

**REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND COUNSELLOR IDENTITY**  
**A HEURISTIC STUDY**

**CRISTINA DUECK**

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## Dedication

To my husband and daughter, who have supported me throughout this process and encouraged me to keep going through challenges. I love you both so much!

To my fifth grade teacher, Mike Dunlop, who was there for encouragement in my youth.

To Dawn McBride, a dedicated teacher and psychologist who has guided my passion for counselling.

## Abstract

An implied obligation inherent in the Canadian Psychological Association's code of ethics is that reflective practice strategies are required to properly respond to the critical need for examination of the influence of personal and social factors on therapists. This project demonstrates one such approach using an arts-based heuristic design.

Photography and writing are used to explore the question *who am I as a counsellor?* The point of departure for addressing the question is living *inside the box* versus living *outside the box*. Thoughts, feelings and emotions will be noted during and after photography shoots, culminating in a creative synthesis. Empirical support for the use of photography and therapeutic writing in reflective practice will be provided.

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## Reflective Practice and Counsellor Identity: A Heuristic Study

### Chapter 1: Introduction

#### *Project Rationale*

In the counselling profession it is critical that therapists become aware of how their “experiences, attitudes, culture, beliefs, values, social context, individual differences, specific training, and stress,” influence their practice (Canadian Psychological Association, 2001, p. 61). Principles two and three of the third edition of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (competence and self-knowledge and objectivity or lack of bias)* implies therapists have both an ethical and moral obligation to engage in reflective practice. This reflective practice project explores the question, “who am I as a counsellor?” using art-based research, specifically photography and therapeutic writing.

This research project started by compiling literature on reflective practice, photography, and therapeutic writing for a literature review that served as a starting point for a heuristic research design. The findings of this study are derived from photographing images and writing text, both used for personal reflection. The research project concludes by discussing implications of the study, limitations and possible directions for similar research.

#### *Author Background*

In the past, I have used reflective practice through journaling, writing poetry, and taking pictures to engage in self-care processes such as counselling and I have recognized the benefits of self-awareness, reflection and growth. Since time and point of view changes perspective (Jacobs, 2004), in this project, I chose photography and writing to

guide me within the context of a heuristic methodology. Its tenants are congruent with reflective practice, which in turn fits with my beliefs as a practitioner.

Despite hesitation, based on previous negative feedback on my writing, I chose to embrace the process. Proponents of writing for reflective purposes recommend avoiding judgment about grammar and/or sentence structure. My willingness to engage in reflective practice took precedence over the fear my writing would fall short of the needed quality.

Professionally, I align myself with theories that encourage self-awareness, self-reflection and the experiential process. I believe that change and growth occurs when individuals notice a state of incongruence in their lives (Raskin & Rogers, 2005), and that self-awareness can help individuals recognize that incongruence (May & Yalom, 2005; Yontef & Jacobs, 2005) in the process of evaluating their current situation (Wong, 2003). In order for awareness to occur it is also important for therapists to incorporate verbal and non-verbal or experiential techniques, which create more of an opportunity for individuals to learn and explore their personality. Learning theory states that individuals learn in different ways, suggesting the use of learning theory in the counselling room would be beneficial (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2001).

### *Project Structure*

This project has been structured into four chapters. Chapter one provides background information on the rationale for the project, research process and the author. Chapter two explores literature about reflective practice, photography in counselling and therapeutic writing. The third chapter outlines the heuristic methodology used in the process, describing personal experiences throughout. The final chapter concludes with a

creative synthesis, which reflects the outcome of the research process, including implications of the study, findings, limitations and possible direction of future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores dominant themes within reflective practice, photography and therapeutic writing. A description of the approach to the review is included.

### *Approach to Literature Review*

#### *Literature Search*

Before gathering information, key terms were sought that would elicit relevant literature from available databases (see Appendix A for definitions). Keywords included self-awareness, self-reflection, reflective practice, therapeutic photography, arts-based research, journaling, therapeutic writing, phototherapy, art therapy, and photographic art. Various combinations of these terms were initially used in PsycINFO to locate journal articles and books. Journal articles and books that were not available online were requested from the University of Lethbridge or University of Brandon Library systems. In many cases, books were brought in from a variety of universities in Canada. The worldwide web was searched and yielded resources that were beneficial or suggested further information to be researched. Having previously written a literature review on phototherapy, I cross-referenced previously obtained articles to determine their relevance to this study. Many references were initially found from the PhotoTherapy website (<http://www.phototherapy-centre.com/home.htm>). Previously reviewed articles and books also yielded references.

#### *Criteria for Inclusion*

Once the literature was obtained, its relevance to the project was evaluated. The criteria used to determine whether an article would be included ranged from reliability of

the source and of the literature to the strength and limitations of the information. Initially, publication date was also included until it became clear early on that early research in photography and writing is experiential in nature, making it an asset to the research project.

### *Organization of Information*

The literature review is presented in three main categories, with themes addressed under each of these. The three main topics include reflective practice, photography, and therapeutic writing.

### *Reflective Practice*

Three main themes emerged while researching reflective practice, including the process involved in reflective practice, benefits from engaging in reflective practice, and fears that arise out of reflective practice. To conclude the review on reflective practice, critiques of reflective practice were also discussed.

### *Process*

Reflective practice can be defined in many ways and has been criticized in some cases for being too subjective and lacking clarity (Kinsella, 2003). “Reflection enables learning from experience so that what has been learnt can be integrated into practice” (Bolton, 2005, p. 37). For the purpose of this project it is important to understand reflection, reflexivity and reflective practice as a process that encourages learning and growth. “Knowing is *in* our action” (Schon, 1983, p. 49). This project accepts the assumption that we need to reflect on actions and thoughts in order to learn and grow from our experiences. This process is hard to describe and has been defined by a variety of conceptual orientations, foundations, and steps (Bolton). Bolton interprets reflective

practice to include a reflexive process in which individuals stand back from their value systems and habitual process to understand how a scenario has affected them.

Experiences are subjective, thereby leaving the individual to self-reference, creating a need for reflection (Praetorius, 2009). Self-reference refers to the experiences that an individual has to refer to in order to provide insight into new experiences. Other authors suggest that reflective practice involves looking back on previous situations to learn from them (Schon, 1983). Many approaches to reflection models emerge from educational models. One approach includes Dewey's Five Steps (1978): 1) a feeling of difficulty, 2) location and definition - examining the situation outside of the conditions of occurrence to evaluate it in a less biased manner, 3) suggestion of possible solutions - looking at how to solve the problem, 4) development by reasoning of the bearing of the suggestion - looking at the possible outcomes of the suggestions created from step three, and, 5) further observation and experimentation, leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief. Smyth's (1989) model is similar in that it has teachers examine what they did, what it means, how did they become who they are, and how they might do things differently. Tripp (1993) also examines reflection on critical incidents that occur in our lives, which can be evaluated, making us accountable for our actions. He suggests looking at incidents by turning them into questions that can be reflected upon. Carper's Ways of Knowing model (1978), including reflection of empirical knowing, aesthetic knowing, personal knowing and moral knowing has also been used in the reflection process. A few authors describe the difference between "reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action" (Bailey, Curtis & Nunab, 2001; Schon, 1983). Reflection-in-action has been described as examining a teaching process to make changes that may be

needed, whereas reflection-on-action is planning a process prior to teaching and evaluating that process in its aftermath (Yang, 2009). Although there are different ways of engaging in the reflection process, various authors agree that it is never-ending and that it is regarded by most professionals as important to ethical practice (Bolton, 2005; Canadian Psychological Association, 2001; Jevne, 1981; Schon, 1983). How does this affect the reflective practitioner?

### *Benefits*

Although there is diversity among reflective methods many authors agree that there can be benefits to reflection in their practice (Bolton, 2005; Etherinton, 2004; Schon, 1983; Yang, 2009). There is recognition that despite the need for reflective practice, it is sometimes difficult to do within traditional settings. Individuals may be requested to do tasks in their profession that they are not educated for and, if they fail at a task they are judged and chastised (Schon). Reflection within the professional field could allow individual strengths and weaknesses to be highlighted, which may avoid scenarios in where individuals are asked to do what they are not qualified for.

Without reflection professionals can miss important information that may serve their clients in a more ethical manner. It allows professionals to recognize their limitations, biases and the fact that they are not all knowing (Schon). Jevne (1981), in a landmark Canadian study of counsellor competencies, explains that in the past, consistency has been lacking in counsellors' need for self-awareness.

Bolton (2005) writes extensively on reflective practice. She suggests that reflective practice allows for critical examination without judgment and that to be an ethical reflective practitioner and effective counsellor, one must recognize one's own

imperfections and thus be willing and open to exploring faults and biases. Without this, she proposes, professional judgment is eroded. Her view is that reflective practice is the ability to view a situation from all directions and possibilities. She joins Schon (1983) in acknowledging that education can be helpful in providing new professionals a starting point in practice, but stipulate that the application of, or reflection on, their practice provides invaluable experience. “It is in an educational approach which makes the difference between twenty years of experience or one year of experience twenty times” (Bolton, p. 3). Confirming Bolton’s perspective, Yang suggests that, “reflective practice not only makes change possible, but also provides information needed to develop guidelines for setting new needs, goals, and plans” (2009, p. 11).

### *Fears*

Some risks with being reflective have been outlined; firstly, social and political obligations often arise from being reflective (Bolton, 2005; Schon, 1983). When an individual is reflective it allows them to question why and how things are done. If they feel strongly one way or another they may feel obligated to stand up for their beliefs or the rights of their clients. The second risk in reflective practice is the risk of practitioners critiquing themselves too harshly, which may create burnout in a vulnerable profession (Bolton; Schon). Thirdly, Bolton outlines how individuals’ cultural perspectives may become more entrenched, which may inhibit their work with individuals by creating judgment and biases that cause further harm (Canadian Psychological Association, 2001). Lastly, individuals need to be willing to tolerate uncertainty and unpredictability generated by being reflective and be able to handle contestation; “The more you know, the more you know you don’t know” (Bolton, 2005, p. 15).

### *Critiques*

Any practice engenders critique. The same is true of reflective practice. Even reflective practice must be reflected upon. Not examining concerns would go against reflective practice's core belief of looking at things from all directions. Kinsella (2003) suggests that reflective practice lacks clarity and the concept is "elusive, is open to multiple interpretations, and is applied in a myriad of ways in educational and practice environments" (para. 2). Sandywell (1996) suggests that other individuals are excluded in reflection because it entails inner cognition. Taylor and White (as cited by Kinsella) suggest that reflective practice injects more ambiguity into a complex world by changing clients' perspectives based on the practitioner's viewpoints.

In sum, reflective practice is a multifaceted concept that involves individual reflection. The reflection process can be lengthy, never ending and may create the recognition that change may need to occur, which is not always easy to do particularly if it includes changing behaviour and thoughts that have existed for several years. However, if an individual is willing to reflect on their lives, they can make changes that can improve their life in multiple ways.

### *Photography as Counselling*

This section addresses the issues of definitions related to the use of photography in/as therapy, the rationale for its use in therapy, ethical considerations and precautions when using photography in/as therapy. For the purposes of this project it is important to define photography *as* therapy and photography *in* therapy. These terms were redesigned from Schon's (1983) phrase "knowing is *in* our action" (p. 49). McNiff (2007) also uses similar terms. Weiser (2009) defines therapeutic photography as using photo-based

activities, which is initiated by the patient or client and is not followed up with formal therapy such as a counsellor guiding the process. Phototherapy is the use of photography as a counselling technique, used in a therapeutic setting with a trained counsellor (Milford et al., 1983; Stewart, 1979; Weiser, 1993, 2002). In my opinion, photography *as* therapy can occur in the context of both of the above definitions if the reflection of the photographs provides new insights that are later used to make adjustments in one's own life. Personal growth usually occurs in individual therapy, but can also occur without a therapist's guidance. An increasing number of self-help references in a variety of disciplines support the assumption that photography can be a mechanism of personal exploration without being guided by a therapist. Though not specific to photography, an example of self-help references might include Burn's *Feeling Good Handbook* (1999) or Bourne's *Beyond anxiety and phobia: A step-by-step guide to a lifetime of recovery* (2001). These books support the theory that individuals can address psychological issues without the presence of a therapist.

Photography in therapy is a term that can be restricted to the use of phototherapy or photography in therapy, with the guidance of a trained professional because it implies that an individual is "in" a guided process, usually with a professional. With regard to this project, photography *as* therapy is pertinent to the heuristic research design used. This does not discount the benefits that can be created from phototherapy. In fact, some of the terms in phototherapy describe techniques that can be used to guide photography as therapy. Other terms used with the use of photographs include photo-art therapy, which includes the combination of photography and artwork (Fryrear et al., 1992) and photo-journaling, which is the combination of photography and writing. Although a variety of

techniques exist to elicit information from photographs (Milford et al., 1983; Schudson, 1975; Stewart, 1979; Weiser, 1990, 1993, 2002, 2003), the philosophy, goals and benefits behind the varying techniques are similar. For the purpose of this project I had access to my supervisor for encouragement and guidance, but overall the process was done alone.

### *Rationale*

Several benefits of photography as a reflective tool have been outlined in literature. This was noted in two ways: its benefits as a research tool, and its use in therapy or other reflection. The latter, is more relevant to the heuristic research design. However, it is important to note that photography as a research tool elicits abundant information (Cook & Hess, 2007; Einarsdottir, 2007; Miller & Happell, 2007) and may benefit the individuals who use photography in their healing process (Cosden & Reynolds, 1982). Photography is not just about “f/stops and depth of field, but about seeing” (Henri, 2007, as cited in Patterson, 2007, p. 18). It is a way of expressing yourself without words, “writing with light” (Stzo et al., 2005, p. 140). Photography is a way to freeze a moment in time, allowing individuals to catch and reflect on an image that may contain multiple meanings. The photograph can represent many things: an emotion, an experience, a moment in time, a thought, an idea, a wish, etc. No matter what the image represents for the individual, it allows for reflection, and therefore new insight. A photograph is a visual record of moments in our lives that we may otherwise be too busy to notice. It is a type of self-expression (Levin et al., 2007) that allows individuals to explore feelings and memories (Weiser, 1984). Oft-times life is so fast that individuals do not find or take the time to reflect (Hagedorn, 1996); a photograph freezes time, allowing the process to occur. In short, it creates awareness within an individual by bringing the

unconscious to the conscious (Weiser, 2002). It is self-expression that allows personal exploration (Chambala, 2008). Photography is additionally beneficial because taking a photograph requires no special skill and it is a non-threatening medium, allowing individuals to open up (Weiser, 1984). Initially, the focus does not seem based on the client, which allows them to explore blocked emotions (Weiser). As noted by McNiff (2007), “art-based methods, making use of larger spectrum of creative intelligence and communications, generate important information that often feels more accurate, original, and intelligent than more conventional descriptions” (p. 30). Given these views and evidence it seems valid to confirm that photography can create healing and recovery (Amaya, 2004). Richmond (2005) explains that photographic art allows individuals to increase awareness, freedom and personhood. Photography is a medium that can be used with a variety of clients, especially if they have difficulties with verbal communication, increasing communication or understanding (Kruse, 2004; Miller & Happell, 2006). It has also been used with a variety of cultures and ages (Pink, 2001). Art-based research can also allow individuals to find a new way of dealing with a problem (McNiff, 2007).

The process is heuristic, introspective and deeply personal (McNiff, 2007). Many of the benefits that can come from photography are suggested in the rationale section but I also wanted to share benefits that are presented from several additional authors that inspired me during the process of this project by sharing insights and thoughts raised in their writing and reflection process.

Canadian photographer Freeman Patterson has written books that not only show images he has taken but what he has experienced through taking pictures (the

process/experience of taking the image) and also what the pictures reveal about himself (Patterson, 1996), as illustrated below.

- “My unconscious represents my adaptation to my natural environment” (Patterson, 1996, p. 98).
- “Everybody is a creation of nature, and both our conscious and unconscious selves are vital aspects of who we are... Only when the ego (the unconscious being) notices, contemplates, and acts upon messages from the unconscious self can one hope to grow... I have come to see the self as a seed that contains the whole plant in latent form, but the plant can develop only when the seed is exposed to light and provided with the air, water, and soil of daily life... By analogy, the more conscious attention I can give to providing good growing conditions for the plant that is me, the healthier and more whole a person can become” (Patterson, 1996, p. 102).
- “Art is the message (feelings, passions, caring arising from the unconscious) that is given form, defined or expressed through craft” (Patterson, 1996, p. 128).
- “Photography—both the craft and art—helps me to be. It allows and enables me to live creatively, which is to honour Creation and my own existence. As I consciously pursue my craft my concerns, anxieties, fears, loves, hopes, and dreams bubble up from my unconscious. In this meeting of the conscious and unconscious, I can acknowledge my wounds and experience healing” (Patterson, 1996, p. 131).
- “I am convinced that our health and well-being as individual persons and as human communities depend on our willingness to engage regularly with the

natural system that gave us birth. Exploring the natural world around me instead of focusing constantly on myself is the emotional equivalent of choosing a new camera position, rather than observing subject matter repeatedly from one point of view” (Patterson, 1996, p. 159).

- Patterson likens growth to a spiral, “A spiral rises as it curves back on itself; it is an ongoing creative process that, unlike a circle, will never be closed” (1996, p. 165).
- “Letting go of yourself is an essential precondition of real seeing” (Patterson, 1979, preface).

In *The Tao of Photography: Seeing Beyond Seeing* (2001), Gross and Shapiro express the need for creating awareness in the here and now. Capturing an image requires an individual to be alert and present in the current moment. This book provides additional insight in the use of photography for self-reflection, as illustrated below.

- “Taking photographs...is a way of shouting, or freeing oneself, not of proving or asserting ones own originality. It is a way of life” (Cartier-Bresson, as cited by Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 52).
- “We look at the world and see what we have learned to believe is there. We have been conditioned to expect... But as photographers, we must learn to relax our beliefs” (Siskind, as cited by Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 86).
- “I am not interested in shooting new things—I am interested to see things new” (Haas, as cited by Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 127).
- “Photography is the ideal medium in which to challenge assumptions, because of all art forms, it is one people most expect to represent reality... The creative

photographer grapples with these expectations, shaping or altering reality by the way he or she approaches a subject” (Boas, as cited by Gross & Shapiro, 2001 p. 61).

The above shows how personal photographs are, even though at first glance an individual may not think much of the image they are taking. Reflecting on the image provides insight to who the individual is. If images are taken with intent, they may prove to be even more expressive because the author has added additional thought to the process.

### *Ethics*

There are numerous benefits to using photography but there are also ethical dynamics to consider, such as ownership of clients’ photographic materials (Weiser, 1993). Furthermore, Jevne (personal communication, July 5, 2007) discusses consideration for who is in the photograph, the environment, and where the photographs are shown. Access, consent, and confidentiality are important factors because more appears in the photograph than just the client (Hagedorn, 1996). Using photography in research raises similar concerns (Pink, 2001). How the truth can be distorted in photographs should also be considered, especially when other people examine the images (Richmond, 2005). Special concessions must be made that are not particularly necessary for mainstream therapy. Having stated this, photography in personal reflective practice may not be a concern due to the individual nature of the process.

### *Precautions*

As with any technique, several considerations must be taken into account when using photography as a medium. It is essential to bear in mind that not everything can be

observed in a photograph (Weiser, 1993; Ziller, 1990). The photographer chooses what to take a picture of, showing one thing or avoiding another. That is why Weiser suggests that it is important for therapists to be involved in the process to deal with the therapeutic aspect and meaning of the photograph. Weiser explains that what is not in photographs is just as important as what is, including blank spaces. Everything tells the viewer something but these inferences should not be made alone, meaning that photographs should not be taken at face value without exploring them with the client. It is also important to note that the meaning of photographs can differ depending on the concept being worked on (Weiser; Ziller). This suggests that when using photos in therapy it is important to make the concepts clear and understand the client's perspective. Experiences that clients bring to the picture are important. Understanding is achieved by asking clients questions along with the picture they took or are looking at.

Technology is another consideration in phototherapy (Levin et al., 2007). Hanieh and Walker (2007) feel that the use of digital cameras brings a whole different element to research because being able to review pictures can lead to individuals judging and retaking the photograph, not to mention the added cost (Levin et al., 2007). There are also programs available to adjust the original image. One can take the position that even if a photo is altered it still has significance because it was altered in a specific way for a reason. This is likely where the therapist's skill for asking questions comes into play about whether changes were made, what was in the original photograph, and why it was changed. Traumatic events may be triggered by images that are presented or taken which can create effects for the client that must be taken into account (Fryrear & Corbit, 1992).

Beyond the process of taking images, what can come from processing them should be considered.

In sum, photography is more than just a photograph. The process of taking the image, the result of the image and reflecting upon it can lead individuals to grow in multiple ways.

### *Therapeutic Writing*

Emotion management has been outlined as staying conscious, achieving clarity (understanding feelings that are being experienced), and maintaining a sense of coherence i.e. emotions need to be somewhat understood and accepted so that they do not disrupt positive feelings about oneself (Jacobs, 2004). Consciousness, clarity and coherence can be discovered through writing (Jacobs). Therefore combining photography and writing may maximize reflection. Key themes that emerged while researching writing in therapy and reflective practice included the process and the benefits, with supporting evidence.

### *The Writing Process*

Literature suggests that the writing process is more beneficial if it has intention, but it should not inhibit the individual's self-expression (Jacobs, 2004; Pennebaker, 2004). Adams (1990) suggests that there should not be rules to journaling, such as showing concern for spelling, grammatical and penmanship errors. DeSalvo (1999), Pennebaker (1997) and Progroff (n.d.) provide three different approaches to journaling.

DeSalvo (1999) provides guidelines for confronting trauma within writing. Some of her suggestions include writing for shorter periods of time over four days so that it does not seem overwhelming, writing in a safe place, writing about issues that are current in your life i.e. something that is consistently thought about in your life, writing about

feelings connected with events and writing in a coherent, descriptive manner and not rushing the writing process through impatience. She offers additional guidelines in what to avoid when writing. She recommends not using writing as a substitute for taking action, not over-thinking what is written, and not using it as a way to complain but rather discovering why you feel a certain way.

Pennebaker (1997) gives further suggestions on how to make writing therapeutic. His basic writing paradigm includes writing on certain topics for three to five days in a row, for 15 to 30 minutes each day. Writing is a creative process that allows individuals to express themselves, however the level of reflection depends on the individual. More recently, Pennebaker (2002) noted that new research indicates that writing can be done in many different ways that benefit individuals.

Ira Progoff (n.d.), using a depth psychology based approach, created a widely used systematic intensive journaling program that includes four main features focussing on a holistic approach. The first feature is the initial journaling process, which is guided by a workbook. Individuals explore open-ended questions that require thought and reflection. The purpose is for individuals to recognize their thoughts and get in touch with their emotions. The second feature is getting feedback on entries, the purpose being to expand individual perspectives, and create growth in thought processes. The journaling process further allows individuals to discover their true self without judgement. Lastly, this approach is holistic, allowing individuals to examine themselves throughout their life process rather focusing solely on specific events, which can cause premature judgement. The purpose is to increase individual perspective and safety.

Although Pennebaker's approaches have more often been used in research for various reasons, the benefits of therapeutic writing of various natures are now well established. The next section of this paper explores these benefits.

### *Benefits*

Several authors describe various health benefits to writing (Adams, 1990; Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Jacobs, 2004; Lemon, 2007). Pennebaker (1997), a prolific researcher in the field, provides evidence of the health benefits of writing about emotional experiences. He explains that it has been linked with decreased doctor's visits, increased antibody response, and various short-term changes such as lowered heart rate. Some of his later studies show that journaling can improve sleep, pain levels and blood pressure (Pennebaker, 2004, as cited in Jacobs, 2004). Self-reports suggest that long-term writing decreases distress (Smyth, 1996, as cited by Pennebaker, 1997). Baikie and Wilhelm (2005) provide evidence from several studies that writing can improve lung and liver function, lead to fewer days in the hospital, improved mood, increased psychological well-being, decreased depression symptoms before exams, and fewer post-traumatic intrusion/ avoidance symptoms. Behavioural changes have also been found (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Pennebaker, 1997), including improved grades (Pennebaker & Francis, 1996), lowered absenteeism from work (Francis & Pennebaker, 1992), quicker re-employment after losing a job (Spera et al, 1994), and increased working memory (Klein & Boals, 2001). Pennebaker and Graybeal (2001) provide evidence that writing may improve social and linguistic behaviour (as cited in Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005).

There are other benefits attributable to the actual process of writing that should also be noted. It is inexpensive, flexible, self-initiated, portable, requires little time and

talent and can be done regardless of a person's health (DeSalvo, 1999). As a process, writing can also be done without social repercussions or judgment (Lepore & Smyth, 2002). Tolton (2005) explains that it is a way to heal emotionally, and an outlet to release distressing emotions. In sum, it is an accessible, effective medium that promotes self-exploration.

There is some discrepancy in the literature regarding whether individuals need to engage in writing about negative emotions or positive emotions, in order for the process to be beneficial. Some researchers suggest that it is important to examine the positive things that come out of a stressful event rather than focusing solely on discussing the negative event itself (King, 2002). As a whole, the body of literature seems to indicate that benefits can be achieved from both forms of exploration.

Additional populations that have benefited from writing include those less likely to write. Lumley et al. (2002) examine the benefits of written emotional disclosure with individuals who have a deficit in emotional awareness and understanding (alexithymia) and repressive personalities. They hypothesize that those individuals who evaluate their response as acceptable when it is not and do not feel that they have a perceived social context are most likely to benefit from writing. On the other hand, they feel individuals with repressive coping strategies or alexithymia may require other methods, because they lack introspection, imagination and fantasy. However, this hypothesis is in its infancy and further research should be conducted to validate the above results.

#### *How Therapeutic Writing Works*

Individuals are all internally affected by events, good or bad, which create emotions and feelings (Jacobs, 2004). "*Emotions* are states of being with a physical basis

in the body and a uniquely personal sense of meaning” (Jacobs, p. 5). For this reason, emotions need to be regulated in order maintain peace within one’s self (Jacobs; Lepore & Smyth, 2002). If emotions are not regulated individuals experience distress (Jacobs). King (2002) suggests that regulation is related to feedback loops, since individuals learn about the meaning of their emotions and their priorities, which in turn creates new life goals.

Baikie and Wilhelm (2005) explain that there are four main mechanisms that describe how writing increases health. The first is emotional catharsis, which is the release of negative feelings; however, they suggest that this theory is unlikely because research has found that writing initially increases negative affect (Smyth, as cited by Baikie & Wilhelm). Second, “confronting a trauma through talking or writing about it, acknowledging the associated emotions is thought to reduce the physiological work of inhibition, gradually lowering the overall stress on the body” (Baikie & Wilhelm, p. 342). The process of translating feelings and events into words creates cognitive integration and understanding, which reduces physical symptoms (Pennebaker, 1985). Disclosing an event can be a powerful therapeutic agent (Pennebaker, 1997). Third is “that the development of a coherent narrative helps to reorganise and structure traumatic memories, resulting in more adaptive internal schemas” (p. 341). Lastly, repeatedly exposing oneself to the event may decrease any associated negative emotions.

Lepore and Smyth (2002) assembled research by several authors that examine the emotional, cognitive and biological processes involved with writing. Lepore, Greenberg, Bruno, and Smyth (2002) explain that expressive writing influences regulatory processes such as attention, habituation and cognitive restructuring. These processes are linked with

regulatory outcomes in emotion systems, such as subjective or experiential processes, neuro-physiological or biochemical systems and behavioural or expressive systems, which they suggest affect mental and physical health. Their basic premise is that writing works by influencing other systems linked to mental and physical health.

The ways in which narratives and photography work together have also been described. Harrison (2002) suggests visual data requires further reflection and possibly resolution which narratives can provide deeper understanding of. Narratives can assist photography in resolving emotional distress by creating a connection with the event or photograph (Lemon, 2007). They allow for deeper understanding (Clough, as cited by Lemon, 2007), and “the researcher to see differently, to move between the particular and the generic, aware of what each says to enrich the other” (Lemon, p. 178). Writing preserves meaning in the images (Harrison, 2002) and allows for an opportunity to reflect on a particular event or feeling, which connects learning and meaning (Lemon).

Future research may lean toward the use of structured writing, such as workbooks (L’Abate & Kern, 2002). Although workbooks provide structure and directions for exploring individual emotions, as well as results that can be tracked empirically, they raise concerns about limiting individual exploration. Moreover, individuals may feel something is wrong with them if they are unable to explore areas in a manner that is suggested in the workbook. However, it is a starting point for individuals who lack direction in written expression of their emotions and may be a tool for deeper individual emotional exploration than may occur without direction. Pennebaker (2002) further notes the importance of the social aspect of writing as an important area for future research, that is, one’s ability to express oneself or not within a social system.

In sum, writing can elaborate on what is explored in therapy (Jacobs, 2004). Jacobs explains that time changes emotions and point of view, which writing facilitates and clarifies. As much of the above literature expresses, it allows individuals to release emotions and provides an array of benefits.

#### Summary

Relative to the current study, reflective practice, photography and writing can be seen as appropriate in a heuristic research process. In particular, a practitioner's personal process with these media can promote insight, growth and self-exploration that can impact their personal practice, benefiting both the practitioner and their clients.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The heuristic research process allows for the research process to be tailored to individual needs. For this reason I chose a heuristic research design that allowed me to experience reflective practice through the use of photography and writing. My main focus was to become reflective as a practitioner but also experience the use of photography and writing in this process so I can then better guide clients who may use these tools in their own reflective journey.

#### *Heuristic Research Design*

“The focus in a heuristic quest is on re-creation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). Although a heuristic research design is open to the variability of an individual, it still has a common process that needs to be followed, as outlined by Moustakas.

1. Formulating the question. This project addresses the question of who I am as a counsellor. Initial discussions with my supervisor drew attention to two themes: a counsellor *inside the box* (what I feel is expected of me) and a counsellor *outside the box* (who I feel I want to be as a counsellor, less restricted by societal expectations). These discussions revealed that for most of my life I have done things based on what has been expected of me, making it difficult to be the person I feel I truly am. This initial dichotomy will be the point of departure for this study.
2. Exploring and answering the question. Heuristic methods are an open-ended approach, focusing on a specific question. To explore the question, I planned to

take photographs that represent either living inside or outside the box as a counsellor on six days, three of them scheduled and the rest at random. This period is termed field experiences. The planned days were set aside, with an idea of where to take the pictures. The goal was to systematically use a journal to record thoughts, feelings, and emotions that arose as I took photographs (see Appendix B). During and after each field experience, I was to document reflections that would provide information such as what the experience was like, what questions arose, which images stood out for me, and why. After the field experiences, I was to choose 10 photographs that represent living inside the box and 10 photographs that represent living outside of the box to write about. I was to discuss why I chose each of the photographs, the thoughts and feelings that stemmed from the image and what it means to me. The pictures and writings constitute the data for this project. Given that a heuristic design is often an “emerging design”, I remain open to further data collection if necessary.

3. Synthesize and analyze the data. After taking photographs and writing about what they represent, the information is analyzed by immersing myself in the images without time constraints. Despite the deadline for completion of this project, most of my time was spent on analysis as I repeatedly reviewed the images and writings until themes and recurring thoughts emerged that provided a heightened sense of self-awareness. Further analysis may generate additional writing, since data generation and analysis can be somewhat recursive.
4. Create the research manuscript. The manuscript summarizes the research process and findings. Outlined in detail, the manuscript explains the topic and question,

reviews the literature, provides an overview of problems that arose during the process, describes the methodology used, highlights discovered themes, and offers conclusions (Moustakas, 1990). The manuscript also presents the data and concludes with a “creative synthesis” (Moustakas, p. 31), summary, and sections on implications and outcomes.

After immersing myself in this project, the process was slightly amended. In some ways the process related to exploring staying inside the box had to occur alongside moving outside the box towards what felt authentically needed. Initially, I had difficulties starting because I felt my focus was restricted to the question. It was as if I was stifled; I did not want to commit to an image representing living inside or outside the box. I wondered if I should stage items to represent my feelings of living inside or outside the box and then decided not to do this for fear that it would stifle my creativity. In and of itself, this decision allowed me to be outside the box, to be open to whatever I was drawn to instead of staging what I thought living inside and outside the box would look like. For this reason I chose to go out and capture whatever images I was drawn to and then select from among those images those representing living inside and outside the box for me. I also found it somewhat limiting to tell myself I had to take pictures on certain days and in certain locations. The project was beginning to parallel the explorations. Again, I allowed myself to live outside the box and take images when I felt inspired. Two photo sessions were planned, while the rest were spur of the moment sessions that elicited 13 field experiences in total. I did not limit the number of pictures taken: in some cases no more than two photos were taken, while in others I took as many as 80, averaging 32 photos per field experience. Over the course of the project a total of 606 images were taken over

a nine-month period, mostly between May and October. I selected 210 of the images, eliminating many that were duplicates and some that were excessively blurry. These were examined in greater detail. The majority of the field experiences were followed up with journal entries that explored thoughts and feelings. Several field experiences occurred in the same day at different locations. To document the whole process and some questions that arose, a few journal entries were written without a field experience.

After completing the field experiences I looked at the images to decide which represented living inside and outside of the box. The process resulted in four piles of photographs (living inside the box, living outside the box, representations of a journey and images that did not stand out). The themes were not planned and emerged during the process. I then took each image and wrote down one to two words that stood out for each photo (again unplanned), and which I associated with my understanding of living inside and outside of the box. Then I read my journal entries and highlighted words that stood out for me. The words associated with the photographs and journal entries were placed into three categories (living inside the box, living outside the box and words that could be associated with both experiences). Examination of both the images and the words resulted in a final journal entry that also emerged as my creative synthesis. To be sure that this entry was more than just a journal entry, I continued to ruminate on the words and pictures for a few days after writing. The same recurring theme arose: *no labels*. I found myself unable to sort the images into piles, which had initially come so easily, and realized it was because the true purpose of this process was to teach me that labels restrict my growth as an individual and as a counsellor.

Overall the research process was an experience, not a destination. It was a process that unfolded, and the design guided rather than restricted my experiences. What resulted from the process allowed me to live outside the box and recognize that a rigid structure is not necessary to have an impact or demonstrate results. I also realized that what I associated with living inside or outside the box could sometimes be seen in either category. I have chosen to comment further on the personal encounter with the research experience hopefully offering a deeper understanding of the flow between the process and the stages of a heuristic study.

### *Reflections on the Self-Inquiry Process with Moustakas' Stages*

The four step process previously described that leads to a manuscript reflects six phases, as outlined by Moustakas (1990): “initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (p. 27). The purpose of this chapter is to share the author’s personal experience of the process.

#### *Initial Engagement*

Initial engagement includes recognizing a topic within oneself that engenders interest or a yearning to discover more (Moustakas, 1990). From a young age I chose journaling as a means of expressing emotion and myself. All psychology undergraduate students were encouraged to explore who we were. The rationale being that, to be an effective counsellor, we would need to know what my beliefs and biases were to ethically counsel other individuals. This allowed me to learn about my beliefs, strengths and limitations by reflecting on myself. At this time most of my explorations were done through writing a journal and inspirational poems. After graduating I purchased my first

single-lens reflex (SLR) camera, which became an extension of myself. I used it to express myself, release emotion and explore the world around me. I still use this process today, which was a factor in selecting this project.

### *Immersion*

Immersion is the process in which the researcher lives the question they are exploring (Moustakas, 1990). Everything in their life that is associated with the question is part of the data being collected (Moustakas). For me, the process included thinking about it so much that I sometimes felt stifled by focusing only on the question. I questioned my question, and how to take pictures to represent living inside and outside the box. For this reason I started to document thoughts associated with those feelings by writing them down. I also recognized that in the process of wanting to express living inside and outside of the box I was placing myself in a box through my own expectations and by putting pressure on myself. As noted earlier, the initial question arose from discussions with my supervisor and past reflective practices, which acknowledged the importance of being an ethical counsellor. The process was difficult for me to engage in until I allowed myself to be open to a different process that unleashed my creativity.

### *Incubation*

Incubation is a unique, and unconscious process that allows the individual to decrease their conscious attention on the question at hand, while unconsciously continuing the search (Moustakas, 1990). For me the incubation period was longer than anticipated. Other responsibilities in my life seemingly overshadowed the reflective process. During this period I felt as though nothing was being accomplished on this project, however in retrospect it allowed me to reflect on my images in other ways. I

started to use photography in my work and encouraged others use it as a means to express and explore themselves. It was amazing to see other people's growth in this process, which also encouraged me to reflect on my own images. In most cases I just took the images, remembered which ones stood out for me that day and saved them on my hard drive. It was not until I printed my images that illumination occurred. Of the 210 examined images, I printed the 63 that most stood out for even further analysis.

### *Illumination*

Illumination is about bringing the unconscious process to the conscious (Moustakas, 1990). It allows individuals to reflect on their processes and what they learned. For me, this began in my workplace, followed by printing my images. The digital versus hard copy was helpful in creating inner awareness of what my unconscious was revealing. I started to sort similar images into piles that seemed to create themes and intuitively noted ideas and words expressed by the images. This process felt effortless. The piles created were *inside the box*, *outside the box*, *journey* and pictures that did not stand out for me.

The following images give the reader a sense of those chosen for each section.



*Figure 1.* Inside the Box: Silenced, Cristina Dueck, 2009.



*Figure 2.* Inside the Box: Inner Soul, Cristina Dueck, 2009.



*Figure 3.* Inside the Box: Trampled, Cristina Dueck, 2009.



*Figure 4.* Inside the Box: Eaten, Cristina Dueck, 2009.



*Figure 5. Inside the Box: Smothered, Cristina Dueck, 2009.*



*Figure 6. Outside the Box: Growth, Cristina Dueck, 2009.*



*Figure 7. Outside the Box: In the Shadows, Cristina Dueck, 2009.*



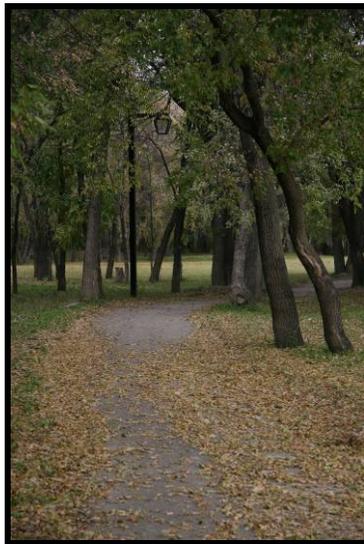
*Figure 8. Outside the Box: Calm, Cristina Dueck, 2009.*



*Figure 9. Outside the Box: Gleam, Cristina Dueck, 2009.*



*Figure 10.* Outside the Box: Sole, Cristina Dueck, 2009.



*Figure 11.* Journey: Winding Path, Cristina Dueck, 2009.



*Figure 12.* Journey: The Road Less Taken, Cristina Dueck, 2009.



*Figure 13.* Journey: Mysterious, Cristina Dueck, 2009.

### *Explication*

Explication is a continued process of illumination in which an individual examines new information that has been brought to life in more depth (Moustakas, 1990). To make my findings more explicit, I noted words in my writing that stood out for me during this process and highlighted them in my journal. The words in Figure 14 were chosen based on my images and writing. Initially, I did not give much thought to the

words because I was focused on themes that emerged. They were words that came to mind when examining an image (a type of free association). The words that went into the chart emerged in both the images and writing. I was interested to learn that some of the words and images that I associate with living inside or outside of the box sometimes overlapped. I found that my negative emotion of being placed in a box was replaced by recognizing the benefits of living inside the box that were absent from living outside the box. I also noted that living outside the box could include struggles that I had not recognized at the beginning of this project. The most interesting revelation was that several words on the list were contradictory. This overall examination resulted in Table 1; the numbers in parentheses indicate how many times each word emerged during the examination.

Table 1

## Word Comparisons: Living Inside and Outside the Box

Inside the Box	Both	Outside the Box
Pressure (4)	Insecure (3)	Rebirth (1)
Constrained (4)	Shadow (3)	Re-growth (1)
Automatic (1)	Comfort (2)	Growing (2)
Unsatisfied (3)	Patience (2)	Journey (2)
Dissonance (1)	Understanding (2)	Re-bloom (1)
Superficial (1)	Guarded (2)	Distractions (1)
Closed (2)		Peace (4)
Rushed (3)		Ease (1)
		Unguided (1)
		Alive (1)
		Manual Mode (1)
		Cherish (1)

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Serenity (1)

Unique (1)

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Without going into further detail, this project was a very real, raw and illuminating process that reveals a unique experience. I did not anticipate how difficult sharing it in writing would be. It is a revealing process that allows my thoughts to be scrutinized, but nevertheless created inner growth.

## Chapter 4: Creative Synthesis and Discussion

The final stage in the heuristic process described by Moustakas (1990) is creative synthesis, which allows the author's overall experience to be illuminated in a creative piece chosen by the individual. For me this process occurred in a final journal entry, which was further expressed by an image I took after the illumination and explication stages. This chapter examines my creative synthesis and discusses the process.

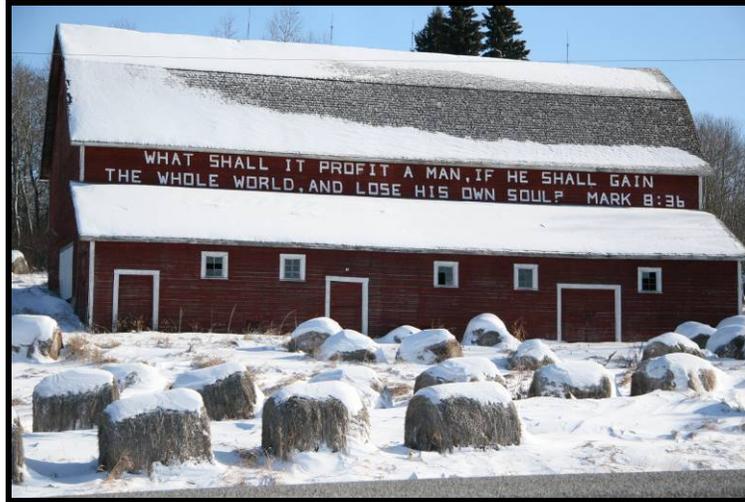
### *Creative Synthesis*

The creative synthesis marks the journey I took during this process and although it highlights my experience, it cannot fully be expressed. Only the individual who has experienced the process can understand the journey (Caines, 2008), which continues in my experience. As Caines noted, the creative synthesis is unknown at the start of project and remained unknown to me until I examined the images and words that emerged; a clear picture or creative process that sums up my experience.

It was interesting to note that my journey resembled Caines' (2008) project, in that it led me back to Naomi Klein's book *No Logo* (2000), which I had previously read. Caines' synthesis had her reflect on a book she read. The nature of the book does not represent my journey, but the title highlighted a realization and helped me recognize that to be a healthy, happy individual and counsellor, I need to recognize and strip away labels myself or others may have applied to me. It inspired a new way of living and being. Though many of the thoughts and ideas were already within me, they needed to be discovered or rediscovered.

The image below is a photograph I took during the time frame I was writing the end of this manuscript. It reinforces the journey I took because it suggests that individuals

need to be themselves. I also felt it was symbolic because I had wanted to photograph this barn with its inscription at the beginning of the project, but did not make the time to capture it. After taking the image, I felt the process was complete.



*Figure 14.* Chosen Path, Cristina Dueck, 2010.

My final journal entry (February 2, 2010) sums up my experience and thus represents my creative synthesis:

How to love oneself...

RECOGNIZE that there isn't a need to be perfect...no one is.

HONOR yourself...take care of your body and mind, you are worth it!

REMEMBER there are pros and cons to everything...believe in the best about yourself and others, karma will come back to you.

LISTEN to your thoughts and feelings, recognize them, allow them to come without judgment. All thoughts and feelings are OK. It is our reaction to those thoughts that may need redirection.

RESPECT others, their beliefs and feelings, listening to them may make you grow...it is up to you whether you feel changes need to be made after that.

LISTEN to your heart, it whispers the truth everyday.

NOTICE the uniqueness and the good in everyone and everything, the energy that goes into judging others and our self take years off our lives.

And most of all be YOURSELF, unique qualities are what makes us who we are.

### *Discussion*

#### *Process Review*

The initial purpose of this project was to explore who I am as a counsellor. Being reflective in nature the project allowed me to illuminate my beliefs and how they impact my work as a counsellor and personal life. I hoped not only to benefit from the process, but that it would also encourage other counsellors to reflect on their beliefs, to experience the process so that they may also be able to use photography and therapeutic writing in therapy, personally or professionally.

The project was initiated by reviewing literature on arts-based strategies such as therapeutic writing and photography. The numerous gains relative to arts-based strategies suggested potential benefits to a variety of individuals. The review was followed by a self-inquiry process, which culminated almost naturally in a creative synthesis. A heuristic research approach guided this process was that engendered awareness of my inner stresses through taking images and writing about my thoughts and feelings. This process was ultimately a means of expressing and addressing my emotions and beliefs, which may impact my work as a counsellor and has impacted my personal life.

#### *Strengths and Limitations*

Strengths and limitations are inherent in any research design and this is also true for a heuristic method. This heuristic research process was deeply personal and unique

and resulted in “growing self-awareness and self-knowledge” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). Moustakas has created a process that allows the researcher to both experience the process and analyze the results.

One of the strengths of a heuristic design is its individualization. It allows the researcher to adapt the process when needed, further enabling a natural process to occur without stifling creativity but still guiding the researcher. Experiencing the process also allowed me to reflect and grow, not only as an individual but also as a future therapist who will use therapeutic writing and photography professionally. Other strengths of art-based research have been outlined by Leavy (2009), such as how “evocative” and “captivating” (p. 12) it is, how it expresses “emotional aspects of social life” (p. 13), gives voice to a variety of perspectives, increases dialogue, reaches a wider audience, and evokes multiple meanings and growth.

However, the above may also be considered a limitation. The flexibility and reflexive nature of the process may create uneasiness and uncertainty since it cannot be fully dictated until the process is completed. Even then, individuals may not fully understand the experience. Therefore, only someone who has experienced the process can evaluate such a project and because it is reflexive, the time it takes varies. In other words, the value for the person undertaking the project cannot be fully determined by external criteria. The sharing constitutes an offering with the assumption that sometimes in the particular, there is the universal. Furthermore, it could be argued that the intense personal nature of the process makes it difficult to avoid bias. Despite these limitations, I feel that “art-based practices produce partial situated and contextual truths” (Leavy, 2009, p. 15-16).

I feel privileged to have experienced the process and the many ways in which I have grown is exhilarating. I also have a newfound passion for alternative research methodologies.

### *The Future*

Using photography, therapeutic writing and heuristic processes has given rise to further inquiries on their use within counselling and research. Some questions have already been addressed in research, though only in a limited way; further research is needed. Many of these questions are similar to those of Caines (2008), and include:

1. How can this process benefit my clients?
2. What individuals would benefit the most from this process?
3. What individuals would not benefit from this process?
4. What cultural considerations should be taken into account during this process?
5. What other ethical considerations should be examined?
6. How could my colleagues and others benefit from this process?
7. How could I further benefit from continuing engagement in this process?
8. Would there be similarities with other projects by counselling psychology students?
9. How can I apply this research in the work I do with children?

Research is a process by which individuals explore questions that create others (Caines, 2008). Without questions we do not grow professionally or personally.

### Conclusion

This intensely intimate project has been a creative, life-changing process that has been guided by Moustakas' (1990) heuristic process and has highlighted how self-

reflection can stimulate exploration of individual beliefs, ideas and struggles. Similarly, the creative process allows individuals to explore themselves in unique ways, which fosters individual growth. Given my own experience, I believe that this can be a building process for growth, for those willing to embrace the experience.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Key Terms

*Arts-based research practices*: “A set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (Leavy, 2009, p. 2).

*Arts-based methods*: “[These] draw on literary writing, music, performance, dance, visual art, film, and other mediums” (Leavy, 2009, p. 3).

*Journaling*: For the purposes of this assignment journaling is documentation of personal writing.

*Photographic art*: The combination of photography and artwork (Fryrear et al., 1992).

*Phototherapy*: The use of photography as a counselling technique, used in a therapeutic setting with a trained counsellor (Milford et al., 1983; Stewart, 1979; Weiser, 1993, 2002).

*Reflective practice*: A reflexive process in which individuals stand back from their value systems and habitual process to understand how a scenario has affected them (Bolton, 2005).

*Self-awareness*: Individual awareness of thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

*Self-reflection*: “Reflection, or more explicitly *self-reflection*, is a process of exploring and evaluating our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. This exploration and evaluation can lead to a cycle of self-regulation or to the ability to use feedback and monitor progress,” (Bar-On, 2007, p. 225).

*Therapeutic photography*: Using photo-based activities, which is initiated by the patient or client and is not followed up with formal therapy such as a counsellor guiding the process (Weiser, 2009).

*Therapeutic writing*: “A more global term used throughout the literature to describe any writing exercise that is undertaken to support therapeutic work” (Kerner & Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 333).

## Appendix B: Journal Entries

## Journal Entry 1

May 3, 2009

I set the project start date as May 1 and it is already May 3. I have not started yet, part of me is stressed and worried about starting and feeling as though I am behind. Isn't it funny that although I chose the start date for this project I feel PRESSURE to do it right, in a certain way and CONTRAINED by time lines. I am excited about the project because it involves my passion for photography and my belief in self reflection as a healing tool. I feel unsure where to begin even though I have an outline. I wonder if I should "set up" or orchestrate images that reveal my pressures for living inside or outside the box. I haven't been compelled to take images due to the gloomy weather. Hopefully soon.

## Journal Entry 2

May 4, 2009

I feel slightly more on track, I have researched articles but know it isn't nearly enough. I feel pressure in reading them all.

## Journal Entry 3

May 7, 2009

As I did yard work with my daughter I noticed tulips coming up. I noted to myself that I need to take a picture of their growth before they bloom. When my daughter was asleep I went outside to take pictures of it. I haven't taken the images off my camera yet but I felt the images didn't capture what I had hoped. I wanted the image to represent rebirth/

growth “living outside the box”, growing free and being myself. I felt disappointed. The images felt too dull to express rebirth/growth.

#### Journal Entry 4

May 11, 2009

For the past two mornings I woke up and noticed the trees shadows in my front yard. Admiring it, I wanted to capture it but knew my little one might get into trouble while I took the opportunity to take the image. This morning I decided that it really wouldn't take me too long to capture what I wanted. I started taking the trees picture. I wasn't satisfied with most of them as I wished the reflection wasn't on something other than pavement which resembles city living... I prefer out of town living. The longer I took pictures the more restless my daughter was so I decided to walk her onto the lawn. As I did this I noticed the beautiful shadow the two of us made. I was reminded how I am looked up to by her and how I sometimes feel I am trying to “catch up” or represent what others feel I should be doing. It reminded me how I have the opportunity to instil different values in my daughter so that she doesn't forget to be herself. This means accepting clients as themselves as well...and maybe myself. Not feeling pressured to be a certain counsellor for clients and allowing clients to be their true selves. Not to judge them, be open to their thoughts and understand them without bias. I too have hidden behind masks and at first when taking these images I was trying to take myself out of the photograph.....\*interesting\*

## Journal Entry 5

May 18, 2009

Today my family and I took a scenic drive. I went with hopes of asking my husband to stop the car to take pictures for my project. Although there was evidence that summer was trying to emerge I had difficulties seeing something I wanted to take a picture of to represent me as a counsellor. This left me feeling dissonance. I want to do my project well but I also want to take images that are meaningful to me. I found myself saying this experience is supposed to be a journey not a destination. I told myself to let go, ignore time lines and let this be “my” journey without expectations. So what if I only took a few images and who cares if none of them are good.

I initially went into this project thinking of images I could take to represent me living inside and outside the box but felt it was too superficial like many things in my life... expectations.

The only thing in my life that I currently feel is “real” is my role as a mother and even with this I wonder if I am doing things “right”. This has left me to ponder my current roles in life...mother, wife, counsellor and how I might change them to be more authentic, the “true me” not a fake. The only time I felt very little stress and very little pressure was when I was on maternity leave with my daughter. Having said this I still had the thought “am I doing this right?” because nurses gave mixed feedback when my daughter was first born and I was learning how to breastfeed but I gave it very little weight...Easing my life.

The image that stands out from today is the stop sign. It stands out for a few reasons:

- 1) It is grey- not the typical red color

2) There are bullet holes in the sign- which to me represents going against norms.

No I will not stop being myself! It is being who I am that truly makes me happy but it is up to me to be okay with who I am instead of worrying what others will think of me. In order to love others, I must first love myself.

### Journal Entry 6

May 29, 2009

For weeks now I have been admiring the new tulips in the yard which randomly planted themselves. Have you ever really stopped to look at tulips? In the morning they remain closed and as the day emerges they re-bloom. Everyday I enjoy this about tulips, it reminds me of myself. I guard my inner self only showing it when I feel the environment is safe enough. I feel that I may be too open with people at times and that people are uncomfortable about this about me. I feel judged for it but it is who I am ..open, honest, unrestricted in most cases. How nice it would be if people could be as understanding as your most precious confident. That would be a world where individuals worked together and were not judged. A world with understanding instead of pure judgement.

I chose to take a picture of the tulips closed. Although I again did not feel I captured the beauty. A reoccurring theme for me it seems. I wonder what my inner self is trying to tell me. I know I am insecure but I feel the message is deeper than this, maybe more images will explain this.

Feeling rushed and not perfect.

## Journal Entry 7

June 7, 2009

I have been reflecting on last weekends photos...or lack of, the difficulties of taking images. It is funny how I would see something and think maybe I should take a picture of that, then I didn't take the picture and regretted it. When you go back to find the same image I couldn't find it. The image is truly a moment in time.

## Journal Entry 8

June 14, 2009

Today I took pictures at a beach. I am continuously intrigued by shadows. There is something about their reflection that I just can't quite explain. I like the curves of the branches, the look of an exotic orchid tree.

I felt at peace taking pictures today. Comfort. A feeling I wish that was constant. When I physically take the pictures I feel at ease. I think of nature and how it exists and how its beauty is received by the viewer. I wish I felt at ease with just being myself. No expectations. No need to put on a show. Just be accepted for who I am. Initially I felt society placed the expectations-guidelines. Now I feel it is only myself who places these expectations on myself. I am an adult who can create my own rules to a certain extent. I just need to do it.

What's stopping me? The feeling that I need to finish what I started. I hope then my focus will be on being with the ones I love and loving life.

I took a picture of myself today with my backpack on. A traveller of sorts. Going on a journey- hopefully one that is soon unguided... to a certain extent.

## Journal Entry 9

June 20, 2009

Feelings: hot, sweating, itchy, alive, growth, like I am dinner.

Thoughts: life is all around us but no one stops to notice the little things

- small things are taken for granted
- life's is about getting dirty

Pictures that stand out- droplets on leaves

- leaf in the bike trail
- cocoon

\* I am always left with a feeling that I am unable to capture the real beauty of nature.

Why?

- 1) Haven't found my inner beauty- or worry about others not recognizing it.
- 2) I don't think others see my true beauty but only recognize faults

The viewfinder doesn't always show the true beauty of the image in real life. Why is that? The camera compensates for overall light rather than unique lighting. Not until we put it in manual mode can we truly try to understand or capture the real image. Even then it takes a lot for the photographer to capture/a lot of time and patience to truly understand, as in real life.

## Journal Entry 10

June 20, 2009

Thoughts: I feel I am beginning to accept myself but hide sometimes. Is it because there isn't pure acceptance or because beauty needs to be found? Is it something we need to look for?

- I appreciate the artists work, their expressions. You can almost feel their emotions/ the story they are trying to tell. I appreciate them sharing their story. It is as if they want to be heard but can't express it in words like photographs/ like myself. I am not articulate or perfect. Grammar, sentence structure isn't as important to me but my story is. The way I express myself is a part of that story. A puzzle needing to be put together.

## Journal Entry 11

June 29, 2009

Feelings: peace, serenity, I want to stay here forever

Thoughts: I wish I could feel this carefree all the time. No distractions, cherishing nature and loved ones. No stress- should, oughts or musts. Everything counts/beautiful even the mosquitoes!

Part of my feelings are associated with my family being with me.

## Journal Entry 12

July 12, 2009

Picture that stood out: Tall trees looking up

Feelings: peace, serenity, awe with mother nature, oneness, wonderment

Thoughts: how can people miss such beauty, not admire it? It is unique, serene. It takes understanding. A willingness to go outside ones comfort zone.

Why do I tend to let things get me down? I search for the right thing to photograph yet I argue that beauty is in front of us at all times. We just have to stop and see it. I also worry or feel judged by others. Ironic? Do I assume others do what I do or am I criticizing others for what I do? Maybe I need to understand my own weaknesses to become the best person I can be and if I am okay with me that is all that matters. Ahh. How do I be ok with me? STUMPED

\*\*\* How do I become OK with who I AM? \*\*\*

Acceptance?

It doesn't mean that a person is perfect but yet they are okay with their flaws and still may work on improving them.

Do I need boundaries?

Am I not ok with me because I know what I am doing is wrong sometimes?

Note: There were some field experiences between August and October that did not prompt written reflection, sometimes due to the circumstances of the shoot and sometimes due to my unwillingness to force a reflection (e.g., the photograph seemed somehow to stand alone). The challenge was whether to conform to the prescription laid out or be *outside the box*. In retrospect, journaling more consistently and intentionally may have elicited further growth and should be considered for any future project.

## Journal Entry 13

February 2, 2010

After looking through all of the images I have taken I was compelled to organize them into separate groups. These same groups emerged when re-reading my journal entries. Reflection on the words, images and the experience itself resulted in the following:

How to love oneself....

RECOGNIZE that there isn't a need to be perfect...no one is.

HONOR yourself.....take care of your body and mind, you are worth it!

REMEMBER there are pros and cons to everything...believe in the best about yourself and others, karma will come back to you.

LISTEN to your thoughts and feelings, recognize them, allow them to come without judgment. All thoughts and feelings are OK. It is our reaction to those thoughts that may need redirection.

RESPECT others, their beliefs and feelings, listening to them may make you grow...it is up to you whether you feel changes need to be made after that.

LISTEN to your heart, it whispers the truth everyday.

NOTICE the uniqueness and the good in everyone and everything, the energy that goes into judging others and our self take years off our lives.

And most of all be YOURSELF, unique qualities are what makes us who we are.

Loving oneself allows us to recognize, change or accept our way of seeing life. It isn't to criticize oneself but recognize oneself. Understanding myself is what allows me to grow and blossom around others and spread encouragement. To judge, when one is not

perfect, is unproductive to both myself and to the person being judged. Good cannot come from it. Mindfulness and the ability to live in the here in now is what guides me professionally. I think it is fair to say that why I have chosen these strategies in my practice was not as clear as it now is. I have learned that what I encourage in my practice, needs to be brought home with me more. I need to practice what I ask of others to do in their lives. Have understanding, forgiveness and give recognition to who they are, for what they are and build upon it rather than condemning oneself.

Living inside or outside of the box seems in a sense not to have merit anymore because it places labels on experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Labels that are defined by what I believe. Beliefs can change and I believe that mine have throughout this process. What I was labelling as inside the box is expectations I felt that others placed on me but really they were labels I placed on myself. Expectations can be influenced by other events but ultimately how I interpret or place them upon myself is what creates the should, oughts and musts in my life. I have learned that I can place expectations on myself, this keeps me productive, while being flexible with how the process unfolds. Living inside the box gives structure and guidance and living outside the box allows changes to occur. The title *No Logo*, a popular book written by Naomi Klein (2000), sums the experience that this project has brought to light. Although we are taught through education, that as counsellors we need to be unbiased with clients, I have now learned that I need to be unbiased with myself. I need to remove labels from my experiences in life. An experience is simply that an experience. Reflecting on experiences helps me to grow but labelling them can be counterproductive. It takes away from reflecting on what I can do NOW to work towards the person I want to be. Life is about living, not about

labelling, and worrying about what has been done. It can not be changed. The change occurs with what one does with the reflection in the present moment.

The reflection that I experienced when looking at the words or “labels” I gave to living inside and outside the box highlighted that pros and cons can be given to both beliefs that I had. This acknowledges further that labelling process is rigid and unproductive. Being open to possibilities, and understanding different ways of seeing things allows me to become a stronger individual, mother, wife, sister, daughter, co-worker and counsellor. NO LABELS.