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FINDING MY VOICE: SURVIVING CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

by

DIANE LAFRANCE

(Under the Direction of Kent Rittschof)

ABSTRACT

This autobiographical study reflects experiences of surviving child sexual abuse and my journey through curriculum studies as a route to finding power through my voices. Using currere as a lead theory to frame this work, this study reveals a first-person account of sexual abuse to detail my development to empowerment and how I learned to advocate for myself and other childhood victims. Within this work, the method of currere, psychoanalytic theory, Focusing, hypnosis, and healing through writing are discussed as processes for increasing self-understanding.

INDEX WORDS: Curriculum studies, Autobiography, Currere, Psychoanalysis, Hypnosis, Focusing, Child sexual abuse, Voice, Trauma, Empowerment, Victim, Survivor

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This is my autobiography. Certainly, in one work, it would be impossible to discuss entire complexity of my life. Therefore, I've decided to focus on one event and how this impacted my psyche, my relationships, and my actions in the past, present and future. This event was the sexual abuse that I experienced as a child at the hands of my grandfather. To establish some background, I am currently a doctoral student studying Curriculum Studies. Therefore, the framework and methodology that I utilize is influenced by scholars within this field. My work will also connect with research from other fields that are associated with and utilized by curriculum scholars. Writing this paper is part of the process I have chosen for self-reflection and psychological healing and reflects my thoughts as I write. It is not a finished work in the sense that it will provide complete closure or definitive solutions or answers, just as I am not a finished work and will continuously evolve in my understanding of myself. You will note internal conflict and uncertainty along with nuggets of wisdom and revelation throughout this dissertation.

This dissertation is an autobiographical inquiry into child sexual abuse and how I found my voice as a survivor of sexual abuse. As I began this, I was a student engaged in reading and reflecting on the contributions of many scholars that preceded me. Essentially, this work looks back at the work of Freud and people such as Borne, Groddeck, Lichtenberg, Goethe, and Schiller who influenced his thoughts on the unconscious, bringing the unconscious to consciousness, the Id, and free association (Britzman, 2010, Morris, 2016a, Breger, 2000, Gay, 1998). Freud built his theory on the work of others and integrated these concepts into his thought processes and writings about psychoanalysis. As such my work relies on this foundational work.

Over time Klein (1948/1993), the mother of object relations theory, and Anna Freud (1992) became two of the first psychoanalysts to work with children. Britzman (2012) points out that Klein's work focused on child fantasy while Freud was interested in the external reality and the real world. Later, Winnicott (1953) would develop this theory believing that children had problems because the mother or the environment caused them. The connections between childhood mistreatment and adulthood are important to my work. However, I am also an educator and am concerned with the influence that my formal and informal educational experiences have had on me and that I have had on others. This is where my interest in the connections between psychoanalysis and education evolve from. Another scholar who has examined the connections between education and psychoanalysis is Britzman (2009, 2011, 2012). This work often explored how formalized education is often focused on standardizing and normalizing people, while psychoanalysis focuses on emotions and memories. However, In *Disavowed Knowledge: Psychoanalysis, Education, and Teaching*, Taubman (2012) notes that psychoanalysis has very little influence in the field of education outside of curriculum theory. He posits that this is the case because psychoanalytic knowledge is too difficult to manage emotionally. It is my position that this difficult work is necessary. Teachers must be able to understand their psyche and their motivations if they are to effectively teacher others.

Educationist and psychoanalysts Klein, Freud, and Britzman built the bridge between psychoanalysis and curriculum studies today. Pinar (2010) describes what it means to be a curriculum scholar. He suggests "what we curriculum studies scholars have in common is not the present but the past" (p. 528). Curriculum scholars owe a debt of

gratitude to those who challenged the status quo (Morris, 2016a). Curriculum Theorists that utilize psychoanalysis in their work today include Pinar (1981, 1994, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012); Vasey (1998); Todd (2012); Phelan (2015); Pitt (2003); Block (1997, 2007, 2009); Taubman (2012); Boldt and. Salvio (2006); Grumet (1988, 1991, 2015b); Silin (2003); Doll (1982, 1995, 2000, 2008, 2011); and Morris (2001, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2015, 2016a, 2016b). This is the place that I find myself, among curriculum theorists that utilize psychoanalysis to better understand the unconscious in specific contexts. I will draw upon their work along with the work of Balint (1992), Bollas (1987, 1989, 1995, 1999), Eigen (1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2001, 2005), Grotstein (2000), Winnicott (1986, 2005), and Laplanche (1999) for my theoretical framework.

My methodology is autobiography and *currere*. Here I draw upon Pinar (1978, 1981, 1994, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2012); Grumet (1988, 2015a, 2015c); Morris (2001, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2016a); A. Miller (1981, 1984, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012). The method of *currere* is a way to examine the past, present, and future and the links between them. While there are four defined steps; the regressive, the progressive, analytical, and synthetical, these steps are not linear. Rather, I go back and forth between the past and present, analyzing and synthesizing my understanding of myself. New revelations about my present actions bring up new memories of the past and conversely, memories from the past bring forth new revelations about the present. As you will see in this dissertation, this a circular process. I discuss psychoanalysis, autobiography, and *currere* in detail in Chapter 1.

As I began developing my dissertation, the purpose for writing it was threefold. First and foremost, my purpose was to find my voice and confront my past trauma. To

confront this past trauma, I explored how my lived experience shaped my relationships with others and my internal decision-making process. Recognizing the importance of childhood trauma may further inform educators on how trauma is revealed and how these experiences force an individual to see and act in the world. Therefore, my second purpose for telling my secret was to encourage teachers and teacher educators to recognize the importance of lived experiences. My final purpose was to add to the body of research in the curriculum studies field on trauma, sexual abuse, and the mistreatment of children. After completing this written work, I look at these purposes again.

The process of identifying and utilizing tools for self-reflection and self-understanding is the important outcome of this journey. Indeed, the memories will never leave, but the tools for confronting them and mediating their control over my life remain. I continue to confront my past trauma and have a voice that I did not have before I began this journey. Previously, I felt being silent was the only solution. What I found is that silence leads to discontent and inner turmoil. Finding a voice has lessened the burden. It has given me the freedom to express myself and to be heard in a way that I had not been able to before. Confronting the trauma has taken away some of the power that it had over me. As I finished this dissertation, I discovered that the process I have used to find my voice and face my trauma is more important as the final product. I also discovered that words are symbols of psychic life and give clues to deeper meaning (Morris, 2016b). What you will read in this dissertation is how I utilized psychoanalytic theory, focusing, hypnosis, the method of currere, restorying, and writing in this autobiography to give meaning to my words and thoughts. As for the second purpose, only time will tell if I have an impact on teachers. However, I recognize that the impact that teachers have is

exponential and unmeasurable. Therefore, if one teacher is touched by my work and is impacted positively, I will feel successful in this area. In relation to the final purpose, I believe that this work does add to the body of work on curriculum studies. Bringing this first-person perspective to the subject of child abuse will bring new clarity to this topic and unveil the secret so many try to hide. This paper addresses the limited knowledge and understanding of child abuse by adding and promoting new literature in this area of research. This work consists of five chapters. The structure is an alternative dissertation method to explore a psych-social concern.

My Niche in Curriculum Studies

As a field, curriculum studies scholars are concerned with issues of equity, access, and voice and acknowledges a broad view of curriculum. Within the field of curriculum studies, my philosophy aligns with the field as it was reconceptualized. This falls firmly within the field of curriculum studies and follows the line of thinking established by Carrere which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 1. While many approaches exist within the stream of autobiographical theory and practice, feminist autobiography, and understanding teachers autobiographically, my perspective is unique since I examine the impact of child sexual abuse on the subject, me. Learning the stories of curriculum scholars has allowed me the opportunity to explore my inner self in a way I had not considered before. Within the field of curriculum studies, scholars have written about trauma, sexual abuse, mistreatment of children, rape, and forgiveness. My work on child sexual abuse will build on the work in each of these areas.

At times in my life, I felt I had no awareness of myself, no stories I wish to have told. For most of my life memories from my past have remained locked in my

unconscious. Grumet (2015b) suggests that people must have a deep understanding of ourselves before we can understand anything externally. As it relates to currere, phenomenology's reflective procedures seek to find what is deep within. Understanding lived experiences is the key to understanding a person. Why is this the essential question? Why do I agree with some people and disagree with others? What is the foundation of my belief system? How has my past influenced my present beliefs? These are the type of questions that guide my study.

I am most interested in autobiography and using currere. The best we can do is study the past to better understand the future as they are both inextricably linked. Is this not, in fact, the method of currere? Furthermore, how do we know what to do with others if we do not know what to make of ourselves? Using currere to explore myself is an interesting task that I must accomplish. While I can easily look back upon my life's happy times, can I face the experiences and emotions that I have pushed into my unconscious? Can I face those difficult emotions that shape every part of my life today? How can I teach with an "ill body" as Morris points out (Morris, 2008, p. x)? How can I teach with a terminal illness of my mother? How can I reconcile my past and my present?

For most of my life my unconscious has contained the harsh memories from my past. I recall Doll's (2000) words, "To have no stories, to lack memory, to have a mouth but no words is to keep oneself in a constant state of hunger" (p. xvii). I now have a story that I must tell. My past is my present. According to Pinar (1994), "Only through regression can one live through past pain, discern, as if it were embedded in one's very musculature, how it infiltrates the present" (p. 57).

I also recognize that a disparity exists between the need for psychological services by victims of trauma and the availability of services. Society is beginning to understand the adverse psychological impact of traumatic events; however, there continues to be a lack of adequate resources to support people with these experiences. While this is a broad phenomenon, the impact becomes more pronounced when we consider specific types of trauma such as sexual abuse. Ultimately, my goal is to open lines of thought and discourse on how we can create a context that affirms, validates, and protects victims of trauma, especially those who are disempowered, so that they might live more fruitful lives and blossom into the person they were born to be before the trauma. Undoubtedly, all people who have faced child sexual abuse deserve this environment.

Advancing the field.

Morris (2016a) states that writing an autobiography is a daunting task that opens one up to vulnerabilities. It is also an ethical act because telling the story helps others who suffer. While my work in curriculum studies aligns with autobiographical discourse, my first-person account of child sexual abuse will contribute to advancement of the field by building on the work on trauma, rape, sexual abuse, and mistreatment of children in the curriculum studies field. Specifically, I will address the limited attention to child sexual abuse in curriculum studies by adding and promoting new literature in this area and by providing a model for educators seeking to find their voice and confront trauma. In addition, this work will provide steps educators can take if they have been abused or if they are working with children that have been abused. While there is much information about child sexual abuse, the abused individual rarely narrates his or her own account.

Examples include *Provocations: Sylvia Ashton-Warner and Excitability in Education* by Robertson and McConaghy (2006) and *Anne Sexton: Teacher of Weird Abundance* by Salvio (2012). Each of these works discusses teachers that were sexually abused. In my study, the trauma of child sexual abuse will be discussed through the eyes of someone who has lived through the torment.

Having been the victim of child sexual abuse and an educator for more than 20 years, I feel uniquely qualified to enter the dialogue on this topic. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that between one in five and one in seven females are sexually abused in the United States by the time they are age 18 (Breiding et al., 2014). Unfortunately, it appears that these statistics are significantly lower than the actual number of victims because this type of abuse often goes unreported. Frequently, this is because the abuser is a trusted person the victim knows.

What is missing from the official story that makes the plight of the oppressed more understandable is increased dialogue and victims sharing their stories publicly. Currently, the privileged and powerful have developed organizations to address the issue of child sexual abuse as well as policies and procedures for mandatory reporting within schools; but, these mechanisms are often severely underfunded and understaffed. While the police come to school once a year to discuss good touch/bad touch, this is a token program similar to the superficial bullying programs that exist in schools.

Given the broad scope of child sexual abuse in the United States, the public space for discussing child sexual abuse needs to be expanded so that solutions to this problem can become part of the public discourse. My story will bring recognition to the reality of this issue and how it impacts teachers who work with these children in schools as well as

teachers who have had similar experiences. By using autobiography, I give a voice to the sexually abused.

Prologue

In a person's life, critical junctures exist where the person comes to understand the self and the world through different eyes. One becomes irrevocably changed. Traumatic events such as the death of a loved one or incredibly joyous ones like the birth of a child are one-time events that trigger such changes. Other times, life changing and perception changing events percolate slowly over time such as raising a child or working through the trials and tribulations of a relationship with a significant other. For me, being engaged in the Doctoral Program in Curriculum Studies at Georgia Southern University has been one such opportunity for ongoing growth. Through this experience, my preconceived notions have been challenged and I have begun to explore the lens I view the world through and how it has evolved.

The connection between curriculum theory and trauma are clear and explicit. While theorists who focus on the practical aspects of curriculum are concerned with testing and measurement, the reconceptualization of curriculum studies has opened the field to understanding the unmeasurable yet no less important aspects of a person's life. In this dissertation, I discuss the historical underpinnings of curriculum theory from the Tyler rationale through the reconceptualization. The current state of the curriculum studies field is as diverse as it has ever been. The enlightenment gained from understanding evolution of Curriculum theory has moved me into my own personal journey down one of the specific areas of focus in the curriculum studies field, trauma studies. As a survivor of child sexual abuse, I must revisit my past in order to understand

its influence on who I am today. By engaging in this psychoanalytic evaluation, I am empowered to live intentionally as I shape my future.

Although I have begun examining the totality of my life experiences and how they have shaped me, in this dissertation I choose to examine the effect of the sexual abuse I experienced as a child. It has become clear that autobiographical inquiry and psychoanalysis are appropriate means for this exploration.

Outline

While currere is a circular process of looking back, exploring the present, and considering the future, the chapters of this dissertation are organized according to the steps of currere; the regressive, progressive, analytical, and syncretical. The regressive step is highlighted in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, the regressive and progressive steps of currere are utilized as I took an intellectual journey to the past and the future. In Chapters 3 and 4, I explore relationships and trauma in the analytical step. Finally, I conclude with the syncretical step in Chapter 5, bringing everything together so that I might understand myself more fully.

In Chapter 1, I begin telling my story by looking to the past and I present the theoretical underpinnings of my methodology; currere and autobiography. As I began my work in curriculum studies, I reflected on how the field has evolved and how three schools of thought emerged. Traditionalists largely subscribe to the Tyler rationale, the conceptual empiricists focus on a theoretical/practical split, and reconceptualists focus on the work of diverse individuals bound by opposition to the traditionalist approach and largely guided by the work of Pinar (1978, 1981, 1994, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012) and many other prominent scholars. Having examined this evolution, I began exploring how my own preparation as an educator had developed.

One of the concepts that evolved from the reconceptualization of curriculum studies is *currere*. For this discussion of *currere*, I draw upon the work of Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995); Pinar (1978, 1981, 1994, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012); Morris (2015); Klein (2002), Pinar and Grumet (2015), and Grumet (1988, 1991, 2015). For autobiography, I draw upon J.L. Miller (1990, 2005); Doll (1982, 1995, 2000, 2008, 2011); He (2015); Casemore (2008); Pinar (1994); and Grumet (2015c).

In Chapter 2, I narrate my story as it relates to my theoretical framework. This chapter focuses on the past. I utilize autobiography, psychoanalysis, and focusing to explore my past, the unconscious, and repressed memories which have emerged. Psychoanalysis, is a treatment method which was originally developed by Freud and has been further developed by psychoanalysts who followed him. For this study, the psychoanalytic theory I primarily utilize is Freud (1915, 1915/1957, 1950, 1962a, 1962b, 1992).

I also draw upon curriculum theorists that utilize psychoanalysis such as Britzman (2009, 2010, 2012), Eigen (2001), Winnicott (1953, 1986, 2005), Bion (1992), J.L Miller (2005), A. Miller (1981, 1984, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012), Bollas (1999), and Grotstein (2000). In addition, I delve into my own experience in hypnotherapy and my discoveries from this experience utilizing research on a psychotherapeutic process developed by Gendlin (1978, 2007, 2016) called focusing.

In Chapter 3, I examine a variety of relationships through the new lens I have developed. I explore how my new understanding of myself has manifested itself in my personal life and relationships. Invariably, a person has a multitude of relationships in his or her lifetime. For this examination, I began with the people who were closest to me in

my childhood: my parents, sister, and childhood friends. I then look at relationships formed later in my life with my husband, and my children. Throughout this section, I draw on the research of Bollas (1989), Doll (2000), Eigen (2001), Greene (1973), Herman (1992), King (2009), Pinar (2012), and Winnicott (1953).

In Chapter 4, I discuss trauma as a universal experience and explore the connections between the abuse during my childhood and the development of my personal identity as a student and teacher. I also discuss forgiveness. In this chapter, I draw upon the work of Doll (2000), Freud (1915, 1915/1957, 1950, 1962a, 1962b, 1992), Foucault (1977/2012), Middelton, Cromer and Freyd (2005), Pennebaker and Seagal (1999), Morris (2006), and Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Tippins (1999).

In Chapter 5, I consider the future. Specifically, I discuss my new understanding of myself as a mother and teacher. I also explore the psychological and physical healing that I have experienced as a result of confronting my trauma and finding my voice. I close with conclusions that I have made from the analysis I conducted and make recommendations for educators that have been sexually abused or who work with abused children. In this chapter, I draw upon research on trauma studies that includes the work of Caruth (1995), Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert (2000), Brown (2010, 2013), Herman (1992), Eng and Kazanjian (2003), and LaCapra (2014).

CHAPTER 1

LOOKING BACK

I was born on February 15, 1972 in Staten Island, New York. I was the fourth member in a Caucasian Italian family made up of my mother, father, and sister. Surrounded by grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, life was never dull. At the age of 5, my family moved to Long Island, New York where I spent my childhood.

Long Island was booming at that time and offered an escape from the urban life of Staten Island. My house was situated on a block with white picket fences and well-manicured lawns; my days were spent with neighborhood children playing kickball, freeze tag, and kick the can. These are the childhood games that pre-dated the technology boom that brought us cellphones and a seemingly endless variety of electronic devices. Saturday mornings consisted of watching cartoons on television (the only day of the week they were on) and, on occasion, I would watch an afterschool special on television at 4:00. Afternoons were mostly spent outside, and Mom would not see us until dinnertime. It was a time of carefree days, no concerns about where we were, and no concerns of abduction. Nearly everybody in the community walked to the local school. It was a very different era than today. Child sexual abuse (CSA) was not a major public concern at the time although Freud had discussed it in the late 1800's.

Research on Sexual Abuse

In 1896, *Aetiology of Hysteria* was presented by Freud (1962b). In his paper, he discussed the sexual abuse of children and its possible connections to mental health problems. He concluded that trauma inflicted by an abuser on the child was the source of internal psychic pain. This led to Freud's "seduction theory" which stated that a repressed memory of early child sexual abuse was an essential precondition for neuroses and other

mental health problems (Israels & Schatzman, 1993). However, Freud eventually abandoned this theory and concluded that the memories of sexual abuse were fantasies (Gay, 1998). During the 1960s the topic of sexual abuse received an explosion of interest. In 1962, the article, "Battered Child Syndrome," by pediatrician Henry Kempe and his colleagues brought national attention to child abuse. In 1967, Kempe would play a pivotal role among all states that enacted reporting laws. Myers (2008) contends:

As reporting laws went into effect, the prevalence of child abuse and neglect came into focus. By 1974, some 60,000 cases were reported. In 1980, the number exceeded one million. By 1990, reports topped two million, and in 2000, reports hovered around three million. (p. 456)

While three million reports of neglect and abuse is substantial, we cannot get an accurate reading of the number of instances because many cases go unreported (Gilbert et al., 2009). In the early 1970s, "recognition of sexual abuse lagged behind recognition of physical abuse" (Myers, 2008, p. 460). Sexual abuse was still essentially invisible. However, this was about to change. During this time, the child protection system expanded, and new research was conducted bringing attention to the prevalence and negative effects of sexual abuse.

In 1979, Finkelhor's study, *Sexually Victimized Children*, brought attention to the prevalence and damaging effects of child abuse. Additional studies followed and raised awareness on this issue. In 1986, Oprah Winfrey shared that she had experienced child sexual abuse. Later, Oprah would testify before Congress on initiatives designed to stop sexual abuse. This string of events would eventually lead to Congress passing the National Child Protection Act, which was designed to open the FBI's national criminal

records to schools, day care facilities, and youth-serving organizations. Eventually, the during 2000s, the National Sex Offender Public Registry was launched. Despite these efforts to bring this problem to light and address it, Perez-Fuentes, Olfson, Villegas, Morcillo, Wang, and Blanco (2013) report that child sexual abuse affects approximately 16% of men and between 25-27% of women in the United States.

The growing body of research that has emerged from the 1960s through today has brought this dark secret to light. A significant portion of the population is affected by sexual abuse in the United States. Reviewing research on child sexual abuse gives historical context of how this issue has evolved in the public eye. This is important to me because understanding the historical context of sexual abuse gives me a greater understanding of my own sexual abuse and the context of the time in which it occurred.

My memories of my childhood are scarce. Teachers' names escape me, only close friends' names and a few special memories remain. Confusion about my childhood remains today and I question the reality of my early life experience. I often wondered if the lack of memories is the result of the natural aging process or something more sinister, something occurring on a deeper psychological level, something my brain is doing to protect itself from intense pain. I have come to find that this confusion stems from the child sexual abuse I encountered early in my life and emerged from my unconsciousness much later in life. According to Freud (1950), these memories were repressed. One way to understand repressed memories is through autobiographical inquiry and currere.

Curriculum Theory

Fundamentally, curriculum theory is an academic discipline devoted to examining and shaping educational curricula. Curriculum theory has a long history which has evolved from traditional conceptions of what curriculum is as envisioned by Tyler in the

Tyler rationale to a broader vision that evolved from the work of curriculum theorists such as Pinar and Grumet. The reconceptualization of curriculum theory has opened the door for diverse thinking and has led to multiple interpretations of curriculum theory. While a traditionalist might ask, “What should students know when they leave school?” New curriculum thinkers might ask, “What is worthwhile?” Schubert (2009) suggests exploring what is “worth knowing, experiencing, being, overcoming, sharing, and contributing”.

Without overly simplifying this dichotomy, we can see that these two types of questions represent very different approaches. There are a multiple perspectives and new forms of research. Now, the field is intellectually lively and complex (Pinar, 2007). Internally complex, curriculum studies is fragmented into multiple specializations such as curriculum history, political, multicultural, gender, literary, aesthetic, spiritual, cosmopolitan, ecological, cultural, postcolonial, post-structural, and psychoanalytic curriculum concepts (Morris, 2016a, 2016b).

Having examined the evolution of curriculum studies, I began exploring how my own preparation as an educator had developed. Investigating the reconceptualists’ viewpoints made me think deeply about what curriculum really means. Initially I experienced cognitive dissonance as my past experiences differed so drastically from this new information. Increasingly, greater understanding of the reconceptualists’ philosophy awakened me to its relevance in my life. It also inspired me to further examine autobiographical inquiry and currere and how these concepts could be used to understand the impact of childhood trauma on my life.

I began by learning more about the theoretical foundations of *currere* and the method of *currere* as conceptualized by Pinar. The foundations of *currere* include autobiography, phenomenology and existentialism, and psychoanalysis. The method of *currere* includes the regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical movements. Pinar states (2004):

The method of *currere*, the Latin infinitive form of curriculum, means to run the course or in the gerund form, the running of the course - provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction. (p. 35)

It is apparent in this definition that *currere* is not an isolated analysis; it is a process that is intermingled. Pinar (1978a) felt that the field of curriculum studies had gone as far as it could in understanding education by focusing on the external. Rather than looking externally, he suggested self-exploration and reconceptualization of curriculum.

This diverged from the Tyler rationale, which focused on instructional design. Curriculum theorists who hold the Tyler rationale sacred believe their work is meant to guide practitioners in schools with the intent of giving advice to teachers on how to change curriculum. Tyler's book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, presents a very specific approach to curriculum planning. Cherryholmes states (1988), "Tyler's basic principles appealed to the field because they promised order, organization, rationality, error correction, political neutrality, expertise, and progress." (p. 26). The focus on the curriculum and what is important to know as conceptualized by the Tyler rationale left control of knowledge in the hands of those in power. The

reconceptualization of curriculum called for self-knowledge as a foundation for understanding.

The foundation of reconceptualization toward self-understanding draws upon many fields. Grumet (2015a), a prominent figure in the reconceptualization, states, “Currere, focusing upon the educational experience of the individual student, finds within autobiography in theatre appropriate symbols for that experience, for both autobiography and theatre are forms of self-revelation” (p. 86). It is what one makes of his or her experiences that is important. Grumet (2015c) also posits, “as a research methodology currere proposes to use literature as a foil for one’s own reflection” (p.55). This dissertation is an example of what currere looks like in practice. Throughout this dissertation, relevant literature is embedded along with my personal reflection and analysis as I move through the regressive, progressive, analytical and syncretical steps of currere. Other examples of research utilizing currere can be found in the work of Carney (2016), Jones (2010), Nissen (2012), and Thompson (2011).

In currere, the focus on the individual is highlighted. Encountering these words from Grumet on currere for the first time helped me see curriculum in a way I had not seen before. Expanding the view to include the individual appealed to me on a deep level. My previous understanding of curriculum was so focused on content that the individual was forgotten. I felt the reconceptualists’ view aligned with my belief that people were important. For this reason, understanding currere is an essential component of this study. In the next section, I discuss how the foundations of currere are guided by autobiography, phenomenology and existentialism, and psychoanalysis.

Autobiography and Curriculum Theory

Prior to 1970, curriculum studies was largely dominated by discussions about the purpose of education, what should be taught, and how knowledge should be passed on. This all changed because of the reconceptualization of the field of curriculum studies, which opened the door for divergent thinking and a broad range of discourses. In 1969, and later reprinted, Schwab published *The Practical: A Language for Curriculum*. In this publication, Schwab pronounced the curriculum field as moribund (Schwab, 1969). “He argued that curriculum inquiry cannot contribute significantly to educational progress if it continues its mistaken and unexamined reliance on theory” (Schubert, 1980, p. 17). Schwab goes on to suggest that there are no global answers to educational issues but that researchers should focus on problems as they relate to individual. This led to the decade of the reconceptualization.

Reconceptualization of curriculum redefined what curriculum is today. It is not just content but includes understanding people and their unique individual characteristics. It is not just about knowledge but about understanding. Since the beginning of the reconceptualization of curriculum, the field has expanded. Pinar (1978a) stated, “. . . the field of curriculum studies will be profoundly different in 20 years’ time than it has been during the first 50 years of its existence” (p. 205). In the field of curriculum studies, 1978 was an important year because it marked the recognition of the reconceptualization of curriculum studies at the annual American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference.

Another curriculum scholar who carved the path for future reconceptualists was Macdonald (1975). In fact, Pinar gives credit to Macdonald for how he maps the field

today. Macdonald pointed to the development of autobiographic and political discourses. He also argued that education should be clustered within humanities and not sciences.

Macdonald (1975) takes an interesting approach which certainly makes sense when we consider the naturalistic conception of human beings and their place in the world. It also makes sense that the humanities pursue an understanding that science cannot deliver. We are not machinery designed to behave in one way based on an external stimulus. Rather, our decisions are guided by the choices we make between external circumstances and internal understandings. After the reconceptualization, curriculum was redefined and additional areas of inquiry, including political inquiry and autobiography, emerged as relevant areas of study. This reconceptualization opened the door for autobiographical studies like this one. It helped me understand that my story had value and could contribute to a greater body of research on trauma and sexual abuse. In addition, it provided an approach that affords self-study as a serious scholarly approach to research.

Pinar stated (1994), “What is essential about the reconceptualization—as the literal definition of the word denotes—is its constant redefinition” (p. 73). This means to me the field is constantly changing. Research can be done based on infinite personal characteristics that people connect with such as autobiography, gender, history, or queer studies. Pinar (2004) also suggests that curriculum conceived as *currere* requires the serious study of psychoanalytic theory in addition to the study of autobiography, history, and social theory. Phenomenology, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and the importance of heightened consciousness were embedded in the concept of curriculum reconceptualized. Today, curriculum scholars are calling the present field a post reconceptualization

(Morris, 2016a). Malewski (2010) suggests that the post reconceptualization is moving away from traditional representations of the field towards juxtapositions of perspectives. Malewski also proposes that this does not mean that the reconceptualization is over. Instead, as Morris (2016a) notes, there is an overlap between what has occurred in the initial phases of the reconceptualization and the work being done in the present. The field has changed and will continue to change. Today, curriculum scholars continue to draw on past theoretical frameworks such “history, politics, gender, race, poststructuralism, and aesthetics” (Morris, 2016a, p.13). Post reconceptualization scholars also draw on theoretical frameworks such as “the literary, the cosmopolitical, post-colonialism, spirituality, cultural studies, ecology and psychoanalytic theory” (Morris, 2016a, p.13).

Schubert (1986) suggests that scholars must work together to engage other people in developing the meaning and practices of curriculum studies as the field is not a finalized project. Schubert (1986) focuses his work to advance the discipline as one that encourages reflection on the central questions of curriculum studies; “What is worthwhile? For whom is it worthwhile? How do we make it worthwhile?” He further suggests that the debate should not be about test scores but rather about what knowledge is of most worth.

Schubert also supports the inclusion of autobiography as a relevant space for inquiry in curriculum studies. Looking at the questions posed by Schubert, it is easy to see the connection between my life experiences and the importance of determining what is worth knowing. Most certainly, understanding myself is worthwhile. For whom? I believe understanding myself is worthwhile not only for myself but also to my significant

others and to people who have experienced similar pasts. In addition, my students will benefit from me having a complete understanding of my thought processes and myself.

Undoubtedly, being sexually abused impacts a person's psyche. Not reflecting on the impact of sexual abuse allows feelings and emotions associated with the abuse to silently control an individual's behavior. Therefore, answering the question, how do we make it worthwhile, is easy to answer. I must look back and reconnect with the feelings associated with sexual abuse, so I can understand them better. I can determine their role in my life. I can determine how they affect my relationships and influence my thought process. Then I can consciously change my life for the better.

So, what is known about autobiographical inquiry and curriculum studies?

Autobiography has been loosely defined as an account of a person's life as written by that person. This definition seems inadequate. Autobiography, as envisioned and described by curriculum theorists Pinar (1994) and Pinar and Grumet (2015), is a much deeper and substantial method for describing and recording a person's life. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) propose that "Autobiography can confront the meaning of the given world, reject it, reformulate it, and reconstruct it with a social vision that is authentically the individual's" (p. 21). Autobiography provides an opportunity for deep self-exploration and understanding.

Over time, autobiography has evolved as a major contemporary curriculum discourse in the field of curriculum studies. Prominent researchers in this field include Morris, Casemore, Doll, Kinchloe and Pinar, J.L. Miller, Grumet, Butt and Raymond, Clandinin, Connelly, and Craig, Schubert and Ayers, and Goodson (Morris, 2008, 2009, 2015; Casemore, 2008; Doll, 1982, 1995, 2000, 2008, 2011; Kinchloe & Pinar, 1995;

Miller, 1990, 2005; Grumet, 1988, 1991, 2015c; Pinar and Grumet, 2015; Butt & Raymond, 1989, 1992; Clandinin, Connelly, & Craig, 1995; Schubert & Ayers, 1992; & Goodson, 1992). While autobiography has a long and storied history, perhaps as long as human history itself, its use as a research tool for self-examination is more recent. Bulloch and Pinnegar (2001) note that self-study has emerged as the result of the introduction of naturalistic and qualitative methods into education, the redefining of validity as trustworthiness, the Reconceptualization movement in curriculum studies, growing involvement from international researchers with diverse intellectual traditions, and action research. Autobiography is one of the most frequently used methods of self-study.

In the mid-1970s, Grumet and Pinar introduced autobiographical inquiry as a form of curriculum theorizing and research into the U.S. curriculum studies field in their book entitled, *Towards a Poor Curriculum*. The third edition of this text was published in 2015 (Pinar & Grumet, 2015). This inflection point opened the door for curriculum, as autobiographical and biographical text, to emerge as a major contemporary curriculum discourse (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995).

Morris (2009) states, “Curriculum Studies was built on the idea that scholarship must be a working out of the self (i.e., autobiography), of going inward in order to understand what Pinar terms the psychosocial.” (p. 187). Pinar often uses the term “psychosocial” to explain what he is doing in his own work and insisted that studying the self is also studying the social because we exist within social and historical contexts. For example, in *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America*, Pinar (2001) points out that

gender and race are historical and ideological processes. We cannot look at the self without considering the social aspects attached to the conception of the self.

Bulloch and Pinnegar (2001) suggest that autobiography is a dominant form of self-study and that “who the researcher is, is central to what the researcher does” (p.13). They go on to discuss potential guidelines for establishing a quality autobiography as a narrative research tradition. These include enabling connection between the writer and the reader, promoting insight and interpretation, engaging history and taking a stand. Autobiography should also take on an important issue, include authentic voice paired with analysis, and should must improve the learning situation for the self and the other. Furthermore, the person and the setting are also important considerations (Bulloch and Pinnegar, 2001). These considerations have been considered in the writing of this paper. Honoring Curriculum Studies tradition, traditional terms found in research such as data, coding, thematic analysis, and findings are not discussed in this autobiography. Instead, the relevant literature and the analysis is embedded throughout the paper as I examine my thoughts, find my voice, confront my past trauma, and contemplate how my new understanding might help others.

By finding my voice and discussing the important issue of child sexual abuse, I connect with the reader, engage history, and take a stand. The writing style is authentic and is paired with analysis. Analytic processes that I utilized included free association during which I wrote down my thoughts without consideration of writing semantics and an expressive writing process called cognitive processing where I wrote down my thoughts and emotions to derive meaning. My process for analysis included writing my thoughts on paper, reviewing and considering their meaning, and making sure that I was

selecting precise words that represent my thoughts and feelings. I also engaged in discussions with my husband and therapist as I developed my stream of consciousness. Some of the reflective questions that I asked myself are presented throughout the paper. In addition, the method of currere, psychoanalytic theory, focusing, hypnosis, and healing through writing are utilized for analysis and are described within this work.

As autobiographical inquiry has emerged, it diverged along many different paths. In fact, Pinar et al. (1995) contend that there are three streams of scholarship under autobiographical discourse: autobiographical theory and practice, feminist autobiography, and understanding of teachers both biographically and autobiographically. What these three streams have in common is the notion of lived experience. While we can place curriculum theorists in one of these categories, it should be noted that many theorists do not fit into just one stream. This is the beauty of curriculum study theory, the ability to explore different streams and discourses. In the following section, I discuss the various streams of autobiography and how currere provides a framework for autobiographical inquiry.

Streams of autobiography.

Pinar et al. (1995) contend that there are three streams of autobiography: autobiographical theory and practice, feminist autobiography, and understanding teachers biographically and autobiographically. However, there are no clear lines between all the streams and this should come as no surprise because life is messy and complicated. Trying to draw well-defined lines between one autobiographical stream and another is equally messy and complicated. Pinar and Anne Pautz (1998) also tell us that “the biographers autobiographical voice sounds in the biographical subject” (p. 67). Scholars

often write about people with whom they identify. Therefore, the lines between autobiography and biography are also blurred. Despite these challenges, I discuss each of these streams individually with the understanding that some scholars fall within more than one well-defined area. My work also has shared aspects between the autobiographical streams. Additionally, these streams are further differentiated into specific and explicit areas of focus that lend themselves to deeper understanding (Pinar, 1995).

Autobiographical theory and practice.

In the first stream of scholarship, autobiographical theory and practice, we see interest in currere, collaboration, dialogue journals, voice, myth, dreams, imagination, and place (Pinar, 2004). The interest in currere is significant as Morris (2008, 2009, 2015), Casemore (2008), and Doll (2000, 2008, 2011) contribute autobiographical theory and practice stream of autobiography as a method for their research.

Morris (2015) contends that autobiography can change one's view of the world and the ways in which the self relates to others in the world. If we are not aware of ourselves, how can we be conscious of others? To date, Morris (2008, 2009) has published two autobiographical books, *Teaching Through the Ill Body* and *On Not Being Able to Play*. In these two books, Morris explores her life, her emotions, and how her experiences shaped her perspective. These texts introduced me to the power of self-reflection and autobiography. I found myself asking whether I could be this honest with others and, truthfully, could I be this honest with myself? Was I ready to face my past, although mostly positive, that also contained extremely painful times? Could I handle the emotions of dealing with the child sexual abuse I experienced in my youth and the

potential impact it would have on my current relationships? What repercussions would I face in the future? Should I just keep these thoughts and feelings locked away, repressed?

Clearly, not only did the work of Morris (2008) change her view of the world, but also it began to change mine as I considered developing my own autobiography. As part of my self-examination, I began to recognize the interconnected nature of my development. Social categorizations such as my race, class, and gender are only part of the picture and are intertwined to paint a picture of who I really am. Other components include my experiences, good and bad, and the context where I grew up, including the place.

The interest in place is prominent in autobiography. Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) and Casemore (2008) studied the conception of place. In *The Autobiographical Demand of Place: Curriculum Inquiry in the American South*, Casemore (2008) contends that we must return home to remember and understand who we are. By studying place, he contends that this is also a way to study oneself. His work models how he used autobiography to understand his past and present although he does not tell the reader to do this. His book inspired me to look within, reminding me that there is “no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves” (Connelly & Clandinin as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 515). Could the place of my upbringing contribute to my understanding of myself? Could embracing this autobiographical journey shed light on who I am and how it affects all parts of my being? By using this reflective process and understanding how I became this person, could I use my experience to help and teach others?

My initial thoughts bring this apparent truth to my consciousness. Had I been raised in states traditionally described as the South, such as Alabama, Mississippi, or Georgia, my perceptions would be significantly different than they are having been raised in the northeast, specifically in New York. Considering place, however, is only one part of a person and, therefore, only one perspective to consider when writing an autobiography. Additional research has focused on more abstract concepts such as dreams, myths, and imagination.

Doll (2000) has done extensive work in dreams, myths, and imagination. She emphasized how narrative work could be looked at through a different lens. It is through conversations opened by reading fictional work that one can look more closely at our personal lives. Doll (2011) contends that we must go below the surface and dig deeper into our understanding of ourselves. In *Pedagogies of the Imagination*, Doll (2008) discusses “capacity and currere” (p. 223). Her book, *Like Letters in Running Water: A Mythopoetics of Curriculum* (2000), is a series of essays using myths, dramas, and fictional text. After reading these essays, I realized that I must acknowledge and come to terms with my inner self before I can address my outer concerns. This is reiterated in Doll’s (2000) words, “Only when connections are made to that which courses within can learners approach the outer problems of race, gender, and identity” (p. x).

It is also important to note that Doll (1995) wrote a feminist autobiography entitled, *To the Lighthouse and Back: Writings on Teaching and Living*. In this book, the author gave a personal account of her life as a daughter, mother, teacher, wife, and sister. While reading these intensely purposeful narratives, I was drawn to look within at my intimate thoughts and emotions. These writings revealed that a person must understand

the old sources of code to give us new references, so we can find a new path, a new future, a new existence. This made me reflect on my own life experiences, and my life as a daughter, mother, teacher, wife, and sister. I thought about how having a child had changed me as a teacher. This line of thinking evolved into exploring each of these roles individually. Ultimately, it helped lead me to understanding more about myself as a survivor of child abuse. It also helped me connect autobiographical theory and practice.

While this first stream of autobiography, autobiographical theory and practice, has evolved in many directions, another stream that diverged is that of feminist autobiography.

Feminist autobiography.

Several prominent curriculum scholars have written significant work related to feminist autobiographical theory. Three of these scholars are Miller (1990, 2005), Grumet (1988), and Alice Pitt (2003). “Feminist curriculum theory not only often includes discussion of autobiography and educational practice; it utilized autobiography as a research tool” (Pinar, 2007, p. 544). This is an important delineation as autobiography is not just a subjective lived experience but is also research tool, a method for understanding.

While discussed here as an example of a theorist with a feminist perspective, Janet Miller could be defined under different streams of autobiography. Miller (1990) believes in using autobiography in collaborative relationships with teachers. In *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices*, using the feminist perspective, she focuses on the nurturing and caring stereotypes in early childhood education. Miller also coined the term, *creating*

spaces, and she contends that these spaces are needed to discover the lived experience of a community.

In *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices* (1990), we see a focus on voice that is present in many strands of autobiographical scholarship. Ellsworth (1989) posits that voice emerges as an important concept not only in the effort to understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text, but in feminist and political theory as well. One reason voice is so important is because it identifies not just those in power, but also voices of the disenfranchised and the powerless. Pinar (2004) maintains that studying the self is an inherently political act. This is especially true when considering traumas endured by oppressed groups such as children who have endured sexual abuse. Giving a voice to a child or female allows the person to break through restrictive barriers that prevent them from becoming their true selves. Overcoming trauma is also important because trauma is damaging to their psyche and impacts them in their personal and professional lives. To overcome the effects of trauma they must break their silence and explore their past. Autobiography makes this possible. Having experienced the trauma of child sexual abuse, the explicit connection between my life and this stream of autobiography seemed self-evident.

In *Sounds of Silence Breaking: Women, Autobiography, Curriculum*, Janet Miller (2005) discusses the various forms of silence and the educational significance of breaking those silences. One of Miller's areas of concern is the silencing of the female voice. Society almost demands a willful compliance. Using your voice and engaging in dialogue, you create an opportunity to combat tangible forms of oppression and accepted norms. While some people may misrepresent the discussion of oppression and

challenging norms as an inability to integrate into and function normally within society, in fact, open dialogue is a healthy process that encourages an individual's development as a self-actualized human being. Miller's (2005) work was impactful to me because I have spent most my life in silence about the atrocities perpetrated on me as a child. Research into sexual abuse confirms the historical stigma attached to women who experienced the same type of abuse that I did. Through this autobiographical inquiry, I am breaking my silence. My need to do this was also confirmed by the work of Grumet.

In Grumet's (1988) work, we see a weaving of autobiography within additional discourses. Grumet argues that *currere* is what the individual does with the curriculum. It is an active reconstruction of its passage through its social, intellectual, physical structures (as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 57). Grumet's (1988) autobiographical book about her experiences as a teacher and mother, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*, is extremely influential today. In this book, Grumet mixes both autobiography and feminist theory.

Grumet (1988) explores the lived experiences of women as mothers and teachers using narrative histories that focus on psychoanalysis and phenomenology to express the situation of the woman and teacher. While reading this text I began considering how my own life experiences have shaped me as a teacher. These experiences ran the gamut and I realized I am the sum of all my experiences. Furthermore, the thoughts and emotions I felt because of these experiences shaped my being and how I view the world. I also realized that two of the most influential experiences in my personal life that shaped me as a teacher were the birth of my two children and the child sexual abuse at the hands of my grandfather.

Pitt (2003), in *The play of the personal: psychoanalytic narratives of feminist education*, writes about psychoanalytic theory and feminist theory and calls her study an “autobiography of learning” (p. 6). Here she discusses her experiences teaching feminist studies to resistance students to understand the “psychic conflicts” (p. 48) that reveal information about the challenges students have learning about topics that challenge dominant paradigms. She suggests that this resistance is a learning opportunity when examined through the lens of the psychoanalytic theory of resistance. What are some of the “psychic conflicts” that I have? How is my ego censoring my thoughts?

Identifying the most influential experiences in my life was the next step in my own personal evolution of understanding myself. Understanding the magnitude of these experiences gave clarity as to how my view of the world and my beliefs as a teacher were shaped. Identifying these powerfully influential experiences also made me reconsider the what-if question we all experience when our lives go down an unanticipated path. What if I had never been sexually abused? Who would I have become? What choices would I have made differently? Would I be a better person? A more complete person? Would I treat my husband and children differently? How would I be different as a teacher? One realization I have come to is that these are backwards looking questions, reflective questions.

Coming to terms with the past is an important part of shaping the present. This leads to the third stream of autobiography, understanding teachers biographically and autobiographically.

Understanding teachers both biographically and autobiographically.

This stream of autobiographical and biographical research is comprised of four streams: “teacher’s collaborative autobiography (Butt & Raymond), personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly), teacher lore (Schubert & Ayers), and studying teacher lives (Goodson) (Pinar, et. al., 1995, p. 553).” These first-hand accounts and impressions of living as a member of an oppressed group shed light on the disparate perceptions of people with different experiences based on their experiences. These works help provide understanding into the psyche of teachers who have triumphed as well as those who have suffered because of their experiences. *Anne Sexton: Teacher of weird abundance* by Salvio (2007) and *Provocations: Sylvia Ashton-Warner and excitability in education* by Robertson and McConaghy (2006) are both biographical works about female teachers. Both teachers endured sexual abuse during their childhood and suffered from mental breakdowns.

Salvio’s (2007) biography of Anne Sexton is an example of a curriculum scholar opening the conversation outside the traditional history of school. This work is important to connecting negative feelings and emotions such as sorrow, guilt, and forgiveness and our work as teachers. Anne Sexton was a professor and an American poet known for personal, confessional writing style. At the time, her writing style was often looked down upon and the politics of the time attempted to prevent her from breaking ground for women. As an antihero she taught us the value of the eccentric. Salvio (2007) suggests that Anne Sexton was a mentally ill person with a shattered sense of self. This shattered self can be connected back to her childhood.

In *Provocations* we also learn that Ashton Warner had also been sexually abused (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006). In this case, by two of her teachers. We also find that she had a troubled relationship with her mother. As an adult, she then abused the children in her care as a teacher. For me, this is a cautionary tale of what I would never let myself become. These women were broken by their childhood and would be good examples to support Miller's assertions that victimization in childhood could lead to adult dysfunction and a repeated cycle of victimization. These biographies also show the value of understanding teachers biographically.

There is also value in autobiographical works. For me, the challenge lies in revealing myself and connecting with past emotions. Although offering a first-hand account is a difficult road, it is one step in helping others listen and not discount the feelings of others. In addition, revisiting the past and telling the stories can be therapeutic and allows the author to make sense of their unique human situation. It also allows the self to make intentional decisions about how to live unencumbered by the past. While not these apply to my own self-exploration, I briefly describe these streams of autobiography as they may provide insight for others as they review my work. First, I begin with teacher's collaborative autobiography.

Teacher's collaborative autobiography.

The use of collaborative autobiography has come to the forefront during the past decade. Butt, Raymond, & Yamagishi (1988) argue that collaborative autobiography is better than other forms of professional development because it is built upon the professional skills and personal knowledge bases that teachers themselves possess. Butt & Raymond (1989) state:

The overall process of teacher development and nature of the knowledge that results, and is applied in the classroom, is rooted mostly in individual experience. This characterizes teacher development as personal, unique, and since it takes place over a lifetime, autobiographical in nature. (p. 416)

The assertion that teachers' life experiences are central to teacher development and classroom instruction are important considerations. The teacher cannot completely disconnect the personal from professional. For example, a teacher who struggled learning mathematics is likely to reduce the mathematics instruction in their classroom. To overcome this fear, a teacher must understand their disposition towards mathematics so that they don't negatively impact the educational experience of their students. This type of revelation can come through collaborative autobiography.

This type of autobiography is also a self-reflective practice. Teachers themselves decide how they wish to grow rather than being forced to attend professional development selected by others. An additional benefit is that the teachers' growth is personal and professional and has a special meaning that will not soon be forgotten.

In traditional professional development, the source is external and, unless it pulls at a teacher's soul, it has little true, meaningful value. While my story is not collaborative, I certainly see the value in developing an autobiography with others. Shared experiences in any context bring people together. The intertwined narrative of their lives can only be understood by the people present in the situation or who experience similar events. While we can empathize with the stresses a teacher experiences or the traumas that someone has gone through, it is not as deeply personal as having lived the experience. In addition, sharing those deeply personal experiences with

others has a therapeutic quality and allows each member of the group to reflect and consider questions they may not have developed individually. This could be a path to personal growth.

Another way theorists attempt to understand teachers biographically and autobiographically is through personal practical knowledge.

Personal practical knowledge.

Curriculum theorists are attempting to show that a teacher's practical knowledge is affected by all the experiences that make up that person's being. Pinar (2004) describes personal practical knowledge as a combination of theory and practical knowledge born from lived experience. These theories can be implicit which leads to *personal, practical knowledge*. Clandinin (1985) suggests personal practical knowledge is knowledge that is derived from a person's professional and personal experiences.

Studies of personal practical knowledge provide narrative accounts of teachers' lived experience. In these narratives, teachers reconstruct meaning. Elbaz (1983) believed that there is no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves. Teaching and learning are inescapably human endeavors. In the heart of teaching is the personal connection that people make with each other and with the content they are learning. Without this meaningful connection, there is no bridge between the known and the unknown. The mind is wired to filter out unimportant material because of our limited capacity to process all the information that we gather from our environment. Therefore, learning is not just practice of the mind, but it is also a practice of the heart, a practice of meaning and passion. This is part of a larger conversation about the intersection between education and psychoanalysis which I discuss in Chapter 2.

One experience I had that brought the concept of personal practical knowledge to light was a digital story project I worked on. As human beings, we all have blind spots and biases. Many of these have developed based on our upbringing and our lived experience. We were not born with them. They evolved over time and manifest themselves in our teaching. The purpose of the digital story was to examine our life history and connect it to our beliefs about teaching. The benefit of doing the story digitally was that we could integrate music, family pictures, and text as we thought about our life history and the beliefs associated with it. Often, the visual representations elicited visceral emotional reactions.

Thinking about my favorite songs from childhood was energizing and brought a broad smile to my face. I also thought about the students who I taught and the lessons I had learned throughout my years working in the classroom and working with teachers as a reading coach. Then, bringing this project full-circle and looking at the present, I could see how this personal practical knowledge had been integrated into my own personal style. I could see how the structured environment of my childhood home was modeled in my classes and my expectations of others. Conversely, other people who completed the assignment went in the opposite direction and were very unstructured as they rebelled against the structure of their childhood. While our intentions were different, we were all able to build a bridge between the past and the present and it gave meaning to our work.

A third way theorists attempt to understand teachers biographically and autobiographically is through teacher lore.

Teacher lore.

Another way we make meaning of biographies and autobiographies is through stories. The stories can be seen as teacher lore, inspirational stories that symbolically help define the culture of an organization and provide insight into the values and mores of the teaching community. In *Teacher Lore: Learning from Our Own Experience*, Schubert and Ayers (1992) define teacher lore as stories about and by teachers. These stories portray teachers in action and interpret ways in which teachers think. Teacher lore also refers to the knowledge, ideas, insights, feelings, and understanding of teachers. This showcases the insight and understanding that teachers bring to the field of education. The stories of these teachers provide opportunities for communities of teachers to learn from each other through writing, reading, listening, talking, and reflecting. Schubert & Ayers (1992) contend:

The secret of teaching is to be found in the local detail and the everyday life of teachers; teachers can be the richest and most useful source of knowledge about teaching: those who hope to understand teaching must turn at some point to teachers themselves. (p. v)

Teacher lore can be described as storytelling, where the teacher is now the researcher who engages in deep reflection in order to change and understand the curriculum. In fact, my autobiography is my story. It is part of my personal history. In writing the story is therapeutic. Wilson (2011) suggests that personal narratives impact our psyche and *story editing* help us make sense of the world. Not only can writing be used as a reflective practice, but it can also become a process for shaping the future.

Stories inspire the heart in a way that cannot be quantified. If a person tells me that 10,000 people cannot read, I am appalled, but not inspired. Show me a picture of an individual with sadness in their eyes, describe to me how not being able to read has negatively impacted the person's life, and I am inspired to action. This highlights the importance of teacher lore.

The final biographical and autobiographical avenue for understanding teachers is through studying teachers' lives.

Studying teachers' lives.

Written accounts about lives of teachers provide rich information about schools and teaching. It is almost irrefutable that teachers are the lifeblood of a school. While each person who works in or attends the school plays an important role, teachers' personal and professional experiences have an incredible impact on the quality of the education that children receive and the messages they hear daily. This includes the null curriculum and the hidden curriculum that exist in each classroom. In *Investigating the Life and Work of teachers*, Goodson (2008) contends that the study of teachers' lives provides a valuable lens for viewing reformation of schools. Goodson (1992) also emphasizes that we should examine teachers story as personal narratives and their life history in the context of the broader historical context. contextual analysis. Furthermore, Goodson (1981) contends that it is critical we know about the person the teacher is in order to understand something so intensely personal as teaching. Given the vast reform efforts underway across the United States, understanding the life experiences of teachers is critical. Accountability is touted as a panacea. No child will be left behind!

Fortunately, this rhetoric only accounts for specific knowledge that has been determined to be important by the people in power.

The negative consequences of the focus on educational standards has been well documented. One example is the national shortage of teachers (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Perhaps holding teachers accountable for societal issues over which they have no power could come through in their stories. In addition, curriculum scholars such as Vasey (1998) and Alan Block (1997) have discussed the harm done by schools.

Atwell-Vasey is one theorist concerned with the effect of schooling on children. Wendy Atwell-Vasey's (1998) book *Nourishing Words: Bridging Private Reading and Public Teaching* focuses on the work of a psychoanalyst and linguist, Julia Kristeva. Along with an interest on the relationship between the infant and the mother in the early years of childhood, there is a focus on how schools should utilize language. Unfortunately, the current educational system, with a focus on standardized testing, has little to do with the relational use of language. Vasey (1998) notes "Words have always been nourishment" (p. 1). While this is true in a comforting home environment, this is often not true in schools.

Block also discusses the harm that is done to students in school. Block's (1997) book *I'm only bleeding: Education as the practice of social violence against children* (Vol. 10), condemns public schooling and the psychological harm it does to children. Block (1997) draws on Winnicott to make his points about this damage:

As an environment, to use Winnicott's phrases, school is not so much facilitating as discouraging, not so much holding as confining. It does not provide space for the teachers to be good enough so that they might provide space to the education

that is good enough for our children. The school structures choke off the ability to play and replace it with work. Education causes serious damage. (p. 20).

Block suggests that the standards movement is about getting children to think alike, therefore, schools are focused on normalizing students. He proposes that current classrooms should embrace ambivalence, disorder, chaos, and uncertainty. These principles are more reflective of the society in which we live than the principle of order that is established by the adults who are in power.

Clearly, the use of autobiography as a research tool for self-exploration is well established. In addition, the self-autobiographical topics that authors have written about are broad and diverse. My autobiography could fall under many of the categories I just described. As I wrote my autobiography, I reflected on how I would organize it. Looking at previous research and the connection between autobiography and currere led to a natural conclusion. Therefore, I use the method of currere as the theoretical framework for this study as well as a method for self-understanding.

Method of Currere

Pinar (1978a) used the steps of currere to examine his own life in schools and the character of his involvement in academic work. Currere encourages educators and learners to look within themselves at their life experiences. Currere asks questions that accompany cognitive development and explore the relationships between the interrelated structure of the parts of a person. Through this exploration and conscious awareness of my past, understanding these relationships have extended and transformed my understanding of myself. Currere as a form of inquiry is autobiography and mirrors psychoanalysis in its analytic method.

The method of *currere* is guided by four steps proposed by Pinar (1978a) for reducing the distance between the researcher and the subject: (a) retelling the story of one's educational experiences, (b) imagining future possibilities for self-understanding and educational practice, (c) analysis of the relationships between past, present, and future life history and practice, and (d) new ways of thinking about education. The value of this reflective method is self-evident. To understand myself, I must look back to see how I was molded and shaped. Then I can examine my present situation. Is this how to behave? Are these the people I want to surround myself with? What are my successes? What are my failures? Why do I feel the way I feel? As I reflect on these questions, I can look forward and choose the direction I wish to follow. In doing this, I must be careful to realize that not all the steps within the *currere* method occur in isolation but simultaneously. No one can do this for you. You must engage in your own self-examination to truly understand who you are. Pinar (2012) argues that curriculum scholars should have "subjective engagement with what we study" (p. 6). So, as I write this deeply personal story of child sexual abuse, I am writing about my lived experience, the curriculum of my life. Curriculum reconceptualized is *currere*, it is the running of the course, not the course itself (Pinar and Grumet, 2015). This means that *currere* is not the structure of the school or classroom, or the books and formal curriculum employed in education, but rather the lived experience that is the curriculum. My lived experience is the curriculum. My past, present, and future is my curriculum. That is the journey that I take you on in this work. The method of *currere* is a thread that carries itself throughout this work. The past present and future are present as I discuss hypnotherapy, focusing,

healing through writing, and restoring. Examining my relationships and my religious faith. It is a circular process of self-reflection.

It is important to note that *currere* also means seeking what is lost. For me, my innocence was lost. The only way to seek what is lost is to go back to the past. Pinar (1978a) posits that people must learn, from the point of view of the self, for cognitive and psychosocial development to occur. This is supported by Grumet's (2015c) declaration:

The theory base of *currere*'s exploration of educational experience is drawn from humanistic philosophy, phenomenology's emphasis on the reciprocity of subjectivity and objectivity in the dynamic Constitution of human knowledge, and existentialism's emphasis on the dialectical relationship of the man to his situation. (p. 45)

Hence, educational experience comes from within; it is the relationship of the person to the world. Curriculum, conceived as *currere*, requires the serious study of psychoanalytic theory in addition to the study of autobiography, history, and social theory (Pinar, 1998, 2004; Pinar & Grumet, 2015). To understand the method of *currere*, we must examine each of the steps in detail. Therefore, in the following sections I will discuss the regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical steps and how they relate to my story.

Regressive.

Pinar (1994) states, "Only through regression can one live through past pain, discern, as if it were embedded in one's very musculature, how it infiltrates the present" (as cited in Pinar, 1994, p. 57). The goal of the regressive step is to observe oneself in the past and revisit our most difficult memories. In the regressive step, we are not

interpreting the past, we are just observing. “By observing this we are bringing the past to the present . . . we are observing functioning in the past” (as cited in Pinar, 1994, p. 23). We must free ourselves from the past to be free moving forward. Just like a teaching philosophy drives everything a teacher does in the classroom; the past is driving present and future actions and beliefs. Without addressing our past, our curriculum is arrested. As we understand the past, we begin to better understand the present. So, in the first step of the currere method, I must enter the past. I must uncover myself.

Initially, I had to think about how I was going to look back to the past. Should I write my thoughts in a journal? Could I just sit and write my dissertation? Would talking to my loved ones about the past be sufficient? Could they bring light to the questions I had about my abuse? As I thought of these questions and many others, the answer came during a call from a dear friend. She shared with me her experience with hypnotherapy. She explained that she had gone to three sessions which she recorded. She also explained that by reliving her memories she now had a better understanding of them. How interesting this sounded to me. Therefore, I began the journey of learning more about hypnotherapy as a practice, identifying how it could be used to help me understand myself, and how it could help me overcome some of the debilitating effects of my trauma. Going to hypnotherapy helped me experience the regressive step.

Hypnotherapy is a self-regulated profession and does not qualify for state licensing in the United States. The International Association of Interpersonal Hypnotherapists (IAIH) is the credentialing body for the Florida Institute of Hypnotherapy. Hypnotherapy is defined as the use of hypnosis as a therapeutic technique. The IAIH (2017) defines hypnosis as a natural, yet altered, state of mind where

communication and responsiveness with the subconscious mind is present. In fact, Freud utilized the clinical technique of hypnosis in the late 1890s although he later abandoned it for psychoanalysis. His work laid the foundation for hypnosis research today (Bachner-Melman & Lichtenberg, 2001). After doing some research, I chose to make an appointment with a woman hypnotherapist, Debbie, who is a certified member of the IAIH.

Waking on the day of my appointment brought mixed feelings. While I was excited about my appointment, I was also nervous. I was initially afraid to go by myself but quickly realized that this was how it had to be. Therefore, when my work day ended, I grudgingly headed to my first session. I say grudgingly because I was torn. Part of me wanted to push back the truth and stay in the known rather than explore the past and open old wounds. However, another part of me knew that the path ahead would be extremely difficult, but it would be worthwhile.

Passing others as I walked to see the therapist, I felt pressure deep inside my body. My stomach rumbled and my heart ached. The secret fear of what would occur was eating at me. What was I afraid of? Certainly, comfort exists in the known. Maybe this was it, the fear of the unknown. It seems ironic that palm trees are the symbol of being carefree and relaxing. For me, passing the palm trees was like passing through a forbidding forest, like walking toward a beautiful gingerbread house decorated in candy only to be eaten. Or perhaps consumed is a more fitting term, consumed by myself, consumed by my own unconscious, overwhelmed by emotions I could not control. This irony did not escape me. Here I was walking to hypnotherapy to be released from feeling

as though I was being consumed and overwhelmed, yet the moments before my appointment only exacerbated my fear. I knew I needed to face the fear and dismantle it.

Memories that are deep in our unconscious affect everything we do today, whether we remember them or not. Deleuze and Guattari (1977) propose, “Find your black holes and white walls, know them, know your faces; it is the only way you will be able to dismantle them and draw your lines of flight” (p. 208). We must discover our most difficult memories. We must not be psychically arrested. For years I had existed in this arrested state, captured by my past. When my grandfather had abused me, he took my innocence and created a fear that controlled my beliefs and actions. Without knowing how much this influenced my behavior, I was unable to release myself from its grasp. Pinar (1981) suggests that we cannot see movement in others when we are arrested. We also cannot live in the past. We must complete the first step of *currere*, the regression to the past, and return to the present.

My first thought upon entering the tiny house with the white picket fence was, what am I doing here. Is this person a quack? Upon entering the house, one of my first observations were the Buddhas everywhere, whiskey in a crystal container, spa music playing, a receptionist walking bare foot and dressed all in black, and a saying on the wall, “Don’t be who you are supposed to be. Be who you are and feel.” This saying made me think who am I. How do I feel? It really helped me connect with the thoughts and emotions that had driven me to this place.

After waiting for a very short time, the hypnotherapist came down the stairs and introduced herself. She greeted me with a soft soothing voice and a peaceful demeanor. A sense of peacefulness pervaded. This was in sharp contrast to the heavy weight in my

heart that pushed down my shoulders and ran down my spine. After taking me to her office, she explained that she also was sexually abused and did not remember it until she entered the hypnotherapy field. She feels drawn to help people like me. She can connect, she can witness. In Freud's words, "it takes two to witness the unconscious" (as cited in Caruth, 1995, p. 24).

As Freud believed, it takes two to bring the unconscious testimony into the realm of cognition. Would Debbie be able to help me bring my testimony out from my unconscious? Debbie explained that through the power of my mind, she would help me reach my goal of freedom from my trauma. She explained that the feelings I had about myself were not me the adult speaking but the child. She explained that what happened to my child has shaped me today. Herman (1992) states, "Repeated trauma in adult life erodes the structure of the personality already formed, but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality" (p. 96). My self was constructed under repeated child sexual abuse. Although I had ignored this past, by participating in this psychoanalytical hypnotherapy session I was able to reach back to my past.

During the session, I utilized focusing which is a psychotherapeutic process developed by psychotherapist Gendlin (1978). The purpose of focusing was to be completely engulfed in the past. By audio recording the session, I was able later to observe and record my own thoughts and feelings. Having a trained professional walk me through the focusing process was liberating. During this regressive step, as Pinar (2012) suggests, I did not attempt to interpret my observations at first; instead I worked to be present in them. I truly felt as if I was age six again, remembering the fear I felt sitting on his lap. I felt the shame. I walked through the moments of my youth, studying the details.

Later, I would sit down with the recordings and revisit what was said and analyzed the transcripts to make meaning. The process for analysis is described later in this paper. In Chapter 2: Uncovering the Truth, I share the transcript from the session and what I learned about myself.

I am a product of my past. I am here but I am not. I recall Herman's (1992) words, "traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living" (p. 52). It was during the regressive step that I began to acknowledge that my psyche had been formed under distress. My deep need to feel wanted, to belong, comes from the trauma I encountered as a child. Having gone back to the past and worked through the regressive step, I moved on to the next step of currere, the progressive.

Progressive.

Having taken the intellectual and emotional journey back to my past experiences, it was time to enter the next step. The progressive step requires a look ahead at what is yet to come. Pinar (2007) states, ". . . the progressive, asks me to ponder meditatively the future in order to uncover my aspiration, in order to understand where I am moving" (p. ix). In this step, cognitive thought intentionally turns towards what is not yet present as we imagine an uncertain future. We must take photographs in our mind of what is to come next week, next month, next year. This is one's fantasies of what one might be. I find this section especially fascinating.

I was never one to dream and look ahead. I now realize that I was caught in the past. Fantasizing is something I never did. While my husband would dream about our future and talk about our retirement plans, these were items that never took up any space in my mind. I lived each day and, truthfully, these discussions of the future were initiated

and dominated by my husband's desire to construct the future through planning. Yes, I planned summer vacations or outings on the weekend, but that was as far as I looked ahead. I was never comfortable dreaming. To travel all the way through the intellectual journey of *currere*, I knew I must think about my future, my dreams. These are the hallmarks of the progressive step. The roots of dream, thought, and fantasy in curriculum theory can be traced back to Maxine Greene's discussions of being wide awake. Greene (2008) suggests that a person must have the ability to reflect on their own life for self-awareness to exist. Consciousness comes from being alive and curious.

Pinar (1978a) suggests sitting alone in a darkened room with your eyes closed. Breathe slowly and focus. Relax. Think of the future: tomorrow, next week, months ahead, years ahead. Where am I going? Where will I be? Who will I be? I now turn toward my imagined future. Pinar (2004) insists, "In the progressive phase of *currere*, one writes to become other, that which has been split off or denied" (p. 126). This was a moment for me to break away from my chains, it was freeing. During this exploration, I allowed my mind to wander. I embraced the actual and the emotional images. I imagined myself as a doctoral graduate, Dr. LaFrance. My parents are so proud and I feel warmth inside. I've accomplished more than I ever dreamed I would.

I continued to explore the future. I envision myself coming down the stairs, smelling bacon and coffee. My husband is cooking breakfast. He has finally perfected eggs the way I like them. My husband. Oh, my husband. Where have the 40 years gone that we've spent together? It's funny to think about the impetuous 23-year-old boy I met becoming the mature, wise old man I see before me now. What a long strange trip it's been. I walk outside with my head held high on my way to work and feel the warm

Florida sun on my skin. As I drive to work, I think that the house is quiet these days. My children have grown and moved away. Do they remember the values and morals I passed on to them? How do they interpret the experiences we had together? What do they remember? The days of tucking them in at night are gone. I miss that. However, it's wonderful to watch them blossom and form new relationships. I enjoy calling my daughter and having adult conversations about her life's journey. She asks about the crockpot recipe I made for her as a child. It reminds me of the calls I made to my mom. I miss her and my father. My son has graduated college and has met a wonderful girl. Marriage? Grandchildren perhaps? Can't wait!

Finally, I arrive at work. I'm back in higher education, teaching preservice teachers. I feel the satisfaction of my hard work and I see the impact that my work has made in the schools. Walking across campus, I feel the sun on my skin and watch the young faces walking by. The wind is blowing lightly as I pass the majestic buildings on campus. I can't believe that my life has come to a place where I can spend the rest of my days doing what I love: collaborating, learning, thinking, teaching. I feel confident and alive.

Pinar (2015a) suggest that it is important to use free association and avoid use of the rationality. Don't assume that an imagined futuristic state is unreasonable. As I sit and think about this future, it is tangible and true. I feel as if I have looked into a crystal ball and know what will happen. This progressive step has me looking ahead at freedom. I see myself without chains, laughing, happy, enjoying life.

Now that the regressive and progressive steps have occurred, and mental pictures have been taken, I move to the analytical step.

Analytical.

During the analytical step, one describes the present, inclusive of responses to the past and the future. In this step, we take a picture of the present with ourselves included in it. In addition, Pinar suggests that we take mental photos of ourselves in the past and the future. Now we have three photos; the past, present, and future. Pinar (2015b) states, “Study the three photographs. What are they; what is their individuality? What fundamental ontological theme do they express? Why are they as they are” (p. 77)? While we are looking at these three pictures, we look to see how they are intermingled with each other. “How is the future present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both?” (Pinar, 2015b, p.78). What am I most drawn to? What are my intellectual interests? What is my emotional condition? These are the questions asked in the analytical step.

During this step, I describe these thoughts to paint a picture, but it is still not the time to interpret the picture. Pinar (1994) posits, “Description via conceptualization is breaking into parts the organic whole” (p. 11). So far, I have broken my self-concept into the past and future. My exploration of the past occurred during hypnotherapy. Following that session, I was engaged in considering the present. I do this work as I write. Thinking. Writing. Rewriting. Who am I today? Why do I do the things that I do?

As I am on the path to healing, unanswered and unresolved questions remain a part of my journey. Given my young age at the time of my abuse and the defense mechanisms of my mind, I hoped that my mom might be able to give me answers so I could understand and move on. I felt compelled to reach out to her and learn more about the situation. Driving home from my appointment, I called and she asked where I was

coming from. When I said I was coming from the doctor's office, she asked, "What doctor is open on a Saturday?" I replied that I went to a hypnotherapist to deal with things with grandpa. She inquired if I was still having episodes about grandpa and if it was still bothering me. I affirmed that it never goes away (something she still does not understand); however, since I am writing about him, some things are coming up.

I then asked her about my grandfather's relationship with his father. I did this, because in the present, I felt the need to know why a grandfather would sexually molest his own grandchild? Why would he touch the daughter of his son? These are the questions I wrestle with today. She did not know about my grandfather's relationship with his father so she asked my dad. He didn't know much about his father's relationship either. Apparently, these are not the types of topics that were discussed at that time within our family. The emptiness inside me has started to close, but it still remains.

So how did I feel following the hypnotherapy session? I'm not sure. Did I expect birds to be chirping and singing in my ears? Maybe. Perhaps my expectations were too high. Expecting to talk to someone and have all the painful feelings go away seems ridiculous now. However, I know that I am smiling right now. I am beginning to feel some relief from the huge weight that I've been carrying inside. Keeping a heavy secret such as this inside has been a tremendous burden. I'm starting to realize what I need to engage myself in is not remembering all the details about what happened, but rather to engage in the act of letting it go. The impact of the experience is what should be my concern (Caruth, 1995). I realize now that I was traumatized. I was possessed by this event that happened. Caruth (1995) states, "The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that

they cannot entirely possess” (p. 5). This matched what Debbie explained to me, that it is not me who feels chained, dead, like nothing, worthless, unimportant, untrusting, scared, out of control, but it is the child in me who feels that way. I had to go back to the child and give her a voice.

When painting the picture of who I am, I also think about my physical self. Interestingly, in my hypnotherapy session, the therapist asked me if I had medical issues. I explained to her that I have gastric issues. I have always had stomach issues. There are times when my stomach starts to hurt immediately upon eating. I feel excruciating pain and immediately must go to the bathroom. It’s almost as if my body rejects the food. However, sometimes it just happens unexpected. For no reason, I will start feeling incredible uneasiness in my gut. After reflecting on this, I noticed that most of my stomach issues occur when I am surrounded by my parents. This revelation astounded me because there is no place I would rather be than with my parents. I always find comfort with them. She explained that we keep our stomachs so tight that it causes issues. Unconsciously, I’m holding onto the pain. I had overlooked the connection between the mind and body. This conversation made me think about the mind/body connection and led to me researching the connection between trauma and physical health. What did research say about this?

Childhood abuse and trauma have been linked to poor physical health. Kendall-Tackett, Marshall, and Ness (2000) noted that women who experienced traumatic events go to the doctor more often, report more health symptoms, and had surgery twice as often as others. Additional illnesses that were found to be related to past physical or sexual abuse included irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), chronic pelvic pain, frequent headaches,

and fibromyalgia (Kendall-Tackett et al., 2000). This research brought light to some of the physical maladies I experience. I also found that one of the more extensively studied long-term health outcomes of child abuse is gastrointestinal symptoms in adulthood. Unexplained gastrointestinal symptoms are more common in adults who recall abuse as a child (van Tilburg et al., 2010). van Tilburg et al. (2010) concluded, “Youth who have been maltreated are at increased risk for unexplained gastrointestinal symptoms, and this relation is partially mediated by psychological distress” (p. 1). Incredible. For all this time, I had no idea why I had these physical problems. These physical problems are the state I exist in today.

In addition, I found that survivors of childhood sexual trauma are at high risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2001), PTSD arises from exposure to traumatic events that invokes intense fear, helplessness, or horror. The symptoms that may occur after these events include reoccurring memories of the event, avoiding things associated with the trauma, feeling numb, and increased alertness to perceived threats. Terr (1988) also noted three main types of symptoms associated with PTSD include flashbacks, re-experiencing the trauma, and nightmares. It is also interesting to note that Coid, Petruckevitch, Chung, Richardson, Moorey, and Feder (2003) suggested women who reported childhood sexual abuse were five times more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD than nonvictims.

While I have never gone to the doctor to be diagnosed for PTSD, these symptoms are not unfamiliar to me. Many nights, when my husband came to bed after I had gone to sleep, I was startled. The creak of the door was enough to awaken me from my slumber. My immediate reaction was to scream and shake vigorously. Fortunately, these episodes

were most prevalent 15 years ago when I first recalled my abuse. These reactions were one of the consequences of my recollection of the abuse: the terror I would feel at night, the terror I would feel in the dark, lying in my own bed. Gasping for air, I would wrap my arms around my pillow, close my eyes, and hope I could fall back asleep. Many nights I couldn't. Fortunately, I can report that these episodes have disappeared. I believe that opening myself up to the trauma has allowed me to overcome the nightly fears.

However, my present state is a fractured one. I'm not quite whole. My life is full, but something is still missing inside of me. My husband and I have had a good relationship for more than 20 years. Both my children are happy and healthy and are very successful in school. I am currently working as an assistant principal. While it's not the job of my dreams, it suffices. As I think about the analytical step, I recall that the importance of this step is not to disengage for the purpose of self-scrutiny, but rather to intensify the engagement with daily life (Pinar, 2004). Considering my present place in life, I am happy, but I am not satisfied. This lack of satisfaction and to be whole again are the impetus for my psychoanalytic self-exploration and writing my autobiography. While I have lived most of my life with these secrets intact, it is time to let go of the secrets. I must move on to the synthetic step.

Synthetic.

Having traveled through time in the regressive, progressive, and analytical steps, the past, future, and present, I now synthesize my understanding gained through experiencing these three steps. What do these three images of myself mean? How are they interrelated? Who am I? In the synthetic step consideration of the other three steps occurs. Pinar (2007) states:

I work to get a handle on what I've been and what I imagine myself to be, so I can wield this information, rather than it wielding me. The beginning of agency.

Now the antithesis, the synthetical stage. More deeply, now, in the present. I choose what of it to honor, what of it to let go. I choose again who it is I aspire to be, how I wish my life history to read. I determine my social commitments; I devise my strategies: whom to work with, for what, and how. (p. ix)

I partake in this process so that I might become liberated, so that I might control my stream of consciousness and not be controlled by the trauma I experienced as a child. This process gives me the ability to gain insight into how emotional and social aspects are an important part of who I am today.

Synthesizing the information from the regressive, progressive, and analytical steps requires a challenging, complicated conversation with oneself. To synthesize one's life is not an easy task. I take on this difficult work in my writing. By writing, I can mull through ideas and being to understand them at a deeper level. According to Pinar, "by examining one's life history, even a fragment of that history, such as one's life in schools, or one's involvement in an academic discipline, one can begin to construct an etiology of one's present arrest, of one's case" (as cited in Pinar, 1994, p. 37). For me, bracketing one piece of my history rather than looking at it in totality allows me to address one of the most impactful episodes of my life.

I also recognize that making important decisions requires reliable and accurate information. A lack of knowledge is like looking at a disjointed puzzle. Once you have the information, you can wield it and live with intention. By walking through the steps of *currere*, I could take the pieces of the puzzle and put them together to see and accurately

conceptualize a new version of myself. It also allows me to examine where I fit in. It gives my life meaning. Through the process of *currere*, I oversee myself. I have a better understanding of myself after going through this process. My personal identity is revealing itself. Parts of me were buried in my unconscious, caught in the past. Schubert (2009) points out in Charles Dickens' classic book, *A Christmas Carol*, that Scrooge is doing just this process. Ebenezer Scrooge goes through the process of reflecting through the spirits of the past, present, and future. In these reflections, Scrooge has a complicated conversation with himself as well.

Pinar (1994) also discusses the importance of the "complicated conversations" required as part of the *currere* process. He means we must always engage in *theorizing*. Going to therapy was not easy. In fact, it was terrifying. It's much easier to pretend the past does not exist, to make statements like I've moved beyond it. I'm past it. I'm over it. In truth, these statements are just lip service. The only way to move forward is by understanding the present after unearthing the past and imagining the future. Morris (2015) suggests that understanding is always partial and problems will arise during the method of *currere*. However, if one becomes stuck psychically in any of these movements, it is important to remain fluid and continue to have complicated conversations about the past, present and future as these are all inter-related pieces of our lives.

As I conduct the complicated conversation with myself, I realize that I cannot just move on. The internal pendulum swings between relief and anxiety. Sure, I wish the anxiety would stop and I could get closure, but that's the quick approach and it's not truly sustainable. Believing that I can suddenly forget the past or completely come to terms

with it are unrealistic and ineffective. The reality is that I must constantly go through the complicated conversation in my mind—thinking about where I’ve been, what I’ve experienced, how it felt, how it shaped me. I must also consider what the trauma means to me. How has the trauma affected my present state and how will it affect my future? Rather, how will I let it affect my future? By having consciousness about my abuse, I now realize I can decide what I want to do with this awareness. How do I paint the new picture of my life without secrets?

However, we must be careful not to become trapped in the method of *currere*. One part of *currere* is to help us become reflective, slow down. As Pinar states (2004):

The method of *currere* . . . promises no quick fixes. On the contrary, this autobiographical method asks us to slow down, to remember even re-enter the past, and to meditatively imagine the future. Then, slowly and in one’s own terms, one analyzes one’s experience of the past and fantasies of the future in order to understand more fully, with more complexity and subtlety, one’s submergence in the present. (p. 4)

Pinar’s (2004) suggestion to slow down is quite the opposite of today’s messages in society. How many private places do I really have to think? How often am I alone with my thoughts? Slow down? Ha! Send a text, check my emails? Still need to return that phone call. Is that my GPS telling me where to go? Oh no, perhaps it’s the radio.

Messages all around us tell us to stay connected to each other. But maybe what we really need to do is connect with ourselves. Perhaps that is why the syncretical step seems to be the most difficult one for me. Up to this point, I have witnessed the past, seen my present, looked to my future, and analyzed my trauma. Now it is time to move forward. I

must move forward attempting to understand how I have been conditioned. Conditioned to react to external stimuli. I'm asleep, the door creaks, I scream and shake. My husband comforts me. It's the past and the present coming together, synthesized. What does it mean? It means that I am loved. It means that I'm ready to move on from the past that entangles me.

While I have unearthed the past, discovered the future, and acknowledged the present, I must now choose my own path. During this step, I am reminded that I need to do something with all this information, with this reflection, with my self-discovery. I must move my private reflection to the public arena.

Grumet (1991) suggests that reflection is not complete until those composing the reflection also engage in its interpretation: "When we work with life history, the autobiographical act is not complete until the writer of the story becomes its reader and the temporal fissure that has opened between the writing and the reading invites negation as well affirmation" (p. 83). As such, I am not just writing my story, I am psychoanalytically thinking about my thoughts and actions. I am writing to find my voice, but I am also writing to be healed. I am considering why some thoughts are conscious and why other memories are repressed. I am searching for a way to take control of the reactions to the traumatic and painful memories of my past.

Many researchers contend that the first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor (Herman, 1992; Caruth, 1995). I am now empowered. I integrate and remove anything that has taken away my power and control of my own life. I am developing an inner monologue that creates safety and does not depend on external sources to bring it to me. I am beginning to be at peace with myself. I should not be

blamed for this trauma, I am the victim, and now I am a survivor. The self-loathing I have for myself is dissipating. I did not allow this trauma to happen to me, I did not cause this trauma. I was a 6-year-old child who did not have a voice. I am now a woman with a voice and a secret that must be shared. I must no longer have a fear of abandonment.

The syncretical step is the stage for self-reflection. Therefore, I write, to experience the therapeutic part of connecting with and understand these thoughts and feelings, moving the trauma, the fear of abandonment, and the secret out of my mind and out of my heart. Now they are tangible, written words in a dissertation. If I want to throw it away, I can. I now want to be heard. I want to scream from the top of the building what has happened to me and what is happening to so many others. This has become my mission, my purpose. Victims and survivors must have a voice. I want to make a difference to trauma survivors. I want to wake up a society that still has not done enough to prevent or help these trauma survivors.

While I had many meetings with my professors about choosing my dissertation topic, I was always asked if I really wanted to do this. Do I want to put myself through this? Why not write in third person? Why not write a memoir? While I know these questions are coming from the need to protect me, I have been silent too long and I am ready to make noise, to be loud, to be relentless with getting out my secret. I yearn to be heard. I want to help people. I want to help children. I want to help teachers become a voice for our traumatized members of our student population.

As I work through syncretical step in this dissertation, I see how the method of *carrere* provided a framework for examining myself within this autobiography. In addition, the syncretical step has opened the door to using psychoanalysis to deeply

explore myself. In the next chapter, I take you on my journey into the past as I attempted to uncover my truth.

CHAPTER 2

UNCOVERING THE TRUTH

In Chapter 2, I continue telling my story as it relates to my theoretical framework. The focus of this chapter is on the past. I use autobiography, psychoanalysis, and hypnotherapy to explore the past, the unconscious, and the repressed memories that have emerged. Psychoanalysis, as a treatment method, is based on concepts concerning unconscious mental processes and was initially developed by Freud. Psychoanalysis was further developed by a considerable number of experienced psychoanalysts who followed Freud. The psychoanalytic theory that I primarily utilize is Freud's (1915, 1915/1957, 1950, 1962a, 1962b, 1992). I also draw upon curriculum theorists that utilize psychoanalysis such as Eigen (2001), Winnicott (1953, 1986, 2005), Bion (1992), J.L. Miller (2005), A. Miller (1981, 1984, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012), Bollas (1999), and Grotstein (2000). In addition, I delve into my own experience in hypnotherapy and my discoveries from this experience utilizing research on a psychotherapeutic process developed by Gendlin (2007) called focusing.

I use psychoanalysis to study myself. Post-Freudian psychoanalysis and focusing are used to better understand the curriculum as reconceptualized by Pinar. The way people relate to others and situations in their adult lives are shaped by their childhood experiences, including relationships with family members. As such, examining my own childhood experiences provides a solid foundation for understanding my own relationships and behaviors. It helps me understand who is driving this vehicle I call my body. Through the lens of post-Freudian psychoanalysis and focusing theorists such as Balint (1992); Bollas (1987, 1989, 1995, 1999); Eigen (1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2001, 2005);

Grotstein (2000); Winnicott (1986, 2005); Laplanche (1999); A. Miller (2006); Cornell (1996); and Gendlin (2007), I examine my past. Understanding the foundation of psychoanalysis as conceptualized by Freud is the first step in this journey.

Exploring the past.

Growing up I had no recollection of the abuse. However, I can remember the day, time, and my location when these horrible memories surfaced. In Doll's (2000) words, I had a "knock at my backdoor". She (2000) states:

In real life, as in existential novels, we find our 'other' in the visitor, the stranger, the old friend, the unusual encounter, the unexpected question, the unfamiliar feeling, the disturbing dream, or the knock at the back door. The visitor awakens us and 'marries us to the creative wellspring lying inside.' (pp. 107-108)

This knock at my door brought back a flood of memories that were buried in my unconsciousness. At the time, I was age 26 and in a committed relationship. Why did these memories choose to resurface at this point in my life? I do not know. Perhaps I still am uncomfortable with facing the truth. Maybe I somehow felt like I was losing control and falling under the power of a man in a way that I had not experienced since I was a child. Clearly, this is an area that needs further exploration. I have no doubt this road is a painful one and will likely be difficult to accept. Regardless of the cause of the memory resurfacing, having a flashback to this event brought up many questions. Was I making this up? Was I dreaming? Did this really happen to me over and over? How could I have forgotten this? If it was true, why didn't I tell anyone? How could I forget a memory that was so intensely painful? Perhaps it is the work of my ego, censoring the

unconscious and protecting me from madness. Doll (2000) concludes that we must be open to the knock. But, how? How do I respond to the knock?

Accurately understanding events of the past is challenging and often I question what is real and what is a figment of my imagination? Is this because I repressed events for such an extended period in my life? Like Freud, Miller (2006) discusses the term *the return of the repressed*. This phrase means that abuse in childhood which is left unresolved until later in life can create dysfunction. Since the repressed memories are not resolved, they create behavior problems. Is this what happened to me? If so, in what ways have the damaged memories manifested themselves in my psyche?

Recalling events from long ago does not provide the clearest lens. At times I am in a state of confusion. Bollas (1999) discusses this confusional state: “. . . confusion is often an attempt to defy the mind’s intellectual acumen. Confusion becomes a screen that aims to deflect the mind’s attack and depressive individuals may embrace confusion in order to minimize the precision of mental reproach” (Bollas, 1999, p. 105). Therefore, our mind tries to hide our contents by maintaining this confusional state. I believe that I was in this state for most of my childhood and part of my adult life. However, reading the work of psychoanalysts opened doors that had been closed and locked long ago.

I now understand that to search for my identity, to understand the self, I must understand the other. Morris (2015) noted that the self can only be understood in the context of the world around us. As we learn about others we learn about ourselves; as we learn about ourselves we learn about others. For me, the other is the Ed.D. in the Curriculum Studies Program. Through the coursework and the assigned texts, I have begun to connect to the self. Each word I have read and each discussion I have engaged

in has allowed me to connect with the past and open closed doors. Connections have emerged in ways I never imagined possible. The experiences and activities I have engaged in during the program created an opportunity for psychic news to emerge.

I can remember being in my very first doctoral class in the summer of 2013. I took this class with Professor Marla Morris. At the time, we were discussing her book, *On Not Being Able to Play* (Morris, 2009). The primary, thought provoking question of the text is whether psychoanalytic therapy could help a musician or scholar that is psychically wounded. Although I am not a musician, I connected with this premise. Could I be helped? Sometimes you know things, but being reminded of them feels like an epiphany. “The purpose of psychoanalysis is to uncover secrets. Not so easy. Secrets are partly conscious and partly unconscious attempts to cover over something painful.” (p. 25). I knew I had a secret. And I knew it would be uncomfortable to talk about. Could I tell someone? Could I write a dissertation and reveal my pain? Reveal my fears? “There is something creepy about people watching you express your deepest emotions” (p. 20). Morris sharing challenges as a musician gave me courage. “The game of life is partly about dealing with the loss” (p. 27). What have I lost because of my abuse? Confidence. Self-esteem. Self-respect. I have buried my pain, but I have not dealt with it. Could this help? Could I be freed from the pain? From the secret? “Who we are is what we have lost. In dealing with the loss tells much about our character” (p. 27). What does hiding my secret say about my character? Is that who I want to be? I admired the courage she had to write such a personal book. I can even recall writing on my discussion post, “I can only hope to one day be as honest as you are in this book.” I knew that I wanted my

actions to reflect the courageous person I aspired to be. Who knew that after 2 years, I would be that honest?

My entire process of analyzing and working through the resistance in my mind about my past led to surprising revelations about my belief system and the way I had reacted to situations. There were certainly characteristics of myself that I did not want to face, that I had unwittingly projected onto others. These could be transference from Freuds' perspective. These new revelations, or psychic news, prepared me for the next steps in my psychoanalytical journey. The process that I used for this dissertation was a combination of psychoanalytic practices.

While you embark in reading this autobiography, I want to provide a broad framework for you to understand my analytical procedures. I began by studying the method of currere and psychoanalysis to help me better understand myself. During the writing of this work, I was exposed to additional methods for building self-understanding; hypnosis, focusing, and healing through writing. Each of these methods are detailed within the chapters of this dissertation. Much of what I discovered about myself was accomplished by spending time writing about various aspects of my life. While I did not document the dates and times that I spent in each writing session, I have been consistently writing and revising for almost three years. During this time, I estimate that I have written on over 150 separate occasions for over 1000 hours. During these writing sessions, analytic processes that I utilized included free association during which I wrote down my thoughts without consideration of writing conventions and an expressive writing process called cognitive processing where I wrote down my thoughts and emotions to derive meaning. Sitting alone and having time to reflect and explore my

stream of consciousness was also an important part of the meaning making process. The topics for writing sessions were selected based on the step of currere that I was engaged in. For example, the regressive step of currere calls for revisiting the past. I decided to use hypnotherapy and focusing to unlock unconscious memories from my childhood related to my sexual abuse. During one hypnotherapy session I audio recorded the interaction between the hypnotherapist and myself. This session and the meaning that I made from this session is included later in this chapter.

For me, mulling through old ideas, the push and pull between what I resist and openly accept, and the search for truth and meaning in my life has all been a process of self-exploration. The objects and understanding that have emerged because of my relations with the objects have helped me embrace new ideas, build a connection, and establish causal relationships between my adult psyche and my childhood experiences. While I am still unsure if my truth is the truth because much of my past is clouded by time and repressed thoughts, I am free to know that it is real to me and that is empowering. During my coursework, I thought deeply in silence about how I have been changed. It also sparked an interest in psychoanalysis that I had never considered before.

Psychoanalysis

Freud is considered by many to be the father of psychoanalysis. He focused on psychoanalytic processes for treating mental disorders by interpreting unconscious and conscious elements of the mind. While psychoanalysis, as a treatment method, was originally developed by Freud, it has been developed further by a considerable number of experienced psychoanalysts who followed him.

Freud introduced a topographical model of the mind in 1900 which included three psychic systems; the conscious mind, the preconscious mind, and the unconscious mind (Freud, 1915). For the concept of the unconscious Freud was influenced by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg who examined dreams as a pathway to inaccessible self-knowledge as well as Goethe and Schiller (Gay, 1998). The conscious mind includes everything we are aware of. The preconscious mind represents ordinary memory that we are not consciously aware of always but that can be easily retrieved at any time. The unconscious mind is an area that stores feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that are outside our conscious awareness. Even though we are unaware of these inner forces, Freud believed they influence our behavior and experience. This work provided the foundation for the development of psychoanalysis that followed. Personally, I had not thought much about the impact of memories that had been pushed back into my unconscious mind; instead, I focused on conscious decisions and what was right in front of me. Over the course of the past few years, I have begun engaging in self-reflection to better understand the influence my unconscious has had on me.

In psychoanalytic theory, the unconscious is the central organizing concept. These inner forces of the unconscious mind are outside our awareness, thus directing our behavior unbeknownst to us. Could this be why I make choices that do not seem to fit with my thinking? Freud (1915) was one of the first theorists to believe the unconscious was inaccessible to us, hence it was hidden. This work was influenced by the writings of Marcel Proust on the emergence of memory from the unconscious (Bernstein, 2005). Freud thought we could only catch glimpses of our unconscious. Examples of these glimpses are seen in our dreams, a random slip of the tongue, or a sudden eruption of

emotions. Looking at my life, I am getting a better idea of the impact of my youth and how the thoughts and experiences of my youth have presented themselves through my random slips of the tongue and emotional experiences. These glimpses of my unconscious arose from memories unconsciously embedded in my psyche.

For Freud, dreams contained both the latent and manifest content. The manifest content is a story line of the dream, while the latent content is what the dreamer makes of the dream (Morris, 2016b). Through free association, a person can attempt to make sense of dreams to make the unconscious conscious. This can be done through psychoanalytic treatment and hypnotherapy.

Freud (1952) notes that people can begin to understand old psychic conflicts and transference. Transference has been defined by psychotherapists as “the redirection of feelings and desires and especially of those unconsciously retained from childhood toward a new object.” (Neborsky and ten Have-de Labije, 2012, p.97). Britzman (2009) claims that transference can create problems when the old patterns are inappropriate to the new situation. This often occurs in education. Students may experience positive transference such as liking a teacher because they remind them of a positive person in their lives or negative transference where student hates a teacher for the same reason. This may also occur for teachers transferring their past on their students (Britzman, 2009). The roots of transference can also be uncovered through psychoanalytic treatment.

Psychoanalytic treatment can reveal how unconscious factors affect current relationships and patterns of behavior, trace them back to the historical origins, show how they have changed and developed over time, and help the individual deal better with the realities of adult life. In psychoanalysis, the focus is on remembering or uncovering the

past. In psychoanalytic treatment, free association can be used to bring the unconscious to the conscious. Freud's method of free association, where a patient says what comes to their mind, was derived from Ludwig Borne's suggestion for writers to write down everything in one's head (Britzman, 2010). While Freud moved from the topographical model to the structural model, terminology associated with the topographical model are still widely used today.

In the structural model that he introduced in 1923, Freud (1962) suggested the human psyche was made up of three systems, the id, ego, and super-ego. The id, which we are born with, is based on our pleasure principle; whatever makes us feel good, the id wants and no consideration is given to reality. This is the all-about-me phase in our lives. Freud credits Georg Groddeck for the concept of the unconscious id (Breger, 2000).

The ego, which develops as we interact more with the world, allows us to relate to the world, to reality, by fighting off psychic conflict. Freud (1966/2000) suggests that defense mechanisms such as repression, isolation, and projection must be utilized to mediate reality and protect us (as cited in Morris, 2016b, p.335). When these defense mechanisms continue to be utilized by adults when they are no longer needed they get in the way of a person living a happy life (Morris, 2016b).

The ego is similar to the id in that it seeks pleasure and avoids pain. Conversely, the ego is different than the id in that the ego is concerned with devising a realistic strategy to obtain pleasure. The ego is based on the reality principle. The ego considers the reality of the situation. Freud (1959) suggests that the ego is where anxiety comes from. The ego is also responsible for censoring dreams (Freud, 1960). Often, the "ego

and superego are merged” and can only be distinguished when a conflict arises between them (Freud, 1959, p.17).

The third system is the super ego. Freud (1969) suggested that the superego provides an opportunity for an after education of the neurotic so that it can correct mistakes that the parents were responsible for. Britzman (2012) further builds on this concept of “after education”. In this we find that the superego can serve as a teacher (Morris, 2016b).

The connection between psychoanalysis to the notion of *currere* is clearly evident. In one definition, *currere* means the seeking of what is lost, a notion we clearly see in psychoanalysis. Pinar (1995) elaborated on remembrance of things past, an important technique in psychoanalysis. For the individual, what one does is based on the experiences he or she lived. We must remember so we do not become trapped. The only way to avoid getting trapped is to go back to the past. Pinar (1995) states, “Psychoanalytically, *currere* as interpretation of experience involves the examination of manifest and latent meaning, conscious and unconscious content of language, as well as political implications of such reflection interpretation” (p. 521). One way to go back to the past is through therapy. To better understand myself and understand my unconscious and subconscious, I used a process of therapy called hypnotherapy, which included focusing.

Focusing

Cornell (1996) suggests that focusing is a body-oriented process of self-awareness and emotional healing. It is a skill, not a therapeutic technique although many therapists incorporate it in their work. According to Gendlin (1978), focusing originated from the

research of Kendall and Rogers at the University of Chicago. He examined recordings of therapeutic sessions, discovered that successful clients paused more often and were willing to try to understand unclear aspects of their experience. The clients were often trying to understand inner experiences that were difficult to describe. As the person focused on his or her sensations, the inner experience became clearer and the person was able to develop new insights that allowed him or her to change behavior. From this research, Gendlin organized the skills he observed into a teachable practice he called focusing. Focusing includes six focusing movements include clearing a space, felt sense of the problem, finding a handle, resonating handle and felt sense, asking, and receiving. These are explained in detail later in this chapter.

For movement or change to occur within therapy, the person must be in touch with his or her own feelings. For me, this came from taking the opportunity to spend time alone and be present with myself. This gave me time to mull around ideas and come to terms with my emotions and beliefs about specific life events. In Focusing, this is called clearing a space. Focusing offers ways to facilitate this awareness. Gendlin (2016) suggests that your body knows more about situations than you are explicitly aware of. He believes that a person's body picks up more about another person than they consciously know. With some training, a person can get a bodily feel for the intangible remembrances and emotions that occur below the surface of conscious awareness. From that bodily feel come small movements that lead towards a positive resolution.

Cornell (1996) also suggests that people can learn how to do focusing alone without the support of a therapist. Often, your body is already speaking to you. You just need to learn how to hear its message. You must listen to the feeling and let it speak to

you. You must open yourself to the depth and richness of your whole self so that you might glean insight, physical release, and positive change from the experience. This broad purpose skill begins with bringing awareness to the body. This is especially true in the throat, chest, stomach, and abdomen. Once you find the feeling, you must acknowledge it and then describe it. This conscious process helps create a deep emotional connection to the feeling.

Just as Pinar (1975) suggested that currere requires a slowing down, Cornell (1996) suggests that we must not be in a hurry if we are to create an inner atmosphere without pressure. It requires presence and inviting our feelings into our consciousness. This allows for small realizations which lead to changes in the body. This happens through the meaning that is carried within the body, connected to a memory, and sometimes an unexpressed part of our self. You cannot fix the problem. You can only hear it and acknowledge it. This, in turn, brings deep relief. By acknowledging your feelings, you can become more comfortable with them. Overwhelming feelings signal that something is very important and needs to be heard. Unfortunately, this intensity might cause us to run from the feeling.

For me, by participating in therapy that utilized focusing, I came in contact with experiences I was carrying within my body so that I could understand how I continue to live frozen by my abuse. This allowed something inside to change. Able to relax, I felt energized. Grateful tears arrived as I took a deep breath. This change is described as the *felt shift* that allowed me to feel better and different in a wonderful way. It allowed me to confront my difficult situation.

Human lives are the interplay between feeling and action. Therefore, focusing and therapy are not separate from life. They are part of life. As such, one of the movements requires exploring the interrelationship between feeling and action. If the inner awareness does not lead to new ways of behaving and living, then it is incomplete. In the beginning stages of change, it is important to consciously experience the feelings generated by the change. Later you focus on how you envision your life in the future. Then you may begin working in a new way (Cornell, 1996).

There are parallels between the process of focusing and currere. Specifically, both are internal thought processes where a person looks within. As such, they require a comfortable, quiet space for thought. While Pinar (1978a) discusses walking through the regressive, progressive, analytical, and syncretical steps during this quiet time, Gendlin (1978) takes a different approach to attaining self-awareness. Gendlin organized six movements to help people focus their thoughts. The six focusing movements include clearing a space, felt sense of the problem, finding a handle, resonating handle and felt sense, asking, and receiving. To understand myself, I utilized both currere which is described in Chapter 1 and Focusing which is discussed in detail in the following paragraphs and utilized as I analyzed the therapy session later in this chapter.

Gendlin (1978) suggests that it is important to find a sense of general physical comfort so that you might look inward. This preparation is essential so that you might walk through the movements. During the first movement, clearing space, you ask yourself questions such as, "How do I feel. Why don't I feel wonderful right now? What is bugging me on this particular day?" (p. 59). You must be open to the feelings associated with these questions.

During the second movement, felt sense of the problem, you must identify which problem feels the worst in that moment. Then you must feel the problem and sense it. This takes patience. Once you have felt a physical connection to the problem, it is time for the third movement, finding a handle. During this movement, you evaluate the quality of the felt sense. Is it heavy, icky, burdensome? On the other hand, you might describe it as helpless to . . . or trapped in a box. Once you have an accurate description of the feeling, you now have the handle. This is a whole felt sense that may occur with a body shift. This shift is a change in your feeling. At first, this shift may be small. Nevertheless, you know a shift has occurred.

During the fourth movement, resonating handle and felt sense, you take the word or image from the third movement and check it against the felt sense, looking for a perfect fit. This sensation may come and go. In that case, you wait until it is right. Once the feeling begins to change, you have made the match. If a big shift in the feeling occurs, then you can move directly to the sixth movement. However, if the change has not occurred, you must do the fifth movement, asking.

In the fifth movement, asking, you ask the felt sense directly what it is. This allows you to clearly wrap your mind around the feeling. For example, if your handle was trapped, you might ask yourself what is it about this experience that makes me so trapped? What comes quickly is old information. You need to get down to the feeling. This is different from mental answers. This is a deep-felt sense. Mental answers are quick trains of thought that rush by. People think they know the answers to the questions, but they never connect with them deeply enough at the felt level.

When the images and words start to flow from the feeling, there is a felt difference. This is when the body shift occurs. The sixth movement, receiving, is when you appreciate that your body spoke to you no matter what it said. This is only one shift, not the last word. Once you receive the message in a friendly way, there can be more shifts. These are small movements in the process of change that allow you to sense your life direction and ask realistic questions. As your body changes, your new life direction can appear throughout the process as you give these feelings space to breathe. You sense it, you are with it.

Focusing is based on the very positive expectation of change. It does not envision a person remaining fixed or incapable of change. Focusing as a method envisions a person as a process, capable of continually changing and moving forward. The problems are parts of the process that have been blocked. Focusing is there to unstop them and get them moving again. You're not trying to analyze the problem, you're getting in touch with the felt sense of it. By having a special kind of receptiveness to the problem, you can create a physical shift away from it (Gendlin, 2007).

Focusing resonated with me. I could not go back and fix the problem of my grandfather abusing me. All that remained were the memories. Even when they existed in my unconscious, my body knew the abuse had occurred. What I really needed was to connect with the feelings consciously and wrap my mind around them. As I became attentive to my feelings, I realized that it was difficult to put emotions into words. How do you describe strange sensations associated with complex situations or experiences that occur during your life? My experience through therapy is presented in the next section to capture the practice of focusing as a method when exploring childhood sexual abuse.

Therapy

Therapist's Role

While focusing can be done by an individual, the role of a therapist is to engender effective movement (Cornell, 1996). A therapist's responses can enable a client's ability to experience focusing. Therapists must understand that it is important for clients to be in touch with their own perspectives, their own point of view, and their own reactions to the events they are dealing with. The therapist acts as a bridge, helping clients become aware of themselves and their own perspective. The therapist may use questions to facilitate the process, such as, how was that for you? What was your reaction to that? How did you feel? Additionally, the therapist actively listens and provides empathetic reflection as part of the process. By using wait time, slowing their speech, and asking the right questions, the therapist can help a person probe his or her own feelings and emotions.

At the beginning of the session, the therapist may use attunement. Attunement involves connecting with your inner self. At this point the therapist speaks slowly, allows pauses, and uses the pace and tone of his or her words to facilitate the client's process of relaxing and moving inward. During this process of relaxing, the client allows awareness to come into his or her body by being aware of his or her hands, feet, contact of the body with the chair, throat, chest, stomach. This awareness rests gently in the center of the body.

Part of the therapy is silence. This silence is an important part of the process in seeking to understand the problem. Bollas (1989) posits that psychoanalysis is a place for experiencing essential aloneness. We are born alone and die alone. It is important to

reserve silent time when we can again experience this aloneness and reconnect with our inner self.

The problem for me was that I never liked being alone. I can remember as a child not wanting to be alone. Not only did I not want to be alone in a house, I did not want to be alone in a room. As a young child, I was always surrounded by somebody in the house. I made sure of it. Perhaps this was because I knew I was an easy target when I was alone, a child, harmless, trusting, naïve, and innocent. As a teenager, I was always doing something with others. Once I began dating, I handled my relationships the same way. We did everything together, no space alone. Now, looking back, I can see how unhealthy these relationships were. Why could I not be alone? What was I afraid of?

For me, participating in therapy is all about a change process and the therapist was the professional to help me on that journey. While I could describe the change process, I can think of no better way than to share my own experiences and understand them than to look back on a personal therapy session with an audio transcript of the actual event. Within this one-hour session, I recognized that multiple movements of focusing occurred during the session. During these movements, I could revisit the past and connect with my emotions. From there, I could focus with the guidance of my therapist who trained at the Florida Institute for Hypnotherapy and has facilitated over 10,000 client sessions. By working with the hypnotherapist, I could benefit from her training in hypnotherapy, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), breath work, and positive mindset while connecting with my feelings and creating a new reality.

Hypnosis

This one-hour hypnosis session began after exchanging the traditional pleasantries and reviewing what I could expect. It was reassuring to feel comfortable and my nervousness began to subside. To begin the session, the therapist instructed me to close my eyes. She began to say a few sentences and directed me to finish them. She also informed me that the practice she would be using was called focusing. She stated, “By focusing, you can be strong. There is no right or wrong. Simple statements like this gave me the confidence to be truthful and to allow myself to release the fear.” She then opened the dialogue: “When you think about where you are, Diane, and you’re tied to these chains, you live in fear and that makes you feel as if you are . . .? Finish the sentence off. It makes me feel as if I am . . .?” I responded, “not in control.”

Looking back on this statement provides a lot of insight into my psyche. When I think about my personal and professional relationships, control is at the center of my thoughts although it is unconsciously at the center. I don’t consciously think about control. However, this question made me think about this concept more deeply. It made me think about how uncomfortable I feel when my husband is not around me. Consciously, I always want to be around him. But perhaps it is more about control. When I’m around him, I know what he’s doing. I feel safe and I know I am in control of his actions. The same goes for my children. My husband always says that I wear the pants in the family. I am in control.

Thinking back to my statement about not feeling in control as a child helps me understand why I yearned to have a sense of control over my environment and myself. This desire for a sense of control also exhibits itself in my professional life.

Professionally I like to have very clear and organized plans. I like for daily routines and activities to be developed the way that I conceptualize them. I feel like being in control of the planning process gives me a sense of security and assures me I can control the outcome.

For example, as an administrator I help with students who are picked up by car in the morning and the afternoon. When I arrived at a new school, the school already had a process that they have used for years. It was not perfect, but it did work. Fitting into the system gave me a sense of uneasiness. I had discussions with the principal on how we could change the plan to make it more efficient. While I generally view this type of behavior as making a process better or improving a process, I now see that it also may have to do with my need to control the environment. Controlling my environment gives me a sense of peace.

When I consider that the curriculum of my life is the lived life, I see that hypnosis also is a curriculum. I learned from participating in hypnosis. Exploring the past as an adult was much different than the lived experience of a child. I could go back with maturity and wisdom to give voice to the child. As a child you do what you are told. You are told how to feel. You don't have a voice. I applied the lens of an adult to my experiences. I learned from this. I learned that I was psychically arrested. By working through the psychic conflicts and psychic pain that I as a child, I gave new meaning to the feelings and thoughts. I brought the unconscious to the conscious so that he could attempt to make sense of it. This was my new curriculum. This was my new learning. This was utilizing the process of currere in a circular fashion. The regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical coming together.

The unconscious.

One of the primary reasons for participating in this therapy session was to connect with the unconscious self. By examining the conscious and unconscious, I attempt to take the steering wheel of my life, so I might live intentionally rather than being controlled by hidden memories long repressed. But is this possible? According to Freud (1950), people often experience thoughts and feelings that are so painful they cannot face them. Freud argued that these thoughts could not be forgotten, but could be moved from conscious awareness to the unconscious.

The concept of the unconscious is familiar to me; however, I had not considered how repressed and long forgotten memories might impact my adult emotions, relationships, and decision-making. The unconscious was a safe place where I tucked away memories that were too painful to recall. Here they could not harm me. This way I could suck it up and get over it. Long forgotten, I could move on with my life and the hidden memories and emotions would not impact me. I realize now that this was a naïve approach. While I believed those memories were locked away, in fact, I was their prisoner because I had never addressed them.

While Freud (1950) believed that the unconscious can be brought into the conscious, Laplanche (1999) was skeptical that this could be done. It is important to note that Freud began to question psychoanalysis later in his life. Again, could we bring our unconscious into our conscious? Can this be achieved through psychoanalysis? Is our unconscious trying to be free? Is our unconscious trying to send a message, but we are unable to understand it? Why can we not always see what is in front of us? One way to connect with the unconscious is by using the felt sense movement of focusing to connect

with sensation. Connecting with sensation is an important quality in escaping the deadness described by Eigen (1996/2004) in *Psychic Deadness*. It is also an essential component of focusing.

In *Psychic Deadness*, Eigen (1996/2004) touches on the heart of psychoanalysis. The chapters in this text bring forth a discussion on the sense of inner deadness that people may feel. This work expanded my thinking and examined what was enlightening and sensitizing. The word *sensitizing*, from the text, has profound meanings as I consider the concept of deadness that he discusses. As I work toward becoming self-actualized as a mother, wife, scholar, and teacher, there always seems to be something missing. Isn't there more that life has to offer? Why can't I find peace with the success I have achieved? How can I connect with my feelings? How can I bridge the gap between my mind and my body?

Connecting with sensation

Once the therapy session began, the therapist instructed me to connect with my thoughts and my sensations. She wanted me to understand what I was feeling inside. This connection is one of the early movements of focusing. It is called clearing a space. It is when I began to sense the feelings within my body, actually experiencing the emotions. To experience the feelings, I had to think about them, connect with them, and see them in the present.

In the transcript from the therapy session I have included in this chapter, you can see that I was scared, feeling like nothing, feeling not in control, and physically feeling that I had a hole in me. I was experiencing pain that I exhibited through the word hurt. I also felt tight. These were feelings from my childhood that still exist today in me.

Although I believed I was ok because defense mechanisms of the ego, repression and denial, had reduced the conscious effects of those memories, the memories were now in the conscious and my physical reactions associated with those memories reemerged. In *The Body Never Lies: The Lingering Effects of Cruel Parenting*, Miller (2006) adds to the discussion and analysis of the links between childhood experiences and the adult psyche. In this text, Miller addresses the central issue of denying sufferings we have undergone in childhood and coming to our own truth as evidenced by my emotions. These emotions are the embodiments of our unconscious as seen in my physical response to internal and external events.

Through her writing Miller (Miller, 1981, 1984, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2012) has shown the personal and social consequences that cruel parenting can have. In my case, it wasn't my parents, but rather my grandfather. For Miller, abuse of children includes physical violence, sexual abuse, neglect, and psychological abuse perpetrated by one or both parents of a child. She maintains that mental illness, addiction, and crime are caused by suppressed rage and pain because of unresolved childhood trauma. In her work Miller connects childhood mistreatment and trauma with adult difficulties. Connecting with the trauma that I had as a child to break the cycle of my own damaged past is one of the reasons that I am looking back and engaging in this work. Now that I had cleared the space, we moved to the second movement, the felt sense.

Now

In this part of the therapy, I focused on the present and searched for the felt sense. The idea is to connect with the feelings so that I know what they feel like, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the session.

Therapist: Because what I'm doing here is something called focusing. And by focusing, you can be strong. There is no right or wrong. So, do not lie to yourself just to finish off the sentences. When you think about where you are, Diane, and you're tied to these chains, the trusting. You live in fear and that makes you feel as if you are . . . Finish the sentence off. It makes me feel as if I am . . . ?

Me: I'm nothing.

Therapist: I'm nothing. Yeah. I'm nothing. I keep busy all the time, I distract so don't stop. My empathy is not high. I don't like to be alone. And so being alone makes me feel so . . . ?

Me: Scared.

Therapist: Because I feel like I am . . . ?

Me: Not in control.

Therapist: I'm not in control. I feel scared and nothing. I'm tied to chains. Just not good enough. It's not me. I'm dead inside, I don't exist. And I'm a nothing. I feel angry. When I'm saying all this to you, Diane, I want you to check in between your chin and your head. I want to see what sensation you feel. What feeling are you feeling inside? What sensation when I'm saying all this to you? This low self-esteem, not being trusting, you have this beautiful family. You have two kids, your parents, your husband, you want to be happy, and laugh and free, but it's not happening. It's not happening. You feel that inside. I'm not just in control. I'm just nothing. I don't exist. It's just not me. I feel dead inside. I'm just not good enough. I'm tied to chains. What you feel. That I'm good inside. Diane? What sensation do you feel inside?

Me: I feel like a hole in me.

Therapist: Yeah. What about, where is that hole, Diane? Drop down to that. I feel as if I have got a hole inside me and that is right in your stomach. That's in my world what we call a felt sense. I'm going to count from one to 10. When I get to 10, I'll snap my fingers and give me one word for that feeling. I feel it. It's a hole inside my stomach. One, it just makes me feel I'm so tired. Two, I'm just not good enough. Three, four, it's not me I feel so dead inside. I don't exist, five, six, I'm tied, I'm not in control. I feel so angry, eight. It's right there, I don't want to be alone, nine, ten. One word for that feeling.

Me: Hurt.

Therapist: Hurts. And it hurts. And it hurts. Describe that hole, that hurt feeling in your stomach. Describe it more to me, Diane.

Me: It's just so tight.

This brings me back to my childhood and the safe cocoon that I developed against my will, outside my conscious, to shield myself from the pain of the past. Unlocking these difficult memories serves a dual role. First, it brings forth pain, but conversely, it releases me from it. Perhaps this cocoon of self-protection was more akin to the deadness Eigen (2001) describes. Working toward understanding myself is work toward becoming more alive and connecting on a fundamental level with the untethered experience of being alive. But is being alive too difficult for me? Winnicott (1986) and Bion (1992) both contend that aliveness can be too much for people. Is it too much for me? At times, I question if unraveling these memories will set me free. Is it enough to just voice these

memories? I am not sure. However, the psychoanalytical literature and focusing therapy has led me to this space and I must continue to explore my past.

Examining these feelings, my data, along with the research on focusing, I can see that the words and phrases that came to mind helped me establish the feelings, the felt sense, and the handle, the words associated with those feelings: scared, not in control, I'm nothing, hole in me, hurt, tight. These were the feelings of my childhood embedded in my unconscious. I was also participating in the fourth step, resonating. During this time, I was going back and forth between the felt sense and the word, checking how they resonated with each other. Since they came from my childhood, we traveled back to their source.

Going back

Once I connected with the feelings in the present, the therapist guided me to examine where the feelings began. It made me think about the regressive component of currere, going back to understand when and where my foundation was formed, where my fundamental beliefs emerged from. Initially, I recalled being 10 years old, and then I recognized my emotions that emerged at age 6. Just as I had remembered recently, these issues stemmed from my abuse at the hands of my grandfather. Thinking about this part of the therapy made me realize that the act was not as important as the feeling. What happened wasn't as important as my interpretation of it as a child.

I remember being with others. I remember being indoors. I remember sitting on his lap and not wanting to be there. I could connect with the moments, connect with the memories. I was able to go back, to regress. It also allowed me to examine my own basic fault. Balint (1992) considers that some people have the basic fault, which is an area in

one's mind or a level of experience that hinders our life experiences. According to Balint (1992):

. . . the origin of the basic fault may be traced back to a considerable discrepancy in the early formative phases of the individual between his bio-psychological needs and the material and the psychological care, attention, and affection available during the relevant times. (p. xx)

Thus, since people have such trauma in their life, they will always have this basic fault. This leads me back to my discussion about my own basic fault. Generally, the ages between 8 and 12 are the time for the formative development of the individual. While most 8- to 12-year-olds were learning how to share, be polite, etc., I was learning the brutal lesson that not everyone is to be trusted having lived through child sexual abuse.

Looking back, I realize this time in my life led me to feelings of insecurity, abandonment, untrusting, and, most of all, self-loathing, all feelings I continue to struggle with today. Today I vowed to retire my masks and get real. To get real and address my basic fault, I know I must look deep into my past and search the unconscious and suppressed memories to get to the root of the issues. This is where the fifth movement of focusing, asking, began. Here we investigate what it is about the whole problem that makes this feeling exist.

Therapist: It hurts. It's tight. It's tight. That's a part of you that feels so tight and it's

holding on to the hurt. That's a part of you that's been there for years and years and years. How old do you think that part was, you said you've been holding on to that hurt, that tightness? How old do you think, Diane?

Me: So old.

Therapist: How old?

Me: Ten years old.

Therapist: It's 10 years old. You said you've been holding on to that. Take a deep breath and follow me. Like that gets stronger and stronger. That tightness, that tightness, that tightness hurts. It hurts so bad. I'm just nothing. I'm not in control. I don't exist. I'm just not me. I feel dead. I'm going to count from five to one, Diane. When I get to one, I'm going to tap your forehead. I want you to see where that goes. Trust your first impression. When you felt that tightness, that hurt, trust your first impression if I go back. I'll tap your forehead on five, four, go back to that feeling inside. Five, four, three, two, one. What comes to mind, quickly? One two, three. First thing that comes to mind when you felt that? Anything at all? One, two, three. That hurts so bad. What comes to mind, Diane?

Me: Grandfather.

Therapist: Grandfather. How old would you been then? One two, three, how old?

Me: Six.

Therapist: You'd have been six and you were with granddad. Okay. Take a few breaths for me. Breath it in and feel that feeling. You are a 6-year-old you with your granddad. Look around you. I'm going to count from one to three. When I get to three anything more relevant is going to come up. One, two, three. What's going on? That 6-year-old girl with granddad. Look around. Who else is there, child Diane? Who else is there? Anything else is going to come up? Quickly, one, two, three. What comes to mind?

Me: My hands are moving.

Therapist: Anybody else with that girl, that 6-year-old girl?

Me: My grandfather.

Therapist: Your grandfather is there. Okay, Stop. What I want to do is take a few deep breaths in for me. Deep breaths, calm breaths and allow that memory, that time, that thought of that 6-year-old girl with grandfather. That felt so hard, it got so tight. You felt this hole inside, right inside your stomach. Again, if you press your teeth, those feelings are going to get amplified. I'm going to count from three to one. When I get to one I'm going to tap your forehead and you are going to get down and be that 6-year-old girl. You are going to be that child in that memory. Three, two, one. You are that girl. That girl is there, quickly, give me a report. What's going on? Are you indoors or outdoors, quickly?

Me: Indoors.

Therapist: Alone or with the others? You are indoors, are you alone or with the others?

Me: I'm with others.

Therapist: You are with others. Okay. Six-year old child, give me a report, what's going on? You are with others, what's going on little Diane?

Me: And then on. I'm sitting on his lap.

Therapist: You are sitting on his lap, yeah. But who else is there, look around. You are sitting on granddad's lap.

Me: Sitting on grandpa's lap, and these people round about.

Therapist: I'm going to count from one to three, move forward. One, two, three. What happens next? What's going on little one?

Me: I don't want to sit on his lap.

This part of the therapy session brought to light the damaged bonds between my grandfather and me. The unconscious appears to be a place to hide strained or damaged bonds between the adult caregivers and the child. This is what the defense mechanisms of the ego do to protect a person from difficult memories. Eigen (2001) draws on the work of Freud, Jung, Winnicott, Bion, and Elkin in *Damaged Bonds*. In this work, he describes and critiques the basic ideas on the dynamics of psychoses. Eigen calls for us to become less afraid of ourselves in an effort to enrich our quality of life. Is this what victims of trauma struggle with? Are we afraid of ourselves? Why? The call to examine this fear of ourselves is highlighted by the quote, “the horrific has its own beauty, its own ecstasy, and we ought to not walk around it as if it were not there, no more than we should become one with it” (Eigen, 2001, p. viii). Eigen suggests that psychosis is one of the phenomenon of human life that takes us to the edge of what is possible to experience and is a way of organizing experience.

So, during this asking step, I honored these statements by walking around in my horrific experiences. Even though my ego had repressed these memories to protect me from the anxiety they brought forth, I chose to face the memories of this trauma. Not neglecting them as if they were not there and not becoming one with them. Rather, I experienced the feelings so that I might create order and dissolve the chains that bound me. In the next section, I begin the sixth movement, receiving, where the body shift begins.

Give the Child a Voice

I had gotten into the moment, the felt sense. I had connected with the repressed memories and named the feelings, the handle. I had resonated and asked myself about the

root of these feelings. Therefore, I was ready for the next phase of the therapy session. The therapist guided me, and, therefore, empowered me to give the child a voice. This was my opportunity to give the child strength. Take back the moment. To take back control and the power that had been stripped from me at 6-years-old. To take back the dignity. By getting my voice and taking back control, this allowed me to begin viewing myself as a survivor rather than a victim. It allowed me to question my grandfather as I was not able to before he died. It allowed me to create a bodily shift.

Therapist: You don't want to sit on his lap. No, you don't. You don't want to sit on his lap.

Tell him that. Tell him what you never told him back then. That child, that 6-year-old child. Tell him what you never told him back then. You can tell him now. Just imagine he's there. I'm going to put a cushion on your lap, Diane. I'm going to put a cushion right on your lap. And I want you to tell granddad . . . there is a cushion on your lap. You tell granddad, 6-year-old child, tell granddad what you never told him back then. Tell him. Tell him.

Me: Stop doing this.

Therapist: Yeah. Tell him. Tell him stop doing this.

Me: Stop doing this to me.

Therapist: Tell him what you never told him back then.

Me: Why are you hurting me?

Therapist: Ask him why.

Me: Why are you hurting me?

Therapist: Ask him why are you doing that granddad. Ask him.

Me: Why are doing this to me?

Therapist: Tell him to stop it. He's right there. Say "stop it". Stop it. Stop it right now; stop it, stop it, stop it right now. Tell him what you never told him. Stop it right now. I'm going to scream and scream and scream. Tell him.

Me: Stop. Stop it, doing this to me.

Therapist: Push him away. He's there. Tell him to go.

Me: Go. Go.

Therapist: Tell him to go. Tell him to go. Push him, he's here. Push him away. Tell him to go.

Me: Stop it. Stop it.

Therapist: Tell him to go. He's there. Tell him to go.

Me: Go away.

Therapist: Go away, tell him.

Me: Go away.

Therapist: Because you make me feel so . . . how does he make you feel?

Me: I'm scared of you. I'm scared of you. I don't like what you do to me.

Therapist: He's there. Ask him why.

Me: Why are you doing this?

Therapist: Such places, child Diane, the granddad, what does he answer back?

Me: He doesn't know.

Therapist: He doesn't know. He doesn't know. He doesn't know why. Tell him what you need from him.

Me: I need you to stop doing this. You just stop.

Connect with others

After facing my abuser as a child, the session allowed me to connect with others. To connect with safety. I was taking back the power by asking him why he was hurting me and telling him to stop, to go away. I told him that he scared me and that I needed him to stop doing this. I told him to stop! Now I connected with the safe feeling, went to a safe place in my mind, my mother.

Safety/Mom

The person who I needed to be with me to feel safe was my mother. She was my protector. Still, as a child, I told her that I couldn't sit on his lap. Told her how he touched me. I recognized the pain this brought to my mom and I envisioned her crying. I pleaded with her that I didn't want to her to leave me and, in response, she let me know she loved me. This love helps nourish my soul. It helps me understand that I was loved. I am loved despite my current feelings of inadequacy. As a child in this memory, my mother was able tell me she loved me. This was an important connection to my mother.

Therapist: The person that you need to be with you, to feel safe is going to be in front of you when I get to one. Three, two, one. Who is there, child Diane, who is there?

Me: My mom.

Therapist: Your mom. Tell mom what you never told her back then, tell her.

Me: Mum, I can't sit on his lap. He touches me. I don't want to be with him.

Therapist: And be mum, what does mum say back?

Me: She said that she's crying.

Therapist: Your mom is crying, yes. Mum is crying.

Me: Be happy.

Therapist: What did you say back, child Diane? What did you say to mom who's just crying? What did you say to her?

Me: Don't leave me.

Therapist: Don't leave me. Don't leave me, Mom. And your mom, what did she say back to you beautiful little girl?

Me: She loves me.

Therapist: She loves you so much. She does. What did you say back, little one, to mom? She loves you so much.

Therapist: I love you.

Therapist: I'm going to keep this pillow on your stomach kid, on your lap. Mom, can you give that little girl a hug? You know how much she likes that? Mom, can you give your beautiful little girl a hug so tight. Can you do that, Mom? And tell her how much you love her.

Me: I love you so much. I love you.

Understanding Grandfather

In the next phase of the therapy session, I envision myself as my mother so that I can understand my grandfather's behavior. This is the part of the process where I really face the feelings and come to terms with the felt sense and handle so that I can redefine the emotions during receiving. Although this was uncomfortable, looking back at it, I realize this is part of the process, part of understanding the feelings and emotions, part of being present in the moment. Doing this helps me understand that he was mistreated as a child. He was beaten by his father. And, he did not feel good inside. He felt that inside and he also felt nothing. Although I was envisioning my mother telling me this about my

grandfather, it allowed me to connect with his emotions. To understand his anger. To understand his pain. He was nothing. This emptiness embodied itself in his actions.

Therapist: Beautiful. So, Mom, now that you're with your little girl. Little girl is with you. She has you. Granddad is going to be there, it's time to get from three to one. When I get to one, granddad is there with you and your little girl. Three, two, one. Granddad. What do you say? What do you say you did this because . . . ?

Me: He did this because he is dead inside.

Therapist: He is dead inside. Yeah. He is dead inside, Granddad. Take a deep breath in for me, Diane, breathe in. Granddad, you did this because you are dead inside. Granddad, I'm going to count from three to one. When I get to one, Granddad, you are going to go back to when you were a little boy. Three, two one. How, what was it like when you were a little boy? What was it like for you little boy, Granddad?

Me: I wasn't good.

Therapist: I wasn't good. When you were a little boy, you were 7, 6, 5. It wasn't good, it made you feel so . . . What did it make you feel granddad?

Me: Dad would always beat me up.

Therapist: I wasn't good. Dad used to beat me up. It made feel as if I was . . . ?

Me: Nothing.

Therapist: And nothing, but dad would beat me up. He made me feel like I was . . . ?

Me: Alone.

Therapist: Alone, yeah. I wasn't good. I felt nothing. I felt alone. It made me feel like I was . . . ?

Me: I was nothing.

Therapist: Nothing. And that made you feel so bad that as a child you were getting

beaten. It wasn't good. You felt nothing. You felt so alone and that made you feel so . . . ?

Me: Angry.

Therapist: So angry. You did, you felt so angry? You felt so angry; you were not for your granddaughter. You were not for that little girl, Diane. She feels nothing and she feels alone and she feels so angry, you want that, Granddad?

Me: No.

Granddaughter

Having connected to and understood some of the underlying emotional difficulties of my grandfather, I was then instructed to take on his role. I was directed to be him. To look at my granddaughter. It is here that he fulfilled one of my wishes. He apologized. He said he was sorry, sorry that he did this to me. He never got the opportunity to apologize face-to-face as my perpetrator. Although I always felt that I was released from his grasp by his death, I was not emotionally released. Even his death did not give closure to the emotional damage. It did not give closure to the pain I carried from childhood to the present. It did not fill the emptiness, the void. But now, at least, I had an apology.

Therapist: I'm going to count from one to three. When I get to three, Granddad, you are going to be looking at your granddaughter. One, two, three. Tell her. Tell her, Granddad. Tell her.

Me: I'm sorry. I'm sorry I did this to you.

Therapist: What do you say back, child Diane?

Me: It's okay.

Sorrow. Apology. Forgiveness.

The Present: Speaking to Child-Self

Having traveled through the emotions of my mother, my grandfather, and myself as a child, I was able to come back to the present, to be the adult. As an adult I was able to give myself a voice. During the therapy session, I could talk to the child and finish revisiting this childhood. I could tell her not to trust him and I could empower her to bring other protectors into the picture. I could tell my father. During this time, I was also able to speak to my grandfather as an adult. I could give the same messages I did as a child. I could tell him that I didn't want him to bother me. I wanted him to leave me alone. Through this therapy session I could go back and forth revisiting each person, understanding what my grandfather said, that he saw himself as an old man, an old hurt man someone who felt so alone and angry. Despite this, I know he loved me.

Therapist: That girl has got a voice. You are an adult here, Diane. You are an adult. You are a beautiful person, you are a wife, you are a mom. What would you tell that child in that memory? She's got a voice. She's got a right to protect herself. What would you tell her? What would you tell that 6-year-old girl?

Me: Tell her not to trust him.

Therapist: But you've got a voice, and if he ever touches you again, what would you tell her?

Me: To tell someone.

Therapist: Yes, you've got a voice. You've got a right to be heard. Six-year-old child, child Diane, you tell that to Granddad. You tell him, if you ever touch me again, his actions were wrong. If you ever touch me again . . .

Me: I'll tell dad.

Therapist: What do you say back, Granddad?

Me: He doesn't want me to tell dad.

Therapist: What do you say back, child Diane?

Me: I'll tell.

Therapist: Tell again, I will, I will.

Me: I will tell, I will tell.

Therapist: What do you say back, Granddad?

Me: He's crying.

Therapist: He's crying, yeah. He's crying. From the adult you, you are the adult now.

What do you say to the inner granddad and that man who was crying? His actions were wrong. His actions were wrong and not acceptable. With the understanding now . . .

Me: Go away. I don't want. I don't want.

Therapist: Yeah. Tell him that.

Me: Go away. Don't want you to come here with me anymore.

Therapist: And him, what does he say back?

Me: He's crying.

Therapist: Child Diane, you'll tell your granddad. What do you need from him? What do you need from him?

Me: I need him to leave me alone. Don't come near me anymore.

Therapist: Yeah. Don't come near me anymore. And if you ever, I'll tell dad. What you did was wrong. Tell him little one. I'll tell dad.

Me: I'll tell dad. That's wrong.

These words continue to help me establish the connection between my feelings of the past and present. And the session continued.

Understanding Perspective

Grandfather.

Therapist: Granddad, what do you say?

Me: I'm just an old man.

Therapist: Yeah. An old hurt man. What can you see, the old hurt man that felt nothing, that felt so alone, that felt so angry and under the anger was fear and he thought fear was hurt? Can you see more understanding now? Does it make his actions right at all? He was a very angry, hurt, sad man that felt so dead inside. That felt nothing. That felt so alone. I want you to feel something. Does it make it right? Does not make it right? So, Granddad what do you say to that beautiful grandchild of yours?

Me: I love you, sorry.

Therapist: What do you say back child?

Me: Give him a hug.

Therapist: You can give him a hug.

Me: Then I run away from him.

From this dialogue, I know that I will always have mixed feelings. I would never trust him again. Once the trust is broken, it can never be fully repaired. It is like

hammering nails into a fence. You can take the nails out, but the holes remain. You can then fill in the holes so that the fence appears to be whole, but it is not the original wood. The damage was done and the holes can be felt but it will never be that uniform, pure wooden fence that it began as. Perhaps the fence is stronger this way, just as a person can be stronger from living through challenging moments. However, the damage from the offense cannot be repaired. I can give him a hug, but I would always run away. I can forgive him, but I will never forget.

Mother

I also visited the perspective of my mother. She can change her behavior. She can protect me. She did not know what occurred all those years ago. Now she does and she can protect me. Not only is this mental but also physical healing. Gendlin (2007) describes this mental and physical healing as the body shift that occurs during focusing. In my session, my mother could grab my hand, comfort me, and help me feel good. Throughout the session, I can see the physical and emotional healing occurring. Hugs, holding hands, verbal affirmations. Verbally telling him no. Verbal confirmations and affirmations from my mother and father that comforted me as a child. The apology. Each of these feelings, each of these emotions, connected to a positive memory, re-creating, and restructuring the emotions. Now I can feel safe, take a deep breath, and be strong. I am okay. Now I have a new voice, a new reality. This is what I am. This is a change from who I was. When I look at who I was, this is now the past tense. I was broken. I was not important. I was not there anymore. I was dead. But these memories have been restructured and they were felt on a deep level as a new truth. A body shift.

Therapist: And, you run away. Yeah. Let's bring in your mum. Mum, what do you want to say to the beautiful girl of yours? She's a child that wants to have fun and be a kid and be happy, what do you say to her, Mom? That little girl.

Me: I'm sorry this happened. It will never happen again.

Therapist: Because what are you going to do differently, Mom? What are you going to do differently?

Me: I'll protect you.

Therapist: Yes, you are going to do that. How? How are you going to do that, Mom?

Me: I want to be with you. I'll be with you.

Therapist: What do you say, child Diane?

Me: Grab her hand.

Therapist: Grab her hand. Hold it so tight.

Me: Yeah.

Therapist: Hold your mom's hand so tight little one. How does that feel?

Me: It feels good.

Therapist: It feels so good. It feels safe. You said it. Take a deep breath and feel that little one. You feel that safe feeling with mom, because mom is going to be there. Mom is going to keep an eye on you. From the adult you, what would you tell that girl to build her self-esteem? What would you say to her?

Me: You are strong.

Therapist: You are strong. What else?

Me: It will be okay.

Therapist: Yeah. Also, she's got a voice. You tell her that, she's got a voice.

Me: You have a voice.

Therapist: And you've got the right not to be subjected to any negativity. But you know something, that girl can change things, Diane. Child Diane, finish the sentence of for me. What granddad did, his actions made me feel like I was . . . ?

Me: Broken.

Therapist: Yeah. I was broken. What he did made me feel like I was . . . ?

Me: Not important.

Therapist: Yeah. Not important yeah. The whole experience as a child made me feel like I was . . . ?

Me: I wasn't there anymore.

Therapist: Yeah. I wasn't there, I wasn't there anymore. I'm broken, I'm not important I wasn't there. Made me feel like I was . . . ?

Me: Just dead.

Not anymore.

Restructuring

During this part of the session, I was able to connect to my current reality, one where I'm protected, important, and loved. I was able to tell myself as a child that she was important. I was able to tell the child inside me that I had the right to be happy. That I am happy. I don't need to hold onto the fear. I don't need to hold onto the hurt and anger. I can allow myself to laugh and be happy. I can be assertive; it's okay to be wild. We could set her free and let her know that she can choose her path and to never give up on happiness. Revisiting through the regressive step, we could build strength in the child, allowing me to be free as an adult.

Therapist: Yeah, just dead. Who can you see, adult Diane, in this room? How these beliefs have been playing out your life? I'm dead inside. I'm just not me, I'm not there, I'm broken. I don't exist. I'm not important. You see all these beliefs have been playing out and triggering your fears? And through playing out in your life with trust issues and low self-esteem, you like to be alone because you're safe. Can you see that now Diane? They are all playing out. The belief, it's causing the emotions, it's causing the behaviors and it's not true. So tell that little girl the truth from you, adult you Diane. Tell that little girl was she not important? That little girl is not important?

Me: No. She was important.

Therapist: So tell her how important she is.

Me: You're so important.

Therapist: What do you say back little one? What do you say back? You have Mom by your side. She loves you so much. She's holding you.

Me: I won't let her go.

Therapist: No. Why do you say, Mom, you are not going? What do you say, Mom?

Me: I'm not going to leave you.

Therapist: No. I'm not going to leave you, no. Tell the truth. Is she loved?

Me: Yes.

Therapist: Yes, she's loved. And tell that girl the truth. That little girl was she really dead. Tell the truth.

Me: No.

Therapist: No. So tell her that.

Me: You are important. It shouldn't have happened to you.

Therapist: What does she say back, little one?

Me: I want to be okay. I want to be happy.

Therapist: Would you tell her? That she should be happy? Would you tell her?

Me: You are happy.

Therapist: Did you tell her that she's broken?

Me: No.

Therapist: No. So tell her the truth.

Me: You are not broken.

Therapist: What do you say back little one?

Me: I love you, Mom.

Therapist: To protect you, to feel safe. Can you now see that now that you feel that you are important and loved and safe? You can be happy and have fun and be a little girl. Mom, you give your little girl permission to feel all of these happy feelings now. Mom, can you tell the little girl. So to be a kid, you have to have fun and can play. Ask her what she is doing, Mom. What does she like to play with? She's 6.

Me: She likes to play with the dolls.

Therapist: She likes to play with the dolls, Mom. What are their names? Come on. Child Diane, tell Mom all about your dolls.

Me: I don't remember.

Therapist: Well, the same, Mom, can you give the girl permission to laugh? What do you say back, child Diane? Breathe in to that feeling. Feel how good it is to laugh. I

can laugh. I can have fun. I can be a kid. That makes me feel so . . . what are you feeling now, child Diane?

Me: Happy.

Therapist: Now, I'm feeling happy. Can you see from feeling so happy the relevance of those negative emotions now? You don't need to hold on to that fear and that hurt and the anger. You can laugh and you can be happy. Can you see that now, little one? From the adult you, what do you say to that girl to build her assertiveness up? That assertiveness and hurt. That she can be who she wants to be. What do you say to her, adult Diane, to that child?

Me: Raise her voice.

Therapist: What do you tell her about having fun?

Me: It's okay being wild.

Therapist: Tell her that. She can do anything she wants.

Me: Do anything you want.

Therapist: What do you say to that, child Diane?

Me: That makes me happy.

Therapist: Well, tell her. What do you tell that girl that feels so happy?

Me: Never give up on happiness.

Therapist: What do you say, little one?

Me: I will.

However, being empowered isn't easy. Before the session ends, we revisit my grandfather. Just the very mention of his name makes the hair on my neck bristle. This process will take time, but I am taking steps in the right direction. Gendlin (2007)

suggests that body shifts may be small. Nevertheless, by repeating the process, discomfort that exists in the body unresolved, will become resolved.

My journey has begun. Therefore, I looked back and thought about my grandfather's actions. I needed to separate him from his actions. His actions were wrong, but he was a person. He was hurt and he was crying out. Despite the heinousness of his actions, I needed to forgive him. For a moment, however, it seemed as if the progress I was making evaporated. The hole in my soul was coming back, that hole that existed in my very being, the hole in my stomach deep inside me.

The only way to close this whole is to let go of the hurt and anger. I must be free to forgive. And, in turn, the forgiveness allows me to be free. It's easy to give lip service to these words but in order to feel forgiveness, I had to understand, accept, and let go. I was able to state that I forgave him. Throughout the session, I recognized that it was important to connect with these inner feelings. I was able to be present in the moment, to feel the hole closing, to feel my body become complete, to breathe deeply, to feel happy, to be happy.

Going Back Again: Forgiveness

Therapist: You know, child Diane, what happened, happened. Grandpa's actions were so wrong. What you say pre-empts his actions now that he came from a very angry feeling or feeling such a nothing, in the dark and alone. Can you separate that man from his actions? His actions were wrong. What he did was wrong. Inside him was a very hurt boy. He was crying out. You separate him from his actions. Was he born a monster? What do you think? Think he came to the world a monster?

Me: No.

Therapist: Or did he come into the world pure love, some things happen to him?

Me: Yeah.

Therapist: Does it make it right? Or there is a small understanding there? Does it make it right? And you know we all do the best we can, Diane. Have done anything that you thought, well I shouldn't have done that? We all do, because we are human and we forgive ourselves or we wouldn't go another day. What he did was wrong. Can you forgive him Diane? Let yourself be free. By not forgiving, what is it doing to you?

Me: A hole is coming back.

Therapist: Yes. A hole is coming back. So by letting it go, then holding on, is not forgiving, you are holding on to the hole, can you see that? By not forgiving what he's done to you

Me: He takes over me again.

Therapist: Exactly. It's time to let go. Take a deep breath in, Diane. Allow yourself to forgive, to be free. Can you accept what happened and let it go and with that is forgiveness. Take a deep breath. Can you allow yourself to forgive, Diane, and let it go? Take a deep breath and feel it. Feel that hollow, that hole inside to just go. Breathe in, every breath that you take that goes. Allow yourself to feel whole complete being you. A sense of freedom. Take a deep breath and feel it for me. With forgiveness and understanding you can accept and let go, allowing yourself to be free. Take a deep breath in. And, from that place of freedom, what does the little girl say to Granddad? What do you say little one, child Diane? That you want to be a kid full of happiness and laughter. What do you say to Granddad?

Me: I forgive you.

Therapist: Yeah. What do you say back, Granddad?

Me: I love you.

Therapist: What do you say back, child Diane?

Me: Welcome back.

Therapist: Feel now little one, child Diane. Checking with your body, how is your body feeling just now?

Me: Better.

Therapist: You are letting it go. You are letting it go. Take a deep breath and feel that.

Feel that hollowness. Feel that hole inside untangle. Feel your body. Feel more whole, healthy, perfect, and complete like never before. Take a deep breath and then feel that. Feel that. Feel his love, child Diane. You are now feeling so . . .

Me: Happy.

Body shifting. Happy. Healing. One step at a time.

The Present: Healing

The therapist then walked me through life from childhood to adulthood, tying together the past and the present, synthesizing them. In a sense, she was walking me through the process of currere, synthesizing the feelings of childhood with the present. She instructed me to take the little girl, me, and grow up with her through the years. To be 6, 16, 26, 36, happy, free, all the way to today. Holding her and pouring her into myself, the beautiful, healthy, happy girl. This feeling went to my core. This was wrapping up the session with a sense of freedom, fulfillment, and joy. This was recognizing that life is good, that I did have a wonderful family, children, husband,

parents, and friends. She reaffirmed that I am good enough. It is okay to feel happiness, joy, laughter, love, passion, and wonder. Through the hypnotherapy using focusing, I can take negatives and turn them into powerful and positive suggestions that become the new reality. I can embed these feelings, these realities, in my conscious and subconscious so they can become true. Powerful words described my new feelings: important, alive, open, genuine, free, joy, peace. I could visualize these words by using statements beginning with I am, I feel empowered.

Therapist: Happy. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. And, you can grow up feeling happy and free. So you know what will happen? Take the beautiful 6-year-old girl by the hand, Diane. Take her by the hand at six and you grow her up all through the years. Don't let anything hold you back. Grow her up all the way up to your present day. Don't let anything hold you back. She's 16. She is 26. She is feeling happy and free. All the way up to your present day. Don't let anything at all hold you back. Now she is there all way up to you. Have her back against your chest, that pillow there, her back towards your chest. You hold her and you pour into you, Diane. That beautiful, whole, healthy, happy girl. Feel this love and comfort and safety. Feel that blending in. Feel that integration of one. Take a deep breath and feel it. Beautiful, beautiful. Breath, feel it. Feel it completely as she integrates into you and you integrate into her that one whole healthy you. Allowing yourself to live your life to the fullest.

With what you've done here today, Diane, you went back to the cores, to the events, to the cores of those negative feelings and you are choosing now to let them go. You are leaving here today feeling so free and so happy. Learn yourself

to feel safe and comfortable within yourself. Your mind so focusing clear giving yourself permission to laugh, to have fun, to be happy, to feel that loving side emanate out. That peace. That love. It's okay to be okay. It's okay to have that balance because every day you are always feeling that sense of freedom. That sense of bliss. That sense of fulfillment. I'm with gratitude, you feel it. Wonderful family you have, your kids, your husband, your parents, your friends. Every morning you are going to wake up feeling so happy, so free. Life is good. You are letting go, Diane. You are now letting go of all the old unwanted, making way for the new loving yourself. To feel that sense of freedom, fulfillment, and joy.

And see how your life changes. Know that you are more than good enough. Know that you can feel, and it is okay that you can feel your feelings of happiness and joy and laughter and love and passion and wonder. And see yourself opening up more and more. And now that you are in this relaxed state, your subconscious mind, your deep inner mind remains open, receptive, Diane, to take in positive and powerful suggestions that easy automatically become your reality. Everything that you are about to hear will be deeply embedded in your conscious and subconscious. And, you'll follow these suggestions as they become true for you now, that knowing that you are more than good enough and more than worthy and deserving of fun and laughter, you feel it more and more every day.

Body shift: from scared, not in control, nothing, hole in me, hurt, tight to freedom, fulfillment, love, happiness. My powerful changes. My feelings.

Wrap Up: Relationships

Finally, I connected these feelings of self, with feelings associated with people close to me. I connected warmth with my husband, comfort with my children, and comfort with my parents and sister. As the session wrapped up, I could feel the shift, the change. Now, I can feel refreshed and awake.

The therapist also let me know that I could return to the hypnotic state whenever I wished by coming back to this moment. It felt good to feel happiness, joy, and freedom. While she closed with “you are ready for this,” I certainly knew that I was. I could feel it with my very being. Now in writing this, I believe that you are also ready to make a change.

Therapist: You now feel it more and more every day. And in your mind you know that you are loved. You are important. You are alive. You are open. You're genuine. You're free and that is okay to feel. You now feel your feeling, you now express your feelings, you now feel that sense of joy and peace and love and yourself and with confidence and high self-esteem. You move on with joy and laughter. I'll leave you for a moment, Diane, to see what you see, what you visualize from a place of freedom, happiness, laughter. You need to keep busy so the time is gone. You are letting yourself be you. That I am, Diane. That I am, laughter. That I am joy. That I am love. That I am happy. That I am confident. That I am free to be true to myself. I'll give you silence. And now, checking with your body, Diane, how is your body feeling?

Me: Better.

Therapist: Now imagine you are with your husband. The husband you love and he loves you. You being the open, real, genuine you, trusting. Checking with your body, how is your body feeling?

Me: I feel warm.

Therapist: It's lovely, isn't it? Well, we're tingly. And now, your beautiful smile is smiling from, you'll just know. Checking with you. You are with your kids. You have that joy and laughter. You are beaming. Checking with your body how is your body feeling?

Me: Comfortable.

Therapist: Yeah. Let's check with your parents and your sis. You are just sitting and talking. Accepting yourself for being you, loving yourself for being you, and forgiving yourself for being you. Because you know what? It's okay to be you. Self-love, self-forgiveness, self-acceptance, you are free, you see yourself, your family. Checking with your body, how is your body feeling?

Me: Comfortable.

Therapist: Beautiful. It's now, before the end of session, anything you want to say to me or have me say to you Diane?

Me: I can be happy.

Therapist: Yes you can. Not you can be. You are. I'm now allowing myself to be happy. Say out loud.

Me: I am allowing myself to be happy.

Therapist: Yes. Beautiful. I am allowing myself to be happy. Beautiful. So now, in just a moment, I'm going to count from one to five. When I get to five, it will come

back to full and regular waking consciousness. Only something shifted, something has changed, something is not quite as it was, Diane. You are going to come back feeling so happy, so free, you are going to remember everything that happened to you today. You are going to come back feeling so refreshed and so wide awake. You can return to the state whenever you wish. One, coming back and more and more listen to my voice. Two, being not to move arms and legs and move, and one, two, three, four, and five. Back, now, wide awake to your full and regular waking consciousness. Good job, girl. How was that for you?

Me: I feel good.

Therapist: Yeah, you are free, girl.

Me: I feel happy.

Therapist: Tears of joy. Tears of happiness, and joy. You are free. Life is too short, Diane. You were born happy. You are happy. Good job. You did really good. You are also ready for this.

Me: Yes.

Body shift: warm, comfortable, free, happy, me.

Follow Up

The therapy session ended. One hour in time felt like an eternity. It was like an inflection point in my life where I made a 180° turn. This process of feeling painful emotions and coming to terms with them was very powerful.

As I begin to write this, I think back to all of the feelings and emotions after the session ended. I don't remember much as I walked to my car. It was almost like doing something you've done a million times before, like driving to work. You know the

feeling, when you get in your car and suddenly you're at work already. That's how I felt. I was so lost in my mind, lost in my own emotions, that it was as if the world around me didn't exist. My greatest desire was to share these thoughts and emotions with the people I love the most.

I began my drive home by calling my mother because I wanted to tell her all about this experience and how I was feeling. We had a great conversation and it was uplifting for me to tell her about this experience. I appreciate that she's always willing to listen to me. Upon arriving home, I my husband and I sat together and listened to the audio. It was amazing to hear the words I said and to relive this one-hour experience. It was like watching a movie over again with a clear understanding and seeing new things. Memories from my unconscious and subconscious were exposed for me to examine. No longer was the ego repressing these memories. I was able to make connections between my emptiness and low self-esteem and several of my behaviors, and recognize some of my contradictory feelings, such as not wanting to be alone but keeping this secret to myself. Psychoanalytically, I recognized how I had redirected my feelings from childhood onto people and situations in adulthood. The transference of these psychic conflicts had created dysfunction in my relationships. I saw the connection between me as a child and my adult behaviors. I found the source of the pain and the emptiness. I understood the actions and emotions of my mother, father, and grandfather. I bridged the gap from the past to the present. I took control of myself and fill the hole inside of myself.

It was an incredible bonding experience to have my husband there by my side as my mind exploded with these revelations. I could almost feel the neurons exploding at a

rapid pace. I could feel the adrenaline pumping through my heart, up my arms, down my legs, through every inch of my body. Oh my, what a powerful instrument our mind is, how powerful our thoughts, what an impact these thoughts have on our body!

Could all this activity change my core and influence my feelings and behaviors?

I engaged in this discovery knowing I can never truly know myself. Bollas' (1999) discussion in the *Mystery of Things* about how mysterious we are to ourselves ties in well with the notion of never really understanding who we are, how we remain an enigma to ourselves. Yet, my experience was part of an endless journey; it was not in vain because this exploration of the past delved into my awareness of and connection with my core that has been brought forth because of my readings.

The core.

What is my core? By core I am referring to the central questions and beliefs that define who I truly am. What am I consciously aware of and what are my blind spots? How can I even become aware of these blind spots? Is it possible? Psychoanalysts have debated these questions for years.

Who am I? Many philosophers have asked this question over the years. Pinar (2015b) later go on to say that the past "is the air we breathe" (p. 195). You are never far from your past.

While I thought my past was over with, I have learned that my past is part of me and always will be part of me. My past is what makes up my world today. Through *currere*, one understands that past, present, and future are intertwined. The air that Pinar (2015b) talks about remains biological as well as psychological. Pinar pronounces that, "

. . . the unconscious is a term of convenience for naming what we do not, perhaps cannot, know (p. 195).”

This leads me to my next question: Can an individual truly know his or herself and does one’s self have a core? Psychoanalysts debate these questions. While Winnicott (2005) declares we have a core, Laplanche (1999) allege we have no unified self, and Eigen (1993a) contends there is no center (core). While I agree with some of these psychoanalysts, I disagree with others. I relate to Bollas’ (1995) conception of the idiom, who we are at the core. While postmodern psychologists suggest there is no core or center, I believe I hold fundamental beliefs and actions that make up my center. In this sense, in any case, what is important is what we do with this knowledge of self.

Through my psychoanalytical self-exploration, I have developed a better understanding of my psyche and to use this insight to assume control over myself as Grotstein (2000) suggested. Grotstein writes, “the task of psychoanalysis is not the attainment of insight but, rather, the use of insight to attain transcendence over oneself, over one’s masks and disguises, to become one’s superordinate subject” (p. xxvii). Grotstein also suggests that a state of serenity comes when a person reaches this transcendent position and that the person can then live fully and freely. Understanding the links between childhood and adult emotions and understanding the world is key to reaching this transcendent position. This is the serenity I strive for as I engage in a transcendental journey into my unconscious mind and soul.

Part of the impetus for exploring my own behaviors was to understand if I am good enough as a mother and to ensure that I do not project the harmful experiences of

my childhood onto my children. Miller (2005) addresses this second concern. Miller writes:

Individuals who believe that they feel what they ought to feel and constantly do their best not to feel what they forbid themselves to feel will ultimately fall ill—unless, that is, they leave it to their children to pick up the check by projecting onto them the emotions they cannot admit to themselves. (p. 15)

While the scars of my childhood are not the result of cruel parenting but rather from abuse within my extended family, I will break the cycle, or as Freud (1915) would suggest, the madness.

In *The Psychotic Core*, Eigen (1993b) discusses Freud's conception of madness. "Madness is both innate and a form of adaptation. It is a desperate response to emotional pain and the stress of life" (Eigen, 1993b, p. 10). Since each person is structured to react to pain and stress in different ways, it is critical to examine personal thought processes and connect with these emotions so that we might understand and control them. Eigen suggests, "The central concepts of psychoanalysis are rooted in the objective problems of science, but they also grow out of a psychosis tinged matrix in the individual (p. 1)".

The primary result I have experienced from examining my thought processes is a deepening of my consciousness and my interest in the problems that exist in my soul, my core. Engaging in this intense intellectual discourse is at times exhausting and at other times invigorating. Deeper understanding excites my senses. Conversely, the question about what my life experiences and the thoughts associated with them mean to me seems elusive. Reading the following quote, "the psychotic individual often oscillates between being withdrawn and cut off and desperately clinging and demanding" (Eigen, 2005, p.

18), makes me wonder if we all have some element of psychosis. Further, if we all have an element of psychosis, can psychoanalysis initiate change to this core?

Bollas (1995) argues that psychoanalysis can change the psychic structure of a person. This psychic structure defines the way a person's mind is organized, how they establish relationships, and how they deal with conflicts. We certainly grow and adapt as we experience life, so intuitively this makes sense. However, some parts of us (our core) are so ingrained, it seems that no amount of understanding or will power can change our beliefs or behaviors. Whether looking at structured content such as the images, thoughts, wishes, fantasies of a person or the structured functions that are the product of a behavioral sequence, the ability to change the psychic structure lies solely within the individual. Tools of adaptation or operational systems are only as effective as a person's will to change. Some people quit smoking cigarettes while others appear incapable of ceasing this behavior. These are the connections I attempt to make through focusing, connections to my core feelings. The terror I feel at times when I awake from my sleep. The general anxiety about not being in control of my life.

The same goes for toxic relationships. In many instances, negative behavior patterns tend to repeat themselves. Psychoanalysts can create awareness within a person about why they exhibit certain behaviors, but essentially, the core can be so well established and beliefs so entrenched that deviant or destructive behavior is the norm and is immovable and unchangeable for the individual.

Another consideration is whether the psychic structure really changes even for individuals who do change the outcomes of their behavior. A person who acts aggressively toward others due to the abuse they experienced as a child may learn to

control and redirect his or her emotions through psychoanalysis. But, has their psychic structure changed? Is the core changed? Or, have they just developed the tools to temporarily protect their victims while containing their pain within themselves? Perhaps they have repressed their feelings and emotions, locking them away in their subconscious or unconscious where someday they will emerge again violently? I suspect for many people, the core may remain unchanged despite outward appearances. In my own life, understanding how my childhood shaped my adult psyche empowers me to live and feel in control, but has it changed my psychic structure, my core? I'm not so sure.

It has taken me many years of counseling to finally realize it is not the specific details of these horrible events I need to know, it is how all of this plays out in my life that is important. Middelton, Cromer, and Freyd (2005) argue, "Memory is not a digital recording that provides for a totally accurate replay" (p. 1). How does this abuse drive who I am? How does this abuse affect my relationship with my family, my husband, and my students? My countless experiences have formed who I am today. I now know that my unconscious forces have driven my behavior in every aspect of my life. Doll (1982) states, "Like a thief at the gates, the unconscious slips through the cracks of conscious control" (p. 198). At times, when the feelings of pain, fear, and being out of control and overwhelmed emerge from these depths, I have wondered if life is better this way. Being engaged in this self-reflection, I now understand that my life and progress have been frozen. However, despite being frozen by my past experiences, new memories and feelings associated with these events continue to emerge.

CHAPTER 3

RELATIONSHIPS

“Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships” (Herman, 1992, p. 51). The impact of trauma on a victim’s everyday life can result in broken minds, injured bodies, and shattered relationships with those closest to them. One of the response mechanisms that humans who experience trauma exhibit is disassociation. It begins as a survival mode, detaching from what is happening in the moment, then it begins to leak into the present. Hence, disconnection affects the relationships we have with ourselves and others. This disconnect happens as a defense mechanism from feeling the effects of the trauma. Hall and Hall (2011) suggest:

Some child sexual abuse survivors may have dissociated to protect themselves from experiencing the sexual abuse. As adults they may still use this coping mechanism when they feel unsafe or threatened (King, 2009). Dissociation for survivors of childhood sexual abuse may include feelings of confusion, disorientation, nightmares, flashbacks, and difficulty experiencing feelings (p.3).

This can also lead to difficulty in interpersonal relationships. Exploring the nature of my relationships and how disconnection may have influenced my behavior and interactions is part of the process of examining the past through a new lens using a new level of understanding. I begin by looking within. Next, since parents are the fundamental caregivers and protectors, I examine how my relationships with my mother and father may have been affected. From there I expand the scope of my exploration to

consider other family members such as my sister. Then, I look at relationships that developed throughout my life: childhood friends, and my husband.

The Conversation Within

Certain characteristics and experiences have shaped my view of the world. I grew up in a household with a mother, father, and sister and was always considered the good child, the good student, and the good friend. People described me as the dependable and responsible person. Doll (2000) states, “women have been trained to choose for themselves to be either the good girl or bad girl” (p. 87).

I was the good girl. I worked full time, graduated college in 4 years, and began my first teaching job upon graduating with my Bachelor’s degree. Ten years later, I earned my Master’s degree in reading instruction. I would describe myself as the person who always walked the straight line. I never wavered. Everything was either black or white, there was no in between. I did what I was told and never questioned anything or anyone. As a learner, I was a docile, empty receptacle filled with knowledge from others.

Doll (2000) argues, “good has been understood to mean sweet, docile, agreeable, and supportive” (p. 87), and these were my characteristics. This was my experience for the first years of my life. Why was I like this? I never really explored this question. I accepted life as it was and did not explore my past in any depth. Now I find myself an ever-questioning female. Mother and wife are also two accurate descriptions of my current life. My two children and husband also shape my worldview. However, I begin my exploration by considering how the relationship with my parents shaped my worldview.

My Parents

At times, I feel deep anger towards my parents. I feel like I was abandoned. Conversely, I feel fortunate to have grown up surrounded by loving relationships. I love them all dearly and I know they love me deeply as well despite the faults we see in each other. We never miss a birthday, holiday, or special occasion with each other no matter how far apart we live. Our bonds are strong; however, no family or family member is without faults. Each of my relationships has a piece of my secret within it. Through psychoanalysis, I have begun considering how the experiences of my childhood impacted me as an adult, so I can be free from some of the unconscious pain that burdens me. I use this new understanding to make my relationships healthier and happier. I wonder how I have disconnected from some of my memories and how the confusion and disorientation from my abuse may have shaped my relationships. I consider my parents individually, starting with my mother who I admire for her kindness and strength of spirit.

My Mother

Traditional psychoanalytic accounts of mothering tend to view the mother as the primary nurturer of the child. Winnicott (1953) contended that the key concept to healthy development was rooted in relationships and micro-interactions with people. He sees these interactions between mother and child as central to the development of the internal world. Winnicott understood that the child needs to realize the mother is neither good nor bad, but is a separate and independent entity. Hence, he coined the term the “good-enough mother” (p.90).

Winnicott (1953) stated, "The good-enough mother . . . starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less

completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure" (p. 90). The mother's role is to gradually introduce the child into the social world.

Did I grow up with a good-enough mother? At the same time, how is one qualified to evaluate if a mother is good enough, especially when considering that the evaluation is occurring based on a cloudy memory of a time long ago where social norms varied greatly from those of today. Furthermore, what impact did my relationship with my mother have on me as the mother of my son and daughter? Certainly, this train of thought can be bifurcated into an examination of my mother as she shaped me and how I as a mother shaped my own children.

My mother was a stay home mom until I began kindergarten. As Winnicott (1986) contends, my mother's role at this time was to guide me through the stages of life. From what I can remember, she was the parent who raised my sister and me. Attending school functions, taking us to sports activities, cooking our meals, and attending to all our childhood needs were the heart of my mother's relationship with me. Unequivocally, I knew I could always count on her to be there when I needed her for my primary needs. What I struggle with is the fact that I never disclosed my abuse to her until my adulthood. However, reflecting on the behaviors she modeled helped me understand myself.

One of her habits that I didn't inherit was her relentless need to ensure that everything was clean, neat, and organized impeccably. While she cleaned daily, my sister and I had chores to be done every Saturday. Cleaning bathrooms, vacuuming, and dusting were just a few of these chores. Thus, we cleaned every Saturday with Kenny Rogers playing on the radio. My mother found solace in this busyness and in the

perfection of a tidy home. Remembering this, I realize I'm also extremely active; however, cleaning is not the area where I express this activity.

On the other hand, one habit of my mother I mirrored when I was younger and that has dissipated over time was the capacity to shout rather than negotiate patiently. My mother had a short fuse and angered easily. I wondered why this rage existed within her and why it exhibited itself so readily. I now understand the persistent arguing between my parents and the source of the rage. The rift was due to infidelity within the marriage on my father's part.

This secret that we do not talk about in some ways parallels the secret of my abuse. Now, I can understand the arguing, the yelling, the crying. For me, understanding myself and the source of my anger has created some inner peace. It has enabled me to connect the disconnect, to understand the source of my own anger, and to be patient when hurt and rage are vented through impatience and shouting. By confronting my trauma, the pieces of the puzzle have fallen into place and the silent, lingering anxiety has subsided. Undoubtedly, abatement of my anxiety has had a positive impact.

Another area I think about is my desire to be friends with my mother. I remember growing up that I always wanted my mother to be my best friend. I yearned for us to go out together, to go shopping, to go to lunch, to spend time in any way possible. However, this was not the case. As a result, I always wished my mother was someone else and I clung to my friend's mother. Fortunately, this dynamic has also changed over time. While my desire to spend time with my mother has remained, her ability and availability have increased exponentially since she retired, and we speak daily and see each other whenever possible.

One of the pleasures of growing older is having a better understanding of how the seasons of our life change. Being a wife, mother, and working full time myself has helped me understand the unique pressures of fulfilling these roles at the same time. As a child, I could not understand the difficulty my mother must have had allocating her time for work, my father, my sister, and me. Now that I see this through new eyes, I can understand how hard she worked to provide for me. This ethic of hard work is clearly visible through my new lens and was undoubtedly instilled in me along with a strong sense of responsibility.

While my mother was there for me, she also let me learn my own lessons. She was never a parent to solve my problems. At times, I remember this to be difficult. My mother also was not a person to offer lots of encouragement, show her love, or profess pride in her children. I rarely heard I love you or I'm proud of you. Not hearing these words left me with a sense of uncertainty. It also created a desire for validation. Perhaps seeing her model hard work is one of the reasons I exhibit the same behaviors. Perhaps, my mother was preparing me for failure as Winnicott (1953) contends.

The failure Winnicott (1953) refers to is not specific to things parents do that affect their children, but rather to the perception of the child as the child grows and realizes that mothers can't protect them and fix everything. "The good-enough mother . . . starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure" (Winnicott, p. 89, 1953).

Over time, I have experienced differing emotions related to my mother. At times, I felt I was abandoned as a child. While she did not know I had experienced child sexual

abuse, there are times I still feel my parents should have known. They should have protected me. Is this what parents do—shelter their children from the harshness of life? I still wrestle with this question. But how would they have known? I never told anyone. Ashamed, embarrassed, confused, I bottled it up inside until I decided to find my voice through writing about it. Secretly, however, I continue to feel this way. It's illogical, but thoughts and emotions are often not logical. So how do I deal with them?

Fortunately, this feeling has grown weaker over time. My mother has become my best friend. She is the first person I think to call each day. In the end, I believe my mother was the good-enough mother. Understanding the context of my childhood through my new lens as an adult helps me understand this. It's easy to judge when you are uninformed or lack the maturity to know better. This leads me to my next question, am I the good-enough mother?

My Son and Daughter

Growing up I remember that all I wanted was to be a mother. I yearned for that child. After 2 years of marriage, my husband and I decided we wanted to start a family. For 2 years, I lived with endless months of no success. Waiting every month to see if I was pregnant began wearing on my relationship with my husband. It also began wearing on my psyche. After going to the doctor and being told nothing was wrong with my husband or myself, I went into a deep depression. How could I believe it wasn't me? Something had to be wrong. Was it from the child sexual abuse? Again, why me?

Imagine my delight on August 1, 2002 when I found out I was pregnant. However, it was short lived. Before reaching my second trimester, I miscarried. This was devastating. Again, I was told this was completely normal and it happens to many

pregnancies. But, I remember thinking, why me? What did I do so wrong to deserve this? Would I ever be happy? Fortunately, my husband and I were not deterred by this traumatic experience. There were certainly many conversations and tears as we tried to figure out our next steps. Should we try again? Could we take this kind of pain again? Could we live a life without children? We both felt destined to have children and decided to try again.

In May 2003, I became pregnant again and carried the baby to full term. My son was born on February 4, 2004. Those beginning years brought a cluster of emotions. While I was elated to have my child, I was also very controlling and overprotective. I was very untrusting of other people with my child. Until age 6, my son was never left alone with anyone but immediate family. The only reason I ever allowed a non-family member to watch him was because my husband and I had just moved and we had no family living in our state.

My daughter was born on October 30, 2006. Once my daughter was born, a new set of emotions overtook my psyche. My controlling manner seemed to intensify. I was not even comfortable with my father watching my daughter. Would he abuse her as I was abused? I was transferring the worries associated with my grandfather's behavior to my father. There was no reason for this. This was a horrible feeling because, while I loved my father dearly, I was afraid for my daughter. The guilt from these feelings has never left me. However, I did not want her to experience what I am going through and I wanted to trust my father. This is one of my reasons for telling this story. Freud believed that psychological problems are rooted in the unconscious mind and bringing them to consciousness provided an opportunity to deal with them. By finding my voice and

confronting my trauma, I am breaking the cycle of controlling behavior. I also prevented me from transferring my concern that my daughter would be abused.

Once I had my children, the question of me working or being a stay at home mom arose. While I loved my time with my children, why was I so against staying home full time? Why did I refuse to give up my job? Was I afraid I would lose my identity? For many years, I never understood why I felt so passionately that I must go back to work. However, I believe my feelings of not feeling good-enough drove my decision. At this time in my life, I was not a good-enough mom (Winnicott, 1953). If I were a stay at home mom, a large part of the responsibility for child rearing would be on me. How could I let that happen if I was not a good-enough mother? How could I teach my children about trust, love, control, and power if I did not have any of these attributes myself? At least if I worked, the foundation of their childhood would not fall on me.

Today I have very different feelings on being the good-enough mother. Winnicott (1953) has lifted the burden I put on myself—to be perfect and to bring up the perfect child. Most new mothers strive to be perfect, to read every book, to do everything right. However, Winnicott contends that you cannot be perfect. By striving for perfection, you will only create disastrous outcomes for your child. You should strive to be good-enough. I have realized that someone else's idea of good-enough may be different from my own idea of good-enough. Being a parent is one of the most important and difficult jobs I will ever have. I will never be perfect at being a parent. I will make mistakes. I will have regrets. But, I will always be good-enough.

While Winnicott (1953) talked about mothers being good-enough, his research also contributed to thoughts about my father. While I attribute much of my behavior and

feelings about motherhood to the impact made by my mother, I wonder how my relationship with my father influenced my worldview.

My Father

What role does the father play in psychoanalytical literature? Winnicott (1986) contends, “Fathers, I know, are just as important, and indeed an interest in mothering includes an interest in fathering, and in the vital part they play in child care” (p. 123). However, the father is absent from Winnicott’s literature. Wholeheartedly I believe the relationship with the father is just as essential and formative as the relationship with the mother. Perhaps traditional expectations based on gender have limited the quantity and focus of research on the father’s role in child development. Nevertheless, I will explore my relationship with my father.

While I grew up in a two-parent household, I consider my father an absent parent. Due to his long work hours and partying lifestyle, my father did not participate in child rearing. The burden of my childhood fell on my mother’s shoulders. Essentially a single mother, my mother had to bring up two children, my sister and myself. My father was present on Saturday and Sunday.

I do not remember our life during the winter, but throughout the summer, as a family, we went boating on Saturday and to the beach on Sunday. While my dad talks about missing our birthdays and my sister remembers this, I do not. I do remember my father coming home on Friday nights drunk; however, I cannot remember my mother’s reaction.

In hindsight, I realize part of his long days at work can be attributed to living on Long Island which required a long commute via the Long Island Railroad into

Manhattan. Truthfully, this was only part of the reason he came home late during the week. My mother and father have been married for more than 50 years and their relationship began very early. By the time they were age 18, they were married. Exploring why he made the decisions he made can be partially attributed to taking on responsibility at work and home at a young age. However, through the eyes of a child, this did not matter. My father was not there.

After he retired at age 53, my relationship with my father began to change. This change was especially apparent to both my sister and myself when we had our own children. My father was the doting grandfather. He wanted to be around his grandchildren constantly. He would change their diapers, feed them, take them for walks. He remains as a strong presence in their lives today. My father seemed to not want to miss anything. He taught my children how to ride bikes and how to fish. To this day, my father and son play Xbox together and call each other all the time.

My father has opened up about not being as good a father to us as he would like to have been. He has stated he has many regrets in life and gives my husband and me advice on being present in our children's lives. He reminds me to slow down and enjoy my family. Perhaps this speaks to people's ability to evolve and change throughout their life.

The two-parent household with a stay at home mom was the dynamic in many of my friends' homes and seemed to be the cultural norm at the time. Or perhaps, since it was normal to me, I assumed this was how all mothers and fathers interacted with their children. Bollas (1989) discusses the idea of fathers getting up early, going to work, and providing for the family. Is this what I expected of my father? Is this why I never felt let

down by him? For me, he provided the family with money. But what about everything else? Everything else was laid on my mother's shoulders. Even now, many of these questions go unanswered. I also wonder how my father's influence has shaped the relationships and expectations I have for other males in my life, such as my husband and son. However, as I look at my childhood and immediate family, I reflect on my relationship with another member of my family, my only sibling, my elder sister.

My Sister

While I experienced sexual abuse, I am not the only one in my family who did so. My sister did as well. For years, this truth was not shared between us. I repressed the memory of my experiences and had no idea what she experienced. Freud (1915) argued that forgetting is the essence of repression, an ego defense mechanism. In his own words, repression "lies simply in turning away, and keeping it at a distance from consciousness" (p. 147). Repression attempts to protect consciousness from conflict, anxiety, and contradiction. I am a living example of how repression works. Repression serves the interest of what Freud called, the pleasure principle. By this he meant an innate tendency to want to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. How could one be expected to embrace such pain, particularly when it occurred during a time of innocence, childhood?

My sister is 4 years older than me. Today I have some recollection of the phone call I made to her while sitting on the floor of my tiny bathroom in my one-bedroom apartment. While I do not remember many specific details, I remember just blurting out the memories that were reoccurring. On the other end, dead silence echoed through the phone. Had we been disconnected? Tick, tick, tick. Each second of silence hung heavily in the air, like an anvil waiting to fall. Hello? Hello? For what felt like hours, I

remember dead silence and fearing I had just revealed my experiences to an inanimate object, the phone, or worse, that I had completely shocked and distanced my sister. This eternal moment, I was sure, confirmed that my abuse was a figment of my imagination. “I’m still here,” she responded, and then the truth rolled out.

My sister confirmed that I was not imagining what had happened to me because she too was abused by my grandfather. I remember her crying that she never told anyone and because of this, she now felt responsible for what happened to me. Why is it that the person abused feels responsible? Here we were as two adults, remorseful for the betrayal of trust that had happened to us. The repressed emotions that existed in our unconscious percolated to the surface and brought back feelings of shame, regret, and fear we had hidden for so long. I had no idea what to do with these emotions and wanted them to go away. Because of the wild, uncontrolled emotions that had been brought to the surface, my relationship with the people around me suffered as did my relationship with the calm person I knew to be myself.

On this day, though, the conversation continued. Hours of dialogue led to the revelation that the abuse was something my sister had always remembered. I had so many questions, which she answered with as much clarity as she had. While my memories were only bits and pieces, her memories seemed to be fully intact. I remember at the time and even today, questioning my memories: is this all, did other things happen that I am not aware of? The calm waters were not ready for the storm that emerged, and I wasn’t ready. I soon went to counseling but repressed the memories once again. At that time, I thought, maybe I would address them later in life or maybe I was better off forgetting them. Fortunately, I am ready to face these memories now.

While we grew up in the same household, our personalities were, in many ways, opposites. I was the rule follower while she was the rebel. I lived by the letter of the law while she defied the rules at every turn. Curfews were a suggestion instead of a strict obligation for my sister; school was just an afterthought. I always questioned how two children could grow up in the same household with the same parents and be so different. While my sister also fell victim to my grandfather's abuse, our experiences differed in that she always remembered the abuse. Her unconscious never blocked this horror. While my memories were only bits and pieces, she seemed to have this part of her consciousness intact. I often wonder why her memories were on the surface and mine were buried. Perhaps it was the difference in our age that allowed her to recall the heinous acts.

Regardless of the cause, the topic of my grandfather never came up between us during childhood. When I did finally remember and learned she too had suffered the same fate, I wondered if it was better for me not to remember the abuse until I was ready to deal with it. Could this be why she seemed to act out? Eigen (2001) believes if you are abused, all you know is toxic. "If you have damaged bonds, relationships do not feel real without damage and are unbearable with damage", contends Eigen (2001, p. 13). In addition to the differences in our memories of these events, our responses to the abuse also differed.

Due to my sister's choices in life, our relationship is guarded. When she is not in a relationship, we seem to be closer. When she is in a relationship, we are further apart. It is incredibly difficult to watch her make decisions which I believe will eventually end painfully because I care so much about her.

At other times, I am angry with my sister. Why did she not tell anyone about the abuse? Maybe this would not have happened to me if she had revealed her abuse. Why didn't she protect me? Given that we both experienced the abuse from our grandfather and we have gone in different directions, I must consider the path I need to take so that I might have a future free of emotional burden resulting from the abuse. Perhaps forgiveness is the path.

Is it possible to forgive such a horrible act? This question is especially important since I had no recourse and no way to face my assailant given his death. Is it better that he has died? In this aspect, I feel powerless and his shadow lingers. Bollas (1995) discusses Freud's notion of the shadow of the object. Bollas suggests this shadow is the parent image or representation that falls on you and crushes you unless dealt with. Symbolically it is necessary to kill the image of the bad parent (or bad grandparent, in this case). Who have I symbolically destroyed in my mind? How does this symbolic assassination correlate with forgiveness? Can forgiveness ever be given? In my situation, can I forgive my abuser? Perhaps, as Miller (2006) states, such awful acts cannot be forgiven. This discussion of my relationships with my mother, father, sister, and grandfather is only the beginning. Work needs to be done in each of these areas and I must consider the role they play in my life today.

One of the greatest impacts these relationships have had is how the memories and experiences are transferred to others. Pinar (2012) suggests we are in a "complicated conversation" (p. x) with ourselves. One component of the complication is the idea of transference that Freud and other psychoanalysts discuss. The connection between childhood experiences and understanding how we transfer those experiences and feelings

onto others in our adulthood encapsulates transference. As my father, mother, sister, and grandfather each had a profound impact on my formative years, understanding how I transfer beliefs associated with them onto people today is important.

While I repressed the thoughts and avoid people who I associate the emotions I felt when being sexually abused, she has followed another path. She is drawn to people who she associates with the pain and disappointment. Like a moth to the flame, she moves in and is burned repeatedly. Examining my relationship with my sister highlights how abuse can elicit a wide range of responses.

Having examined the relationships within my immediate family, I expand my exploration to other childhood relationships, such as my best friend.

My Best Friend

“Like all other relationships, friendships are psychically determined, and they serve conscious and unconscious purposes” (Nemiroff & Colarusso, 2013, p. 8).

Friendships are an integral part of adolescence and adulthood. One of the many lethal effects of child sexual abuse is the kind of relationships that adult survivors establish.

Growing up, I always surrounded myself with people; however, my girlfriend Denise and I have a very special relationship.

I met Denise in 9th grade science class. From the time we met until I met my husband, we were inseparable. Truly, we were like sisters. Whether it was at school or after school, we spent just about every waking minute together. These shared experiences during our formative years helped us form a bond that will undoubtedly last forever. Her mother became my second mother, the motherly figure I envisioned for all children. The type of mother you see on television. She was sweet, kind, and always doing the things you would expect a mother would do for her children. In fact, she would

even go beyond expectations. For example, she would take us shopping and take us into the city (something my mom would never do).

Denise and I had many things in common. We were both Catholic, Italian, and came from large extended families. We were the type of friends who could easily finish each other's sentences and I always knew I could trust her, even with my deepest darkest secrets. Unfortunately, she had the same secret I had; we were both sexually abused by our grandfathers. While her grandfather was her mom's dad, mine was my dad's dad. Neither one of us can remember the exact conversation when we learned this truth about each other. However, we do remember we were either age 15 or 16. Strangely, I then repressed the memory of my abuse and my discussion with Denise in my mind and forgot about the both experiences for many years. We both told our parents about the abuse later in life. Unfortunately, we also experienced the same second trauma after telling our families. The sexual abuse had to remain a secret from to the rest of the family. Both our families felt this secret must stay within the immediate family because of the fear of too many people being hurt.

It seems odd that my best friend experienced the same type of childhood trauma I did. Is this what drew us to each other? It seems like more than a coincidence that my childhood friend, a person who I trust unequivocally, and I would meet and spend so much time together even when we didn't know we had both experienced the same type of trauma. Denise has always been a positive and healthy part of my life. She has been my confidant. My relationship with her was the closest I had with anyone outside my immediate family until I met my husband.

My Husband

The close intimate relationship with my husband was the spark that brought my abuse back into my consciousness. All the intimacy, trust, and sexuality issues connected with the betrayal of being molested came back with a powerful wave of negative emotions. Perhaps these feelings surfaced because of my relationship with my husband and brought my repressed memories back to the forefront.

My husband and I have been in a relationship for more 20 years including the 5 years we dated before we married. Sometimes, when I think back, I find it amazing how quickly our relationship developed and how long it has lasted. We met through mutual friends and moved in together after only one month. In the beginning, the relationship had the usual give-and-take that exists when two individuals come together and renegotiate the terms of their existence as a couple.

One of the running jokes between us was that he could not go anywhere without me by his side, and I would always ask him to verify my statements. I would end a statement with, right Jay? For example, Denise would make comments like, "I'm going to get dressed, right Jay?" Or, "I'm hungry, right Jay?" At the time it seemed harmless and funny, but I realize now that this behavior was a manifestation of the self-doubt and need for validation I felt inside.

I would like to say I gave him space in our relationship, but for many years I did not. The fear of abandonment has always been with me. Herman (1992) states, "The sense of safety in the world, or basic trust, is acquired in earliest life in the relationship with the first caretaker" (p. 51). As a survivor of child sexual abuse, I never acquired

trust and security. Having my husband near me gave me the sense of security I yearned for.

Herman (1992) also noted that in situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection. “Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered” (Herman, 1992, p. 52). Although my parents cared for me deeply, they never knew the terror I felt inside. Therefore, they never had the opportunity to hear my inner cries for help. Instead, I repressed my memories and feelings. After I met my husband, I experienced a complicated array of emotions, due largely to the closeness I felt to him and from being intimate. These emotions included an extreme fear of abandonment and a strong need to be protected. I now understand how these feelings emanated from my childhood.

As a child, during your early years you build on trust and love from your parents. I see now that I felt abandoned by my parents because of what happened with my grandfather. Why did they not protect me? Looking back, the blame is no longer there. They did not know. They never would have placed me in that position.

“She must develop a sense of intimacy out of an environment where all intimate relationships are corrupt” (Herman, 1992, p. 101). I quickly became very dependent on my husband. I wanted us to do everything together. I was at times suffocating. I wanted the feeling of love and security but was haunted by fear of abandonment. Herman (1992) states:

Unable to develop an inner sense of safety, the abused child remains more dependent than other children on external sources of comfort and solace. Unable

to develop a secure sense of independence, the abused child continues to seek desperately and indiscreetly for someone to depend upon. (p. 107)

Bedtime became a time of heightened terror for me. Would I have a bad dream?

In the beginning of our relationship, if my husband did not come to bed with me, I would wake up in terror when I heard the door open to my bedroom. I would jump up and let out a loud gasp or scream. Frequently, I would be shaking and sometimes tears would soon follow. For a long time, we did not know what this was about. However, I now realize that many times my abuse occurred when my grandfather came into my room once I went to bed. I was a prisoner of my own childhood. Many survivors have trouble with intimacy, control, and trust. I experienced these issues.

Sex also can be a problematic area of marriage for child abuse survivors whose most traumatic memories involve sexual acts. For a period of time, I was totally disinterested in sex and intimacy. Many survivors have flashbacks while making love. This was the case for me. While my eyes were closed, I would see my grandfather. There were times I remember shedding tears during lovemaking with my husband. I yearned for a time when I would not see my grandfather in front of me, when I would not think of what he did to me.

This was obviously a difficult time in my relationship. Many times, I wondered if I was punishing my husband for the pain I experienced at the hands of my grandfather. Was this my way of controlling the issue I could not control at age 6? Although my husband was not the actual victim of child sexual abuse, he was becoming a victim of my past.

For a long time, I pushed my husband further and further away. At first, he was confused and could not understand why I was not interested in him. Once I recalled my repressed memories and confided in him, he at least knew some of the reason I became startled at night and shied away from sexual contact. While my husband understood my behavior, at least he said he did, this was a wedge in our relationship. He responded to my secret with loving concern; however, I do not think he understood the control this secret had over me.

While my husband wanted to be close to me, my past kept haunting me. Though I tried to not relive those memories, they kept creeping back. The time had come for me to deal with this horror, this secret. The abuse had stolen my childhood; I did not want it to destroy my future.

A year after we were married, I began going to counseling. I was age 29. I remember finding a therapist in the yellow pages. After two sessions, she advised me to tell my secret to my family. I would tell my secret and be able to move on. Unfortunately, this did not occur, and I stopped going to counseling, again pushing my memories of the sexual abuse into my subconscious. It would not be many years before the memories came back to haunt me.

I fell back into my same old patterns. I felt guilty that my husband and I did not have a normal, happy sex life, but each sexual encounter triggered memories of the violation I experienced in my youth. Analyzing these feelings psychoanalytically, I now see that I was transferring my fear and anger toward my grandfather to my husband. At times, I felt my husband was the perpetrator. I did not want this to happen, yet it did.

Although I could not have a good sexual life, it did not mean I did not love my husband. I just could not show him and love him through sexual intimacy.

I disconnected from sexual life. I had constant feelings of guilt because I did not have enough sex or good sex. Why could I not just be normal? I would try to tolerate sex; try not to show how much I was hurting inside. However, this was not fair to my husband. Sex and intimacy were acts that were supposed to be beautiful.

My sexual relationship with my husband is healing. Since the reawakening of my secret and writing this dissertation, I am beginning to heal, I am recovering. My flashbacks occur less frequently as time goes on. My husband and I are growing closer. He gives me constant reassurance of his love. He tells me how I am strong and brave to face and conquer this trauma. He reminds me daily of how proud he is of me writing about such a difficult topic. By sharing with him my research on child sexual abuse, I believe he understands more about me and accepts that my love for him is strong.

Even though my trauma taught me that I could not trust anyone, trust is forming in our relationship. As the trust has increased, I am getting closer to the peace and freedom I yearn for. I have also let go of the need to control everything. It was my way, or it was wrong. While it has taken 20 years, I am thankful I am finally able to connect with and understand myself enough to trust others. I am also beginning to trust myself.

CHAPTER 4

TRAUMA AND FORGIVENESS

The first principle of recovery is empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure. (Herman, 1992, p. xx)

When I initially enrolled in the Curriculum Studies doctoral program, I had no idea of the impact it would have on my understanding of myself and how profoundly I would change. I have always been a person who enjoys learning. Continuing my education was the next logical step, so I enrolled in the doctoral program. I also participate in many other gratifying experiences that help me grow, such as reading books and expanding my ability as a chef. Okay, maybe I am not a chef if you define that as a professional cook, but I love to cook for my family and friends.

There is some irony in the impact that the trauma has had on me as a learner. In *Provocations: Sylvia Ashton-Warner and Excitability in Education* by Robertson and McConaghy (2006), Selma Wasserman writes that Sylvia comforted her by saying, “Dearest, something good will come of this...” (p. x). I have found that some good has come from my own trauma. First, it allowed me to connect with the content of the Curriculum Studies program in a deeper way than I would have had I had not had experienced trauma. Thus, my learning impacted my trauma and its role in shaping my life. The irony is that the trauma I experienced negatively affected my self-respect and self-esteem. As a result, I never really feel good about myself. Perhaps this is one of the reasons I continue to earn college degrees. These degrees are tangible recognition that, in fact, I am good enough. Had I not experienced the trauma, I may not have pursued the

Curriculum Studies degree that has caused me to reflect on the impact of these experiences.

Prior to my doctoral program, my experience with schooling from k-12 through my Master's degree was just that, schooling. I was told what to think, how to feel, and especially not to question. Kincheloe, Steinberg, and Tippins (1999) posited, "We have developed important methods for the study of the 'world out there' but we have failed in the attempt to study 'me in here'" (p. 12). This resonated with me and sums up my schooling experience.

I saw education as the transfer of information and content from one person to another. A teacher was responsible for controlling the environment, deciding what was important to know, and evaluating how well the students mastered the content. As a student, my role was to learn what I was required to learn. I had not considered that school could also include learning about who I was. Morris (2006) claims, "students simply do not know who they are or what they think themselves to be" (p. 6) because they have never done their own autobiographical work. My own autobiographical work began in my first class with Dr. Morris. The primary function of this class was to understand my identity as well as some aspects of it such as how my identity influenced me as a teacher. All of this would take place by looking at how my abuse as a child had influenced my belief system and actions.

My first class in the doctoral program completely threw my life off course. Like Kincheloe et al. (1999) claim, I began "to see relationships that have never been seen before" (p. 2). I had so many questions. How? Why? Who? Power? What is important to know? Who am I? Why am I this way? The Curriculum Studies program created

opportunities for me to engage in critical reflection upon the past and current circumstances, pushing me out of my comfort zone. I also connected with Greene and her words from *The Passionate Mind of Maxine Greene* (1998): “I choose myself with more passion and insight, developed more courage to be” (p. 12). Courage has swelled inside of me because I no longer blindly follow; instead, I feel empowered and that my beliefs have value. Is this because I am opening up from the trauma?

My eyes connect to my past, present, and future. Morris (2001) affirms, “We understand at the limits of our own situatedness, at the limits of our own horizon” (p. 6). What we bring to the table, our lived experience, is what shapes our thinking. We all have different schemas, different viewpoints, so how can we be expected to have the same educational experience. How are we expected to have the same outcomes with such different lived experiences? Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2012) states:

All learners construct knowledge from an inner scaffolding made up of their individual and social experiences, emotions, will, aptitudes, beliefs, values, self-awareness, purpose, and more . . . what you understand is determined by how you understand things, who you are, and what you already know, as much as by what is covered and how and by whom it is delivered. (p. 27).

As a doctoral student, I began writing of the trauma and exploring my past. By writing, I found my voice. Writing about these personal memories awakened my soul. While many of these awakenings have been painful, writing about these situations has been therapeutic. It has pressed me to grow and, at times, become a stranger to myself.

The biggest question related to my trauma is how it impacted my psyche and worldview. Before beginning my doctoral program, I had not considered the effect of the child sexual abuse that occurred in my childhood. In fact, if you ask me, I probably would have said that the sexual abuse was not having that much of an effect because I had unconsciously forgotten much of what had occurred. In addition, what I remembered, I actively worked to ignore. What I now know is that ignoring the memories did not make them go away but set them free to wreak havoc in my unconscious. I had to examine my silenced self. I filled my life with busyness. I avoided taking time to stop and reflect. Silence was my enemy. I became the master of avoiding myself. If I was not alone, I would be okay. If I worked all the time, I was not alone. This manic activity manifested itself in all areas of my life including as a learner and an educator. I immersed myself in my education and in my work on top of my responsibilities as a wife, mother, sister, and daughter.

By studying curriculum theory and how it interweaves with psychoanalysis, I have a better understanding of the why questions in my life. Why do I choose not to be alone? Why I did not question anything? Why did I believe everything I was told? This led to the conformity I experienced for most of my life. This conversation with myself has been a complicated conversation.

Sometimes I lay awake at night, laying in the silent darkness, knowing my family is there, yet, I am still alone. I wonder why this happens to me? It is easy to externalize causality. I am unlucky. If only I had If only he had not If someone had just said something, warned me about the danger, protected me. However, if you hand the keys over to someone else, you never have control, you never can be free, free from the

pain, free to be happy. That only comes when you realize your power, your ability to control the circumstances within your power, deep within your mind. Only then will the opportunity present itself for you to live the life you desire, the life you deserve. That is why I began to write and find my voice. I realized that I was not alone, and I had something important to say that could benefit others. I could confront my trauma and the impact that it had on me. I could be a model for others who felt disempowered and afraid to speak because they were controlled by their past.

Trauma: A Universal Experience

Through my readings and life experience I have discovered that trauma is a universal experience. This was something I had not really thought about. Generally, I accepted things at face value. People appear to be happy, so I assumed they were unless I was proven otherwise. In a few instances, with close friends, we discussed some of the traumatic experiences they had endured. In each case, these were socially acceptable traumatic events. For example, the mother of one of my friends died unexpectedly while my friend was in high school. Some of my friends who were firefighters struggled with what they had seen while picking up the dead amongst the rubble after the Twin Towers collapsed on September 11, 2001. These are traumas that could be openly talked about and shared.

Meanwhile, I kept my secret hidden. Being sexually abused by your grandfather is not something you tell others. It is something you deal with by yourself. At least that was my perception of how to deal with it. Trauma is unsettling and forces us to rethink our experiences; it exposes us to the human condition of vulnerability.

Throughout their lives, people are exposed to trauma in diverse ways. In fact, “It seems that the phenomenon of trauma has become all inclusive” (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). Community violence, complex trauma, domestic violence, early childhood trauma, medical trauma, natural disasters, neglect, physical abuse, refugee and war zone trauma, school violence, sexual abuse, terrorism, and traumatic grief impact people across the globe (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017). How people react to and process these experiences into their psyche has an indelible effect on the quality of their life and the lens through which they view the world.

While each of these types of trauma is unique, there are universal, broad ranging problems associated with trauma including psychological and physical dysfunction. By engaging myself in my own process of examining the connections between my feelings about my abuse and their repercussion on myself, I have developed greater awareness of my own traumatic experience and greater understanding and empathy for the traumatic experiences of others. Empathy is important for all who have endured trauma. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra (2014) insists on the need for empathetic discussion and unsettlement in response to traumatic events. He goes on to suggest that the aftermath of traumatic events affect everyone and are not fully owned by anyone individually. Therefore, I realized that revealing my secret was an option. Perhaps the fear I felt inside was unwarranted. I had allowed fear of what others would think of me to shape my identity and control my voice. I made a conscious decision to no longer allow this to occur.

Personal Identity

The question of personal identity is literally a question of life and death. Who am I? What do I need to do to survive? How do I fit in? These are important questions as we interact with the world around us and make sense of our thoughts and feelings. This is especially true as our identity begins to form in our childhood. Developing our identity is a mental and social process, taking cues from the environment, opinions, observations, and reactions from friends and family, and making decisions about ourselves (Schmitt, Dayanim, & Matthias, 2008).

Children take social cues from the context in which they live. When trauma is thrown into the picture, self-doubt, anxiety, depression, and self-consciousness result from the shattered conception of selfhood (Herman, 1992). Bonds of trust are severed for trauma survivors and their fundamental assumptions about their safety are shattered. Fortunately, people can make meaning of the world again by talking about their manic experience in the company of empathetic others. While talking to others has been found to facilitate healing and reconnect the person with their new conception of self, it is not something that children are taught.

For much of my life, I blindly accepted my personal identity and did not consider how trauma had played a role in my development. Since engaging in my doctoral program and writing this dissertation, I am a forever-changed person who questions everything. I see how lived experience shapes us and creates individuals with varied thoughts and beliefs. Through the process of writing my dissertation, I have come to understand diversity through a completely new lens.

Prior to studying in this program, I had a limited view that was largely defined by the traditional categories defined by society. Are you an immigrant? Are you White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian, male or female, gay or straight? By exploring texts such as *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* by Patricia Hill Collins (2002), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* by Michael Foucault (1977/2012), *Men Who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics and the Art of Masculinity* (2006) by Michael Gard, and *This Corner of Canaan: Curriculum Studies of Place and the Reconstruction of the South* by Whitlock (2005), I have come to a much deeper understanding of power, the self, place, and the true diversity of each individual's lived experiences. Growing up in a closely knit Italian community, I was not exposed to much diversity. There were many traditions and the roles of men and women were well defined. As I have moved into the diverse world we live in and read works from others, I have begun to view the world differently.

Returning to my former naïve understanding would be impossible. Looking back, examining the present, and considering my future are all occurring through this new informed perspective. I now realize that I could not enter this educational experience without becoming changed. Block (1997) claims that engaging in an educational experience is to make yourself a stranger because you will be changed by the experience. Places where you found comfort such as your home feel different because you are different. In effect, you become a stranger in your own home. This understanding leads me to my interest in developing a better understanding about how my past has shaped me. It has also prepared me to confront the past.

Simon et al. (2000) stated that they are often asked, “Why your rendering concerned with the memory of pain, loss, degradation, and death? Why subject yourself to a seemingly never-ending attention to human suffering . . .?” (p. 1). These questions could easily be applied to the examination of and the pursuit to understand and remember specific acts of child sexual abuse. Why my enduring concern with the memory of pain, loss and degradation? Why subject myself to the seemingly never-ending attention to sexual abuse? Simon et al. go on to state:

. . . underpinning such doubts is a worry that persevering on difficult remembrance is not only unhealthy but politically suspect and socially unwise. Quite often these misgivings are driven by the apprehension—not altogether unrealistic—the remembrance—may become an irrational, obsessive practice, and indulgence in pain or a ‘dementia’ in which one is possessed by ghosts. Equally, remembrance may be judged as a rational, but cynical, calculated endeavor to mobilize support for a particular interest. (p. 1)

For me, the pursuit in understanding is about finding my voice and facing ghosts rather than being possessed by them; it is about becoming unburdened and opening discourse so that the issues of child sexual abuse are not brushed under the rug for others. Rather than being a victim, I am a survivor. Simon et al. (2000) goes on to frame learning and remembrance as a strategic practice. I passionately concur with this assessment. To avoid repeating mistakes of the past we must learn the lessons of the past. To do this we must:

recognize that different forms of remembrance carry different conceptions of what might be taught, what might be learned (by whom), and how this

learning\teaching is to be accomplished . . . to initiate a remembrance practice is to evoke a remembrance\pedagogy, an indissoluble couplet that echoes Foucault's (1980) pivotal dialectic 'knowledge/power.' (Simon et al., 2000, p. 2).

By extending our boundaries, we can become more receptive to others and we can confront and understand the stories of the past as well as the stories of ourselves as we are in the present, historically, existentially, and ethically. What is important to understand is that I am ready in the present. I'm ready to explore the impacts of my trauma. As an adult, I could not fathom how I would have been perceived as a child in elementary school would be viewed by my friends if I told them she was sexually abused by her grandfather. I'm certain I would have been ostracized and ridiculed. I'm also just as certain that the adults would've told me to keep quiet. That's how problems were handled in the 1970s in my family.

Growing up and fitting in with peers is hard enough when you're a child trying to establish your identity, figure out who you are, and how you fit in with the other children. Adding in the complex event of sexual abuse makes establishing identity overwhelming. Therefore, it's not surprising that the coping mechanism I leaned on at that age was to bury the memories and attempt to forget. Now, I am ready to take on the implications as an adult and redefine my identity.

One of the challenges to understanding the stories of the past, even when they are our own personal experiences, is the conception of truth. What really happened? This crisis of truth is one of the greatest challenges in psychoanalysis (Caruth, 1995). "For the attempts to understand, brings one repeatedly to this peculiar paradox: that in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that

immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness.” (Caruth, 1995, p. 6).

Here is one of my own personal greatest challenges. In examining my experience with trauma, what is real? I certainly had become numb to it, especially having those traumatic experiences buried under decades of soft pillow-like memories that are much easier to cope with. However, I understand that there is a falsehood in grasping and embracing the better memories by suppressing the pain. The memories are always there, looking over my shoulder, tainting the purity of my current life. Turning to face the specter head on now seems like the only solution. However, the memory fades and repressed memory is fragmented. From a fundamental level, my gut told me I had been abused, but I could not say with hundred percent certainty that was true. I question myself. I knew it was true, but I couldn't really remember it. What exactly happened? Did it really happen? I know it did. Or was it just a dream? No, I'm certain of it. That's how the conflict went in my head. My body knew the truth, the pent-up knots in my stomach, the panic attacks, the fear. Meanwhile, my mind attempted to protect me and shield my consciousness from this difficult knowledge.

In *Between Hope and Despair*, Simon et al. (2000) discuss the problems of how personal identity is threatened and reconstituted by difficult knowledge. This knowledge is created by and lingers after traumatic events and destabilizes the ego in a process Freud (1915) described in the essay, *Mourning and Melancholia*. Although mourning and melancholia may emerge from the same external event, mourning is a healthy process that can be worked through, while melancholia (depression) is seen as a dangerous illness that includes a loss of self-regard.

In melancholia, the subject dwells on the loss of self, substituting this loss for the loss of something external thus shielding itself from the contingencies of the external other. In mourning, the other is acknowledged and with it the externality of loss. The mourning subject engages with the world and with the loss inherent to it in a way the melancholic subject cannot. Interestingly, Eng and Kazanjian (2003) suggest that “melancholia might be said to constitute an ongoing and open relationship with the past—bringing its ghost and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into the present” (p. 4). Here the past can be considered and consciously taken on.

Conversely, Eng and Kazanjian suggest mourning, which gets over loss by laying the past to rest, may not lead to adequately mulling over and de-pathologizing the loss. Understanding this one might need to move back and forth between melancholia and mourning to feel the pain and then adequately mourn the loss. This requires a *risk laden learning* that extends personal boundaries of the self. As Simon et al. (2000) suggest:

a critical and risk-laden learning . . . seeks to accomplish a shift of one's ego boundaries, that displaces engagements with the past and contemporary relations with others out of the narrow, inescapably violent and violative confines of the 'I,' to a receptivity to others Remembrance is . . . a means for ethical learning. (p. 8)

Undoubtedly, I have immersed myself in this risk laden learning. I've gone back and forth between feeling the pain and putting it to rest. I've used focusing to make connections to the inner feelings I had and to make sense of them. Processing my thoughts and my feelings through my writing has also been therapeutic. I am no longer

running from the pain. I'm no longer suppressing the past; instead, I am actively engaging in this process of growth.

Deciding to actively engage in the process of growth has been worthwhile and was easy once I made the decision to do it. Being sexually abused profoundly impacted development of my identity. For others, the type of trauma may vary. A life lived is messy with a multitude of loose ends and traumas. Miscarriages, broken families, and the death of loved ones are all worthwhile traumas to investigate. How does each play a role in the present? LaCapra (2014) suggests:

I think that generally what happens (both in personal and collective life) is that one comes to focus on a given trauma when there may be other traumas that are more pressing. This often happens: that you look at an earlier trauma as a way of not looking too closely at the contemporary traumas, or it could be to avoid or mitigate other past traumas that are just coming to fully articulate voice in their present. (p. 171)

This suggestion raises an interesting point. Unconsciously, is my struggle examining child sexual abuse an excuse to avoid the challenges of today? How do I determine which traumas are the most relevant and which ones we should engage in our primary thought process? Undoubtedly, we all have experienced multiple traumas in our lives. Often, we have come to terms with the experience of less severe traumas and they have made us stronger. Meanwhile, more difficult issues become repressed.

My time is precious and my capacity to think is limited. Perhaps that is why I try to suppress the horrible thoughts and experiences of the past and focus on the good ones. Considering these difficult questions about the most pervasive and damaging traumas

raises concerns about vulnerability. What occurs if I do not hide the pain and the shame, but instead embrace vulnerability? The sense of abandonment brought on from the trauma I experienced as a child has clearly impacted me as a person, as a learner and teacher, and has impacted my identity.

I came to this new understanding through the process of writing and engaging in activities which allowed me to explore my inner thought processes. These activities include walking through the method of *currere*. While walking through the method of *currere* I tapped into my past. Here, I uncovered memories that existed in the subconscious. By engaging in the regressive step, I was able to revisit my most difficult memories and bring the past to the present. I began by writing about what had occurred and considering how it had impacted me. During these writing sessions I did not worry about writing semantics. Rather I utilized free associated and wrote whatever came to my mind. Later, I revisited the writing and attempted to make meaning of it by connecting it to the work of other curriculum theorists.

In hindsight, I recognize that my belief system was influenced by how my child sexual abuse and my repression of it increased my self-doubt and led me to overcompensate so that others would accept me. To be accepted in society means to conform to it. According to Moghaddam (1998), "Conformism can be defined as the change in thinking, feeling or acting following pressure, real or imaginary, exercised by the group" (p. 6). Conformity means to behave according to the people or culture in my life. How do I conform? Why do I conform? In what ways do I expect students to conform to my expectations in the classroom? How do I expect teachers who I taught to conform to my expectations of good teaching?

Since part of my identity is being a teacher of others, I needed to understand myself. I needed to look within and think critically. To help students understand themselves, I must engage in deep self-exploration. I realized that some important questions needed to be answered about my past if I was to be an authentic teacher. How do I understand the *other* if I do not understand myself? How do I teach students if I have no connection to myself? I cannot ask my students to do what I do not ask of myself. Am I truly open to different opinions? I must also be careful of what the other really is. Levinas is careful not to signify that the other is just another person. He believes “the Other is what I myself am not” (as cited in Todd, 2003, p. 29). I must understand what my identity is and how it has been shaped in the past so that the future version of myself aligns with my vision of the future. Self-understanding is necessary for all people who have influence over others. They must know their identity if they are to intentionally and positively influence the identity development of others.

Many teachers today can connect to Greene’s (1973) words from *Teacher as Stranger*. Greene argued, “The stranger is she/he who once was at home in the world and now has lost that sense of comfort” (as cited in Block, 1998, p. 25). Greene believes that teachers must have a heightened sense of consciousness. As teachers, we must step back and look through the window to see what we are doing. Greene asserts, “To take a stranger’s point of view on everyday reality is to look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives. It is like returning home from a long stay in some other place” (p. 267).

By considering my past traumatic experiences, my role as a teacher, and my new evolution as a learner utilizing currere, I realized that I must look through new eyes and

acknowledge things that were once hidden so that I could connect the subconscious memories of my abuse with my current actions and beliefs. Therefore, I sat quietly and contemplated the connections between the past and present and connected with my stream of consciousness. As I considered the thoughts and feelings that passed through my mind, I made connections between my thoughts and actions as a teacher. One aspect that I have come to understand about myself through this analysis is how my formative experiences impacted my teaching and the connections I had with specific students.

One way trauma manifested itself was in the deep, profound, personal attachment and connection I developed with students who experienced traumas in their own life. Each year I served as an educator, the number of students I was able to connect with who faced traumas in their own lives grew exponentially. However, one example readily comes to mind although I use a pseudonym to protect his identity. The student was a wiry young man, age 6, named Joe. He had dusty brown hair that was always disheveled, piercing blue eyes, and thick round bottle like glasses.

On the first day of school, the students were asked to draw a picture of themselves and their family. As I circulated around the classroom, I saw many colorful pictures of stick figures with smiling faces. Large characters portraying the father figure in some pictures and a slightly smaller figure portraying the mother. In some instances, only the mother was present, while siblings and pets also appeared in the pictures. In each case, family members stood side by side with clear smiles on their faces.

As I approached Joe's desk, I found a drastically different image. In his picture, the entire piece of paper was one giant circle, the face of a young boy . . . with bottle glasses, blue eyes, and equally blue tears streaming down his face. No family, just a

picture of himself crying. I soon learned that Joe's father had significant psychological problems and was in and out of the home. Meanwhile, it was not unusual for Joe to find his mother unconscious on the floor with a heroin needle sticking out of her arm.

It was no surprise that Joe defecated in his pants, smelled badly, and rarely smiled. Other teachers were repulsed by this class disruption, but my heart ached for Joe. During the year we spent together, my attachment to him grew and I often wished there was more I could do to change his environment and help him cope with the trauma he was experiencing. Unconsciously, my own tarnished childhood allowed me to understand his pain. It also made me feel that his trauma could be pushed to the side and overcome as I had done, so I was always caring but expected a lot from him. While I don't not know what he is doing now, I know that I never forgot Joe and I suspect he has not forgotten me. I imagine he is also a survivor.

Remembering Joe, I wish I had understood myself more then. I wish I thought more about the trauma I had undergone. I think having conscious awareness of it would have allowed me to be an even better advocate and support for Joe as his identity formed. Certainly, I would not have shared my experience, but I could have empathized more and connected him with additional resources so that he had the right tools with which to face his problems. Clearly, just talking to the guidance counselor was not enough.

In fact, many of the social support systems for children are unknown or underfunded. I imagine I would have reached out and searched for more information if I had known that hiding painful experiences and trying to move on wasn't the best approach. It is important to know yourself and your own development so you can understand the pain of others and attempt to break the cycle that traumatic experiences

cause. By understanding yourself, you can help others start to confront their traumas early on. This is especially true when considering the prevalence of child sexual abuse. In a 2013 study, Perez-Fuentes, Olsson, Villegas, Morcillo, Wang, and Blanco reported that child sexual abuse affects approximately 16% of men and between 25-27% of women in the United States. While shocking, these statistics highlight the importance of educators playing a role in helping students who have been abused. Unfortunately, the training for educators is limited to mandatory reporting policies. For example, in Florida, the Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession state that teachers should “make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning and/or to the student’s mental and/or physical health and/or safety.” (Florida Department of Education, 2016). A reasonable effort is insufficient. In practice, this means that all school personnel must report suspicions of abuse to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) by calling a central abuse hotline. The information is also given to the school principal or the supervisor of the person reporting the suspected abuse (Hillsborough County Schools, n.d.). Explicit guidance for teachers frequently ends at this point as the responsibility for the welfare of the child has been passed to the DCF. This lack of guidance highlights the importance of this work in providing additional guidance for educators.

We are called to make a choice: confront the past or passively ignore it. Deciding not to choose is effectively choosing the latter. This leaves us considering how these events impact our identity and whether engaging in revisiting the past is a worthwhile endeavor. It also leaves us considering how we can help others.

Confronting Trauma

Understanding the trauma I lived through led me to a greater understanding of how this trauma allowed me to see things that had gone unseen. Realities I blindly accepted as truth have been revealed because of gaining this new knowledge and reflecting on my personal motivation for accepting these truths. Understanding the trauma enables me to identify and evaluate how trauma influences individuals in our society and schools. Reading texts assigned in the Curriculum Studies program as a doctoral student has enabled me to reflect on my personal growth.

This doctoral program and my own difficult discourse with myself have helped me achieve greater awareness. I no longer wish to conform to the patterns of our society. I now believe in Fleener's (2002) words, "We can never afford to abandon the profundity of 'why'" (p. 11). I am no longer afraid to question and express my own opinions. With this greater sense of self, I have a renewed awareness and a greater sense of purpose.

As an educator, I am in the process of transforming my own world based on what I see as valuable and what I believe is important. Through education and not schooling, my own thinking engulfs me. This new way of thinking has impacted my teaching and how I mother my children. Through reflection, I re-examine who I am and how I fulfill these roles. I am reminded of a powerful quote by Thoreau (2006):

If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again, if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk. (p. 94)

I believe I am ready to walk; ready to walk into a new life as a woman empowered by self-awareness, self-acceptance, and a clearer understanding of the world. I am ready to address the feelings of abandonment I felt for many years and how the feelings impacted my world. However, the only way to be free is to confront the trauma.

During the past few years, I have come to understand that my reaction to the events in my life are similar to many others who have experienced trauma, especially individuals who experienced sexual abuse. I believed I had escaped from this trauma and put it behind me by repressing the memories into my preconscious and unconscious memory. What I have come to discover is that these experiences have shaped me and silently controlled me, manifesting the effects of the abuse in my personal and professional life.

One of the challenges in confronting the trauma is overcoming the social stigma that surrounds it. As much as I lived in fear of the traumatic event itself, I was also afraid of how the people around me would react. Would my husband still love me? Would my parents talk to me? Would my sister talk to me? What if my son and daughter found out? These are not questions I took lightly. I would think to myself, do I really want to have this discussion with my mother and father? Invariably, the answer would always be no. I would much rather talk about happy things in life and try to forget my abuse. Why bring it up? It's done, it's over with. He's dead. My life is much better now. Nevertheless, the truth is, the pain still exists. The only solution was to talk about it and come to terms with it. This was very hard, because the need to belong and be accepted is powerful and discussing this could undermine the comfortable relationships I had.

Brown (2010) suggests that fitting in and being accepted is crucial to people. The feelings of belonging and being wanted are supposed to develop when we are very young children from our caregivers. When we don't receive this caring attention from our loved ones, it distorts our lens. Brown (2010) notes:

A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don't function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We know. We take. We hurt others. We get sick. (p. 26)

As we grow up, emotional security is what you know. Unconsciously people re-create the upbringing they experienced emotionally. Environment is manipulated until it resembles the drama they grew up with because they are comfortable with those patterns and roles. The security of the known trumps the insecurity of the unknown. Whether it was right or wrong by societal norms does not matter. Therefore, the trauma of the past must be confronted. New events seen through what I call the unfinished business lens confirm that the other is not trustworthy. Achieving forgiveness and recognizing the impact the event had on a person unfreezes stuck energy and cleans the slate for the next phase of life. The challenge is that "psychic trauma involves intense personal suffering, but also involves the recognition of a reality that most of us have not begun to face" (Caruth, 1995, p. vii).

Herman (1992) conjectures, "To study psychological trauma is to come face to face with the human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature" (p. 7). As early curriculum theorists posit, engaging in this battle with the

demons of the past is engaging in one's own development. This development applies to all affected by traumatic experience.

Once I decided to write this dissertation, I was forced to have conversations about the abuse with people whom I loved. If I had not been engaged in this long process, I could easily have brought the trauma of my sexual abuse up once and then put it away. Having a hard conversation takes willpower. Having many hard conversations with multiple people takes extreme willpower and conscious decision making over and over again. At any point, it would be easy to give up and return to the default mode, back to being silent and dealing with it alone. By engaging in this writing, I have acknowledged my sexual abuse and confront the unwanted consequences of it. I have been able to reconcile how it had shaped my identity and how I would allow it to shape my identity going forward. I have taken back my voice and changed my perception of myself from a victim to a survivor.

However, as I confronted the problem, another question arose. How would I deal with my now deceased grandfather? Would I continue to hate my grandfather or would I forgive? He is no longer living, so it really would not matter for him; instead it was about me. What do I want to do with his memory? How do I want to perceive him? Could I forgive the unforgivable?

Forgiveness

What is forgiveness? It is certainly difficult to measure. The concept itself of forgiveness is confounding. It's almost as if you are releasing people from responsibility for their actions. What can be forgiven? Are there acts that are so heinous that they are unforgivable?

Forgiveness can be examined in terms of global events or from the perspective of individual conflicts. In *On Forgiveness* (2001), Derrida discusses several notions related to the concept of forgiveness and attempts to rationally account for an act which exceeds any final rational accountability. Derrida's Work on this subject is significant and suggests that forgiveness is paradoxical. In this work, Derrida begins his thoughts on forgiveness with a discussion of repentance, confession, forgiveness, and apology which have been pervasive on the geopolitical scene. Not only do individuals seek forgiveness, but entire communities, professional corporations, and global leaders do as well. In fact, the scenes of forgiveness are so common, they are not pure, for pure forgiveness requires forgiving the unforgivable without conditions. On the political stage, these are calculated transactions. Through reconciliation it helps form national unity or helps strengthen international bonds.

Derrida (2001) also notes that the language of forgiveness has its roots in Abrahamic religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Derrida suggests that there are acts which are unforgivable. "If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls 'venial sin', then the very idea forgiveness would disappear" (p. 32). However, what religious language calls mortal sins are unforgivable crimes. Derrida (2001) also posits the paradox of forgiveness lies in the Abrahamic Tradition of forgiveness which causes an unresolvable tension between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. Furthermore, Derrida discusses irresolvable internal contradictions related to forgiveness. If we forgive something that is forgivable, then we are just using calculative reasoning. It is not true forgiveness. We have just reasoned that what they did is logical and, therefore, should be forgiven. However, genuine forgiveness must involve the

impossible, forgiving an unforgivable transgression such as sexual abuse. To do this, the forgiveness must be unconscious and defy rationality. Apologies and repentance are unnecessary. Having such conditions on forgiveness amounts more to reconciliation than forgiveness. Based on these beliefs, forgiveness can never be finished or concluded. Therein lies the paradox of forgiveness.

I revisit the question; can I forgive the unforgivable? If so, how do I do it? How do I mentally reconcile what has occurred and release my grandfather from responsibility for his actions, even in death? Is there a limit to forgiveness? Is there any permanence to forgiveness? Could I forgive? If I could, what benefit would it have for me psychologically? I consider the work Miller (2011) as I think about bringing understanding in the light of horrific experiences and forgiveness.

In *The Conflagration of Community*, he explores pre and post holocaust literature to investigate how the Nazi's shattered the notion of community. In this text, Hillis Miller's examines Adorno's statement, "After Auschwitz, to write even a single poem is barbaric" (p. ix). Miller questions how suspect his work would be when considering this notion and argues for the possibility of literature to bear witness to extreme collective and personal experiences. This text attempts to bring to light how literature can help a person understand the unfathomable. For me, I bore witness to my trauma, so I am not relying on the fictional literature of another. Rather than being barbaric, I see my writing as cathartic. I am attempting to answer questions for a dead grandfather. Considering Derrida's assertion that only the unforgivable demands forgiveness, I see that my situation lends itself to the possibility of forgiveness. There is no possibility for

conditional forgiveness. No apology. No promise to never do it again. Is forgiveness a leap that I can take without justification? Only time will tell.

Creaky Bones, fatigued eyes, wrinkled hands, trembling voice—the images I have of my grandfather will never be forgotten. But, can my grandfather be forgiven?

When I began this journey of writing my dissertation, my dream was to break the chains that have encumbered me for most of my life. I wanted to be free from the trauma; I wanted the chains to be broken. Now as I approach the end of this journey, I must reflect on these desires to be free.

Though my chains have been broken, it is primarily the result of me finding my voice and confronting the past. The child sexual abuse I encountered during many of my formative years will never leave me. That is my grandfather's legacy, the person I have not yet forgiven.

Perhaps forgiveness is a long and winding path. Is it possible to forgive such a horrible act? This is especially true when I have no way to face my assailant given his death. Is it better that he has died? In this aspect, I feel powerless. C. R. Strahan believes:

Forgiveness has nothing to do with absolving a criminal of his crime. It has everything to do with relieving oneself of the burden of being a victim—letting go of the pain and transforming oneself from victim to survivor. (as cited in Terrill, 2014, p. 112).

However, his shadow lingers. Bollas (1995) discusses Freud's notion of the shadow of the object. Bollas suggests this shadow is the parent image or representation that falls on you and crushes you unless dealt with. Symbolically it is necessary to kill

the image of the bad parent (or bad grandparent in this case). Who have I symbolically destroyed in my mind? How does this symbolic assassination correlate with forgiveness? Can forgiveness ever be given? In my situation, can I forgive my abuser? Perhaps, as Miller (2006) states, such awful acts cannot be forgiven.

Can we forgive such horrific events in our life? Can I forgive the man, my grandfather, a person who was supposed to be a mentor and guide? This is my question. While psychoanalysts' interest in forgiveness is expanding, opinions on the topic vary (Alford, 2014). However, Smith (2008) suggests the reality of working through trauma is so difficult to deal with that we turn to forgiveness as a way of erasing our pain. I so dearly want to ease the pain, but I struggle with forgiving. How do I reconcile these opposing feelings?

These words force me to think back to my session with my psychotherapist: "Do you forgive your grandfather? Tell him." And I said, "Yes." Yes? Did I really say yes? Why did I say yes?

While listening to the recording of my session, I thought, how could I say that? I don't forgive him! Why did I say I forgave him? Why did I lie about that? Was this my easy way out?

When I review that day, I think of the hopes I had for that session, dreams of complete recovery, birds singing, me laughing and smiling. I wanted to be healed, to move on, and to move past the trauma and pain. Was I just pushing that to happen? Was this my shortcut? Is the pain so difficult that I just wanted to get to the finish line?

Based on Winnicott's (1953) beliefs, when my state of being is ready, I will forgive. Winnicott discusses what he calls transitional spaces. He defines this type of

space as a place that grows between mother and infant. It is through this space that a child begins life by first merging with the mother and eventually separating into the world. The child will eventually develop his or her inner self as separate from the mother.

This transition space is also a space where forgiveness happens. Winnicott (1986) contends that we forgive when we reach this transitional space where we no longer need to hold onto any anger or hurt. Many times, it happens unconsciously. While I am determined to move on from this place in my life, I am not in that transitional space yet. This is alarming to me. I feel let down. I wonder if I am stopping myself from getting to this space. Karen (2003) states:

In our capacity of failure to forgive we reveal our ability to recognize the humanity in someone who has hurt or disappointed us, as well as to see our own limitations and complicity. It represents an ability to imagine what life is like on the other side of the fence, where another human being is engaged in his own struggle, to let go of the expectation that people exist to be just what we need them to be. And this sensibility applies to our view of ourselves, too: for forgiving others is nothing but the mirror image of forgiving oneself. (p. 9)

By not forgiving my grandfather, am I still not forgiving myself? I was a child. I was not an adult. I did not yet have my voice. I did what I was told. I did not question. In the transcript from my therapy session, the therapist begins by reminding me that it is the child in who feels chained, who feels like nothing, not the adult. Karen (2003) also believes that to reconnect with ourselves we must mourn the loss of our childhood; we

must go through serious work within our self. We must mourn the losses we have experienced.

Another scholar, Schoenewolf (2015), contends:

In order to forgive people for hurting us, we need to step back and look at the situation. We need to sweep aside the anger and look beneath it. We need to empathize with those who hurt us and try to understand why they did it. And we need to look at ourselves and understand what we may have done to provoke them. (p. x)

My blood boils reading these statements. We must look at ourselves and see how we might have provoked them. Is this not one of our problems with society? Is it always the victim's fault?

I reread the transcript of my psychotherapy session paying special attention to asking my grandfather why he did this to me. My grandfather states that he had a horrible childhood, that he was beaten often as a child. Knowing that this occurred, does it make it easier for me to forgive? I do not know. While I feel sorry that he had such a horrible childhood and I recognize that the research contends that trauma done to us can become a circular issue, it does not help me forgive him. It makes me feel sorry for him. It makes me question why he was not strong enough to stop this circular trauma in his life. This is something I am trying to make sure never happens in my life and in the lives of the people whom I love. I will be strong enough.

Frommer (2005) contends that we long to forgive because we are mourning a part of ourselves. He believes we must bypass grief and go straight to acceptance. In that way we don't acknowledge what has occurred. We are not changed. According to Klein

(2002), this continuous desire for reparation and to repair damage is very troubling and could be the reason why we are so obsessed with forgiveness. When we jump to acceptance, what have we done to get to that point? There is no work involved when we do this. Nothing will change; we will remain the same as we were. In this situation, we forgive rather than confront.

I question whether we can be same as we were before a trauma. The trauma I endured has changed me. Just like growing up in the North has molded who I am today. Every part of my life has shaped me into the person I am. This trauma will never merely lie in my past. It is part of me and part of everything I do. However, I have overcome the barrier of secrecy, I have grieved my past, and I have a new understanding of myself. I am anew.

I am always reminded of the words, it could be worse. I now try to live my life with gratitude. While many people might think being thankful for little things is a cliché, I believe living through such a difficult trauma has helped me appreciate all facets of my life. Herman (1992), states:

The survivor who has accomplished her recovery faces life with few illusions but often with gratitude. Her view of life may be tragic, but for that very reason she has learned to cherish laughter. She has a clear sense of what is important and what is not. Having encountered evil, she knows how to cling to what is good.

(p. 213)

In a way, the problems of life are necessary. They create balance and allow us to have a clear vision of what life is really like. When everything goes well, human beings take it for granted. We see the good life as the status quo. Things are good, so they will

always be that way. Most people don't wake up in the morning and appreciate when they are healthy. However, a simple cold can remind us of how fortunate we are to have good health. I think we've all experienced the first day after you wake up and your nose isn't stuffy anymore. You immediately say, "I'm so glad I'm not sick anymore." You appreciate your newfound health. While I'm not grateful for the hard parts of my life, I realize they have a purpose, and I'm going to make the best of my life by utilizing them to appreciate the finer times.

Conclusion

The art of self-examination is an arduous task, but it is one I am well prepared for. Using currere, I am seeing how my past, present, and future are intertwined. It is what a person makes of his or her experiences that is important. My ability to explore deep within myself has emerged as a result of being a doctoral student in the Curriculum Studies program. During this time, my everyday world has been profoundly and irrevocably transformed.

While I have begun to feel more alive and more open, I am still not comfortable with who I am. Doll (2000) writes, ". . . in the revisioning of who we are, we might feel uncomfortable with this reinvented self" (p. 113). My reinvented self is still angry at times, even though I am in a much better place than I have ever been. I am more in touch with my personal identity, how it formed, and what I can do to be an even better version of myself in the future.

Life is not fair. We all learn this at one time or another; but this is a lesson a child should not learn because of being victimized by a family member. Enduring child sexual abuse at the hands of my grandfather has had a deep impact on my perception of the

world; however, for many years I suppressed this memory and ignored its role in shaping my beliefs and actions. During the past few years, I have come to understand that my reaction to the abuse is similar to many others who have experienced trauma. I believed I had escaped from the trauma unchanged and put it behind me, repressing the memories into my preconscious and unconscious memory. Instead, I discovered is that these experiences have shaped me and silently controlled me, influencing my personal and professional life as a learner and teacher.

After moving through the regressive, progressive, and analytical steps of currenre, the conclusion I have come to is that I should not make the mistake of focusing on what I have lost, but rather I should measure my success by what I have gained by coming to a clear understanding of my experiences and their role in who I am today. I must continue to confront the trauma, find my voice, and move forward so that I might help others. Through this self-examination, I am gaining self-awareness and self-esteem. I am regaining control of my life. This is what psychoanalysis and examining the past has done for me. To understand the impact that trauma had on specific facets of my life, it is important to bring it together and examine the impact on my entire self, what happened and how it has impacted my personal lens.

CHAPTER 5

HEALING THROUGH WRITING

In this final chapter, I begin to synthesize my new understanding using the synthetical step of currere. Here I begin to look at myself as a whole person and discuss how the writing process has helped me and how it can help others.

Overcoming Isolation

For years, I had internalized the secret of my sexual abuse as a child and subconsciously included it in my sense of self. The story of my formative years as a victim had become entrenched, whether I liked it or not, by the sexual abuse I experienced as a child. While I thought I had it under control by suppressing it, in reality I had no control over the ways in which the trauma affected me the most. As I explored my internal self and how trauma shaped my public identity, I understand the value and significance of the experiences and my previous reaction to it.

The weight of a secret can be overwhelming. I struggled with the question of how I could lighten the load. Would confronting my trauma remove the weight of it from my shoulders and put it on the shoulders of my parents, my sister, and my husband? How could I take the power away from the memory of the abuse? How could I lift the burden from my mind, heart, and soul? This is why I decided to write this paper, find my voice, and confront the trauma. I also began writing this paper to provide an example for how others could do the same.

For each person, the answer to these questions and the right approach will be different. Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) noted that a person will have his or her own natural tendency when it comes to disclosing strong emotional experiences such as traumas. Some are very willing to divulge their experience to other people. Conversely,

others will keep it to themselves. I fell into the latter group. There were many internal and external forces that prevented me from discussing my childhood sexual abuse after it came to my consciousness.

Herman (1997) posits, “When a victim is already devalued (a woman, a child), she may find that the most traumatic events in her life take place outside the realm of socially validated reality and the experience becomes unspeakable” (p. 9). This socially validated reality becomes a barrier for exploring the self. Instead, the victim is encouraged to live a double life. We see this all around us. People have a public self and a private self. People have a work life and a home life. This duality is a strong part of American culture and is encouraged by society. The environment supports this deception. Unfortunately, living this duality is easy because society encourages it despite its damaging effects.

One way out of this trap is to reveal one’s self and embrace vulnerability (Brown, 2010). Embracing vulnerability unifies the self and removes the fear of being revealed as a fraud. Brown (2010) maintains that shame and fear underlie excruciating vulnerability such as sexual abuse. Understanding this vulnerability brings up existential questions. Am I strong enough to face the shame and fear? Is the risk, reward, or trade off worth it to reveal this painful deep secret? Am I worthy of being loved? Am I good enough, especially if I reveal this deep flaw in my past? While not a flaw that I caused, this is a flaw in my childhood. Certainly, it’s not the story of normal kids, of the normal childhood. Brown (2010) calls for authenticity, letting go of who I should be for who I am . . . to embrace vulnerability by telling the story of who I am with my whole heart. Compassion for myself can then lead to compassion for others.

By confronting my trauma and developing my voice, I have become more empathetic and compassionate to others as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend, and teacher. Herman (1997) suggests one consideration is preparing a compassionate environment that accepts differences. Herman (1997) recommends:

To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, the social context is created by relations with friends, lovers, family. For the large society, the social context is created by both movements that give voice to the disempowered. (p. 9)

This social affirmation is an important consideration when examining how to take self-understanding and bring it to others to create a social environment where safety and understanding are norms and the expectation of perfection is not the norm.

To date, the small steps I've taken have led to a spiritual awakening. This comes from opening up to the truth, letting go of the fear, and discussing my abuse with my husband, parents, and friends. By writing about this trauma, I've released it and taken away its secret, silent power. While I may have lost the struggle to hide my scars, I'm winning my life back. I am beginning to reconnect with ordinary life. This exploration reinforced existing insights and awakened further understanding of who I am, why I suffer, and how I can reshape myself and the institutions I work at to fulfill my potential as a spiritual human being. Through this journey, I am reminded of Herman's (1992) words: "No longer imprisoned in the wordlessness of the trauma, she discovers that there is a language for her experience" (p. 158).

Writing has inspired me to break the barrier between the personal and the political and helped me realize that the very act of talking openly about child sexual abuse is in fact a powerful political act. As a society, we must publicly acknowledge when a person has been traumatized and we must assume responsibility to help the individual overcome the effects of the traumatic experience. Our culture's tendency to blame the victim is so deep that it has negatively affected the direction of psychological inquiry. Moreover, children are the most deeply affected. Herman (1992) contrasts the magnified impact of repeated trauma on children with its effect on adults. Chronic trauma on children can damage the personality, causing lifelong effects. Evidence seems to support the view that chronic trauma and abuse in childhood is a primary factor leading a person to seek psychiatric treatment as an adult.

I have chosen to confront the horrors of my past to reclaim my world. Finally breaking the cycle of silence has freed me from the burden of carrying this secret. The effects have been a pleasant surprise despite my fear of how others would respond. Therefore, I encourage others to overcome fear, so they might experience the freeing effects of disclosure and support that I have.

Undoubtedly, this was the most horrible, dark secret I have had in my life. What is ironic is that I can hardly recall being afraid to talk about it. I am now weary of talking about sexual abuse since I have done so much reading, analyzing, and writing. At some point, you think so much about something that it not only becomes disempowered, but it becomes passé. I think I have hit that point. I am burned out on it. I think I understand well enough how it has influenced me. Now it is time to move forward and determine how I will proceed with this new understanding. During this process, most people have

provided support for me; a few have gone back into their shell and remained silent. Now, they are processing how to deal with it. It is out in the open and can be faced head on by everyone who was affected.

Much of my strength during this process has been drawn from self-reflection. Harris (2012) suggests that gaining strength from self-reflection occurs because contemplating things allows a person to create a therapeutic movement of the mind. This movement of the mind then creates opportunities for physical healing. As I processed my trauma, I had not considered that everyone experiences pain during their lifetime and, unfortunately, many of these narratives originate in childhood: abandonment, loss of a loved one, various forms of abuse. Whether the experiences involved oppression or traumatization, the psychological wounds remain. These psychological wounds also create a place where people can be empathetic about the pain of others; in my case, they can be empathetic about the trauma I experienced. The isolation I felt while keeping my secret was an unnecessary burden.

Through writing, I feel I have overcome my isolation. The isolation I experienced is what made the silence so difficult. As humans we are all social beings who desire acceptance. This need for acceptance partially explains why I was so afraid to reveal my secret. Would I be rejected? Would I be branded? How would people view me? While I could control my narrative, I could not control the prejudices of others. While I could ignore those prejudices, they still hurt. While I felt the isolation from not sharing the painful experience, I also could not bury it. Personal trauma cannot be banished from the consciousness because it refuses to be buried (Herman, 1992). Even when you think you

have buried it, it silently works its way into decision making processes. Arendt (1994) states that writing is a matter of seeking understanding.

Therefore, I took up the charge to utilize literary representation to help me comprehend my history from a present perspective (Harris, 2012). I utilized writing as a therapeutic process to give me a voice, so I might confess my inner fears and confront my present feelings of guilt, shame, fear, and anger. “Voice, in both the psychoanalytic and literary encounter, is not only a means of expressing one’s pain, but is also a means of repeating painful experiences that cry out for understanding.” (Harris, 2012; p. 19). Writing became a significant way for me to master the trauma and complete the work of understanding myself. Writing has helped facilitate this careful process of self-construction and renewal and has affected me psychologically and physically. As I have developed a better understanding of the importance of developing my voice, and the healing effects of writing, I have begun encouraging others to embark on a journey to find their voice and confront trauma.

Trauma and Psychological Pain.

I have also continued to explore ways to examine my thought processes. Practicing focusing with a psychotherapist, having discussions with my husband, and writing have each provided me with outlets to explore my inner thoughts and beliefs and how they translated into the physical world. I have discovered that there is a connection between each of these different forms of expression and the healing of psychological trauma. Expressing my thoughts in verbal and written form allowed me to explain, order, and extract meaning from the chaos in my life and led to healing.

Gregory-Thomas (2016) describes narrative identity theory as a model for understanding human thought behaviors. The basic premise is that we are the stories we tell, and we tell these stories to help us understand ourselves. Since the stories are personal, we consider them authentic even though they are not fact checked. Our own lens helps us create meaning from our experiences, define how we feel about ourselves, and shape our identity. Experiences such as being rejected, feeling shamed, or experiencing trauma creates very powerful impulses. How we convert those experiences to life stories defines who we are. Do we become the victim? Are we debilitated by the experiences? On the other hand, do we see these experiences as opportunities for wisdom building and personal growth? Has the pain of experience taught me something about how I want to live my life?

Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) discuss the specifics of sexual trauma and the damaging effects that it has on the psyche. They suggest that sexual traumas are so devastating because people often cannot talk about them. Furthermore, when the trauma remains a secret, it increases the odds that you will have health problems. These authors suggest that of all the traumas they have studied, including the death of a family member, being a victim of violence, moving, failure, and personal losses, people are typically least likely to talk about sexual trauma.

How could I not have known about the connection between trauma and physical health? How could I not have connected my physical ailments with the sexual trauma that occurred during my childhood? I'm glad I know now. We live in a society that can be uncaring which makes opening up uncertain and dangerous. Will people blame me? How could someone blame a child for his or her own sexual abuse? Will this truth

destroy the family? It is amazing what I did to keep this secret and maintain the status quo.

I found that writing allowed me writer to overcome the fear to speak to somebody face-to-face and admit these flaws. I didn't have to worry initially about questions such as; Will they judge me? When will they get sick of hearing me complain about my problems? Writing, however, was much simpler and personal than conversations about sexual abuse. Sit at the computer with the keyboard and you can start writing about your traumatic experiences. Pick up a pencil or pen and a piece of paper. When you start writing about your deepest thoughts and feelings about the experiences, you can start to make sense of them. In the post-Freudian age, the *talking cure* has opened the door to a *writing cure* (Harris, 2012). While many psychologists such as Breuer and Freud came up with the idea of having people talk to each other about thoughts and emotions to cure mental distress, current psychologists such as Pennebaker (1993, 1997) and Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) have been exploring the written word as the medium for healing.

One of the benefits of utilizing writing is that it is private and intimate. This has allowed me to deal with my inner conflicts without worrying about public concerns. This is true even though I know that others may read my writing. During the process, I have been able to cull my thoughts privately with a hypnotherapist, with my husband, and in front of a keyboard in my own home. By writing about my thoughts, I can step back, observe my ideas, and contemplate what they mean. It is true that "Personal writing can be a means of creating a stable identity in regaining ego strength lost in a crisis or infirmity" (Pennebaker and Smyth, 2016 p. xv).

It is almost as if a life is like building a castle out of Legos. Each day you have a Lego block or maybe even a few. One particularly bad day maybe a few blocks are knocked out of the castle. Maybe they are replaced; maybe they are not replaced. Through the decades, the castle grows but it is not the perfect giant princess castle you imagined living in with your prince when you were a child. Now it is turned into a different type of castle. Nevertheless, it is all your own. It is unique. For me, I built a giant wall around my castle with a small entrance and a moat to protect it. This was my reaction to the abuse. While some people may reach out for support and help, I walled myself in. I have had enough of it already from being abused as a child. Being abused created a great deal of fear in me. Fear of abandonment, mistrust, fear of not being good enough.

So, I engaged myself in a doctoral program and needed to decide what to write about. Do I write about something outside of the wall? Being a mother is something many people have written about. It is a safe topic. It is a pertinent one. But it just did not feel right. Having a small door on your wall means you can only let a few people in. Therefore, in my life I have a few very good friends. I am slow to trust and it takes time being around me until you can find the door and get in. However, once you do, the friendship is strong and long lasting. Therefore, I have strong bonds with some very close friends. The question arose, would I be strong enough to take down the wall and tell people my darkest secret?

I am tired of reliving the sexual abuse, but I have taken away the control it had while being hidden in my unconscious by facing it and analyzing the impact it had on me. Part of me thought it would be gone, far away, as though it never happened once I

embarked on unlocking my unconscious memories and analyzing them through psychoanalysis. However, the feelings still exist. I know they are there, but they exist in a different way. Their weight is lighter and I am much more at ease with them. It is like someone you do not particularly like, but you have learned to deal with his or her annoying little habits. Each time I put pen to paper, or more accurately fingers to the keyboard, the fact that I was abused has less power over me. The words have less power. I do not feel as much of a victim anymore. I am now a survivor. I have a voice and am not afraid to say what happened. That itself is empowering.

The wall of the castle is a little bit smaller today. Clearly, I have taken down some of the bricks from the Lego wall. In doing so, something strange has happened. I have realized that walls do not just keep people out, they also keep people in. Living in a castle surrounded by a giant wall means I spent a lot of time looking out the window, looking through my own personal window to the world. Living in a castle you created, you do not see the world around you. You are blinded by it. As I read about Freud and the unconscious, it made me think that I was not even aware of the walls I had built. I wasn't aware of what was trapped in my unconscious and how it controlled me. However, the unconscious thoughts and feelings shaped how I perceived myself and how I viewed others. It shaped how I looked at situations and how I reacted. It affected all my relationships, it affected how I saw myself as a religious person, and it affected me as a teacher and learner. Now I have a better understanding of those connections.

Willis (2009) argues that exploring painful emotions allows for the possibility of healing transformations within individuals. This has certainly been true for me. The human mind in all its complexity can adapt. It is a necessary function in a rich world full

of wonder and stimuli. Sounds that surround us are filtered out subconsciously. Without this filter, we would experience madness. However, controlling the mind easily allows us to connect with the environment, recognizing the sounds, heightening the feeling. It is amazing how this adaptation has effected and affected me. I think it is human nature to try to bury the past—out of sight, out of mind. But unless I turn and face the beast, it unconsciously controls me, lurking in the unconscious like a sadistic puppeteer pulling the strings of the marionette. Turning your back on the past does not change it. It only allows it to work untethered by your conscious will to fight it.

Fortunately, by consciously connecting to the feelings and making something tangible and malleable from them, I can turn the tables on my inner conflicts. Now, I decide what to do with the feelings of self-doubt and self-loathing. It does not have to be a bold proclamation of what happened. For example, you could write in a diary. However, the confirmation, validation, and feedback from having others read it has been empowering and useful. It helped me understand what I was thinking and let me know that the thoughts and feelings I was having were ok. My thoughts and feelings were typical for a person who had experiences like mine. I have also discovered that research supports my experience with healing through writing.

Physical Healing

The effect of writing for understanding and healing is powerful (Gregory-Thomas, 2016; Pennebaker, 1993; Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker and Smyth, 2016; Wilson, 2011). These authors have connected expressive writing to improving psychological and physical outcomes. Having already discussed some of the psychological benefits, I turn to the physical difficulties I have experienced and the

research on the connection between writing and physical health. Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) suggest that physical ailments such as “asthma, wheezing, congestion, and other respiratory changes have long been known to be related to psychological conflict.” (p. 6). While we rarely see the relationship between psychological effects and illness in ourselves, when we do, the course of the illness changes for the better. This goes along with what Freud (1915) argued: that we employ many defense mechanisms including denial, compulsive behavior, and dwelling on physical symptoms to reduce anxiety and psychological pain.

Admitting to personal struggles is much more difficult than the excuses we can make up for physical infirmities. This is another reason writing and getting to the root of problems is important. We take the issue head on and attack the underlying causes of our physiological problems. Taking aspirin for a headache is just treating the symptom. Writing about the physiological basis for the stressors can alleviate the headache by addressing the underlying cause. In society, we are bombarded by messages for quick fixes, but these solutions are superficial.

As I have written about my childhood sexual abuse and thought about the psychological impacts, I have benefited physically as well. My stomachaches have substantially lessened. The underlying cause, the anxiety I felt daily, has also dissipated. I am not as quick to anger, and I feel a renewed sense of peace physically. I view the world differently and my body can tell. I have been able to sleep more soundly and for longer periods of time. These physiological changes are supported by a growing body of research finding that expressive writing can help with a broad array of sleep-related processes even when writing is not specifically targeted for sleep (Arigo & Smyth, 2012,

Gortner, Rude, & Pennebaker, 2006; Harvey & Farrell, 2003; Mooney, Espie, & Broomfield, 2009).

Pennebaker and Smythe (2016) suggest that inhibitions are potentially harmful and confronting our deepest thoughts and feelings can have positive health benefits. They recommend writing about personal experiences to help heal old emotional wounds, increase feelings of well-being, decrease stress, improve relationships, and boost the immune system. These are bold claims, but I can certainly attest that the experience of writing about my personal experience has been cathartic and healing.

Conclusions

As currere is a lived experience and requires a constant flow of considerations between the past, present, and future, my findings have been an ongoing process that have emanated from my ongoing writing of this dissertation and the developing stream of consciousness that has evolved as I read more about the method of currere, psychoanalytic theory, Focusing, hypnosis, and healing through writing. The hybridization of my methodology is a function of my desire to explore various ways to unlock and understand the memories that were repressed in my unconscious. Exploring each of these has been part of my journey and have helped me expand the tools I have to heal myself the way a teacher in a classroom utilizes a broad range of strategies within a classroom. These concepts and the detailed process for each are covered within the chapters of the paper. Currere is Covered in Chapter 1, psychoanalysis in Chapter 2, Focusing and hypnosis in Chapter 2, and healing through writing in Chapter 5.

In each of these chapters I discussed a facet of my life and then provided interpretations using the news lens that I developed from my readings. These findings can

be more accurately described as my new understanding of myself and the world around me as it relates to sexual abuse, trauma, and teaching. These findings are not static as my life is not static.

Analytic processes that I utilized included free association during which I wrote down my thoughts without consideration of writing conventions and an expressive writing process called cognitive processing where I wrote down my thoughts and emotions to derive meaning. My process for analysis included writing my thoughts on paper, reviewing and considering their meaning, and making sure that I was selecting precise words that represent my thoughts and feelings. I asked myself questions that I posed throughout the paper such as, “How do the words on the appear accurately represent what I feel inside?” and “Is this what I really believe and why?”. This cognitive process has been ongoing for years as I made connections to all the work that I read throughout the doctoral program and have been writing in this dissertation. It was an iterative process of understanding. As a project, I am not a finished product with clearly defined limitations. As such, the research analysis did not have a clearly defined beginning and end. In many ways, the layout of this paper reflects my personal growth and my growing understanding of methods for investigating myself, finding my voice, and confronting my trauma.

I have learned so much about myself going through this process. I am changed. While there are few words that can adequately describe the gratification, I feel from finding my voice, I will attempt to summarize some of my key takeaways from this intellectual journey and how these may be of value to educators.

Harris (2012) posits that there is something special about the writing process and using literary expression to signify pain and heal a person. In fact, literary expression can be a form of self-renovation and therapy that can provide profound relief for the writer and the larger community as they share a common bond, express empathy for each other, and identify with the profound sadness and pain of another. Writing brings out parts of the whole person in all their emotional complexity. The process of currere and psychoanalytic analysis have allowed me to understand the complexity of my thought processes as they relate to the childhood sexual abuse I experienced.

I have realized healing is a process and will likely be a process that never ends. What comes from it is that I have a way to get better, a way to increase my control over my destiny and myself. There is comfort in that. Another part of the process has been understanding that we are all flawed in some way, damaged by the reality of life. For me it came from childhood sexual abuse, but the causes will vary for each of us: death or illness of a loved one, personal illness, bullying, physical abuse, being the victim of a crime, being involved in an auto accident, divorce of parents. In every case, coming to terms with the events and our reaction to them takes time and conscious effort. It requires following a process like currere or focusing to look within.

The broad interconnected web of relationships and the complexity of thoughts and experiences a person has makes coming to terms with trauma a long process. The impacts are not isolated, but rather filter through us and into each of our actions and interactions. Relationships are impacted and our self-confidence and self-worth is affected. Writing has given me an outlet to channel some of these thoughts. Writing has

been a way to use a high level cognitive skill to put together the pieces, reach into my mind, and make sense of it all. It has been a way to make intangible feelings into tangible words on the page, outside of myself, removed from myself. My writing is something tangible I can pick up and look at with consideration. Is this how I really feel? Is this who I really am? Is this who I really want to be? If not, how can I change it? Am I empathetic enough when considering the challenges others face? How can I take what I have learned from my experiences to make a positive difference in the world around me?

While no one can say what works after a traumatic experience, the research suggests, and my experience confirms, that building and enhancing a narrative surrounding the trauma is useful for expressing emotion, connecting with feelings, comprehending their influence on decision-making, and formulating a new role for those feelings in life. After following the method of currere and going through the regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical steps, thinking about the impact of my trauma on my relationships and my teaching played a part in my worldview, I have concluded that I do not need to dig any deeper at this point. I have gathered information to the point of saturation and conducted a thorough analysis. I set out to find my voice, confront the trauma, encourage educators to recognize the importance of lived experience, and add to the body of research. I have accomplished each of these goals.

By writing, I have improved my relationships. I understand how trauma has impacted my connections and my interactions within the social world. I have come to terms with the harmful, self-defining experiences that cued the defeating, destructive thinking or behavior I exhibited in the past. My new understanding has allowed me to dislodge myself from pessimistic thinking and has produced positive change in my self-

esteem and self-concept. I recognize I cannot change the past, but I can change how it affects me. By understanding how I have been impacted by my past and what I tell myself about it, I acknowledge and embrace the fact that I can redirect my future. In relationships, through life choices, I have begun a different journey, a re-envisioned story, as an empowered survivor. This is the most liberating aspect of this journey. For so long I have kept the secret and protected the abuser.

The original purpose of this paper was threefold: first, to find a voice and confront my past trauma; second, to share my lived experience with others who might benefit from it; and third, to add to the body of research in the field of Curriculum Studies. It is time for me to revisit these purposes.

First, I wanted to find my voice and confront my past. Having gone through this process, I have realized I will never be free from the memories of my past although I feel their power is loosening. During countless hours when I sat in silence, focusing, I thought about how my past has shaped me and the impact it has on me today. I have connected with the feelings on a deep level and certainly thought about how those feelings sat inside me and tied me in knots. The feelings resulting from my trauma controlled my actions and caused me to do things I wish I had not done, such as acting out in anger, living in fear, holding onto things I just needed to let go of. Finding my voice has allowed me to channel my feelings in new directions and redirect my thoughts in empowering ways.

Herman (1992) believes that “Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate throughout the survivor’s lifecycle” (p. 211). I too believe that there is no ending to trauma. My trauma

will always be with me. However, how I confront these events in my life is what I am concerned with. For many years, I convinced myself that I had forgotten the trauma, but my body always knew. My body needed the truth to be told. I will not allow this memory to seep back into my unconsciousness. Instead, I have a voice. I can speak of what occurred, keep it in my conscious memory, and use it to help others.

Nevertheless, while I feel I will never be completely free, I am a person who has grown considerably. I have grown in my understanding of myself and in my ability to consciously dissect my thought processes and understand why I am choosing to do the things I am doing. Learning to understand myself and dissect my thought processes is a huge victory, especially considering how overwhelmed I have been in the recent past with writing this dissertation; working as an assistant principal; and being a mother to my children, wife to my husband, daughter to my parents, sister, and friend. I live in a time when there is so much pressure in life: never being able to disconnect from technology, always searching for that perfect moment, trying to recover from the toll that work and life demands take during the daily grind. At the same time, I am also trying to soak it all in and enjoy every moment, knowing that today is the youngest I will ever be and that the time I spend with my children and husband are some of the happiest times I will ever have. Juggling all these things is not an easy task, but it is my reality.

I appreciate that I had the time to spend reflecting on how I developed and how something as significant as sexual abuse as a child had influenced me in each of my roles. One of my takeaways is how incredibly lucky I have been to end up surrounded by people who care about me.

My second purpose for telling this secret was to share my lived experience with others, including those from my chosen profession, teaching, so that they might benefit from the experience. I want to emphasize to teachers and teacher educators the importance of lived experiences, not only how they affect the individual but also how these experiences force the individual to see and act in the world. While I am unable to know the impact of my work now, I believe it will meet this purpose.

Being a teacher is always something I wanted to do. As a matter fact, being a teacher is all I have ever wanted to do. I would lay awake many nights dreaming of the day when I could put up bulletin boards, set up my daily schedule, and welcome students into my classroom. I knew I wanted to make an impact on the world by sharing my knowledge with children and helping them grow into the best people they could become. I wanted my time with them to be something special, something impactful, something they would always remember. A caring adult would protect them and have high but realistic expectations of them so they could learn more than they ever imagined they could learn.

Fortunately, my dream has come true. I have been fortunate to be an educator for more than 20 years. As an educator, I taught early elementary grades, served as a reading coach, assistant principal, and higher education faculty member. One of the best things about my roles is that the scope of my influence has expanded over time. While I initially had classes of 20 students, I now I have worked with hundreds of teachers who, collectively, have taught thousands of students. In my own way, I have had an impact on each of them whether they know it or not.

One of the great things about getting older and writing this paper is that I have developed my thought processes and increased my understanding of what needs to be taught by examining why things should be taught. Curren has been a professional development activity that has allowed me to understand myself so that I can better educate others. This goes along with my personal understanding of what I need to do and looking deeper into understanding why I was doing it. Why do I believe in structure? Why did I feel so compassionate for students who were abused at home? How had my own abuse affected me as a teacher? I now understand that this reflection has given me courage, given me the courage to stand up and speak openly about my experience.

My third purpose was to add literature to the Curriculum Studies field as it relates to child sexual abuse. To date, the topic has been researched; however, most of the literature talks about child sexual abuse in the third person. I have not only been the victim of child sexual abuse, but also a survivor, and now a writer. I believe my work will spark the interest of other researchers to explore this issue and perhaps tell their own stories. By bringing a first-person perspective to this subject, I believe I have begun to unveil this secret.

For teachers to understand the human experience and help others, they must understand themselves. Autobiography and curren provide an avenue for developing this foundational understanding. Since the Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies in 1976, the use of the method of curren and autobiography for studying lived experiences has grown. This paper adds to the Curriculum Studies field in several ways. First, my work adds to the number of dissertations that have been written utilizing autobiography and curren. Examples of dissertations include the work of Carney (2016), Jones (2010),

Nissen (2012), and Thompson (2011). In addition, my work builds upon the work of educational theorists and psychoanalysts Klein (1948/1993), Freud (1992) and Britzman (2012) who built the bridge between psychoanalysis and curriculum studies today. As a field, curriculum studies scholars are concerned with issues of equity, access, and voice for marginalized groups. My work builds on scholarship in each of these areas as it includes discussion of sexual abuse, mistreatment of children, forgiveness, finding my voice, and confronting trauma. Finally, this paper serves as a resource for other educators who have endured sexual abuse and are seeking ways to find their own voice. These are the ways that this paper adds to Curriculum Studies literature.

Having considered how my exploration has come together, I now propose recommendations I have for educators.

Recommendations for Educators

There are many steps that you can take away related to what I've discovered. These are broken down into two categories; recommendations for educators that are sexual abuse survivors and how to support students that are victims as an educator. If you or an educator who has experienced a traumatic experience such as childhood sexual abuse, there are several recommendations:

- Set aside time to engage in self-reflection and explore unconscious memories that may be influencing your behavior.
- Learn more about Psychoanalysis, hypnotherapy, and focusing.
- Overcome your fear and take action.
- Have courage to confront trauma.
- Don't worry about the prejudices of others.

- Find ways to express yourself in the verbal or written form. For example, engage in writing as a reflective practice. This is a safe place to begin finding your voice.
- Explore the various approaches to expressive writing; standard expressive writing, cognitive processing, exposure, benefit finding, and best possible future self.
- Consider engaging in story editing to reframe your personal perspective and overcome setbacks. Use as a purposeful act of empowerment.
- Seek social affirmation in an environment where safety and understanding are the norms.
- Consider divulging your experience to other people. This may include other survivors, people who care about you, or mental health professionals.
- Raise public awareness by speaking about your experiences.

If you are an educator that works with children who have been exposed to trauma, you have legal and ethical responsibilities as a teacher. Therefore, recommendations include:

- Fulfill your legal obligations as a mandatory reporter to contact the appropriate state agencies in your jurisdiction. These vary by location and may include the Sherriff's department or Child Protective Services.
- Educate yourself on the signs that a child may have been sexually abused.
- Develop a social environment in the classroom where students feel safe and may be willing to seek help.
- Acknowledge when a child has been traumatized and assume responsibility to help them.

- Connect with organizations which support students who have been abused so that you can provide support, advice, and resources to the child.
- Maintain normal routines and structure within the class.
- Maintain personal space for the child as they may be uncomfortable with physical contact.
- Respect students right to privacy as they may fear other children finding out about what happened to them.

While these recommendations are not all encompassing, they provide a starting point for educators interested in overcoming or supporting others effected by sexual abuse. In the next section I close with an epilogue.

Epilogue

“In the telling, the trauma story becomes a testimony” (Herman, 1997, p. 181).

This is my testimony. What is yours? Through this writing, I have regained the world I pushed away. While I now feel safe and have moved from victim to survivor, I worry for all women who are going through this secret trauma. No one should be a prisoner of his or her own childhood. We must find a way to incorporate this trauma into our lives today. I urge women to find groups and people who share the same commonalities. Reconnect with the world. I challenge you to tell your story.

Engage in the process of knowing yourself. What are the underlying motivations for your actions? Knowing what to do and doing it our very different. I know how to lose weight, but it’s very difficult to do it. Developing the habits to improve your life are important. Tell your story. Use a process such as currere to look that the past, present, and future and how they are intertwined. Go to a psychoanalyst or hypnotherapist and

have them walk you through the process of uncovering your unconscious memories. Or, if you are so inclined, pick up a book about psychoanalysis, hypnotherapy, or focusing and begin reading. Then start writing. Use free association and get your thoughts out and down on paper. The ideas are yours. By creating something tangible like written words on a page you will be able to see them in a different way. You will use your high level cognitive skills to mull through ideas, think about the words. What do they mean to you? Do they really reflect who you are? Do they reflect who you want to be? How can you bridge the disconnect between the two if it does exist? It doesn't matter how you attack this, but you need to go forth and do something.

Do not let others tell it for you. Do not continue to protect the abuser. As mothers, we must protect and educate our children. What can we do in schools to address this trauma? Our schools and society cannot remain morally neutral. We must take sides and place the blame on the perpetrator not the victim.

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