 women to join me at UNBC to participate in a focus group to discuss women's safety and make art.

This project is a one-time commitment. The time expectations for participants are as follows: Approximately 30 minutes is needed for the pre-focus group to discuss consent, confidentiality, and the details of the project. The focus group itself would last approximately 2 hours. The focus group will be recorded for and analyzed for audio and visual data. During the focus group, we will discuss the group's opinions, perceptions, and experiences of safety, and participants will each make a piece of artwork based on their perceptions of safety. After the focus group, participants will be contacted and asked to review the transcription of the focus group discussion, any direct quotes, and interpretations of their art.

The artwork created in this focus group will then be displayed at UNBC and the Prince George community will be invited to view the exhibition.

Participants have 30 days to collect their artwork after the completion of the study. They will be contacted and reminded, but if, after 30 days, they have not come to collect it, it will be disposed of.

Risks or benefits to participating in the project

This study is taking a strength-based approach to women's safety, but the topic of safety may raise memories of times participants felt unsafe. Please let the researcher know if you have any concerns. All participants will be provided with a list of mental health resources to take home with them at the end of the study. Social risks may include risks associated with confidentiality in groups, but every effort will be made to explain the importance of confidentiality to participants individually and as a group. There are no foreseen physical or legal risks associated with this study.

If, at any point in the study, you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify the researcher immediately and your wishes will be respected.

This study offers an opportunity for expression and empowerment through the creation and display of artwork. This is an opportunity to contribute to the study of women's health and safety in a manner that is easily accessible to both the academic and public realms.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Storage

This study involves a focus group. Every effort will be made to explain confidentiality both individually and as a group, however, we cannot control what participants do with the information discussed.

Participants will be asked to use pseudonyms as a measure to protect anonymity and confidentiality. If participants wish to sign their artwork, pseudonyms must be used. The pseudonyms will be used for any study reports and no participants will be identified by name.

All documents will be identified using the pseudonym and will be stored on the researcher's UNBC OneDrive in password-protected folders. Raw data will only be accessible to the researcher and their academic supervisor.

The information gathered from this study will be kept for 5 years. It will then be securely destroyed. Any digital files will be deleted, and paper forms will be shredded.

Compensation (*if applicable*)

We will not pay you for the time you take to be in this study.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. Direct quotes will be included, using pseudonyms for participants. A link to the thesis will be provided to participants, if interested, once it is available.

Participants have 30 days to collect their artwork after the completion of the study. They will be contacted and reminded, but if, after 30 days, they have not come to collect it, it will be disposed of.

Questions, Concerns or Complaints about the project

Any questions about this study are to be directed to the researcher or their supervisor, using the contact information at the top of the information letter.

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

Participant Consent and Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. Participants will have 2 weeks to decide whether to participate in the study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time up until the report completion without giving a reason and without any negative impact. If a participant chooses to withdraw, all of their information and data will be removed from the study.

CONSENT

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES

NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

YES

NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind.

YES

NO

I have been given a copy of this form.

YES

NO

I agree to be recorded

YES

NO

I agree to have my artwork photographed, shown in the exhibit for this project, to be used for future publication and keep consent for the next 5 years

YES

NO

I want to receive information on the completed results of this study:

YES

NO

Follow-up information (e.g. transcription), and links to study results (if desired), can be sent to me at the following e-mail or mailing address:

YES

NO

Email: _____

Signature (**or note of verbal consent**): _____

Name of Participant (Printed): _____

Date: _____