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## Exploring a Trainee's Response to Visiting Refugees in Jordan: A Bifocal Art Exploration

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Exploring a Trainee's Response to Visiting  
Refugees in Jordan: A Bifocal Art Exploration

by

Daniela Marie Montañez

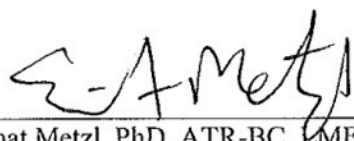
A research paper presented to the  
FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY  
LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree  
MASTER OF ARTS

May 2015

**Signature Page**A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Montañez', written over a horizontal line.

Daniela Montañez, MA Candidate, Art Therapy and MFT trainee; Researcher

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E-Metzl', written over a horizontal line.

Einat Metzl, PhD, ATR-BC, LMFT; Research Project Mentor



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### **Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to the Syrian, Sudanese, Palestinian, and Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Your resilience and strength inspired me to take an active role in exploring and understanding the mental health needs surrounding the refugee experience. Thank you for allowing me to enter your space and spend a small amount of time in your lives. You opened my heart and mind and I will forever be grateful for you. Additionally, to the wonderful Jordanians who hosted me with kindness and compassion, educating me on the complexities of this issue. My heart and thoughts are with you all.

## Abstract

This arts-based research investigated the personal responses of a trainee art therapist working with displaced refugees in Jordan. This inquiry is based on the belief that it is important for a new trainee to cultivate a broader appreciation of cross-cultural issues for both personal and professional applications. The art-based data, analyzed through Betensky's (1995) phenomenological approach, inspired a profound exploration of the refugee experience while simultaneously exploring the role and identity of the trainee. The author presented seven prominent themes that emerged from the refugee and trainee experiences: displacement, survival, connection, loss of control, safety, competence, and countertransference. Between both refugee and trainee there are three main shared themes, (a) connection, (b) loss of control, and (c) safety, which highlight shared meeting points of empathy. The research highlights meeting points and differences between the trainee and refugees to provide a deeper understanding of the refugee experience as understood by the trainee. The results of this research strive to provide insight into the ways art-making can help trainees navigate through cross-cultural encounters.

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## **Introduction**

### **The Study Topic**

The purpose of this research paper is to examine an art therapy student trainee's response to working with refugees. This research explores the personal responses of an art therapy trainee during a 13-day voyage to visit and work with Syrian, Sudanese, Palestinian, and Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Art-based data is examined to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experience of refugees, while simultaneously exploring the role and identity of the trainee. Utilizing a bifocal art exploration allowed the trainee to examine multiple perspectives while mirroring countertransference symbolically. The first piece of the art exploration examines the trainee's perception of the refugee experience. While the second piece of the art exploration utilizes the experience of working with refugees to reflect on the role and identity as a trainee. This inquiry provides insight into the reflective art-making process and its potential to help navigate and inform a trainee's response to working within an international, cross-cultural context. This is based on the belief that it is important for a new trainee to cultivate a broader understanding of cross-cultural issues to apply both personally and professionally.

### **Significance of Study**

In 2012, the world refugee population grew by 22% to 11.3 million, of which the United States legally accepted 56,424 refugees, with a cap of 70,000 in 2013 (Street, 2013). This marks an increased demand for mental health support and services to address the psychological needs of refugees within the United States and worldwide. The refugee experience can include war, oppression, torture, trauma, loss, and resettlement in search of a new home (Fitzpatrick, 2002). While several populations face displacement (homeless, teen runaways, immigrants), refugees face particularly unique stressors and challenges that are far less researched within the art

therapy field. It is clinically compelling to consider the experience of displaced populations who might have a choice to leave their homes, contrasted with the refugee experience, which characteristically involves being forced from one's homeland. The experience of being involuntarily forced from one's homeland includes an inherent lack of control or choice. It would be beneficial for the art therapy field to further research the significance of being forced from one's home compounded by the additional stressors of the complicated refugee flight. Further research would yield more understanding to approach refugees thoughtfully.

Within the limited information published, the majority of available studies focus on the benefits of using creative expressive arts interventions with refugees, and they rarely focus on the experience of the therapist working with refugees. Before the field can begin finding solutions, we must attempt to further understand the needs and challenges of the refugee population to anticipate what it means to offer art therapy as a mode of treatment. As a student seeking to enter the field of art therapy, I feel a personal responsibility to think critically in order to approach cross-cultural encounters from an informed space that assesses and anticipates which treatments are being offered and what countertransference may be present.

Furthermore, I have a personal interest in the Middle East with a strong desire to understand more about the region, beyond the limited exposure of mainstream news sources, which hold particular agendas and biases. This study demonstrates my desire to be exposed to populations firsthand to learn from cultural exchanges that will inform me personally and professionally. Researchers agree that it is particularly important for new therapists to learn how to be exposed and open to learning about other cultures (McNiff, 2009). It is understood that trainees gain a broader understanding of the differences that clients bring to the therapeutic relationship through personal exposure to different cultures and values (Cattaneo, 1994). While

many art therapy and marital and family therapy graduate programs offer cross-cultural experiences (New York University offers an art therapy course work in Ghana; George Washington University offers art therapy course work in Lebanon; and Loyola Marymount University offers art therapy course work in Mexico), there is little to no literature surrounding the findings, benefits, challenges, or experiences of student cross-cultural encounters. While it appears that graduate art therapy programs, their prospective universities, and students find these experiences to be valuable, there is a lack of information surrounding these learning opportunities. There is a gap in research regarding art therapy trainee experiences of cross-cultural, international work, including but not limited to refugee populations. This arts-based research project is meant to provide further understanding on the experiences of refugees, while simultaneously exploring countertransference and the role of student trainees.

### **Background of Study Topic**

While there are many ways an individual may become a *refugee*, for the purposes of this study *refugees* are individuals forced to leave their homes for their own welfare or survival as a result of war. Displaced refugees span different ages, personal histories and ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Van der Veer, 1992). Nearly all refugees, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, encounter similar kinds of difficulties and tend to exhibit unresolved grief, intergenerational conflict, and numerous psychological and behavioral issues (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The individuals' support systems, education before leaving their country, and coping mechanisms will affect their capacity to deal with the traumatic experiences while adapting to new conditions in the country of exile (Van der Veer, 1992). While many refugees need help, some do not seek it out, some find it difficult to find, and some may not feel comfortable with the kind of mental health offered (Van der Veer, 1992).

In order to communicate amidst cultural and language differences, openness to new and creative approaches is required (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Mental health clinics can turn to creative art therapies as a way to connect with war refugees who may not respond to traditional talk therapy (Baker, 2006). Research demonstrates that art therapy allows refugee participants the chance to create symbols that represent themselves (Fitzpatrick, 2002) making room for both verbal and nonverbal expression to process the emotions caused by trauma and loss (Lacroix et al., 2007). Thus, art becomes a mode for the participant to face the traumatic experience in an indirect way (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The artwork enables the refugee to discuss symbols and metaphors instead of having to face the feeling directly (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Furthermore, it is said that art can reach across cultures, creating another language that can be used to repair the consequences of trauma (Baker, 2006).

While there is a fair amount of research concerning the refugee experience, there has been limited research conducted to focus on the therapist's experience of working with refugees. This gap in research signifies substantial space for inquiry and learning, particularly within the field of art therapy. We understand that due to the enormity of the refugee experience, therapists involved in working with refugee populations may experience a level of distress as complex dynamics can make therapeutic work with refugees very difficult (Eleftheriadou, 1999). Personal development and supervision are considered necessary in monitoring the therapist's involvement in the refugee client's emotional experience (Eleftheriadou, 1999). It is vital that the therapist's internal reactions must be attended to, understood, and in some way, managed (Diemer, Gelso, Hayes, & VanWagoner, 1991). Furthermore, it is agreed upon that professional therapists and trainees must explore a thorough, honest self-inquiry, which involves an understanding of one's own cultural lens as well as an awareness of any personal discomfort regarding appearance, smell, nonverbal behaviors, physical proximity, worldviews, accents, and limited English spoken by people from other cultures (Hocoy, 2002). These considerations and understandings are prerequisites for becoming a respectful, effective art therapist who is tolerant of the differences clients offer in the therapeutic relationship (Cattaneo, 1994).

Historically speaking, art therapy has adopted its philosophical beliefs from the cultures of Western psychiatry and psychology (McNiff, 2009). As a field, art therapy can benefit from the incorporation and expansion of interdisciplinary studies in fields such as anthropology, religion, philosophy, and art (McNiff, 2009). With thoughtful consideration of these issues, art therapy has a unique opportunity to depart from its Western heritage to become a tool of cultural enrichment rather than oppression (Hocoy, 2002). When considering cross-cultural exchanges, it is vital to use culturally sensitive treatment approaches, rather than enforcing Western-oriented

ideas and approaches on non-westerners (Chilcote, 2007). The application of Western notions without the consideration of local beliefs is more than ineffective; it is harmful (Watters, 2010). Additionally, the ways in which the role of art therapy differs from culture to culture must be considered.

Art therapists possess a valuable resource, art-making, which has rich potential for self-processing (Wadeson, 2003). Artwork created in response to material that arises in therapy is called response art (Fish, 2012). Response art refers to therapists' use of art materials in reaction to the client in session or as a means of processing feelings and reactions post-session (Miller, 2007). Art therapists can use art-making to examine their experiences, contain difficult session material, as well as process their countertransference (Fish, 2012). According to Miller (2007), art-making allows the therapist the space to release strong feelings, which in turn become a tangible record of the therapist's reactions to the client. This record can aid the therapist in understanding the complex countertransferential issues (Miller, 2007).

There is currently a significant lack of literature that focuses on the experience of therapists working with refugees. Hence, this inquiry attempts to fill in some of the gaps by providing insight into the reflective art-making process and its potential to help navigate and inform a trainee's response to working with refugees. This inquiry is based on the belief that it is important for a new trainee to cultivate a broader understanding of cross-cultural issues to apply both personally and professionally.

## Literature Review

War, violence, political strife, and natural disasters continue to displace people from their families and homes. In 2012, the refugee population grew by 22% to 11.3 million worldwide, of which the United States legally accepted 56,424 refugees, instating a cap of 70,000 in 2013 (Street, 2013). The United States is a large recipient of refugees who come from many countries all over the world. Refugees are people forced to leave their home (country, state, or region) for their own welfare or survival (Refugee, n.d.). Refugees leave their home countries "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (Refugee, n.d.). While people become refugees for many reasons including natural disasters, environmental disruptions, oppression, political strife, and climate change, this research project will center on Syrian refugees, who are a product of manmade disaster: war.

The refugee experience can include war, oppression, torture, trauma, loss, and resettlement in search of a new home (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The journey of entering a new culture is another factor that can cause additional emotional distress (Fitzpatrick, 2002). It is understood that refugees experience trauma on many levels. Visual art therapy can provide a unique, powerful way to help individuals explore and reconstruct traumatic experiences, thus aiding the ability to begin integrating some of the events they lived through (Fitzpatrick, 2002). These complex dynamics can make therapeutic work with refugees rewarding, but emotionally difficult (Eleftheriadou, 1999). The literature reviewed looks at creative arts therapies conducted with refugees to consider the benefits, challenges, and themes that emerge. Next we will explore countertransference and cross-cultural concerns related to psychotherapeutic work with refugees, and conclude with literature that considers art-making a beneficial way for therapists, both



professionals and trainees, to process the experience of working with refugees, exploring cultural differences, trauma, and emotional responses that this work may unearth.

### **Refugees in Jordan**

The region of Transjordan, the Hashemite Kingdom now known as Jordan, was created in 1921 in a region affected by the relations between Arabs and the British, who were joined against the Ottomans during World War I (Jordan, 2014). The Arab Revolt directly led to the establishment of the modern state of Jordan (Walker, 2012). The region's long history of turmoil and war has led to an equally long history of refugees. Positioned between Iraq, Syria and Israel and the Palestine Territories, Jordan has sheltered millions of refugees throughout history (Walker, 2012). In addition to becoming the first host of Palestinian refugees in 1948, Jordan has hosted forced refugees from other Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon during the 1975-1991 civil war and Iraq from the 1991 Gulf war as well as in 2003 after the removal of Saddam Hussein (Chatelard, 2010). The extensive history of accepting refugees and asylum seekers makes Jordan have the highest ratio of refugees to indigenous population of any country (Chatelard, 2010).

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of April 2014, Jordan was housing 625,790 refugees, including 594,596 Syrians (95%), 27,188 Iraqis (4.3%) and 4,006 other nationalities (0.7%) (UNHCR, 2014b). As indicated above, the most recent substantial wave of refugees has come from Syria as a result of the uprising-turned-civil war, which began in the spring of 2011. Syrians have quickly become the largest population of concern to the UNHCR in Jordan bringing half a million Syrian refugees to Jordan since the war began (UNHCR, 2014a). It is estimated that between 1,500 and 3,500 Syrian refugees are now arriving in Jordan each day (Murshidi, Hijjawi, Jeriesat, & Eltom, 2013). As of February 2014,

Syrian nongovernmental organizations reported that over 140,000 people have died as a result of the conflict, with 7,000 being children (Reuters, 2014). Based on current trends, UNHCR (2014a) anticipates the number of Syrian refugees fleeing to Jordan to increase, which is a concern for a multitude of reasons. It is essential that the international community join Jordan to assist in the ongoing effort to care for refugees from Syria and other countries, as the Jordanian system is severely overstrained (Murshidi et al., 2013).

### **Creative Arts Therapies Conducted with Refugees**

Unique factors surround therapeutic support and healing as a result of the enormity of many refugees' experiences (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The term trauma is derived from the Greek word for wound or injury (Wilson & Lindy, 2013). *The American Heritage College Dictionary* (2000) defines trauma as an "emotional wound or shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development of a person" (p. 1439). Authors Wilson and Lindy (2013) explained that trauma confronts the survivor to express the unspeakable. In some cases trauma is compounded with a language difference as well as cultural differences, making communication even more challenging. The constant flow of linguistically and culturally diverse refugee populations creates difficulty in reapplying interventions and procedures to subsequent groups (Birman et al., 2008). As Birman et al. (2008) described, service providers are challenged to create effective, appropriate interventions shaped by the ethnic group and needs of that specific group. Specific needs for each group must be met through careful consideration and therapeutic approach. In order to communicate amidst cultural and language differences, openness to new and creative approaches is required (Fitzpatrick, 2002). While it can be difficult to reach across refugee populations, whose cultures and languages are different from the majority, it can make a significant difference in providing a sense of safety and understanding (Baker, 2006).

Art can reach across cultures, creating another language that can be used to repair the consequences of trauma (Baker, 2006). Creative expressions including music, dance, drama, writing and the visual arts can communicate and symbolize that which cannot be said in words (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Mental health clinics can turn to creative art therapies as a way to connect to war refugees who may not respond to traditional talk therapy (Baker, 2006). The research demonstrates that art therapy allows refugee participants the chance to create symbols that represent themselves (Fitzpatrick, 2002) making room for both verbal and nonverbal expression to process the emotions caused by trauma and loss (Lacroix et al., 2007). Trauma survivors often remain silent but when they speak of their severe stress experiences, they frequently communicate in "trauma-associated metaphors" (Wilson & Lindy, 2013, p.35). The artwork enables the refugee to discuss symbols and metaphors instead of having to face the feeling directly (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Thus, art becomes a mode for the participant to face the traumatic experience in an indirect way (Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Through the use of art and metaphors participants are permitted to release and transform the implicit experience into an explicit experience, restructuring the emotional processing (Lacroix et al., 2007). Restructuring allows participants to find a sense of control over things that have worried them in the past (Fitzpatrick, 2002). This is particularly important for resettled refugees who are looking for the opportunity to make something new (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Additionally, art helps to enhance a sense of identity which is also important for refugees who are struggling to rebuild identity in a new setting (Fitzpatrick, 2002). It has been demonstrated that a survivor's adjustment to a strange and life threatening situation can be improved with the help of inner strength and a sense of purpose or mission (Leach, 1994). Creative activities have proven to help strengthen resiliency factors (Lacroix et al., 2007) empowering clients on a

pathway to become survivors instead of victims (Baker, 2006). Furthermore, the act of creating can become a powerful counterbalance to loss and a powerful way to remember, mourn and reform experiences of trauma (Fitzpatrick, 2002).

While the literature presents particular benefits of creative arts therapy with refugees, it is important to consider the multitude of challenges and unique goals associated with refugees. While art may serve in communication to overcome language barriers, interpreters are necessary if one cannot speak a client's language (Baker, 2006). After witnessing hundreds of counselors pour into Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami, a World Health Organization representative stated that sending mental health workers who didn't speak the local language or understand the culture was as incompetent as sending the wrong medication (Watters, 2010). Translation is an important component to providing sound, thoughtful psychotherapy. A good translation goes beyond the transformation of the statement from one language to another, to express the original idea and sentiment (McNiff, 2009). In addition to the translation of language and sensitive material, the interpreter plays a role in cultural orientation. Translators can offer insight into unique cultural aspects of local customs such as the education system and rituals for expressing grief (Chilcote, 2007). The translator, and cultural liaison, becomes a co-therapist of sorts, working closely with sensitive, confidential material in sessions (Chilcote, 2007). Since translating traumatic experiences can be emotionally and physically trying, it is important to be sympathetic and considerate of the interpreter's feelings and emotional state (Baker, 2006). An art therapist working in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami explained that she often made time to debrief personal feelings with her translator, particularly after emotionally charged sessions as the translator herself was a survivor of the tsunami disaster (Chilcote, 2007). In addition to checking in with the emotions of the interpreter, meeting after sessions can provide clarity and

further understanding of the client's experiences, while providing therapists a place to explore cultural issues (Baker, 2006).

Displaced families are challenged with rebuilding their lives in a new culture (Birman et al., 2008). During this period, nearly all refugees, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, encounter similar kinds of difficulties and tend to exhibit unresolved grief, intergenerational conflict, and numerous psychological and behavioral issues (Fitzpatrick, 2002). If the refugee has relocated to a new country, there is often a strong attachment to the mother country, as one's birthplace remains "special" (Eleftheriadou, 1999). This cultural nostalgia is a large part of the refugee experience and psychotherapy may be the only safe place to think about and express their ties to the past (Eleftheriadou, 1999). In addition to strong nostalgia, refugees may experience feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness and frustration of being forced to flee, unlike the experience of immigrants who have left a country by choice (Eleftheriadou, 1999). While many refugees may feel relieved about being free, they might experience an immense feeling of guilt surrounding those who were left behind, referred to as "survivor's guilt" (Eleftheriadou, 1999). A vast range of issues can inhibit the daily functioning of refugees including depression, anxiety attacks, and memory loss (Baker, 2006). In addition to psychological needs, basic needs for survival such as food, shelter, clothing and blankets may exist (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999). Therapeutic goals include helping obtain basic physical needs, serving as a witness, responding to unforeseen needs, as well as planting a seed for the individual to reflect upon later (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999).

The flexible and unstructured environment that often surrounds refugees can make traditional therapeutic boundaries and relationships impossible to sustain (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999). The environment demands both adjustability and resourcefulness. For example, in

the work conducted by Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (1999), art therapy sessions were held in the rubble of destroyed homes. In addition to a changing environment, the participants of that study ranged from children to the elderly, requiring the art interventions to take on many forms to be inclusive of everyone (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999). Even amongst the challenges, creative expression provides participants the chance to build strategies to persevere through anxiety and psychological distress (Lacroix et al., 2007).

### **Themes of Artwork with Refugees**

Despite the wide range of circumstances involved in working with refugees, research shows similarities in the themes of the artwork created. Several common themes arise in the artwork of refugees and immigrants, as seen in the research of Fitzpatrick (2002), Yohani (2008), Lacroix et al. (2007), and Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (1999). Parallel themes and images surface among the wide range of participants, despite their age, cultural background, or race. The themes and symbols in the artwork derive from a place relevant to the refugees' experience of home and journey (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Homes, roads, bridges, and food were common themes seen across all four studies.

The home is a place where we find a sense of security, meaning, and identity in the world (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The need to seek and experience home is a primary desire for refugees who have most likely experienced war, oppression, and poverty (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The theme of "home" arose during projective storytelling in the research of Fitzpatrick (2002), in the sandplay research of Lacroix et al. (2007), the photography portion of research by Yohani, (2008), and the drawings done on-site in research by Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (1999). While houses were explored by resettled refugees (Fitzpatrick, 2002; Lacroix et al., 2007; Yohani, 2008) they became the main theme within the artwork made in war zones (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999).

The theme of movement and journey were apparent in all of the research reviewed. The on-site work in Croatia generated many images depicting roads, which emerged as a main theme (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999). In these drawings, many of the roads crossed and led off the page. These roads were typically lined with detailed houses though the roads themselves were often only partially finished or left unpainted, indicating that there was no clear destination (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999). This sense of journey is reflected slightly differently among the post-relocation participants (Fitzpatrick, 2002; Lacroix et al., 2007; Yohani, 2008). The post relocation participants in Australia used bridges to symbolize a way of moving into the future (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Those bridges vary from what was seen in Canada where resettled children used bridges in sandplay to symbolize a means of escape (Lacroix et al., 2007). In all of these instances, the bridge, road, or other means of escape display a clear sense of hope.

As mentioned previously, refugee work can involve the unique challenge of providing basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. It is important to note that food is also a seemingly important theme for refugees. Food appeared in the artwork from each of the research with resettled populations. The food manifested within the artwork in many different ways, symbolizing different things to different participants. For example, a hope quilt created by post-relocation children included a snapshot of a United Nations food truck from a refugee camp (Yohani, 2008), while a resettled woman from Bosnia reflected on the nurturing role food played in her former life (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Utilizing collage images she shared that food (during picnics) was an important part of gatherings between friends and loved ones back in Bosnia. Though the participant reports to attend picnics in Australia, her new country, she states, "It's not the same. We do not have people we can talk to very easily... English is hard... Sometimes it get's lonely" (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p.154). The hope symbolized in the United Nations truck and the

loneliness expressed through the narrative and collage images of picnics vary from the way food was used by a little girl in the research of Lacroix et al. (2007). During sandplay the five-year-old girl created a metaphor about the ability to find food. The metaphor and story about finding food demonstrate her resiliency and concern for survival (Lacroix et al., 2007). The commonality of subject matter including food, houses, bridges and roads speak to the universality of the experiences that refugees endure during resettlement and on-site phases alike.

### **Countertransference**

While themes in the artwork highlight some similarities amongst the refugee experience, limited literature also suggests some similarities in therapists' experiences of working with refugee clients. Limited research exists on the relationship between professionals using a psychodynamic framework (therapists) and refugees. From the limited resources available, we understand that therapists report being affected by the complicated dynamics involved in working with various refugee populations (Eleftheriadou, 1999). This reported reaction might be classified and further understood through the term countertransference. While there are many definitions and understandings of countertransference, this literature review will acknowledge the moderate view of countertransference, which defines it as the therapist's personal reaction (sensory, affective, cognitive, and behavioral) to clients based primarily on therapist's own individual conflicts, biases, or difficulties (Gelso & Hayes, 2002; Langs, 1974). Hence, countertransference will represent the total emotional response of the therapist to the refugee (Robbins, 1981). These reactions, triggered by transference, client characteristics, or numerous other aspects of the therapeutic situation can be conscious or unconscious (Fauth, 2006). The exchange that occurs on conscious and unconscious levels yields an ongoing transformation of thoughts, feelings and actions between the client and therapist, both serving as active participants



(Dosamantes, 1992). These emotional reactions are often inevitable as art therapists travel with their clients into deep, unknown, nonverbal territory (Robbins, 1981). While the therapist must empathize with what the client is feeling, he or she must also maintain enough distance to conduct treatment (Eleftheriadou, 1999). This may be challenging as the countertransference is not simply harking back to the past; it is being relived in the here-and-now by both the therapist and the client (Eleftheriadou, 1999). Epstein and Feiner (as cited in Dosamantes, 1992) noted that countertransference has the potential of having a harmful affect (becoming a hindrance to treatment), or it may be used as a useful vehicle for further understanding of the client dynamics. It is essential for the therapist to be aware of these reactions, to examine them, and use them in service of the work rather than allowing them to impede on treatment (Diemer et al., 1991).

### **Self-Examination**

Personal development and supervision are necessary in monitoring therapists' involvement in the refugee client's emotional experience (Eleftheriadou, 1999). It is understood that therapists are able to gain more insight into their clients stories through exploring their own emotional reactions to them (Eleftheriadou, 1999). It is vital that the therapist's internal reactions must be attended to, understood, and in some way, managed (Diemer et al., 1991). While personal reflection and self-examination of an experienced art therapist may last a lifetime, trainees experience a particular intense period of self-examination, as they are encouraged to further understand themselves, their beliefs, and their cultural identity. It is agreed that developing therapists become more capable to make sense out of the world and better understand how others may view it by engaging in deep personal examination (Cherry, 2002). During this vulnerable time, trainees are encouraged to explore their personal and cultural identities, values and beliefs, as well as biases and assumptions (Cattaneo, 1994). An awareness of these

assumptions comes from a thorough, honest self-inquiry that involves an understanding of one's own cultural lens as well as an awareness of any personal discomfort regarding appearance, smell, nonverbal behaviors, physical proximity, worldviews, accents, and limited English spoken by people from other cultures (Hocoy, 2002). To begin to understand issues with other cultures, trainees are required to address their own issues of racism while also exploring their own ethnic identities (Cherry, 2002). During this phase of training, self-examination can be painful as old philosophies start to erode and emerging values seem both unclear and unformed (Cattaneo, 1994). This susceptible period requires a network of support from professors, supervisors and classmates (Cattaneo, 1994). Working through one's own particular issues is essential to explore conscious and unconscious attitudes and biases towards differences and diversity (Hocoy, 2002). Awareness is the first step against imposing subtle or overt cultural values in order to develop a sensitive and responsible art therapy practice (Hocoy, 2002). Additionally, cultural understanding can signal that behavior in certain circumstances may have a cultural rather than a pathological bases, which allows clinicians to be more empathetic and culturally competent (Cherry, 2002).

Art therapists are regularly presented with a wide variety of cultures and subcultures, never working in a culturally homogenous situation (Cattaneo, 1994). The therapist's beliefs, views, and identity will inherently influence the way they interact with clients (Cherry, 2002). Therapists bring not only a therapeutic style, but also expectations and attitudes from past experiences that greatly influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of their clients (Horovitz-Darby, 1992). Therapists are better equipped to meet their clients, accepting the relevance of the personal and cultural attitudes brought into therapy, if the therapists have undergone self exploration (Cattaneo, 1994). The recognition and understanding of cultural influences is

necessary for art therapy to be relevant, sensitive, and effective for individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds (Hocoy, 2002). These considerations and understandings are prerequisites for becoming a respectful, effective art therapist who is tolerant of the differences clients offer in the therapeutic relationship (Cattaneo, 1994).

### **Cross-Cultural Considerations**

Therapists are typically chosen to work with refugees because they come from a similar cultural or racial background, have had similar experiences, or speak the same language (Eleftheriadou, 1999). A cross-cultural encounter (where the therapist and client are culturally different) has the opportunity to offer something new and valued, or the potential to perpetuate cultural imperialism (Hocoy, 2002). While cultural similarity can have positive effects in some cases, it can have negative implications in others (McNiff, 2009). McNiff (2009) explains that in his personal work he has consistently found cultural differences to have beneficial effects on the therapeutic process.

A well-intentioned but culturally unaware therapist can insult their client with the slightest therapeutic decision (Lofgren, 1981). Since most art therapists are from white, middle-class backgrounds and are educated by individuals of similar backgrounds, there is a likelihood of having a conscious or unconscious bias towards the values of that culture (Lofgren, 1981). Historically speaking, art therapy has adopted its philosophical beliefs from the cultures of Western psychiatry and psychology (McNiff, 2009). As a field, art therapy can benefit from the incorporation and expansion of interdisciplinary studies in fields such as anthropology, religion, philosophy, and art (McNiff, 2009). With thoughtful consideration of these issues, art therapy has a unique opportunity to depart from its Western heritage to become a tool of cultural enrichment rather than oppression (Hocoy, 2002).

According to Sue and Sue (2012) culturally competent therapists should be:

- Moved from being culturally unaware to being aware and sensitive to own cultural heritage and to valuing and respecting differences.
- Aware of own values and biases and of how they may affect diverse clients.
- Comfortable with differences that exist between themselves and their clients in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other sociodemographic variables. Differences are not seen as deviant.
- Sensitive to circumstances (personal biases; stage of racial, gender, and sexual orientation identity; sociopolitical influences, etc.) that may dictate referral of clients to members of their own sociodemographic group or to different therapists in general.
- Aware of their own racist, sexist, heterosexist, or other detrimental attitudes, beliefs, and feelings (pp. 50-51).

When considering cross-cultural exchanges, it is vital to use culturally sensitive treatment approaches, rather than enforcing Western-oriented ideas and approaches on non-westerners (Chilcote, 2007). The application of Western notions without the consideration of local beliefs is more than ineffective; it's harmful (Watters, 2010). An example of this can be seen in the assumptions made by an abundance of mental health professionals who traveled to Sri Lanka, responding to the 2004 tsunami. In the days following the catastrophic event, American clinicians and reporters were baffled and worried when the locals didn't react to the disaster the way they'd expected (Walters, 2010). The notion that people from other cultures may have fundamentally different psychological reactions is difficult for Americans to comprehend (Walters, 2010). To cultivate thoughtful practices and their many variations globally, art therapists must remain flexible and open to new truths and outcomes (Kapitan, 2006).

Additionally, we must consider the ways in which the role of art therapy differs from culture to culture. While McNiff (2009) states that art therapy has a unique ability to construct a cross-cultural process based on universal properties, Hocoy (2002) takes into consideration that art itself may have different conceptions and functions in other cultures. Other authors similarly considered that the ways art is seen in other cultures is likely to differ from Western ideas, and the notion that art affords psychological healing in other cultures is an assumption (Hocoy, 2002).

### **Art-Making as Beneficial Tool for Therapists**

While art therapy may be beneficial for refugees, therapists too can benefit from exploring their emotional reaction to client content through their own art-making. Art therapists possess a valuable resource that they can access by engaging in art-making for themselves, which has rich potential for self-processing (Wadeson, 2003). Artwork created in response to material that arises in therapy is called response art (Fish, 2012). Response art refers to therapists' use of art materials in reaction to the client in session or as a means of processing feelings and reactions post-session (Miller, 2007). Art therapists can use response art to examine their experiences, contain difficult session material, as well as process their countertransference (Fish, 2012). According to Miller (2007), art-making allows the therapist the space to release strong feelings, which in turn becomes a tangible record of the therapist's reactions to the client. This record can aid the therapist in understanding the complex countertransferential issues (Miller, 2007).

Engaging in visual processing contrasts drastically from the limited expression that verbal processing allows (Harter, 2007). Unlike the successive, temporal order of language, visual arts make room for expression to exist as a whole (Harter, 2007). A holistic view,

achieved by engaging in art responses can help to enhance empathetic exchanges between the therapist and client (Fish, 2012). According to Harter (2007), visual processing offers an understanding that is nonlinear and linguistically inaccessible. In this way, art becomes a way to reach beyond the self, letting go of preconceived notions to connect with the external world and people from a new perspective (Harter, 2007).

Letting go of preconceived notions and refraining from selection is known as free association, in which the patient is asked to observe the unconscious, as developed by Sigmund Freud (Schaverien, 2005). Carl Gustav Jung, a psychiatrist and cultural philosopher (Van den Berk, 2012) arrived at active imagination, a direct extension of free association, as a way to mobilize the psyche through an image or a chain of images and their related associations (Schaverien, 2005). It is thought that by lowering consciousness, the therapist is able to be in touch with the client's unconscious inner world through the use of imagery (Schaverien, 2005). Jung understood expressive arts as a bridge from conscious to unconscious:

And so it is with the hand that guides the crayon or brush, the foot that executes the dance step, with the eye and the ear, with the word and the thought: a dark impulse is the ultimate arbiter of the pattern, an unconscious a priori precipitates itself into plastic form. Over the whole procedure there seems to reign a dim foreknowledge not only of the pattern but of its meaning. Image and meaning are identical; and as the first takes shape, so the latter becomes clear. Actually, the pattern needs no interpretation: it portrays its own meaning (Van den Berk, 2012, p.99).

Therefore when Jung found himself blocked by his own analytic material, he engaged in model making, painting, and circular drawings (Schaverien, 2005). Jung believed that art seized a human to make him its instrument (Van den Berk, 2012). During this process of active

imagination, one part of the personality acts as a participant in the art-making, and the other part acts as an observer (Schaverien, 2005). It is thought that the therapeutic relationship, according to Greenson (as cited in Schaverien, 2005) is split into three parts: the real relationship, the therapeutic alliance, and the transference (countertransference). Schaverien (2005) identifies the art piece as an expression of the here and now countertransference. Thus, art is a profoundly personal way of knowing and exploring possible facets of an experience (Harter, 2007). Through art and active imagination, nothing is linear or logical, yet its process makes sense in an indirect manner (Schaverien, 2005).

A small number of examples of art therapists' art in literature addresses the use of art-making for professional processing (Wadeson, 2003). Wadeson (2003) studied the way art therapists have used art-making as a way to examine, clarify and work through countertransference. She recognizes two categories of art-making: spontaneous responses and systematically established art-processing procedures. The therapist creates spontaneous responses in reaction to strong feelings aroused by the client. These immediate reactions, without predeterminations, can bring forth unconscious material. This type of art-making is contrasted with the slower development of a finished piece, referred to as systematic processing. Systematic processing can be a meditative experience that deepens the reflection process and understanding (Wadeson, 2003). It is understood that both approaches can be deeply valuable.

Multiple art therapists interviewed by Wadeson (2003) saw their art-making as beneficial in aiding empathy and clarifying confusion. Some of the examples Wadeson (2003) discusses explore the supervisory relationship, while others concentrate on self-examination and identification. Yet most of the examples deal with countertransference and strong reactions to the traumas of clients' lives. Art-making can further explore old attitudes to address the therapist's

own cultural biases in working with a different population. Wadeson (2003) discusses the use of systematic art self-processing procedures for a young, Caucasian middle class therapist working with a low income African-American community. Having been raised in a Caucasian community, the therapist understood the necessity to address her own biases about working with this population in a new and different environment (Wadeson, 2003). Anne, the art therapist, developed a systematic plan where she kept a visual sketchbook to record powerful reactions and feelings aroused by her clients (Wadeson, 2003). When she noticed the reoccurrence of confusing cultural content, or reoccurring images she pursued in developing a larger scale mixed media piece to explore more deeply (Wadeson, 2003). During this exploration Anne was conscious of separating her reactions to clients from responses she had previously learned from her culture (Wadeson, 2003). This example serves to show how the therapist can further investigate emotional reactions to aid the therapeutic process.

In addition to art-making being a space to explore countertransference, it is a means for creative expression to stay central to the art therapy experience (Wix, 1995). Art therapist Pat Allen discusses "clinification syndrome," a term to describe the process in which art therapists develop clinical skills while art production decreases (Wix, 1995, p.175). Clinification syndrome can generate a professional art therapist who can no longer be distinguished from a psychologist, social worker, or any other member of the clinical treatment team (Wix, 1995). The loss of art-making for an art therapist may be perceived as concerning for such a new field that is still creating its identity. Therefore, it is important for trainees and new therapists to embrace the role of art in their own personal and professional development. It is the responsibility of the art therapist to use response art-making soundly for themselves as well as the benefit of the client (Fish, 2012).



## Summary

This literature review has examined a broad range of existing research related to this study. Creative arts therapies conducted with refugees were presented initially to provide more insight into the benefits, challenges and themes that exist within this study topic. Literature demonstrating the complexities of countertransference and cross-cultural concerns provided groundwork to explore the importance of self-examination for student trainees as well as professional therapists. Next, literature that considered art-making a beneficial way for therapists to process countertransference, including but not limited to, the experience of working with refugees was reviewed. Overall, the literature states that refugees pose unique therapeutic challenges and treatment goals. While it is understood that creative arts therapies may benefit refugees, there are limitations to the existing research. There are many factors to be studied when dealing with a vulnerable population that requires special attention and therapeutic consideration. Although more research is needed regarding the effects on trainee and professional therapists working with refugees, it seems likely that reflective art-making by the therapist can be a vital component of self-expression and exploration of countertransference.

### **Research Approach**

This research project was designed as an art-based inquiry. An art-based inquiry can be defined as a method for illuminating or building knowledge through direct art practice, which becomes the "site" for research problems and methods (Kapitan, 2010). Art-based research is the methodical use of the creative process, the actual art-making, as the chief way to explore and understand the experiences of both the researchers as well as the population involved in the studies (McNiff, 2008). According to art therapist McNiff (1998), art-based inquiry cultivates from "a trust in the intelligence of the creative process and a desire for relationships with the images that emerge from it" (p. 37). To embark on this exploration of the trainee's personal responses to the experience of working with refugees, an arts-based research approach was an appropriate method. This approach would provide space for illumination and provocation versus confirmation or the consolidation of knowledge (Kapitan, 2010). Art making as a form of inquiry can serve as a medium to connect to the self, while simultaneously distancing the self in order to see something from a new perspective (Kapitan, 2010). The imagery produced may capture hidden aspects that can be hard to grasp in language, highlighting a complex truth or experience (Kapitan, 2010). The inquiry, which can be emotional and sensory, can often provoke deep somatic responses (Kapitan, 2010). The key features of art-based inquiry allow the researcher to observe discoveries and make meanings that may not have been recognized or noticed before. According to Kapitan (2010), "art-based inquiry provokes, innovates, and breaks through emotional equilibrium or resistance, forcing us to consider new ways of seeing or doing things" (p. 165). Consequently, an arts-based approach can add an invaluable perspective to help drive a research process in surprising, critically significant new ways (Kapitan, 2010).

## Methods

### Definition of terms

#### **Art:**

The American Heritage College Dictionary (2000) defines *art* as follows: 2.a. The conscious production or arrangement of sounds, colors, forms, or other elements in a manner that affects the sense of beauty, specifically the production of the beautiful in a graphic or plastic medium (p. 76). For the purpose of this study, the term art is used to define art-making and visual expression. The term art-making and response art are used interchangeably in this study.

#### **Countertransference:**

The American Heritage College Dictionary (2000) defines *countertransference* as follows: The surfacing of a psychotherapist's own repressed feelings through identification with the emotions, experiences, or problems of the person undergoing treatment (p. 317). For the purpose of this study, the term countertransference is used to define the total emotional response or personal reaction of the therapist to the refugee and cross-cultural experience.

#### **Cross-cultural:**

The American Heritage College Dictionary (2000) defines *cross-cultural* as follows: Comparing or dealing with two or more different cultures (p. 330). For the purpose of this study, the term *cross-cultural* defines an encounter where the therapist and client are culturally different.

#### **Refugee:**

The American Heritage College Dictionary (2000) defines *refugee* as follows: One who flees in search of refuge, as in times of war (p. 1148). While there are many ways an individual may become a refugee, for the purpose of this study the term refugee defines people forced to leave their home country for their own welfare or survival (Refugee, n.d.) as a result of war.

### **Trainee:**

The American Heritage College Dictionary (2000) defines *trainee* as follows: One who is being trained (p. 1434). For the purpose of this study, the term trainee is used to define someone who is in training and is used interchangeably with the term student.

### **Trauma:**

The American Heritage College Dictionary (2000) defines *trauma* as follows: 2. An emotional wound or shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development of a person (p. 1439). For the purpose of this study, we will also refer to the definition of trauma as defined in the DSM-5-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), under the category of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:

The essential feature of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the development of characteristic symptoms following direct or indirect exposure to one or more traumatic events. In some individuals, fear based re-experiencing, emotional, and behavioral symptoms may predominate. The directly experienced traumatic events include, but are not limited to, exposure to war as a combatant or civilian, threatened or actual physical assault, threatened or actual sexual violence, being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, and natural or human-made disasters. Witnessed events include, but are not limited to, observing threatened or serious injury, unnatural death, physical or sexual abuse of another person due to violent assault and war or disaster. Indirect exposure through learning about an event is limited to experiences affecting close relatives or friends and experiences that are violent or accidental (p. 274).

## **Design of Study**

### **Sampling**

This research utilized data created by myself, the researcher/trainee, as the subject to gain information to help answer the research questions. The study took place during a trip to Jordan where I worked with multiple organizations supporting refugees. During this research as a trainee, I created artwork in response to my experience of visiting and working with refugees. The systematic creation of art responses occurred from May 15 and 27, 2014, a six-day period of direct contact with on-site refugee participants. During this collection period I engaged in 30-45 minutes of rapid art-making at the close of each day spent on site as a facilitator. The approach to the post-session response art was largely spontaneous and without planning. The systematic reflections were created in the privacy of an apartment building in Amman, Jordan to allow time and space to process the contents of each day. The research questions helped to identify the emergence of countertransference while exploring my experience of the refugee experience. A potential bias that may result includes the absence of an objective review of the data, as the subject is also the researcher, which could yield skewed results.

### **Study Questions**

#### **Lens A: My perception of the refugee experience**

- 1A. What can art-making do to deepen the understanding of the refugee experience?
- 2A. Can art-making help a trainee connect (clinically or personally) with someone who has drastically different experiences?
- 3A. Can art-making help navigate through personal emotional responses and cross-cultural experiences?

**Lens B: Utilizing the experience of working with refugees to examine my role and identity as a trainee**

- 1B. What can art-making do to deepen a trainee's growth process as an art therapist?
- 2B. What themes of countertransference emerged from the artwork created throughout the study?
- 3B. What differences and similarities exist between the artwork that focuses on the refugee experience versus my experience as a trainee?

**Gathering of Data**

From May 15 and 27, 2014, I functioned as an observer and art facilitator, amongst three groups in Amman and Ramtha Jordan; The Jordan River Foundation, the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative, and the Jesuit Refugee Service. I chose to focus the study on my own personal response and experience that was informed through interacting with refugee participants. While the majority of individuals observed were Syrian children many Iraqi, Palestinian, and Sudanese children and adults also partook in the observed activities. The reflective art-making concentrated on my personal emotional reactions towards the workshops, participants' involvement, and cross-cultural matters. The data (40 pieces in total) were gathered at the close of each day spent on site as a facilitator. Additionally, I would create a piece throughout the course of the day including days with no direct refugee contact if there were any heavy emotional responses. Each response piece was created on 7.5"x10" piece of paper to create comparability. I limited the choice of materials (graphite pencil, colored markers, tissue paper, tape) as to not overcomplicate the process with selections. All of the art materials used for the data collection were purchased in Amman, Jordan from a local supply shop. Each data entry was

collected and organized in chronological order from the beginning of the collection date to the end and was sometimes accompanied with writing.

### **Analysis of Data**

Throughout the process of collecting data, I systematically created artwork on a daily basis in response to direct contact with refugees in Jordan. To begin the data analysis, I organized all of the data (40 pieces total) chronologically by date, as it was collected, between May 15 and 27, 2014. To include context, each piece of artwork was marked with site specific details, including any daily writings (journal entries) that accompanied the art-making process. Considering the study questions, I utilized a bifocal art exploration to systematically consider multiple perspectives (A and B) of the first eight art pieces. While I originally intended to include all 40 pieces of data, time limitations associated with this study led me to ultimately utilize the first eight pieces of artwork. However, themes and possibilities of the remaining data are speculated and will be further considered in a future study. For the purposes of this study, eight pieces were explored using Betensky's (1995) phenomenological approach of intentional looking and seeing. The phenomenological approach was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Next, the eight pieces of artwork were analyzed from lens A (my perception of the refugee experience) and lens B (utilizing the experience of working with refugees to examine my role and identity as a trainee). These two groupings helped to organize an exploration of the differing and similar themes between the refugee experience and the trainee experience (A and B). I then revisited the art to let reoccurring creative elements enhance, clarify, and change the major themes found from perspectives A and B. The bifocal exploration allowed me to examine qualities of the art pieces to designate meaning about my experiences through the art. After using emergent coding, I identified the most prominent themes based on recurrence and significance.

## **Results**

### **Presentation of Data**

From May 15 to 27, 2014, I functioned as an observer and art facilitator, amongst three groups in Amman and Ramtha Jordan; The Jordan River Foundation, the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative, and the Jesuit Refugee Service. I chose to focus the study on my own personal response and experience that was informed through interacting with refugee participants. During this collection period, I engaged in 30-45 minutes of rapid art-making at the close of each day spent on site as a facilitator. The approach to the post-session response art was largely spontaneous and without planning. The systematic reflections were created in the privacy of an apartment building in Amman, Jordan to allow time and space to process the contents of each day. The reflective art-making concentrated on my personal emotional reactions towards the workshops, participants' involvement, and cross-cultural matters. Each response piece was created on 7.5"x10" piece of paper to create comparability. Each data entry was collected and organized in chronological order from the beginning of the collection date to the end and was sometimes accompanied with writing. While I originally intended to include all 40 pieces of data collected, time limitations associated with this study led me to ultimately utilize the first eight pieces of artwork from Day 1 and Day 2.

### **Day 1: Thursday, May 15, 2014** *(Based primarily on journal entries)*

After landing in Amman, Jordan we were escorted to our apartment for a quick change of clothes and then began our drive to Ramtha, Jordan. This border town, just 10 miles from Syria, is southwest of Daraa, the starting point of the 2011 uprising against the Syrian government. The clear sunny sky and calm air differed greatly from the Jordanian teachers' personal accounts of



bombings in Daraa, which at one point were visible and audible from their homes. Our proximity to the border was both crushing and mind-boggling. As we arrived and entered the small one-roomed facility we were surprised as the overly excited 30 + Syrian boys and girls ages 5-18 broke into intense laughter. The laughter filled the room and lingered with a slight awkwardness. The children, thrilled to say "hello" in English, flooded us with passionate greetings. This group of children engages with the center daily, to participate in learning activities, which are currently being funded by US-Middle East Partnership Initiative. Despite the huge age range, all students are taught together as one group, divided only by gender.

Jet lagged but motivated we arrived with a loose plan of activities to introduce ourselves and engage the children in play and self-expression. After a few icebreakers of singing we attempted to lead more structured musical exercises, however it quickly became clear that we were unable to provide containment for their enthusiasm. The room quickly began to feel chaotic and haphazard. Some of the children who were seemingly activated by the musical activities began acting out and quickly progressed from drumming and clapping to beating chairs and other objects in the room. Another child rounded the corner with a broom positioned as an automatic weapon. He smiled wildly as he pretended to gun down all of the other children in the room. The other children were not alarmed by this, they found it quite amusing and laughed loudly at their friend's action. Simultaneously, a group of children eager to inquire about familiar Western culture asked of Celine Dion and the childhood game Truth or Dare. They delightfully demanded that we all sing Queen's "We Will Rock You" as a large group. Their eagerness and laughter became so intense that it was difficult to recover the group. The fact that we were unable to speak the language posed another challenge, as only one translator (their teacher) was present. She became quickly fatigued and terminated the day early.

We piled into the van and drove over two hours to return to our apartment back in Amman. Dirty, tired, and speechless I grabbed my art supplies and sat in the dimly lit stairway of the quiet hallway in the building. As I sat looking at the blank sheet of paper I noticed a dirty finger mark. Until that moment I had not realized that my nose was bleeding lightly. With that, I began the art-making process to reflect on my emotional response and the contents of Day 1 (Figures 1 through 5).



**Figure 1:** paper, blood, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 1 Thursday, May 15, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a dim quiet stairwell during evening hours



**Figure 2:** paper, marker, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 1 Thursday, May 15, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a dim quiet stairwell during evening hours





**Figure 3:** paper, marker, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 1 Thursday, May 15, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a dim quiet stairwell during evening hours



**Figure 4:** paper, marker, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 1 Thursday, May 15, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a dim quiet stairwell during evening hours



**Figure 5:** paper, marker, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 1 Thursday, May 15, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a dim quiet stairwell during evening hours



**Day 2: Friday, May 16, 2014** *(Based primarily on journal entries)*

After a good night's rest we awoke early to seek out art supplies for the workshops. I made a conscious decision before leaving the United States that I would not to pack supplies in order to obtain all of the materials from Amman. While we knew loose details about the weeks ahead we were unable to get clear answers from the foundations we were working with. We had very little knowledge of how many participants would be attending the workshops throughout the weeks. I had a healthy amount of money to spend on supplies acquired from a small fundraiser I held before traveling. With these funds we sought out a store to purchase basic supplies. After driving to multiple closed shops our driver explained that it would be difficult to find an open shop because it was Friday, a holy day. Overwhelmed that we may not have supplies for the day I doubted my choice of not packing a few supplies and was embarrassed that I hadn't anticipated closed shops. As we approached the last store the driver knew of, I felt a sense of relief sweep over me as a customer exited the shop. Thankful it was open, I loaded up a basket with tissue paper, felt, colored paper, glue sticks, liquid glue, scissors, pipe cleaners, ribbon, yarn, paint, oversized paper, markers, and several soccer balls. As I paid for the supplies the shopkeeper was so thankful for the business that he named it the best day his shop had ever seen.

As we began our journey north to Ramtha we reviewed the plan for the day. While knowing that we needed to remain flexible, we also recognized our desire to provide structure for a safe and positive afternoon. We felt that one way to achieve that would be an additional translator. Our driver Anas, a well-educated twenty-something year old Jordanian who works for a prosperous social media company agreed to stay and help translate. In addition to Anas, Naveen (their teacher) invited her brother along to translate, bringing the total amount of fluent



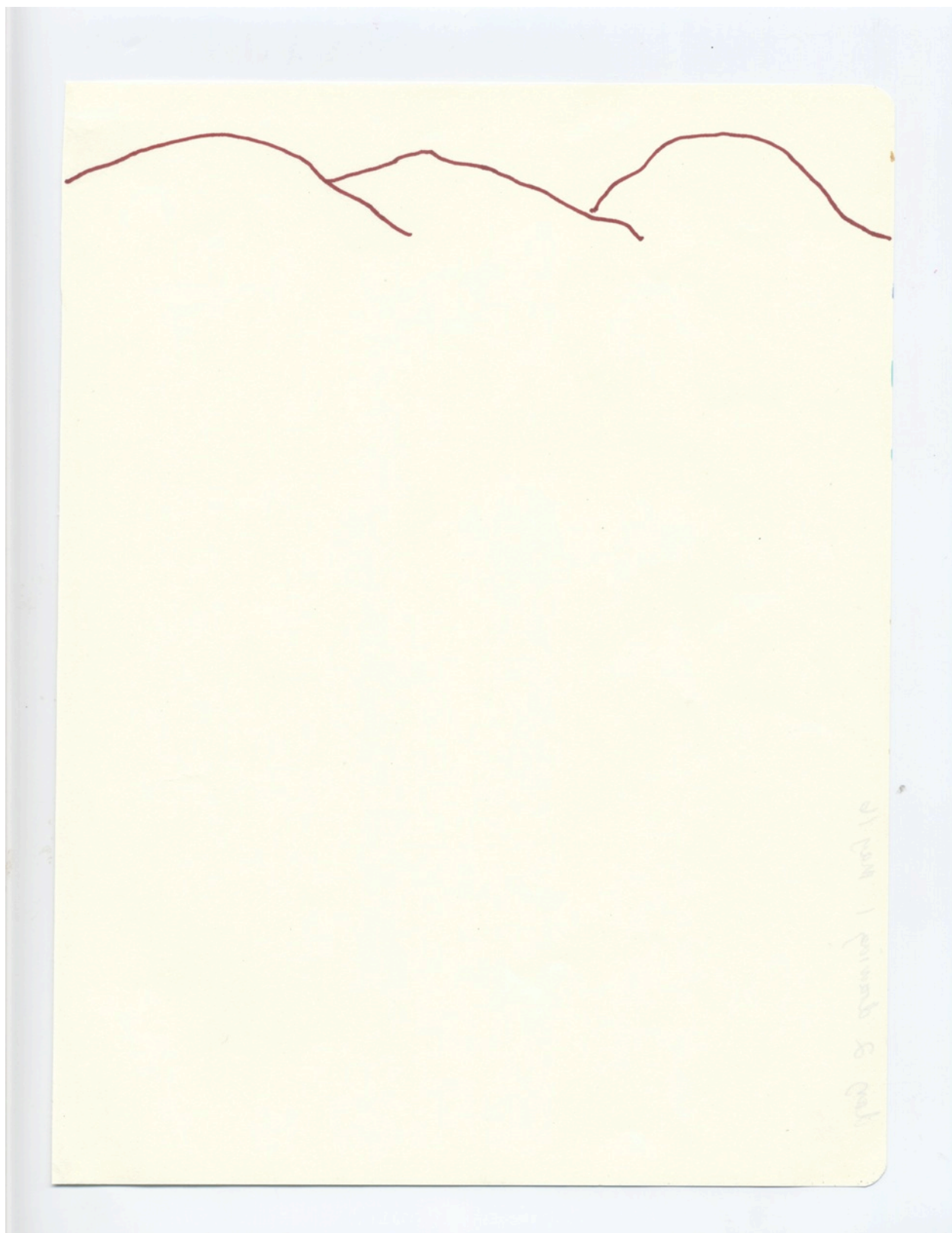
translators to three. To help navigate the children's excitement and provide more individual attention we split the participants into smaller groups. The two male facilitators formed a small group with the boys and the girls were split up between 8 female facilitators.

The first activity of the day was a joint drawing conducted within each of the small groups. I sat on the floor with my group of three girls, two thirteen year olds and one eleven year old. Employing overt body language I chose a color marker and indicated with my hands that they should each choose a color. I explained as best I could that we were to each only use our designated color and that we would be making marks on the oversized paper one person at a time. The girls' wide eyes watched me closely as they listened, smiling. Someone volunteered to go first and the rotation of the circle was quickly established. The first thing to be drawn was a circle at the top corner of the paper to indicate a sun. Next, heart shapes, butterflies and other schematic elements quickly decorated the page. The girls began to heavily influence each other, speaking in Arabic telling one another what to draw. Upon my turn then began to instruct me on what to draw, repeating "heart, heart." I lovingly shook my head no and drew something other than what they instructed me to draw; I drew an orange cat utilizing a green circle (previously drawn by another member) as the head. They seemed to appreciate me saying no and as I was drawing, I heard an audible, "ooooohhhh" in unison as and shook all their heads up and down. They had understood that we each were allowed to draw what we wanted while supporting another person's drawing. From there, they began to add details to each others marks and drew more thought-provoking content. After birds, clouds and rainbows filled the sky, flowers lined the foreground and a family of ducks marched across the page one of the girls drew a blue tent. At this point I called over for a translator to ask the girls if any of them lived in camps or tents. The girls all said no stating that they lived in houses. I asked the girls via translator what the tent

or camp needed. What should be drawn for the tent? They excitedly began taking turns drawing what they needed the camp to have. Food, family holding hands, a well for water, and fire for warmth were drawn around the tent. These items were then labeled in English. A series of arrows were drawn connecting the family and this written statement: "It's very very happy. It's family. Cry of happiness." As the girls finished the drawing, with a translator still present, I asked them where the picture took place? Without hesitation they said Syria, which I didn't need a translation for. I felt a pang in my heart and observed the tingling feeling that was now entering my body. I asked the children to title the piece. They titled it in Arabic aloud and the translator narrated, "Syria, our beautiful country that no longer exists." I felt moved as I watched the beautiful fluidity and quickness of the young girl's Arabic marks titling the back of the drawing. I attempted to validate their title and thanked them for sharing with me. We sat quietly exchanging simple non-verbal communication until the remaining small groups were finished.

After the joint group drawing we moved to a more individualized activity, still to be completed within the small groups to provide individual attention. We explained the premise of the quilt project to the entire group. Participants were instructed to create a felt square to symbolize something about them. The three girls in my group were very excited by the quilt project. It was amazing to watch the care and detail each member put into their individual panel. While there were moments of slight frustration when the glue wouldn't hold pipe cleaners, the girls were open to problem solving with tape. After about thirty minutes we formed a large circle in the room and began to have the children place their squares in the middle of the circle one at a time stating their names and something about their square. As the panels began to come together as a group large sea of patterns and color lined the floor. The paint, pipe cleaners, construction paper and ribbon purchased earlier that morning were now wildly decorating their self-symbols,

which were being assembled to create a metaphoric quilt. Their quilt, representing community and support, highlighted individuality while presenting similarities. Although they were not directly asked about their experience as refugees, their quilt pieces incorporated the emotional residue of their trials, trauma, and loss. Their resiliency and spirit was visible in the hope they named. It was moving to hear the boys and girls express their emotions, personal stories, and hopes through a translator. They seemed genuinely touched by our willingness to listen and witness their stories. As people laid their work on the carpet one by one the girls in my group would quietly exclaim English words to comment on the squares. "Beautiful" and "fantastic" were repeated over and over again. At the close of the activity we said goodbye for the day and traveled back home to Amman. Exhausted but moved I sat in the brightly lit kitchen and began to process my day through the response art (Figures 6 through 8).

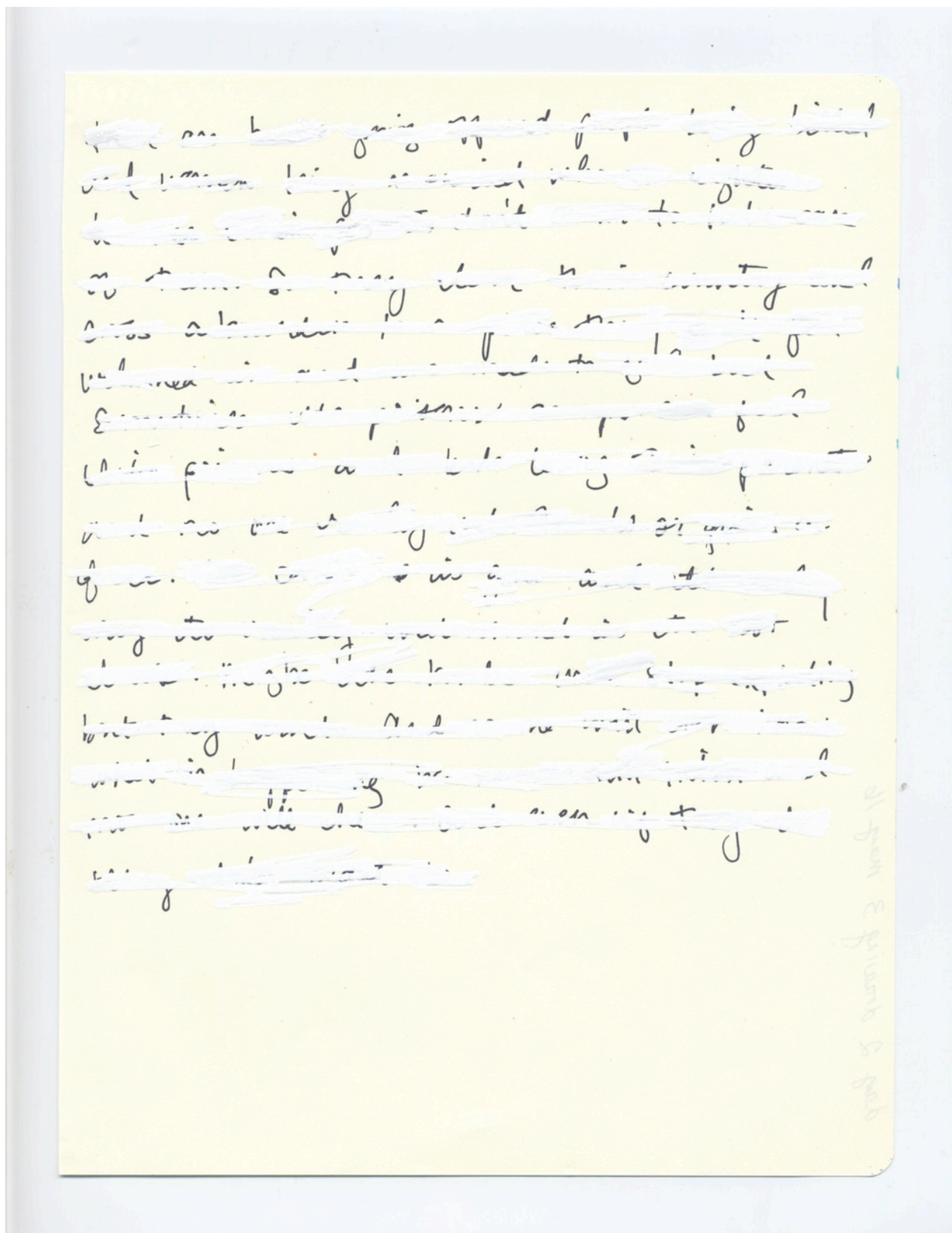


**Figure 6:** paper, marker, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 2 Friday, May 16, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a brightly lit kitchen during evening hours

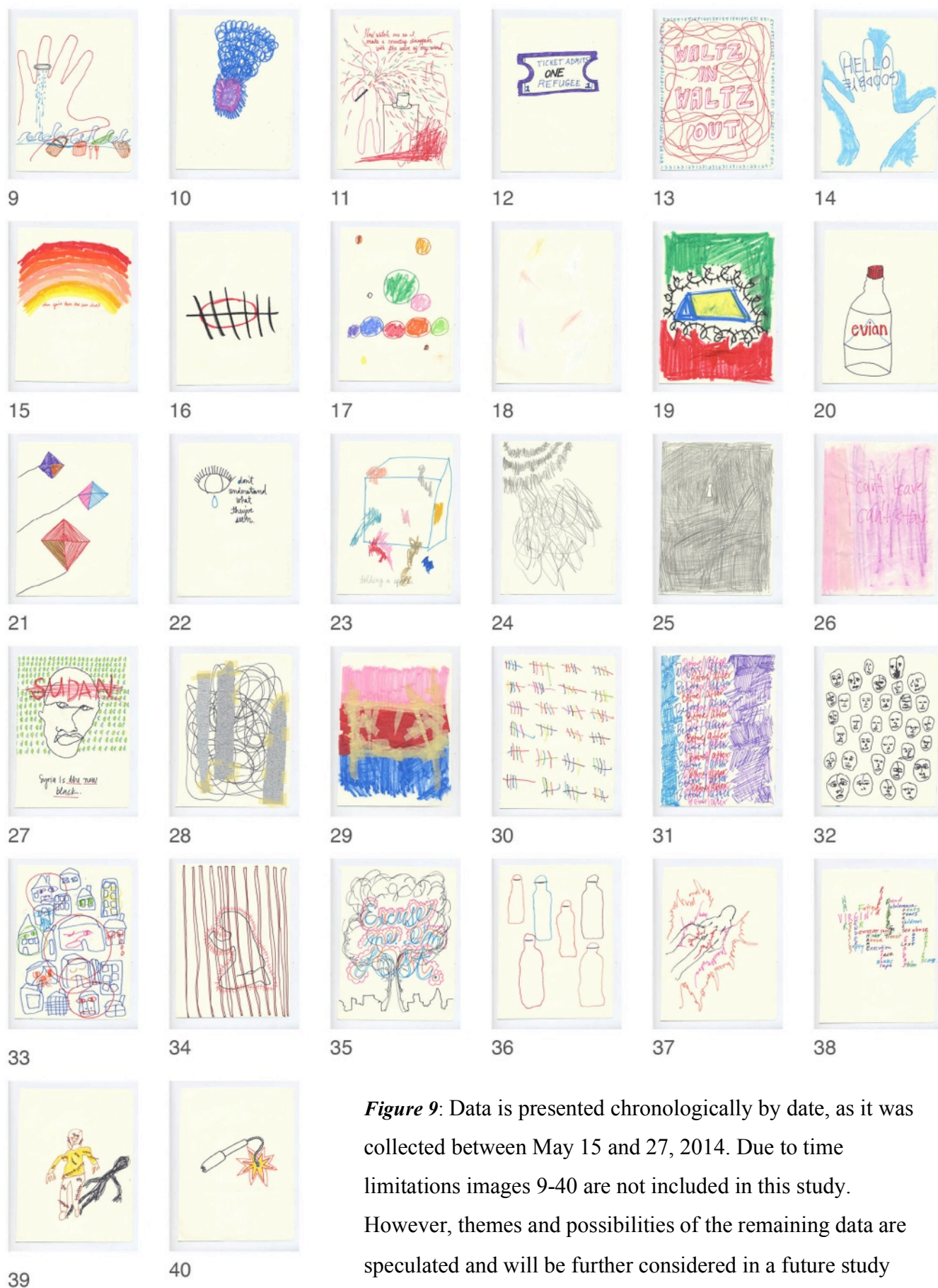


**Figure 7:** paper, marker, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 2 Friday, May 16, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a brightly lit kitchen during evening hours





**Figure 8:** paper, pen, correction fluid, size: 7.5" x 10" - Made day 2 Friday, May 16, 2014 in the privacy of our Amman apartment, in a brightly lit kitchen during evening hours



**Figure 9:** Data is presented chronologically by date, as it was collected between May 15 and 27, 2014. Due to time limitations images 9-40 are not included in this study. However, themes and possibilities of the remaining data are speculated and will be further considered in a future study

## **Analysis of Data**

Considering the study questions, I utilized a bifocal art exploration to systematically explore the first eight pieces of artwork from the perspectives of the refugee experience and the trainee experience (lenses A and B). While I originally intended to include all 40 pieces of data, time limitations associated with this study led me to ultimately focus on the first eight pieces of artwork. However, themes and possibilities of the remaining data are speculated and will be further considered in a future study. For the purposes of this study, the first eight pieces were explored using Betensky's (1995) phenomenological approach of intentional looking and seeing. This process began back in the United States, at Loyola Marymount, in November 2014, six months after the collection of data in Jordan. The schedule for data analysis aligned with the calendar of my research, which was led by the course itinerary.

### **Betensky's phenomenological process**

To begin the phenomenological process I placed each piece of art in a position where I could step back and observe the data (Figure 10) in accordance with Betensky's (1995) method. Within the privacy of my home, I systematically sat across from each piece of art, and one-by-one tape-recorded myself describing what I saw in each piece. I chose to tape-record the phenomenological approach in order to fully experience the art and avoid getting too involved in the writing and cognitive portion of editing the observations. The use of audio recording allowed me to remain fully present and actively experience the art as I would in a session. After tape-recording what I saw in each of the pieces, I transcribed each recording verbatim to capture the full sentences, slight nuances, and pauses in my speech. Possible themes, such as loss of control, began to emerge during the transcription process, and the frequent use of certain descriptors like chaos and agitated were noted.



**Figure 10:** Betensky's (1995) phenomenological approach of intentional looking and seeing

IMAGE	BETENSKY
1 	"I see a scattering of marks that appear random and thoughtless. (pause) There seems to be a mass towards the lower middle area of the paper that's a little more concentrated in a shape. The marks look brown and it almost feels a bit desperate. Or innocent. Almost like a child's painting."
2 	"I see a scared girl with big eyes. And she's wrapped in a bright hijab with red bursts of color making the flowers almost look like flames. The circles of her eyes look empty and the sketchy quality of the lines creating her face looks agitated and unsure."
3 	"I see a bold statement in the middle of the page screaming to be heard. 'I love you.' A familiar phrase is out of context and unfamiliar. I'm not sure who's saying this to me. And I'm not sure how to respond. It seems faint and far away, but it radiates on the page. (pause) Its tenderness seems powerful (pause) and the emptiness of the space around it is occupied with whatever this person meant to say."
4 	"I see bold letters trickling off the page (pause) the bright colors seem like they are trying to convey a presence. This noise that I'm familiar with ('ha ha ha') suddenly looks abstract and I see H-A as a pairing over and over again that doesn't have a meaning. (pause) The 'ha ha ha's' are in rows that are trying to be orderly yet there's room for improvisation and variety that makes it feel less ridged and more alive. I see purple and green and blue and the peach fades away - leaving a gap between the marks. I'm suddenly not only seeing the 'ha ha ha's' going horizontal, but also going vertical. And suddenly it appears more chaotic and disjointed."
5 	"I see four figures embracing each other or leaning on each other. And I'm not sure if they feel safe or endangered. I see a little figure being protected by a larger figure, who's being protected by a larger figure, who's being protected by the largest figure. (pause) And the clouds are also trying to protect each other with outlines like the blue cloud is outlined with brown marker. And the hills are also supporting one another with a brown line being copied by a black line. (pause) It seems like these problems are literally stacked on each other and it's layered. And that even though there are lines that are trying to protect it, it's not safe. (pause) And somehow the four red figures become one big figure. And that big figure (comprised of four figures) represents everyone in a devastating situation like this."
6 	"I see a vast landscape. The emptiness of the bottom half of the paper feels heavy. (pause) And the smooth agitated lines making the hill feel very intentional. The hills seem really far away. (pause) I don't know what's behind the hill. Or to the left or right of the hills and the piece feels really silent. Each of the lines making up the three hills seems slightly different. With an energy that became slightly emotional. The middle hill looks slightly agitated. And while the piece feels really flat, I also feel a lot of perspective between the foreground and the background"
7 	"I see colorful lines creating hills. Each of the hills is made up of different lines that become a pattern. Which are also broken by white spaces in between each of the three mounds. The white spaces look like deep cracks making the ladders feel unsteady. These tall ladders almost seem impossible to climb. And once you've climbed out it seems very difficult to get back in. (pause) The marks of the ladders feel haphazard and unfair. They're not sturdy; it almost feels like the land is moving. Shaking. And it feels like a real unsteadiness. And the white space at the bottom of the page doesn't help to ground the hills. It actually makes it feel like it could just fall. Almost like everything in this drawing is suspended."
8 	"(pause) I see texture. I see black marks that have been covered up and are hard to read. I see scratches. I see a lot of empty white spaces that are covering up what the person was trying to say. This piece is hard to understand because it's not communicating clearly, the way it wants to. It feels like it's being silenced or censored. I almost feel like this is a person whose mouth is bound or told not to speak up or share their opinion or story. It feels like mumbling. (pause) And quiet."

**Bifocal exploration: Refugee experience and trainee experience**

Next, I used the eight-recorded phenomenological transcriptions to enlighten perspective A (my perception of the refugee experience) and perspective B (utilizing the experience of working with refugees to examine my role and identity as a trainee). Figure 11 presents all eight pieces as seen through lens A, while Figure 12 presents all eight pieces seen through lens B. These two groupings helped to organize an exploration of the differing and similar themes occurring between the experience of the refugees and trainee. These thematic occurrences are presented in Figure 14. Simultaneously, I revisited the art (Figure 18) to let reappearing creative elements in the data (negative space, text, and landscape) enhance, clarify and inform the major themes found from refugee and trainee experiences. Utilizing the art as the main informer, the bifocal exploration allowed me to examine the data to name meaning about the refugee experience (Figure 11) and the trainee experience (Figure 12).

**Figure 11:** Lens A (the refugee experience)




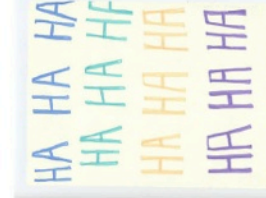












IMAGE	LENS A
1 	The random brown marks may represent the lack of control associated with the refugee experience, as evidenced by the marks appearing thoughtless and desperate. The innocence conveyed in this piece may imply a level of universality in the human experience. This is further highlighted in the media used: human blood.
2 	The lone scared girl with empty eyes may represent women at large. This drawing may symbolize long-lasting gender issues, which appear to be a part of the refugee experience. The red bursts on her hijab, representing both flames and flowers point to a duality of fragility and strength, capability and incapability. Gender issues surface here as one of many complexities concerning many Middle Eastern cultures.
3 	The centrality of the phrase "I love you" is meant to be clearly witnessed. There's nothing getting in the way of this message. It's meant to openly communicate a universal emotion. This familiar phrase so strongly proclaimed might indicate the refugee's powerful need to attach and associate with something that feels safe. This piece expresses the need for love and the desire to belong.
4 	The young refugees' laughter filled the classroom just as it fills this page. Perhaps the laughter was an attempt to hide pain and recent deep traumatic issues. One could argue the laughter was being used as a coping mechanism to survive. Perhaps in this moment it was to minimize the anxiety of being around new strange people. Humor felt like a crutch that could easily be accessed and used to hide true feelings. Additionally, it resembled a universal way to communicate with one another despite language differences.
5 	LENS A The drawing's themes of safety and protection highlight the complexity and vulnerability of the refugee experience. The multiple figures, embracing or leaning upon one another, could represent the compounded problems that are literally stacked on each other. They may also represent the intergenerational effects of displacement and trauma.
6 	This piece may suggest the intense connection and longing a refugee may feel towards their homeland or terrain. The piece's composition suggests an emptiness and distance that a refugee may feel from their homeland. The vast landscape and silence of this piece may indicate an emotional emptiness that accompanies displacement.
7 	The ladders' instability may embody the emotional and physical experiences of being forced from one's homeland. The unsteady nature of these ladders speaks to the uncertainty of one's fate in a new country and the complex feelings that may occur simultaneously. The height of the ladders (making them impossible to climb) alludes to the difficulty of escaping as well as returning. The deep cracks penetrating the earth may symbolize the intensity and magnitude of the refugee experience or may represent the earth crumbling beneath their feet. The one thing that seemed to be solid (the ground) is actually not secure.
8 	The texture, scratches, and layering in this piece portray the complexity of politics surrounding war and the refugee experience. The black pen marks covered by correction fluid may symbolize individuals or groups left voiceless and powerless. This may suggest that the refugee experience does not support personal stories, which are often lost, covered up, or never heard.

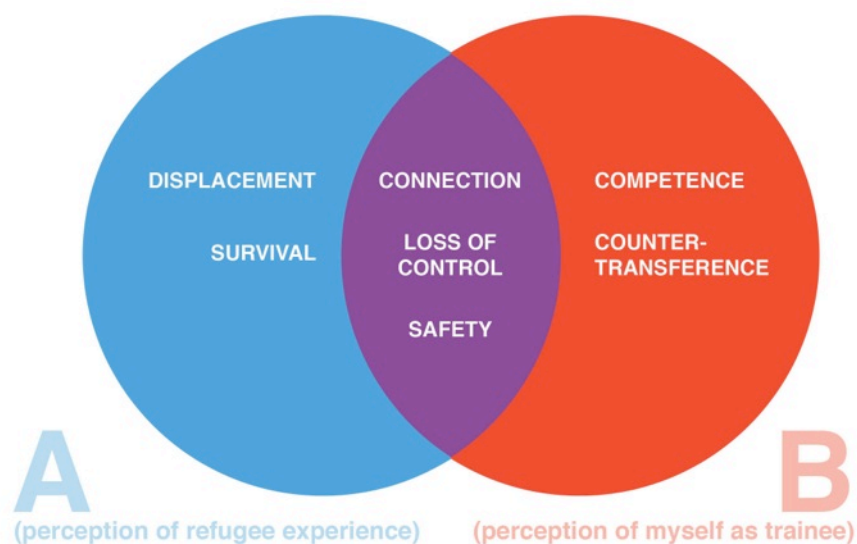


Figure 12: Lens B (the trainee experience)

IMAGE	LENS B
1 	The randomness and thoughtlessness of the brown marks may indicate an inability to make sense or order of the refugee experience. Using my own dried blood to make marks may suggest an attempt to connect with the refugees on a basic human level. The use of a body fluid may also indicate a sentiment of exposure and vulnerability.
2 	As a female trainee pursuing higher education in a graduate program, I experienced a strong countertransference around the perceived gender issues of young girls and women I encountered. In this drawing, the girl's empty eyes may symbolize her inability to see into her future. This may signify my difficulty in working with populations who I perceive to be subjugated while highlighting my ability to recognize my own countertransference.
3 	I love you, radiating on the page, is an art piece in response to a young girl who told me she loved me after knowing me for just a few hours. This piece declares my desire to respond to the young girl. This artwork is a way to allow her to know that she is loved. This is my attempt to connect back to her, to allow us to relate and reach out to one another. Despite our attempts, the emptiness of the page may suggest the vast space between us.
4 	This rendition of laughter ("HA, HA, HA") could be my way of employing a very similar coping mechanism. Perhaps the act and creation of a pattern, in multiple rows, was an attempt to understand the meaning of the laughter previously experienced. The repetition in this piece may illuminate my pursuit to create order and structure out of a very uncomfortable atmosphere. Just as the children used laughter, this artwork highlights that I, too, was utilizing coping mechanisms in this new and intense environment.
5 	The figures' ability to converge and represent themselves as one figure may indicate my overwhelmed concept of the vastness of this situation. My ability to view the figures' as one entity may highlight my role as an outsider, attempting to wrap my head around the greatness of the sheer numbers of refugees. The intergenerational nature of this piece may also convey a sense of worry that the problems will continue to be passed down and experienced by survivors and future generations. The repetitive blue and brown outlines around the hills and clouds may show my desire to offer protection or help.
6 	This depiction of the Syrian hills the children often drew during art making may speak to my countertransference surrounding their longing for Syria. I witnessed these hills each day as we drove from Amman towards the northern border town of Ramtha. The hills, appearing very far away, may signify my limited understanding of Syria and the complex issues as evidenced in this statement: "I don't know what's behind the hill or to the left or right of the hills." This piece expresses my feelings of helplessness as a trainee working with displaced refugees.
7 	The haphazard lines and unsteady quality of this drawing may represent my experience as a trainee in a cross-cultural situation. The shaky ladders may portray my feelings of insecurity and self-doubt in my ability to navigate.
8 	The obscurity of this piece may suggest my attempts to understand the entire story. Also the covered and scratched text could represent the complexities of communicating through translators, particularly with sensitive personal information. This may portray that politics and cultural differences are not the only place for things to be misunderstood or lost in translation. There is a significant lack of understanding due to not speaking the language of those I am encountering.









## Themes

The recurrence and significance of themes began to surface during the analysis of the refugee experience, lens A (Figure 11), and the trainee experience, lens B (Figure 12). Seven prominent themes emerged from the refugee and trainee experiences: displacement, survival, connection, loss of control, safety, competence, and countertransference. Between both refugee and trainee there are three main shared themes: (a) connection, (b) loss of control, and (c) safety. While these three themes were evident in both perspectives, the refugee and trainee appear to experience these themes in very different ways. The refugee and trainee may understand them differently because they are coming from different places. The analysis of the refugee experience (lens A) shows that the refugee is driven by either displacement or survival (themes exclusive to the refugee) while the trainee (lens B) is driven by competence or countertransference (themes exclusive to the trainee). Therefore, while there are meeting points for the main shared themes connection (Figure 15), loss of control (Figure 16), and safety (Figure 17) there is a disparity between the refugee and trainee perspective. Figure 13 illustrates the meeting places and differences between lenses A and B.



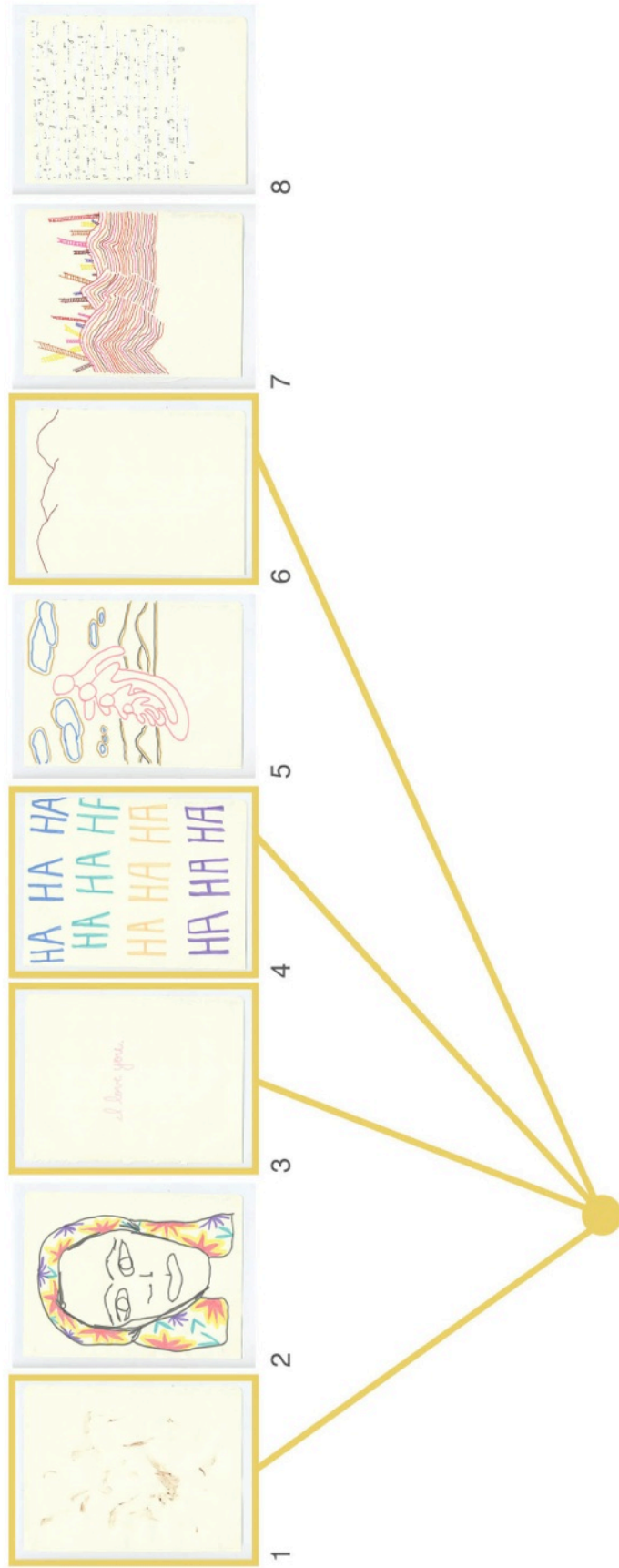
**Figure 13:** Venn diagram of themes pertaining to lenses A and B

**Figure 14:** Occurrences of themes

		THEMES SHARED BY A & B			THEMES OF A		THEMES OF B	
		Connection	Loss of Control	Safety	Displacement	Survival	Competence	Counter-transference
1	 lens A	X	X					
	lens B		X				X	X
2	 lens A							
	lens B							X
3	 lens A	X		X		X		
	lens B	X						X
4	 lens A	X	X			X		
	lens B		X				X	X
5	 lens A			X	X			
	lens B			X			X	X
6	 lens A	X			X			
	lens B						X	X
7	 lens A		X	X	X	X		
	lens B			X			X	X
8	 lens A		X					
	lens B						X	X



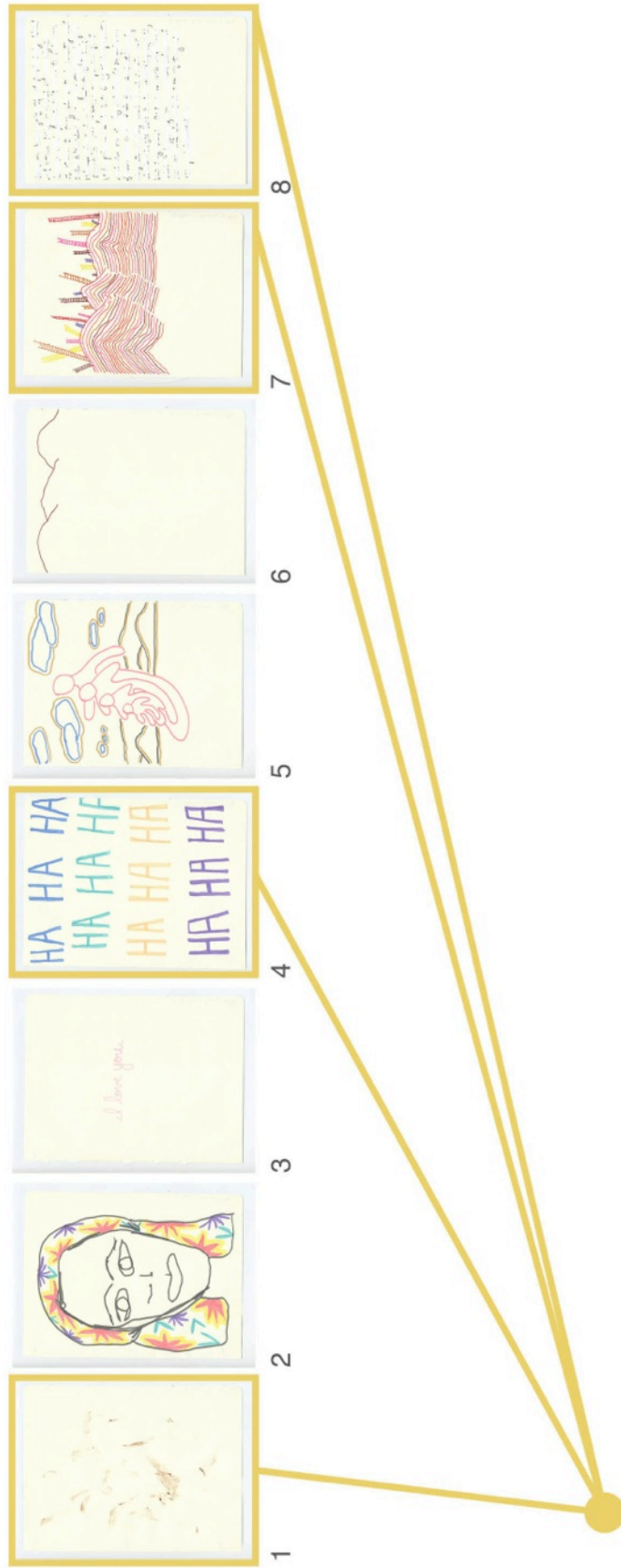
**Figure 15:** Connection: visual and written reflection



The theme *connection* occurs in Figures 1, 3, 4, and 6 in different forms. The use of dried blood in Figure 1 may suggest the trainee's attempt to connect with the refugees' on a very basic human level. Connection is used differently in Figure 3, a response to a refugee who used English to say "I love you" after knowing the trainee for a mere few hours. Her action and message may indicate the refugee's powerful need to attach or connect with the trainee to feel safe or loved. Although she would never see this artwork, the art is a way to let her know she is loved which may indicate the trainee's desire and need to connect back to her. The "Ha Ha Ha" in Figure 4 was influenced by the refugees' uncontrollable laughter, which was experienced upon our arrival at the site on in Day 1. This laughter can be understood as a universal way to connect and surpass the language differences. Again, demonstrating the refugees' need to connect. The landscape in Figure 6 suggests the refugees' deep connection and longing for their homeland. The reoccurrence of landscape (Figures 5, 6, 7) deepens my understanding of the major theme connection. The reappearance of landscape in the data denotes a longing for one's motherland which is highly associated with the refugee experience. The vastness appearing in the landscapes captures the distance that a refugee may feel from their place of origin; a constant longing for one's identity and home. By looking at the occurrence of themes we can see that the refugees may have been driven to connect due to displacement, while the trainee may have been driven to connect due to countertransference.

## CONNECTION

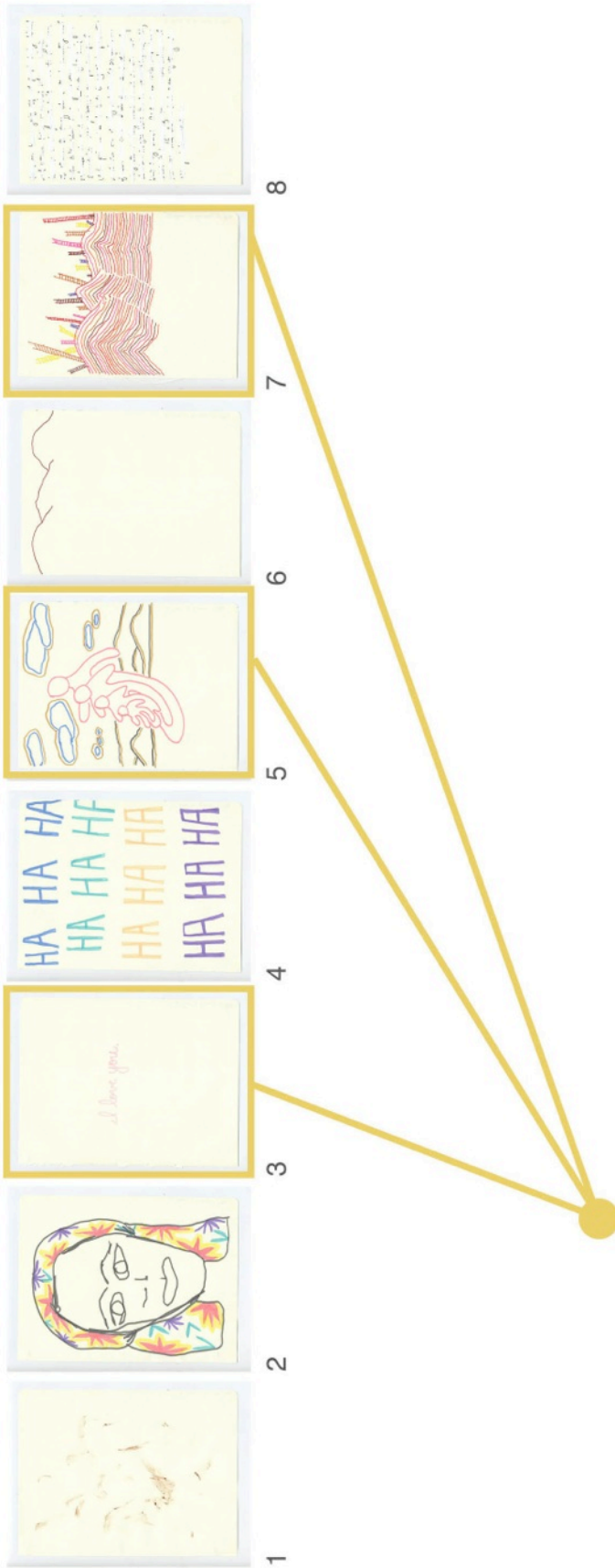
**Figure 16:** Loss of Control: visual and written reflection



The theme *loss of control* occurs in Figures 1, 4, 7, and 8 in various ways. The random brown marks of Figure 1 may represent the refugees' lack of control associated with their experience, as evidenced by the marks appearing thoughtless and desperate. Furthermore, the randomness and thoughtlessness of Figure 1 may indicate the trainee's inadequacy to make sense or order of the refugee experience. The chaotic and disjointed laughter displayed in Figure 4 represents the loss of control felt by the refugees in an environment with new people. This intense laughter experienced on Day 1 was internalized by the trainee who then attempted to structure the chaos through the artwork (Figure 4). Thus, Figure 4 indicates the trainee's pursuit to create order and structure out of a very uncomfortable atmosphere. This demonstrates the trainee's way of employing a very similar coping mechanism to the laughter the children were using. Just as the overwhelmed children used laughter as a coping mechanism this piece highlights that the overwhelmed trainee used art (repetition and pattern making) as a coping mechanism. The unsteady nature of the ladders in Figure 7 speaks to the uncertainty of the refugees' fate in a new country and the complex feelings that occur. In addition to the precarious ground, the height of the ladders (making them impossible to climb) alludes to the refugees' difficulty in escaping as well as returning. This loss of stability, choice, and ability speaks to the refugees' loss of control and the complex emotional and physical stressors associated with displacement. The haphazard unsteady quality of Figure 7 may also represent the unsteadiness of the experience as a trainee in a cross-cultural situation. The shaky ladders may portray the trainee's feelings of insecurity and doubt in the ability to navigate the enormity of the refugee experience. Loss of control is portrayed slightly different in Figure 8. The texture, scratches and layering of Figure 8 illustrate the complexity of politics surrounding the refugee experience. The pen marks covered with correction fluid may symbolize refugees left voiceless and powerless. The obscurity of this piece may highlight the significant lack of power and understanding experienced by the trainee who did not speak the language of those encountered.



**Figure 17:** Safety: visual and written reflection



## SAFETY

The theme *safety* occurs in Figures 3, 5, and 7 showing a range of ways refugees and the trainee experience safety. The familiar phrase “I love you” in Figure 3 may indicate the refugees powerful need to attach and associate with something that feels safe. This piece expresses the need for love, belonging and safety. The drawing’s themes of safety and protection in Figure 5 highlight the complexity and vulnerability of the refugee experience. The figures embracing or leaning upon one another could represent the need to feel close or safe. However, it may also represent the possibility of intergenerational effects of displacement on future generations indicating that even the future is not safe from this compound trauma. The repetitive blue and brown outlines of Figure 5 (around the hills and clouds) may indicate the trainee’s desire to offer protection. These containing lines may be an attempt to mitigate the refugees’ vulnerability. So while the refugee experiences a lack of safety while in survival mode, the trainee experiences the desire to provide safety. The instability and unsteadiness of Figure 7 highlights the intensity and magnitude of the refugee experience. The height of the ladders alludes to the refugees’ difficulty of escaping as well as returning. The deep white cracks in the hills of Figure 7 could also represent the trainee’s feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. Highlighting that safety for the trainee is quite different than safety for the refugee. The lack of safety felt by the trainee has to do with being out of one’s comfort zone and questioning one’s competence as a trainee.

**Figure 18:** Reoccurring art elements: negative space, text, and landscape



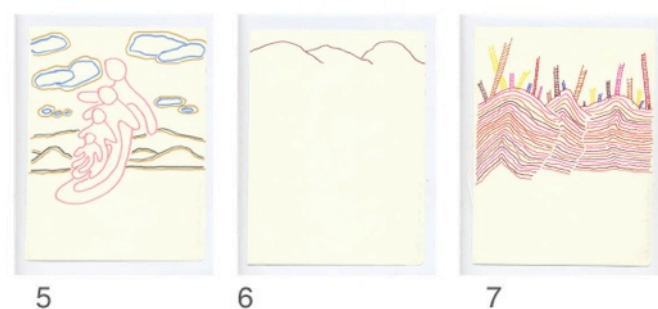
### NEGATIVE SPACE

The reoccurrence of *negative space* in Figures 1, 3, and 6 communicates a level of susceptibility felt by both the refugee and trainee. The disproportionate amount of negative space in each piece may accentuate the main images vulnerability and isolation. The negative space in Figure 3 highlights a gap or distance between the refugee and trainee, despite how much the refugee and trainee both crave to connect. The empty space in each image helps to emphasize the main subject. The space around the blood marks of Figure 1 helps to emphasize vulnerability and chaos. With nothing in the way, these image's centrality and starkness convey their need to be clearly witnessed and received.



### TEXT

The reappearance of *text* in Figures 3, 4, and 8 may represent an attempt to clearly communicate despite language differences. The text, while used differently in each piece, tries to communicate and be understood. The prominence of the familiar phrase "I love you" in Figure 3 denotes the refugees use of English to connect with the trainee. The laughter rendered in Figure 4 is a universal way to connect despite language differences. While the obscurity of the partially covered text in Figure 8 may represent the complexities of communicating through translators, particularly when discussing sensitive information. Figure 8 may also highlight the significant lack of understanding the trainee experienced when unable to speak the language of those encountered.



### LANDSCAPE

The repetition of *landscape* in Figures 5, 6, and 7 may denote the intense longing for one's homeland, which is understood to be an important aspect of the refugee experience. The hills, a backdrop for Figure 5 may imply that one's homeland is always present in the refugees' heart and mind. The vast landscape in Figure 6 makes the hills appear very far away. The gap between the foreground and background in Figure 6 emphasizes the distance the refugee may feel from their place of origin. The landscape and ladders in Figure 7 may represent the refugees' difficulty in escaping as well as returning.

### **Shared main themes: Connection, loss of control, and safety**

Connection, loss of control, and safety are the three prominent themes shared between lenses A and B. As previously stated, while these meeting places for thematic occurrences exist between the refugee and trainee, they are experienced very differently. While the theme of connection is detected in both lens A and B (Figure 14), it occurs far more frequently in lens A (the refugee experience). These occurrences may suggest that the desire or yearning for connection is more significant to the refugee experience. As Figure 14 shows, in lens A there is a correlation between occurrences of connection with the themes of survival and displacement. By looking at the occurrences of each of the themes (Figure 14) we can note that refugees' may be driven to seek connection due to displacement, while the trainee may be driven to make connection due to countertransference. As Figure 14 shows, the one time connection appears through lens B is in regard to Figure 3. This piece, a direct response to a young refugee, was driven by countertransference. The theme of connection is further explored in the written reflection of Figure 15. The written reflection considers calling upon the artwork's recurring themes of landscape, negative space, and text to further expand and deepen the meaning and understanding of connection (Figure 18).

Similar to the occurrences of connection, the theme of loss of control is more prominent in lens A than lens B (Figure 14). However, there are two instances in which lens A and lens B both portray loss of control within the same piece of artwork. As seen through the artwork, these co-occurrences may indicate a sense of synchronicity between lenses A and B. The loss of control and enormity of the refugee experience invites the refugees and trainee to attempt to cope and create structure or control in some way. This shared experience (between lenses A and B) of

trying to make sense and structure while feeling out of control is explored in the written reflection of Figure 16.

Similar to the occurrences of loss of control, safety co-occurs in two instances between lenses A and B within the same pieces of artwork (Figure 14). These co-occurrences do not suggest that the refugee and trainee are having equal or shared experiences, only that the theme safety is a meeting place between the two. Once again, the refugees' experience of safety would entail displacement and survival, whereas the trainee's experience would entail insecurity in competence. The uncertainty of the trainee may stem from the doubt surrounding the navigation of cross-cultural experiences and the enormity of the refugee experience. Figure 17 explores the shared theme safety in a written reflection that draws on three pieces of artwork to make connections between lenses A and B. To further explore the theme of safety, Figure 18 examines recurring aspects of the artworks' negative space, which helps to further inform the theme safety. The negative space in the artwork communicates a level of susceptibleness felt by both the refugee and trainee.

### **Answering the Study Questions**

#### **Lens A: My perception of the refugee experience**

1A) What can art-making do to deepen the understanding of the refugee experience?

Research shows that the use of art-making can deepen understanding by facilitating exploration to illuminate or build knowledge (Kapitan, 2010). Art-making as a form of inquiry can serve as a medium to connect to the self, while simultaneously distancing the self in order to see something from a new perspective (Kapitan, 2010). Both the art-making process and analysis of lens A (Figure 11) provided a space to explore and further understand the refugee experience. By the trainee distancing herself to examine each piece of art through lens A, she was able to

intentionally study the art and draw insight into the refugee experience, an experience much different than her own. The study of lenses A and B both illuminated and deepened the understanding of the refugee experience by allowing the trainee to find meeting points between the two perspectives (Figure 14). Additionally, the analysis process allowed the space to honor differences that are not shared between lens A and B. Through understanding that the refugee experience may be driven by displacement and survival (themes exclusive to lens A), the trainee gained more insight into the experience of the refugee. Using the bifocal art exploration to find meeting points and differences was a dynamic process that further deepened the trainee's understanding of the refugee experience.

2A) Can art-making help a trainee connect (clinically or personally) with someone who has drastically different experiences?

Yes, demonstrated by the data collection, themes of connection were evident in the art-making, allowing space for the trainee to connect personally and clinically to someone with drastically different experiences. The artwork (created by the trainee) was informed by time spent with refugees. As seen in Figure 15 of the data analysis, the art provided a space for the trainee to connect with the refugees in different forms. Rather than drastic differences being a hindrance, they became a catalyst for the art pieces. Countertransference and the desire for the trainee to connect with the refugees appeared in different forms throughout the pieces where the theme of connection occurs (Figure 15). While the artwork allowed a space for the trainee to express her desire to connect with the refugees, the artwork furthered this connection by allowing the trainee to deeply explore the refugee experience, or lens A (Figure 11). By engaging in the bifocal art exploration, the trainee was able to connect first through the art-making and then through the analysis of the artwork from two different perspectives. Exploring the art from

lenses A and B deepened the trainee's understanding of the artwork while featuring meeting points and differences between the refugees and trainee. This process helped further the trainee's ability to connect with the refugees. The recurring art elements (Figure 18) furthered the trainee's ability to connect by allowing the art to inform and expand her understanding of the refugees' experiences of displacement and survival.

3A) Can art-making help navigate through personal emotional responses and cross-cultural experiences?

Yes, as the data analysis shows, the artwork was used to navigate through personal emotional responses of the cross-cultural experiences. While this question was originally thought to fall under the refugee experience (lens A) it is clear that the trainee's emotional responses were strongly informed through the countertransference associated with lens B. As Figure 12 demonstrates, each piece of art analyzed through lens B (the trainee experience) discusses the various ways the art was utilized to navigate challenging emotional reactions. In some instances the art became a place to respond directly to the refugees, as a way to connect back to them, despite the fact that they'd never see the art (Figure 3). In other instances the art was used as a coping mechanism to attempt to create order and structure out of a very uncomfortable atmosphere. The usage of repetition and pattern making can be understood as a way for the trainee to try to make sense out of the chaos signifying her desire for structure (Figure 4). Additionally, the art was often used as a place for the trainee to explore her feelings of helplessness as she attempted to grasp the enormity of the refugee experience. Figures 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 each speaks to the complications of trying to fathom the complex issues concerning the refugee population. The art was used to reflect on feelings of insecurity and doubt that unearthed when working in this cross-cultural context.

**Perspective B: Utilizing the experience of working with refugees to examine my role and identity as a trainee**

1B) What can art-making do to deepen a trainee's growth process as an art therapist?

The art-making process allowed space for the trainee to explore the refugee experience in a profound way (refer to question 1A above). The practice of considering and exploring other cultures is a very important aspect in a trainee's growth and development. Through the experience of working with refugees, the trainee was able to examine her role and identity as a developing art therapist. The trainee was able to dive deeper into the art by using Betensky's (1995) phenomenological approach of intentional looking and seeing (Figure 10). This process can expand the trainee's personal and clinical growth, influencing the way art therapy sessions are approached. During the analysis of the lens B (Figure 12), themes of countertransference (question 2B below) informed the trainee of emotional responses to consider. The examination of countertransference is an essential part of a trainee's growth process. In addition to art-making being a space to explore countertransference, it is a means for creative expression to stay central to the art therapy experience (Wix, 1995).

2B) What themes of countertransference emerged from the artwork created throughout the study?

Elements of countertransference emerged from the artwork throughout the study. The reflective art-making, created throughout time spent in Jordan, concentrated on personal emotional reactions towards the workshops, participants' involvement and cross-cultural matters. The approach to the post-session response art was largely spontaneous and without planning; intended to capture unfiltered emotion and avoid presupposition. As each piece is concentrated on an emotional response, each piece holds countertransference in varying forms. Figure 14

illustrates the occurrences of themes, indicating that each of the eight pieces conveys countertransference when viewed through the experience as a trainee, or lens B (Figure 12). Lens A (Figure 11) does not include themes of countertransference, as it is exclusive to the trainee experience. In studying Figure 14 the main theme that emerged from the artwork in regards to countertransference was competence. Competence had the highest level of recurrence present in six of the eight pieces of data. Throughout the eight pieces of data the theme competence co-occurs with the three main themes of the study: connection (1 instance), loss of control (2 instances), and safety (2 instances). From this we understand that while countertransference co-occurs with connection, loss of control, and safety, the countertransference occurring with competence is much more prominent.

3B) What differences and similarities exist between the artwork that focuses on the refugee experience versus my experience as a trainee?

Analyzing each piece of artwork from both lenses A and B allowed for each piece of artwork to reflect both the refugee experience as well as the experience of the trainee. It is difficult to distinguish differences between the eight art pieces themselves as each reflection was highly influenced by the trainee's encounter with the refugee population, hence the bifocal art exploration. Looking at the data, it is more appropriate to distinguish the differences and similarities that exist between lenses A and B (Figure 13) than on the artwork itself. The differences and similarities between lenses A and B are thematically significant (Figure 14). Lens A (Figure 11) denotes that the refugee experience is influenced by displacement and survival, two themes exclusive to the refugee perspective. This differs from lens B (Figure 12), which shows the trainee experience is driven by countertransference and competence. This distinction explains how the shared meeting points between the two perspectives are different



experiences for the refugee and trainee who are each propelled by different purposes. The refugee is driven by survival and displacement while the trainee is driven by countertransference and competence. The meeting points between the two lenses are the shared themes: connection (Figure 15), loss of control (Figure 16), and safety (Figure 17).

### **Summary**

This research demonstrated how art-making can be useful to a trainee navigating in a cross-cultural context. Utilizing a bifocal approach allowed the trainee to further understand the refugee experience while identifying countertransference and emotional responses, which informed her role and identity as a trainee. Through the analysis of lenses A and B, three main themes emerged between the refugee and trainee experience: (a) connection (b) loss of control, and (c) safety. In addition to shared themes each perspective had themes exclusive to themselves. The refugee experience (lens A) revealed themes of displacement and survival, while the trainee experience (lens B) reflected themes of countertransference and competence. These influencers inform some of the ways in which the meeting points between the two perspectives would be experienced differently. This dynamic process of identifying meeting points and differences deepened the trainee's understanding of the refugee experience and herself.

## Discussion

This research explored an art therapy student trainee's response to working and interacting with refugees. The study focused on the personal response artwork created during the trainee's time in Jordan. Art-based research is the methodical use of the creative process, the actual art-making, as the chief way to explore and understand the experiences of both the researchers as well as the population involved in the studies (McNiff, 2008). This study provided the trainee with the means to deeply explore the artwork as a way to gain insight into the refugee experience while simultaneously inspecting the role and identity of the trainee. Art-making as a form of inquiry can serve as a medium to connect to the self, while simultaneously distancing the self in order to see something from a new perspective (Kapitan, 2010). According to Kapitan (2010), "art-based inquiry provokes, innovates, and breaks through emotional equilibrium or resistance, forcing us to consider new ways of seeing or doing things" (p. 165). Thus, the bifocal art approach led to the exploration of multiple perspectives to find meeting places as well as points of difference between the refugees and trainee (Figure 13).

Throughout the process of collecting data, artwork was created systematically on a daily basis in response to direct contact with refugees in Jordan. To begin the data analysis, all artwork was organized (40 pieces total) chronologically by date, as it was collected, between May 15 and 27, 2014. To include context, each piece of artwork was marked with site specific details, including any daily writings (journal entries) that accompanied the art-making process. For the purposes of this study, eight pieces were explored using Betensky's (1995) phenomenological approach of intentional looking and seeing. While the trainee originally intended to include all 40 pieces of data, time limitations associated with this study led her to ultimately utilize the first eight pieces of artwork. These eight pieces of artwork were then analyzed from the perception of

the refugee experience (lens A) and the perspective of the trainee (lens B). These two groupings helped to organize an exploration of the differing and similar themes between the refugee and trainee perspective (Figure 13).

While schematic thinking reflects that the refugee experience and trainee experience are very separate, there is limited research surrounding this subject. This research study indicates that there are meeting places between these two perspectives, which showcase points of empathy. This study's careful analysis and examination of the response artwork led to three shared emergent themes between the refugee experience and the trainee experience:

(a) connection, (b) loss of control, and (c) safety. In addition to the meeting points, each perspective had themes exclusive to their experience. As the research shows, the refugee experience (lens A) co-occurred with themes of survival and displacement (Figure 14). The themes of survival and displacement, exclusive to the refugee experience, vary greatly from the trainee experience (lens B). The trainee experience co-occurred with themes of countertransference and competence (Figure 14). This may indicate that while the themes of connection, loss of control, and safety are shared meeting points, they are experienced differently between the two perspectives since the two perspectives are driven by themes exclusive to their experience: survival and displacement for refugees and countertransference and competence for trainees.

The learning associated with the refugee experience (lens A) can help to inform many aspects of clinical work and the development of the therapist. As this study shows, the artwork denoted the refugees' connection to their homeland. This speaks to Eleftheriadou's (1999) writing that states if a refugee has relocated to a new country, there is often a strong attachment to the mother country as one's birthplace remains "special." This cultural nostalgia is a large part of the

refugee experience, and psychotherapy may be the only safe place to think about and express ties to the past (Eleftheriadou, 1999). This informs trainees and therapists to be culturally sensitive and empathetic in regards to displacement and attachment to one's homeland with the understanding that therapy may be one of the only places this can be addressed and processed. Figure 18 discusses negative space and landscape, two recurring themes in the artwork that derive from a place relevant to the refugees' experience of the home and journey (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The need to seek and experience home is a primary desire for refugees who have most likely experienced war, oppression, and poverty (Fitzpatrick, 2002). This awareness can help trainees and therapists shape the therapeutic approach and goals when working with refugees. The therapeutic goals can include helping obtain basic physical needs, serving as a witness, responding to unforeseen needs, as well as planting a seed for the individual to reflect upon later (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 1999).

The refugee experience of being involuntarily forced from one's homeland includes an inherent lack of control or choice, which became evident in the artwork (Figure 16). This can be seen in the image, which pictures colorful hills and unstable ladders. This piece speaks to the uncertainty of the refugees' fate in a new country. In addition to the precarious ground, the height of the ladders (making them impossible to climb) alludes to the refugees' difficulty in escaping as well as returning to one's homeland. This loss of stability, choice and ability speaks to the refugees' loss of control and the complex emotional and physical stressors associated with displacement. This understanding can help the developing therapist lead thoughtful interventions that recognize the complexity of the situation and utilize alternative ways of processing.

Research suggests that through the use of art and metaphors participants are permitted to release and transform the implicit experience into an explicit experience, restructuring the

emotional processing (Lacroix et al., 2007). Restructuring allows participants to find a sense of control over things that have worried them in the past (Fitzpatrick, 2002). This is particularly important for resettled refugees who are looking for the capacity to make something new (Fitzpatrick, 2002). It has been demonstrated that a survivor's adjustment to a strange and life threatening situation can be improved with the help of inner strength and a sense of purpose or mission (Leach, 1994). Thus, using art can begin the restructuring of emotional processing giving a sense of purpose or mission that can help to contain this sense of loss of control (Figure 16).

It is understood that trainees gain a broader understanding of the differences that clients bring to the therapeutic relationship through personal exposure to different cultures and values (Cattaneo, 1994). The analysis of the refugee experience (lens A) allowed the new trainee to cultivate a broader understanding of cross-cultural issues to apply both personally and professionally. This study shows that while the refugees and trainee are coming from drastically different places, there are shared meeting points between the two perspectives (Figure 13). It is understood through multiple interviews by Wadeson (2003), that art therapists see their art-making as beneficial in aiding empathy and clarifying confusion.

The learning associated with the trainee experience (lens B) can also help to inform many aspects of clinical work and the development of the therapist. According to Miller (2007), art-making allows the therapist the space to release strong feelings, which in turn becomes a tangible record of the therapist's reactions to the client. This record can aid the therapist in understanding complex countertransference issues (Miller, 2007). Schaverien (2005) identifies the art piece as an expression of the here and now countertransference. Thus, art is a profoundly personal way of knowing and exploring possible facets of an experience (Harter, 2007).

Countertransference, a highly significant theme to the trainee perspective (lens B), occurred in six out of eight pieces of artwork studied (Figure 14). This theme, exclusive to the trainee perspective, can be further understood through Figure 12, a collection of responses deriving from the trainee perspective. In this study, countertransference represents the total emotional response of the therapist to the refugee (Robbins, 1981). These reactions, triggered by transference, client characteristics, or numerous other aspects of the therapeutic situation, can be conscious or unconscious (Fauth, 2006). This study indicates that the trainee's drive for connection is influenced by countertransference and competency (Figure 14). This can be further examined in the written reflection of Figure 15. Within Figure 15, Figure 3 provides a good example of the art being utilized by the trainee as a means to connect to the refugee. Although the piece was based on a refugee who would never see the artwork, the art became a place to let the refugee know she was loved and witnessed. This indicates the trainee's desire to connect to the refugee, reinforcing that the refugee was attended to and understood.

It is essential for the therapist to be aware of these reactions, to examine them, and use them in service of the work rather than allowing them to impede on treatment (Diemer et al., 1991). It is understood that therapists are able to gain more insight into their clients' stories through exploring their own emotional reactions to them (Eleftheriadou, 1999). Through a deep personal examination, developing therapists can nurture an understanding of how others may see the world, in turn broadening their worldview (Cherry, 2002).

As the research shows, the trainee's experience of connection also involved feelings of inadequacy due to language barriers, which seemingly affected the trainee's ability to connect on the deep level she desired (Figure 16). This speaks to the fact that while art may serve in communication to overcome language barriers, interpreters are necessary if one cannot speak a

client's language (Baker, 2006). Baker (2006) discusses the difficulty in reaching across refugee populations whose culture and language are different from the majority, reinforcing that it can make a significant difference in providing a sense of safety and understanding.

In addition to art being an alternative means of communication to surpass language barriers, this research suggests that art-making is highly beneficial in aiding the trainee's understanding and ability to navigate cross-cultural encounters. The study shows that the creative art-making process offers an alternative mode of exploration that provides the trainee space to confront and process multiple perspectives including that of both the refugee and developing trainee. This can be seen in Figure 4, which encapsulates an emotional response from the trainee representing the loss of control felt by the refugees in a new environment with unfamiliar people. As evidenced by the artwork (Figure 4), the trainee internalized the intense laughter experienced on Day 1 and turned to the art-making as a place to organize and contain the chaotic feeling of loss of control. Thus, Figure 4 indicates the trainee's pursuit to use art-making to create order and structure out of a very uncomfortable atmosphere accompanied with the feeling of loss of control. This example speaks to the exchange that occurs on conscious and unconscious levels yielding an ongoing transformation of thoughts, feelings, and actions between the client and therapist, who both serve as active participants (Dosamantes, 1992). An awareness of this potential powerful exchange is essential to a trainee conducting thoughtful sessions and encounters.

The research indicates that refugees and trainees both experience a feeling of lack of safety and security due to being in an unfamiliar environment that is new and out of their comfort zone (Figure 17). For the refugees, displaced families are challenged with rebuilding their lives in a new culture (Birman et al., 2008). During this period, nearly all refugees,

regardless of their cultural backgrounds, encounter similar kinds of difficulties and tend to exhibit unresolved grief, intergenerational conflict, and numerous psychological and behavioral issues (Fitzpatrick, 2002). While there is limited research in the use of psychodynamics with refugees, from the resources available we understand that therapists report being affected by the complicated dynamics involved in working with various refugee populations (Eleftheriadou, 1999). In this study, the trainee's feeling of insecurity may be enhanced by the ever-changing environment associated with refugees, language barriers, the refugees' traumatic content, and cultural differences.

As discussed in the study questions, this research suggests that art-making is highly beneficial in aiding the trainee's understanding and ability to navigate cross-cultural encounters. The study shows that the creative art-making process offers an alternative mode of exploration that provides the trainee space to confront and process multiple perspectives including that of both the refugee and the developing trainee. The use of the bifocal exploration led the researcher to consider multiple perspectives to draw meaning from the similarities and differences that emerged. In addition to this being significant to the researcher, this learning is applicable to other trainees, particularly those working with refugees. This research is also informative for university study abroad programs that promote student cross-cultural encounters. While it appears that graduate art therapy programs, their prospective universities, and students find these experiences to be valuable, there appears to be a lack of information surrounding these learning opportunities. This study may influence trainee involvements and future clinical approaches.

This study, while being a meaningful personal exploration, has its own limitations and challenges. As a single subject, the artwork and data collected is unique to the researcher and not generalizable. In attempts to expand beyond the researcher's personal experience, the study was



extended, through analysis and discussion, to make meaningful connections to art therapy literature as well as general literature. To verify these research findings it would be pertinent to extend this research to other trainees working with refugees in both cross-cultural contexts overseas as well as stateside. Additionally, research amongst refugees comparing or contrasting the researcher art to the refugees' art would help to further validate, credit, or discredit these research findings. Another constraint associated with this study was the time limitation driven by the university course itinerary. The data collected between May 15 and 27, 2014 yielded 40 total pieces of artwork. While I originally intended to include all 40 pieces of data, time limitations associated with this study led me to ultimately focus on the first eight pieces of artwork. Future studies could involve the exploration and analysis of the remaining data (Figure 9) to consider additional emergent themes. These themes could include transitions (before and after, coming and going, hello and goodbye), compound trauma, gender issues, basic needs, human figures including faces, and entrapment (Figure 9). Furthermore, future studies could consider how this dynamic process would change as therapy and time progress in a longer-term study where the researcher spends more time onsite. Moreover, future research can further examine how this dynamic process of identifying meeting places and differences can be used to foster the treatment of refugees.

The bifocal approach provided a deeply personal exploration that was engaging throughout each step of the study. By placing art at the center of the analysis (Figure 10), the researcher was able to find inspiration in both the conscious and the unconscious. The emergent themes from this art exploration provided the researcher with new material to consider and draw upon. This dynamic approach gave the researcher new insight into how artwork can illuminate hidden meanings and draw connections not apparent on the surface (Figure 18). By allowing the

exploration of multiple perspectives, the researcher was then able to have a more deeply informed understanding of the refugee experience as well as a more informed identity in the role of a new trainee.

## **Conclusions**

This research used a bifocal art-based exploration to examine the personal responses of a trainee art therapist working with displaced refugees in Jordan. The arts-based data were examined to provide a deeper understanding of the refugee experience while simultaneously exploring the role and identity of the trainee. Data analyzed through Betensky's (1995) phenomenological approach was used to inform the exploration of both the refugee perspective as well as the trainee perspective. Seven prominent themes emerged from the refugee and trainee experiences: displacement, survival, connection, loss of control, safety, competence, and countertransference. Between both refugee and trainee there are three main shared themes: (a) connection, (b) loss of control, and (c) safety. These three emergent themes highlight shared meeting points that signify empathy. While these three themes were evident in both perspectives, the refugee and trainee appear to experience these themes in very different ways. The analysis of the refugee experience (lens A) shows that the refugee is driven by either displacement or survival (themes exclusive to the refugee) while the trainee (lens B) is driven by competence or countertransference (themes exclusive to the trainee). Literature was explored that involved creative arts therapies conducted with refugees to consider the benefits, challenges, and themes that emerged. The comprehensive literature review also discussed countertransference and cross-cultural concerns related to psychotherapeutic work with refugees while considering the benefits of art-making.

The arts-based results of this research strive to provide a better understanding of the ways art-making can help trainees navigate through cross-cultural encounters. The research highlights meeting points and differences between the trainee and refugees to provide a deeper understanding of the refugee experience as experienced by the trainee. There is currently a

significant lack of literature that focuses on the experience of therapists working with refugees. Hence, this inquiry attempts to fill in some of the gaps by providing insight into the reflective art-making process and its potential to help navigate and inform a trainee's response to working with refugees. This inquiry is based on the belief that it is important for a new trainee to cultivate a broader understanding of cross-cultural issues for both personal and professional applications.

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