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## A Heuristic Exploration of White Lesbian Identity and Cultural Humility Through Art Therapy

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Running head: CULTURAL HUMILITY AND ART THERAPY

A HEURISTIC EXPLORATION OF WHITE LESBIAN IDENTITY AND CULTURAL  
HUMILITY THROUGH ART THERAPY

by

Jennifer Phelps

A research paper presented to the

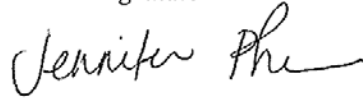
FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY  
LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

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

May 7, 2019

**Signature Page**

Author's Signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jennifer Phelps".

Jennifer Phelps, MA Candidate, Art Therapy and MFT Trainee

Research Advisor's Signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joyce Yip Green".

Joyce Yip Green, Ph.D, LMFT, ATR-BC

**Abstract**

In this heuristic exploration, data was collected through in vivo reflections using the cultural humility model. The researcher used art making, journaling, and a process of indwelling to collect data exploring the relationship between multiple identities and cultural humility. Through this exploration, four main themes emerged. These themes were explored in a final creative synthesis art process. This research serves as a starting point for developing a culturally humble stance as an art therapy trainee. In addition, this exploration highlights the way that art making can enhance the heuristic research experience by deepening the reflection and pulling out themes not readily seen.

**Disclaimer**

This research reflects the unique experience of the researcher exploring identity, art therapy and cultural humility. This research does not reflect the views of Loyola Marymount University, nor the Department of Marital and Family Therapy.

**Dedication**

I dedicate this research to all those still finding their way.

**Acknowledgements**

Thank you to Sarah, to whom I owe everything.

Thank you to Lucy and Abby - you are my stars.

Thank you to everyone at LMU who guided me, held me, and otherwise allowed me to grow.

I have cried so many tears, my heart is full.

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## Introduction

### The Study Topic

In this project, I explore the relationship between art therapy and developing cultural humility. Using a heuristic approach, based on the six phases outlined by Moustakas (1990), I use art making and personal reflection to explore my own identity as a white, lesbian identifying, cisgender female; within the cultural humility model (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

### Significance of the Study

Under the Trump Administration, racism, religious discrimination, misogyny, xenophobia, and homophobia have been increasingly visible; through demonstrations, verbal attacks, discriminatory policies and acts of violence (Le Tourneau, 2019). People with racist beliefs seem to be emboldened by the inflammatory language of the President. I believe it is more important than ever for people, especially white people, to examine their privilege and use that knowledge to help dismantle white supremacy. In light of the recent decision (AATA, 2017) by the American Art Therapy Association to endorse second lady Karen Pence, I feel a strong desire to contribute to the field of Art Therapy research with work that explores art therapy as a means to *enhance* cultural humility. This research will add to the growing literature on the topic of white identity within cultural humility, while adding on the layer of my less privileged identity as a lesbian. Future graduate students in art therapy and other fields may be able to use my research to help inform their own identity formation and exploration of cultural humility.

This research will show that making art is a valuable way to understand the self and to identify and explore privilege and bias. In addition, I am creating a foundation for an identity as an art therapist who will become a lifelong learner within the cultural humility model.

### **Background of the Study Topic**

Cultural competence was developed in the 1980's in the United States (Danso, 2016; Nadan, 2017) as a way of better providing services to an increasingly multicultural population (Blunt, 2007). An emphasis in cultural competence was established for educators, clinicians and professional organizations related to social work (Blunt, 2007). Cultural competence has been defined by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2015) as:

The process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, spiritual traditions, immigration status, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities. (p. 13)

There is much debate about the definition of cultural competence (Nadan, 2017; Danso, 2016). Three components of cultural competence that are often cited are: cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (Chiu, Lonner, Matsumoto & Ward, 2013; Danso, 2016). Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) suggest that cultural awareness, knowledge and skills were not sufficient in addressing the power imbalances between different cultures. Furthermore, Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) argue that successfully working with diverse populations must include a lifelong process of self-reflection, self-critique, and continuous learning. They proposed a new concept called: cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

With a growing awareness of cultural competence and cultural humility within graduate programs, counseling trainees are increasingly exploring these concepts in their education. White identifying students may be fully engaging in learning about privilege and institutionalized racism for the first time. White European Americans often lack the understanding of how being white impacts their lives (Berg & Simon, 2013) since their whiteness gives them more privilege in American society. Often, white people are socialized to think of racism as isolated behaviors,

instead of an overarching system perpetuated by white supremacy (Berg & Simon, 2013). Graduate students identifying as White have done research exploring their privilege and their relationship to cultural humility (Beagle, 2017; Ordway, 2018; Har-Gil, 2010). Davis (2014) examines the idea that individuals can be members of both oppressive and oppressed groups. According to Davis (2014), there is a significant gap in the literature concerning white lesbian counseling trainees and cultural humility. How can raising awareness of both privileged and oppressed identities lead to cultural humility?

## Literature Review

### Introduction

This heuristic arts-based research project explores my identity, as a white lesbian graduate student in art therapy; through the cultural humility model. In this review, I explore the concept of cultural humility, arts-based research, and identity formation in preparation for my research. I have split the identity formation section into three subcategories, addressing aspects of my identity, as well as addressing the need for self-care during this process.

### Cultural Humility

Cultural Humility emerged from the work of Tervalon & Murray-Garcia (1998) in looking at the power dynamics and biases at the Children's Hospital of Oakland in the later part of the 1990's. The authors presented cultural humility as a process, rather than a goal of mastery (1998). Within the cultural humility model, patients would be better cared for when physicians respected them as the experts in their own story, understood their cultural healthcare practices and beliefs, and were flexible and humble in their approach to working with patients (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Furthermore, the cultural humility model was meant as an ongoing engagement between providers, patients, institutions, and their surrounding communities (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Perhaps most importantly, cultural humility incorporates *humbly* engaging in a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Yeager & Bauer-Wu (2013) describe cultural humility as a process of reflection, where the idea that "the problem is due to the difference" (p.252) is abandoned. The goal of the process of cultural humility, according to Yeager & Bauer-Wu, is to improve the way vulnerable groups are treated and researched (2013). Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington & Utsey (2013) define cultural

humility as “an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused, characterized by respect and lack of superiority toward an individual’s cultural background and experience” (p. 353).

### **Cultural Humility vs. Cultural Competence**

Cultural humility is a lifelong process of self-reflection. It includes learning about and respecting cultures different from our own, acting to upset societal power imbalances and engaging in a process of deep self-examination in order to address ways in which privileged and oppressed identities have affected our lives and the lives of those around us (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Hook et al., 2013; Davis, 2014).

Cultural competence is defined by the National Association of Social Workers as the process by which individuals and systems “respond respectfully” (p. 13) to people of diverse backgrounds and identities (NASF, 2015). Cultural competence has been said to consist of three main components: awareness, knowledge, and skills (Danso, 2016). Blunt (2007) explains that cultural competence values diversity, self-reflection and development of cultural knowledge, as well as “providing... alternatives to educational service models to satisfy the learning obligations of minority students” (p.99).

Both *cultural competence* and *cultural humility* are used throughout the literature. Danso (2016) argues that the term cultural humility has only “semantic appeal” over the previously embraced concept of cultural competence, and that cultural humility lacks conceptual clarity. Danso also asserts that the three elements of cultural competence, including cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills are, in fact, essential to the practice of cultural humility.

According to Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998), cultural humility is more appropriate than cultural competence for health care providers since there is a focus on a lifelong commitment to learning, as opposed to a sense of comprehensive knowledge that may be inferred from cultural

competence. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) suggest that following the cultural humility model means seeing the patient (or client) as the expert in their own story and eliminates the sense that the health care provider should (or could) be an expert in the beliefs of every cultural group. In a series of four studies, Hook, et al. (2013) showed that the perception by the client of the level of cultural humility of the provider is positively correlated with a stronger working alliance and perception of improvement in therapy. This research by Hook et al. (2013), highlights the importance of cultural humility in establishing a strong therapeutic relationship.

According to Davis (2014), both privileged and oppressed identities must be included when exploring identity and enhancing awareness of assumptions, values, and biases. In my research, I chose to use the cultural humility model, as outlined by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998). The cultural humility model is appropriate for this study, due to the self-reflective nature of creating art as a means of gaining awareness. In addition, using a heuristic method will be a way for me to engage in a kind of dialogue within myself regarding my findings. As a graduate student and art therapy trainee, I am aware that cultural humility is not something I can ever fully achieve. It is something I must continuously work towards throughout my life, as a learner.

### **Art Making as Research**

In this research, I use art making as a way of knowing. I create art which I then view through an art therapy lens to help me understand my findings. Allen (1998) suggests that exploring imagination and memory through art making can lead to a greater understanding of self (1998). Self-reflection through art making can be part of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). Har-Gil (2010) states, “Given the highly personal self-examination that must take place when exploring one's cultural values and biases, heuristic research seems well suited.” (p. 19).

In arts-based research, one must trust in the creative process and be willing to engage with the images that result from this process (McNiff, 1998). Jackson (2018) posits that self-examination of lived experience is a “tacit way of knowing, described as wisdom” (p. 18). I utilize art making throughout this research to inform and illuminate my results.

According to Kapitan (2010), those attempting heuristic research should make sure to: “clarify the purpose...carefully consider the choice of topic, ... (and). create a detailed, sound design” in order “to avoid getting caught in a ‘heuristic swamp’ of endless self-reference” (p.196). Kapitan states that one of the purposes of arts-based research is to “provoke, challenge, and illuminate knowledge, rather than to confirm or consolidate it” (p.214). Arts based research may include the steps involved in creating an artwork (Hevey, 2000 as cited in Kapitan, 2010) – including “initial awareness, . . . intentional re-creation, ... discriminating critique, ... refinement and transformation” (p.219-220), and “re-contextualization through public viewing” (p. 236). Allen (1995) states that it is important to understand our intention when sharing our art work and to be able to let go of desired outcomes in order to feel at peace with sharing an image. Allen states that the “energy within us is alive and playful; it will constantly form and fall apart and re-form into new configurations, new imagery” (p. 192).

McNiff (1998) suggests that in arts-based research, if we pay close attention to the images and the creative process - this will lead to new methods of understanding. Art therapy techniques are well suited for exploring identity (Pelton-Sweet, L.M. & Sherry, A., 2008).

### **White Female Identity: Acknowledging privilege and learning about racism**

The literature includes several explorations in cultural humility by researchers (mostly graduate students) who identify as white females (Ordway, 2018; Beagle, 2017; Har-Gil, 2010). White people in the United States often believe that “acknowledging someone’s race is inherently



racist” (Berg & Simon, 2013, p. 8). White people often do not understand the impact that being white has on their lives (Berg & Simon, 2013).

The literature also focuses on the difficult aspects of learning about white privilege. Recognizing your privilege can be a painful, anxiety provoking experience (Mills & Murray, 2017) that can have lasting effects on your perception of your own identity as well as your relationships with others (Beagle, 2017).

According to Berg & Simon (2013), the “process of self-assessment, acceptance of personal responsibility, and commitment to change” (p. 9) is often a painful one. In a study of 145 students, Mills and Murray (2017) found that students who had high scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) also reported higher anxiety. Mills and Murray (2017) report that exploring one’s racial identity can be a time of uncertainty, which can lead to symptoms of anxiety.

Beagle (2017) explores the ways in which learning about racism affects relationships with people who hold “a different level of understanding of racism” (p. 6) and may not yet acknowledge their privilege. Beagle (2017) relates how she began to “shut (herself) off from the love and care (friends and family) tried to convey to (her)” when she realized they “weren’t invested in fighting against racism” (p.4) The idea of cultural humility is to understand and respect people in other cultural groups who are different from us, but what do we do when people within our same cultural groups don’t understand or even reject these concepts? White people in the *pro-minority and antiracism stage* (identifying with non-dominant groups and resisting racism) are “questioned or misunderstood by both the ingroup (White) and the outgroup (non-dominant group)” (Sabnani, Ponterotto, and Borodovsky, as cited in Jun, 2010, p. 295). Beagle reports that through her acceptance of her white privilege, she was able to develop greater empathy for other white individuals, regardless of their own acceptance of privilege or knowledge of racism (Beagle, 2017).

Jun (2010) outlines Sue et. al's (1998) model of developing white racial identity. The five stages include: *conformity*, *dissonance*, *resistance and immersion*, *introspection*, and *integrative awareness* (Sue et al. as cited in Jun, 2010). In the *conformity* stage, people "deny white privilege and the existence of racism" (Jun, 2010. p. 296). In the *dissonance* stage, people "experience internal conflict between their old beliefs and their new knowledge about the existence of racism" (Jun, 2010, p. 296). In the *resistance and immersion* stage, people begin to understand white privilege and their own role in perpetuating racism, but they "feel guilty about having been misinformed about the multicultural history of America" (Jun, 2010, p. 296) and at times reject their own white identity (Sue et al. as cited in Jun, 2010). In the *introspection* stage, individuals redefine whiteness to include systematic oppression, white privilege and racism. They then begin to search for deeper, personal meaning about being white (Sue et al. as cited in Jun, 2010). Finally, in the *integrative awareness* stage people "understand themselves as racial and cultural beings" (Jun, 2010, p. 297), they value themselves, while working to dismantle oppression (Sue et al., as cited in Jun, 2010).

Sabnani et al. (1991) present a model of white racial identity with five stages including the *pre-exposure or pre-contact* stage, the *conflict* stage, the *prominority and antiracism* stage, the *retreat into white culture* stage, and the *redefinition and integration* stage (as cited in Jun, 2010). In the pre-exposure or pre-contact stage, white people have no awareness of their racial identity or privilege (Sabnani et al., as cited in Jun, 2010). In this stage, individuals "accept stereotypes about nondominant groups" (Jun, 2010, p.295) and identify with whiteness (Sabnani et al., as cited in Jun, 2010). In the *conflict* stage, white individuals begin to feel confusion, guilt, anxiety and depression as they learn about nondominant groups how they are a part of a group that has oppressed people of color (Sabnani et al., as cited in Jun, 2010). In this model, individuals resolve their feelings from the

conflict stage in one of two ways; either they begin to identify with nondominant groups and resist racism and enter the *prominority and antiracism stage* or they react with defensiveness about white culture and enter into the *retreat into white culture stage* (Sabnani et al., as cited in Jun, 2010). The final stage in this model is the *redefinition and integration stage* in which individuals redefine their white identity to include the understanding that their group has contributed to the oppression of people of color. In this stage, individuals work against racism and eventually work against all oppression. (Sabnani et al., as cited in Jun, 2010). Both Sue et al. (1998) and Sabnani et al. (1991), conclude that a greater awareness of racial inequality leads to a broader understanding of oppression across all groups and identities (as cited in Jun, 2010).

### **Lesbian Identity: Acknowledging privilege and learning about racism**

According to Davis (2014); “There is a significant gap in the literature concerning how a white, lesbian counseling trainee can enhance her multicultural counseling competencies by raising her awareness of her privileged and oppressed identities” (p.193). Berg and Simon (2013) explored white identity development with seven female university students who were “heterogeneous” in their sexual orientation (p. 25) but the groups were focused primarily on white privilege and did not explore their other identities. Furthermore, Satterberg (2017) found that a gap remains in current art therapy research related to a deeper understanding of sexual identity formation through the lived experience and art-making process of lesbian-identified women.

In her arts-based research on lesbian identity, Satterberg (2018) found three emergent themes including “positive lesbian identity imagery,.. stagnant memory versus movement in memory,.. and representational imagery versus abstract form” (p. 126-127). Satterberg (2018) states that “these results suggest the potential of identity development as being a process of learning and personal feedback” (p. 95). Satterberg (2018) found that “art-making was beneficial when

reflecting on the lived experience” of sexual identity formation as it is “not a linear process, but rather fluid and not predictive” (p. 133).

Lesbians may face discrimination in the workplace or school and even physical harm (Davis, 2014) Davis states that “the lesbian counseling trainee may be better positioned to acknowledge her privilege and commit to a non-racist identity as compared to white counseling trainees who do not hold other oppressed identities” (Davis, 2014, p. 196). Similarly, Jun (2010) states that “holistic thinking... needs to be implemented to understand the multiple identities of a person within their sociocultural context” (p. 161).

The work of identity exploration in developing cultural humility is lifelong and ever changing. We must be able to examine our own experience of culture in order to better understand others (Yeager and Bauer-Wu, 2013). To add complication, culture is dynamic and changes over time and location (Yeager and Bauer-Wu, 2013)

In doing the work of cultural humility, we must also reflect on our various identities. In this study, I am choosing to focus on my white lesbian identities. These two identities have alternately given me privilege and pain at various times in my life. Similarly, Jun (2010) states that “I have had different emotions with different identities, as I have experienced lots of pain from discrimination in relation to some identities and no pain in relation to others” (p.317).

We may choose to express or accept different identities at different times, across spaces and relationships. We may belong to many different cultures, and move between them, even throughout the same day (Yeager and Bauer-Wu, 2013) In doing the work of cultural humility, we must be mindful that as we move through life, identity is an ever-shifting experience, not something to be ‘answered’ in a finite manner. If I were to complete this study at a different point in my life, or in a different social or cultural context, the work might look very different.

Jun (2010) summarizes the six stages of Cass's (1984) model of Homosexual Identity Formation as such: *identity confusion*, *identity comparison*, *identity tolerance*, *identity acceptance*, *identity pride*, and *identity synthesis*. Individuals in the *identity confusion* stage feel "inner turmoil due the conflict between societal values on homosexuality and their feelings towards same sex persons" (Jun, 2010, p. 297). The next stage is the *identity comparison* stage; here individuals are aware of their homosexual identity, "while still experiencing social alienation" (Jun, 2010, p. 297). Next, people enter the *identity tolerance* stage; "they tolerate their sexual orientation, but do not accept it" Jun, 2010, p. 297). *Identity acceptance* is next, in which the individual accepts their homosexuality and seeks out other gay and lesbian individuals (Cass, as cited in Jun, 2010). In the *identity pride* stage, individuals are proud of their identity and "reject heterosexual values" (Jun, 2010, p. 297). Finally, in the *identity synthesis* stage, individuals are able to integrate their sexual orientation into their personal identity. They are able to accept and interact with others regardless of sexual orientation. (Cass, 1984, as cited by Jun 2010). In the identity synthesis stage:

A homosexual identity is no longer seen as overwhelmingly the identity by which an individual can be characterized. Individuals come to see themselves as people having many sides to their character, only *one* part of which is related to homosexuality (Cass, 1984, p.152)

In looking at identity formation, it is important to acknowledge all of our various identities. In this research, I am focusing on two aspects of my identity - white and lesbian and exploring how those relate to cultural humility in art therapy. However, it is important to realize that these are not the only identities I carry.

### **Self-Care: Acknowledging privilege and learning about racism**

As I embark on this exploration, I must remember to practice self-care. Yeager & Bauer-Wu recommend mindfulness as a way to help maintain a "sense of clarity and kindness" towards marginalized populations you may be studying (p. 255). Allen (1995) discusses several steps

toward setting the stage for artistic exploration, including setting space, time and intention for your work (p.15). She calls setting the intention the “spiritual aspect of art making” (Allen, 1995, p.16).

When I enter my art space, I try to have the clearest intention possible to accept whatever comes to me. I trust that the images I need, the knowledge I need, exists within me and that I can access it through this process...To signal my intention, I sometimes light a candle.... My overall intention is to come to know the source of wisdom and guidance within me (Allen, 1995, p.16)

I attempt to be mindful of these techniques as I move through this exploration.

### **Conclusion**

Cultural humility and identity formation are connected. One must examine one’s identity in order to understand oneself as a “racial and cultural being” (Jun, 2010, p. 297). The literature does not always agree on the name of the concept (*cultural competence*, *cultural humility*, *multicultural competence*) but the idea that practitioners must be educated about cultures different from their own is largely agreed upon.

Being lesbian and white, offers me a unique perspective moving into this research. I link these two aspects of my identity into my exploration of how to further understand my biases and other areas for growth. Recently, I have experienced a period of painful personal growth. I want to make sure to practice self-care and compassion during this time, so that I may not feel fearful or angry of the data I collect. I aim to work towards identity synthesis (Sue et. al, 1998 cited by Jun, 2010) and integrative awareness (Cass, 1984). I look forward to what the art will tell me.

### Research Approach

I am using the Heuristic Research method as outlined by Moustakas (1990) as well as art making as “a way of knowing” as described by Allen (1995, p. 3). I am hopeful that my experiences in creating and reflecting on the art will result in “wisdom”, as stated by Jackson (2018, p. 18). My research approach is also inspired by the work of Har-Gil (2010) who made art in response to her sessions with culturally diverse clients which led her to a deeper understanding of herself and her relationship with others.

Allen (1995) details her life’s journey of using art making as a means of self-reflection. As she encounters different students, clients, and life situations, she creates art as a way to more fully understand her experiences. She makes art when a student irritates her (Allen, 1995, p. 171-172). She creates art inspired by her dreams (Allen, 1995, p. 186-189). Allen states that “attention transforms” (p. 197) and allows you to honor the image and “reclaim” what it represents. I want to use art making to guide my process, and to “know” (Allen, 1995) more “wisdom” (Jackson, 2018).

According to Har-Gil (2010), art therapy is a less threatening way to allow our unconscious biases to be seen and integrated into our consciousness (p. 3). By using art making in a heuristic research model, I hope to allow my biases and assumptions to present themselves more readily.

In her research, Jackson (2018) describes different ways of knowing – such as a “western scientific way of knowing... an Afrocentric way of knowing” (p. 19-20), and finding “truth” (p.24) through art. Jackson links *wisdom* to the lived experience of Black Women (2018). In my research, the art work that I create will be a representation of my own truth and wisdom, according to my experience. Art can incorporate all ways of knowing. It is a representation of the known, the

unknown, and what is yet to be known. Therefore, art becomes a holistic way of defining reality.  
(Jackson, 2018, p.25)

In my work, I use art making as a way to find my own inner truth in terms of myself reflection and increasing cultural humility. The art work I create expresses my lived experience in this heuristic journey. Art will help illuminate areas I can explore further. As previously stated, I am using art making to better understand my own identity through the cultural humility model, as a white lesbian art therapist. My research will be structured around the heuristic method, as outlined by Moustakas (1990). Methods of heuristic research are open ended (Moustakas, 1990, p. 43) but may be organized into six phases: *Initial Engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication, and Creative Synthesis* (Moustakas, 2010).

In order to deeply reflect on and explore my own identity and my own wisdom of life experience, I have decided to use a heuristic study method. By engaging in art making and journaling as my “ways of knowing” (Allen, 1996), I will be able to freely express myself in a manner that feels comfortable and familiar to me. Using this familiar language, I hope to explore the privileged and less privileged aspects of my identity to better understand my other growing identity as a culturally humble art therapy trainee.



## Methods

### Definition of Terms

**Art:** the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects. (Merriam –Webster.com)

**Bias:** an inclination of temperament or outlook, *especially*: a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment: prejudice. (Merriam –Webster.com)

**Cultural Humility:** “incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique, to redressing the power imbalances in the patient-physician dynamic, and to developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic clinical and advocacy partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations.” (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p.1)

**Cultural Competence:** “the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, spiritual traditions, immigration status, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each” (NASW, 2015)

**Cultural Stretch:** An experiential activity in which one seeks to “stretch” their comfort zones. (Bodlovic & Jackson, 2018, pg. 3)

**Explicit Knowing:** A way of knowing which “can be transmitted in formal systematic language” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, as cited by Kenny, G., 2010, p. 7-8)

**In Situ:** In the natural or original position or place (Merriam-Webster.com)

**Intuition:** “The bridge between the explicit and the tacit...the realm of the in between” (Moustakas, 1990).

**Oppression:** something that oppresses, *especially* in being an unjust or excessive exercise of power. (Merriam –Webster.com)

**Lesbian:** a woman who is a homosexual. (Merriam –Webster.com)

**LGBTQIAP+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Polyamorous and more (operational definition).

**Privilege:** a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor. (Merriam – Webster.com)

**Tacit knowing:** “a principle of heuristic research that acknowledges a person’s knowledge and understanding obtained through an inner search for meaning” (Kapitan, 2010, p. 355).

**White Privilege:** “a set of unearned advantages granted to whites that manifest through institutional power” (Pinterits, Poteat, & Spainerman, 2009, as cited by Davis, 2014, p.194)

### **Design of Study**

I decided to use self-reflection and art making to engage in this research on identity formation and cultural humility. Since cultural humility emphasizes a lifelong self-reflection and self-critique (Tervalon & Murray Garcia, 1998), a research method which employed these methods seemed very appropriate. I chose to use the six phases of the heuristic method as outlined by Moustakas (1990) to guide my self reflection. In addition, I chose to use the cultural stretch method, outlined by Bodlovic and Jackson (2018) to experience self-reflection *in situ* during visits to various locations.

Before my first cultural stretch visit, I took two of the Harvard Implicit Bias tests. The results stated that had a “moderate automatic association for American with White American and Foreign with Native American”. (“Project Implicit”, n.d. test completed on 1/22/19) and a “moderate preference for Gay people over Straight people” (“Project Implicit”, n.d. test completed on 1/22/19). I took these tests to provide insight into my biases, assumptions, and beliefs before collecting data.

## **Gathering of Data**

I envisioned this study as a 16-week journey of making art, journaling, and moving through the six phases of heuristic research in order. As I embarked on my exploration, I found that my plan shifted, I found my question, and my journey took an unexpected turn. In the end I made meaningful connections and engaged in a process of art making which enhanced my sense of cultural humility, including taking a look at my biases, assumptions and beliefs in relation to my own white lesbian identity. In the following sections, I elaborate on my experience as I move through the steps of the heuristic research process.

## **Initial engagement and Incubation**

Throughout my time as a graduate student in art therapy at LMU, I have engaged in self-reflection about privilege and cultural humility. In the fall of 2018, I deepened that exploration in culture class through “cultural stretches” (Bodlovic & Jackson, 2018) reflections, and readings that explored privilege across identities, such as SES, sexuality, gender identity, race, religion and more. For my research project, I decided to further this work by engaging in a self-exploration of cultural humility through art therapy.

One week after the end of the fall 2018 semester, I created my first art piece and journal entry while thinking about my identity as a white lesbian cisgender woman and my relationship to cultural humility. In looking at the collage art I made (Figure 1), I felt a bit lost. None of the collage images felt *right*. I wasn’t sure what I was trying to say. I wasn’t sure what I was feeling. I created collage images of black women’s faces with white women’s limbs. I created a collage piece that felt disjointed and superficial. I felt discouraged. I realized that in my eagerness to begin the process, I had not yet taken the time to thoughtfully ask where I was headed and why.

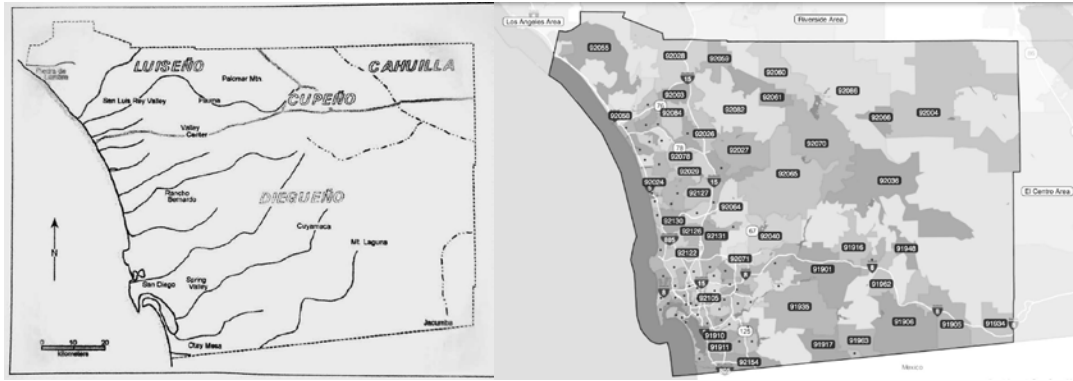


**Development of research question**

In January 2019, I began to think about my cultural identity in terms of my native city - San Diego. I realized that in looking at my own identity, I wanted to look at the history of my place of birth and growth thus far.

I began by making a list of neighborhoods in San Diego. I then researched San Diego zip codes and printed a 2018 map of San Diego County, showing all the current zip codes. As I contemplated those lines and boundaries, I began to think about the people who lived on this land before me. Juan Rodriguez (Juan Cabrillo) a Portuguese explorer, landed a ship at present-day Point Loma (in San Diego) in 1542 and claimed the territory for Spain ("Chronology of the Indigenous Peoples of San Diego County", n.d.). According to the San Diego History Center, "The credit for the discovery of California belongs rightfully to Cabrillo" ("Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo," n.d.). However, at the time Cabrillo arrived in Point Loma in September of 1542, the population of the San Diego area was estimated at 20,000 people, including the Luiseño, Cahuilla, Cupeño, Kumeyaay, and Northern Diegueño people. ("Timeline of San Diego History," n.d.)

I found a map of what is now San Diego showing locations of indigenous peoples in prehistoric hunter-gatherer communities (Laylander, 1997). I compared that to the map of San Diego county with the current zip codes ("Race and Ethnicity in San Diego", n.d). I began to think about the descendants of those indigenous people.



*Figure 2: Map of San Diego County with ethnographic boundaries of Native American peoples in prehistoric times (Laylander, 1997) & Map of San Diego County with Zip Codes as of 2018 (“Race and Ethnicity in San Diego”, n.d.)*

I continued considering my research question and decided that I would use the cultural stretch model (Bodlovick & Jackson, 2018) as part of my methodology. I researched the demographics of San Diego County. I identified the five zip codes in San Diego County with the smallest percentage of Caucasian people (Figure 3). I decided to start there.

Name of Neighborhood	Zip Code	Percentage of population that is white
Pala	92054	6.4%
National City	91950	9.9%
Chula Vista	92173	18.7%
La Preza	91977	24.9%
Imperial Beach	91932	32.5%

*Figure 3: Demographics of San Diego*  
Source: Race and Ethnicity in San Diego, 2018

On January 22, a photograph of a young white male high school student facing a Native American male elder and veteran went viral (Figure 4). When I saw this picture on social media, I

felt sad and ashamed as I reflected on the young white man who, in my mind, was the embodiment of privilege, smiling at a Native American man, while supporting a president who supports white supremacists, and marching against abortion rights for women. As I looked at it further, feeling my discomfort and wanting nothing more than to distance myself from this smirking individual - I wondered... *What is my part in this? Where am I in this picture? How have I contributed to white supremacy in the United States?* I began to think that any exploration of race and my identity in San Diego needed to start with the indigenous people who lived here long before my European descendants arrived and began to build Missions and take land and build a legacy of deception and oppression lasting until today.



*Figure 4: "Where Am I in this Photo?" - J.Phelps*

Photo Credit: Video still from anonymous twitter post by @2020Fight, Retrieved from CNN.com. Video taken from Indigenous People's March in Washington, D.C. January 18, 2019

Through this process of self-reflection, I discovered the heart of my research. My research question became: *How can art be used to foster a culturally humble identity as an art therapist?*

### **Immersion / Data Collection**

Now that I clarified my research question, I was ready to begin the *immersion* phase of my research. My *intuition* (Moustakas, 1990) to further educate myself about the Native American people of San Diego led me to visit Pala for my first *in vivo* self-reflective experience. After that, I visited San Ysidro and the Tijuana River Valley, as planned. However, I found myself feeling like I needed to go back to Pala afterwards, like this was the heart of my research. In this section, I will provide a description of each visit and how my data was collected.

#### **Pala**

On my way to Pala I felt as if I was travelling to another country. I turned on my radio and listened to static until finally, as I neared the reservation, 91.3 FM “Rez Radio” came on my speakers and I listened as I drove around the area. I felt so out of place here. I wondered if I should even have come. I felt a mixture of guilt and shame and curiosity. I visited the outside of the Pala casino, sat in a small Mexican food restaurant, journaling on my phone and noticing my feelings in this space. A few days later, I created my art piece (Figure 5). As I wrapped the white yarn around the broken palm frond, I had a strong feeling of sadness and loss. I also had a sense of covering and encroaching. When I finished with the piece, I held it. I ran my fingers over the yarn and over the curved lines of the palm frond. I engaged with it daily as it lay in my living space. It began to look like a leg. I was both disturbed and intrigued.





*Figure 5: palm frond with yarn*  
Art reflection on Pala, Feb. 2019

### **San Ysidro & Tijuana River Valley**

The following week, I visited San Ysidro and the Tijuana River Valley, near the border between San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico. I decided to visit this area as the border region has been the subject of much political rhetoric. Families seeking asylum in the United States have been separated along the border and children and babies have been taken into custody in detention centers. Recently I have been participated in several organized marches and protests in other spaces, but I do not remember the last time I visited this neighborhood. I admit, I was somewhat anxious to

go to this neighborhood. I did not know what to expect. I asked a family member to go with me. I felt a sense of safety having someone else with me.

First, we visited a large outlet mall located at the border between San Diego and Tijuana. We enjoyed churros at a small stand located in the mall. We walked around the mall and I went in to several high-end stores that I normally would never go to. We drove to San Ysidro High School and explored the Tijuana River Valley. We saw open spaces with birds, we saw large ranches with horses, and we saw several large border patrol trucks parked at various trail heads. This was nothing like I had imagined.

I wrote down some notes and took some pictures. I contemplated my experience and created art (Figure 6) about a week later. The art felt very different from the first two pieces. I used markers and paint. I used bright colors and bold lines and shapes. There was a warmth portrayed by the image, with a large yellow sun and bright colorful buildings. But there were also black curving lines that later reminded me of dirt, smoke, or barbed wire. I wondered why the line I drew to represent the border felt less divisive than those curved black lines dividing the clear blue sky and all the colors.



*Figure 6:* acrylic & marker  
Art reflection on San Ysidro & Tijuana River Valley, Feb. 2019

### **Pala / Pauma**

Since my first visit to Pala, I listened online to Pala “Rez Radio” FM 91.3. I listened to the latest episode of a podcast called “Pala Life Past and Present” featuring Jane Hill, who, I learned, helped edit a book of the oral history of the Cupeño people, along with Rosinda Nolasquez. During this episode, they shared the story of the Coyote and the Flood. This story felt very strange to me. I didn’t understand it. As I moved through this process of self-reflection and asking questions, I felt drawn to go back to Pala. I felt as if there was more I needed to see and learn about this place. I felt the need to go back in order to understand the deeper reason for my first visit. What did I need to know?

The second time I drove out to Pala, I was much less nervous. I still had some anxiety navigating the single lane highway, winding around hills and through farmland to the Pala Casino,

Resort and Spa. I drove around the same small neighborhood I did last time. I saw the small Mexican food restaurant. I saw the laundromat. The fire station, the rec center, the youth center and the cultural center. I kept wondering where the rest of the town was. Were there any other businesses here? Where did people go grocery shopping? I decided to explore further.

I followed the signs and the winding roads all the way to Pauma (7 miles Southwest of Pala). On the way I passed the “Champagne Lake RV Resort”. I didn’t see a Lake, but there was a lot of dirt and a lot of folks driving in and out of the gates. I didn’t feel comfortable going inside. When I saw the sign for Pauma Casino, I decided to take the other road instead, thinking maybe I could see more of this place than that. I drove up a road that looked like it led to a residential area. There was a sign that read “Welcome” and a small booth with windows. A Caucasian looking man wearing a blue uniform and a radio asked me where I was going. Since I didn’t really have an answer, I just told him I would turn around. I ended up going to the Pauma casino parking lot. As I sat in my car on that cloudy day, I made a quick sketch which I later used as inspiration for my art piece. I wrote my thoughts down in my journal and I left, feeling even more confused and out of place than ever.

After completing my last visit, I felt a sense of heaviness. Throughout this immersion phase, I had allowed myself to be fully engaged in the heuristic process. I gathered a great deal of information and insight into my identity and my relationship to the people and the history of San Diego - and the realizations I had felt overwhelming. I wasn’t sure I could carry these things with me for the rest of my life. I began to question my ability to do the work of cultural humility. I began to wonder if I really wanted to do this work.

The evening before my last visit to Pauma, I had a strong urge to watch an old Jimmy Stewart movie I used to love - “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance”. I wanted to watch “Gone With The

Wind”, which had been one of my favorite films as a young girl. I had had the strong urge to not do another visit to Pala and to stop exploring other cultures and perspectives.

### **Illumination**

#### **Indwelling**

As I drove home from Pauma, I identified this feeling I had as wanting to “retreat into whiteness”. According to Sabnani et al.’s model of white racial identity, white individuals feel anger and guilt about their affiliation with the dominant culture and sometimes “retreat into white culture” and “over identify with whiteness with defensiveness about white culture” (Sabnani et al. 1992, as cited in Jun, 2010) I had the urge to go back to the way I used to feel before I began exploring racism and cultural humility. I wanted to wrap myself up in the comforting thoughts and ideas I’d had when I was younger, which I now realize were centered in “whiteness” and just not think any more about cultural humility. As I continued to engage in this feeling, I realized that all my life I was engaging in music, movies and books that shone a light on injustice or that gave voice to marginalized people. These authors, songwriters and movie makers created stories about marginalized people. When I began to think about the specific voices that shaped my thoughts and my own work, I realized that they were all white voices. Most of the artists who I had listened to tell stories about Native Americans were white. Almost every idea I’d had about racial injustice and oppression was told to me by a white person. An art piece I’d done years ago (Figure 7) about different points of view of Native American people and missionaries, had in fact been based on white perspectives. (pictured below, selection from Untitled, 1999 using text from *Mission San Diego de Alcala brochure* and text from James Michener novel called *Centennial*)

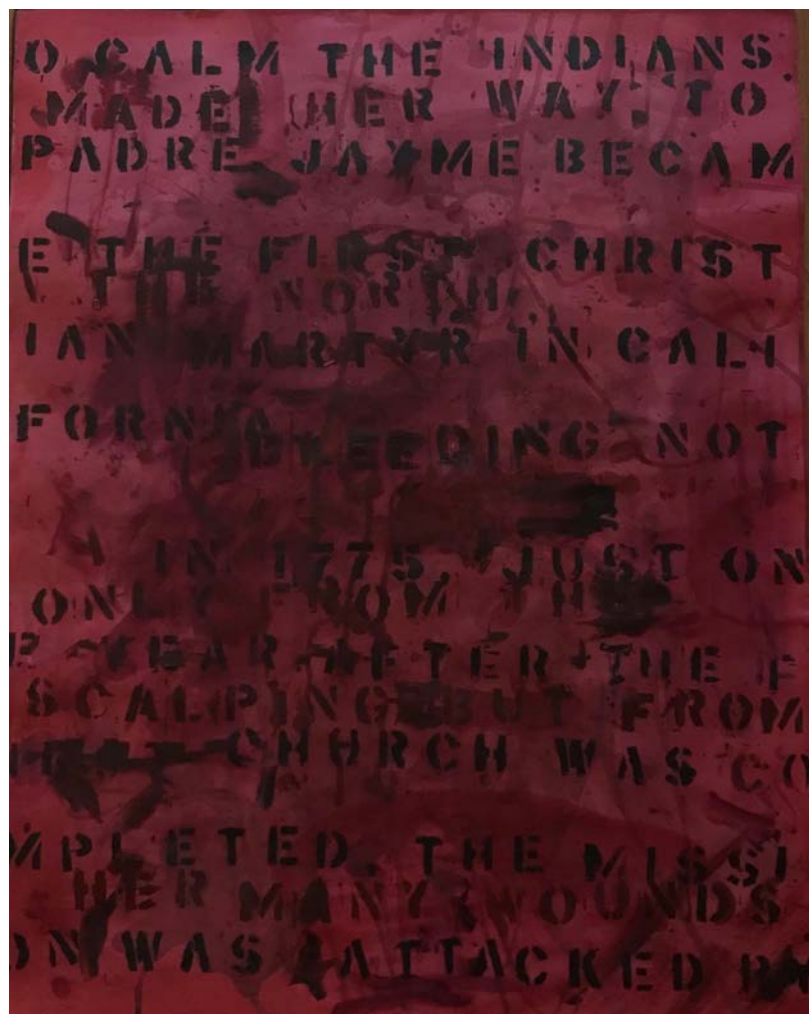


Figure 7: acrylic on poster board  
selection from "Untitled", 1999

### Art Reflection

I came home and made art about my visit to Pauma (Figure 8). I portrayed the mountains and the clouds I had seen. The piece felt mysterious and inaccessible somehow. Then I printed out pictures of artists I had turned to over the years who wrote or sang about racial injustice in their work (Bob Dylan, James Michener, Nanci Griffith). I printed picture of Betty Friedan, who I admired as a feminist revolutionary. I printed out pictures from movies (The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, Gone With The Wind, Dances With Wolves) I remember watching as a young girl which

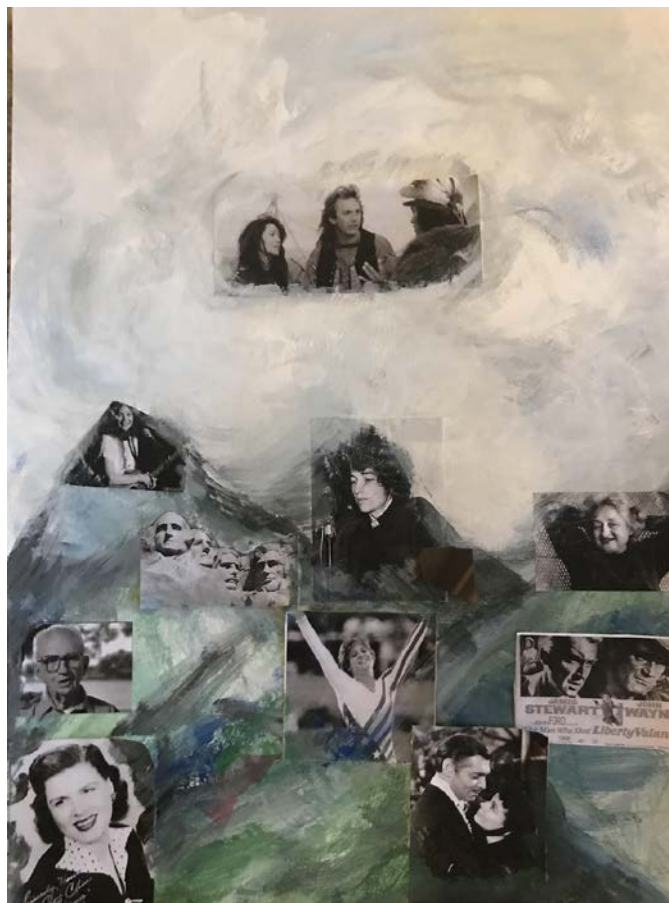
shaped my sense of the world and who I was. I chose a picture of Mt. Rushmore, which I remember feeling in awe of as a young girl, as a great work of art and a great undertaking. White men carved into the mountain. And I placed them on the painting, staring out at the viewer in satisfaction as the clouds and the land fill the background in silent pleading.

The smiling triumphant figure of Mary Lou Retton is in the center of the piece. An American gymnast who became the first female from the United States to win a gold medal in gymnastics in 1984. She is wearing the Stars and Stripes on her leotard, her arms raised over her head. The image of her brings back the pride and excitement I felt as a little girl watching her win on TV.

I included country singer Patsy Cline whose songs I love and who represents a kind of idealized version of a white woman in the 1950's. I included Scarlett O'Hara, a character who embodies the epitome of white privilege, who I used to admire as a young girl for being strong and independent.

At the top of my art piece is Kevin Costner and a photo from the movie *Dances With Wolves* (Tig Productions, 1990), which had a significant effect on my ideas about the history of Native American people as well as my perception of the lack of Native American actors in the movies I watched. I was 14 years old when I watched that movie. I remember thinking that this was one of the greatest movies I had ever seen, and I admired Kevin Costner for telling this story. As a 14-year-old girl, I might be forgiven for thinking that this "white savior" (Cammorota, 2011 p. 247) movie was the best movie I'd ever seen, but the problem is that this movie was one of the only portrayals I saw. I didn't seek out any other stories. For years into adulthood, (*Gran Torino*, 2008) I experienced this type of movie as inclusive and raising awareness instead of centering whiteness and marginalizing people of color even in a movie supposedly about them.

As I looked at my art work, I realized that in my own history, there had been a lack of Native American voices, a lack of African American voices, a lack of Asian American and Latinx voices. Looking at all of the white faces in my art helped me see that in fact, the points of view I had heard were severely limited by race. I realized that white people had not only historically taken the lives and land of Native American people, they erased them from the history books, they appropriated aspects of their culture and did not even give space for Native Americans to tell their own stories.



*Figure 8: acrylic and collage on watercolor paper,  
Art reflection on Pauma, Feb. 2019*



### **Analysis of Data / Explication**

As my data collection came to an end, I had multiple journal entries and four art pieces. I transcribed my journal entries and organized everything chronologically. During two separate sessions a week apart, I sat with the artworks in front of me for several hours. While I completed other tasks, I let myself look at the art and write down words, reactions, themes, as the hours passed.

After gathering the two sets of data from my analysis of the art work, I went through my written material and identified themes, using the methods described by Saldaña (2011). I then condensed these six pages of lists into the following themes - *desire to distance myself from my white identity (at times by using my lesbian identity)*, *oscillation* between resistance to and desire to engage in deep self-reflection regarding my own biases, assumptions and beliefs, a *binary and separate sense of race* (between white people and nonwhite people) and having a *strong sense of loss and sadness* when confronting white supremacy.

### Meanings / Creative Synthesis

#### **Desire to distance myself from my white identity**

The first theme I noticed was a desire to distance myself from other white people in my community. I noticed in my journal entry that I placed myself apart from other white people, particularly in terms of my sexuality. In addition, I made assumptions about the religious and political beliefs of other white people based on their race. As I examined this further, I wondered if I thought that because of my identity as a lesbian, I did not hold as much privilege as other white people and somehow that kept me separate from them in terms of potential racist beliefs or lack of understanding of white privilege. In this stage, I related to the *conflict* stage from Sabnani et al.'s (1991) model of white racial identity (Sabnani et al., as cited in Jun, 2010) in which the white person begins to learn about marginalized groups and “question(s) how they can be a part of a group that has oppressed people of color” (Jun, 2010, p. 295). As I have learned more about my own white privilege and systemic racism, I noticed a desire to distance myself from other white people, especially those I perceived as less aware of these things than I was.

I was also relating to the *identity pride* stage of Cass's Model of Homosexual Identity Formation (1984). According to Cass (1984), this stage is “characterized by feelings of pride towards one's homosexual identity and fierce loyalty to homosexuals as a group.... while heterosexuals have become discredited and devalued” (p. 152). This is also evident in the results of the implicit bias test I took prior to beginning this research.

#### **Oscillation between engaging and disengaging in work of Cultural Humility**

In my first art work, I used a picture of a white cat. This represented my current feelings two years after the first Women's March in 2017. In this march, mostly white women participated, no arrests were made, and people wore knitted “pussyhats” in protest against remarks made by

President Trump about sexually assaulting women (“Transcript: Donald Trump’s taped comments about women”, 2016). Many argued that the main reason there were no arrests made during the Women’s March, was because the majority of the participants were white (Ramanathan, 2017). Others argued that the “pussyhats” worn by thousands of women in the march were “white focused and Eurocentric” and represented “exclusionary white feminism” and were discriminatory towards transgender women (Pensacola Women’s March Facebook Post as cited by Jagannathan, 2018). I took part in this march in San Diego in January of 2017. It was by far the largest and most powerful march I have ever been a part of. It felt unifying and powerful to be in that crowd of women, shutting down the streets and letting our voices be heard. Afterwards, I remember feeling saddened by the realization that my positive experience of this event was, in part, due to my identity as white cisgender female. It was very difficult for me to accept that as a white woman I felt such a strong sense of belonging during this event, which other people may not have felt. I did not want to accept that this was the case. In this artwork, I was able to use the image of a white cat to identify my biases due to my whiteness in regard to feminism.

This came out later in my art response to Pauma (Figure 8) in which I included Betty Friedan, a white woman who I identified as a feminist, noticing that voices of black women were absent from my perspective on feminism. Hoffman (2014) writes about her experience as a white lesbian identifying feminist in Boston in the 1970’s. Hoffman (2014) reflects on her belief that (during the 1970’s) she and her friends were “harbingers of a great cultural shift” (p.134). She goes on to explain:

Our community institutions contained the seeds of their own destruction even as they blossomed. I can get nostalgic and regretful, but in a way, they were no different from the ones they were supposed to replace. The people they served best were exactly those like me: white, educated, young, childless, able-bodied, politically aware, and engaged. Middle class. Blithely privileged. Able to pass, if it came down to that.... But what about lesbians who were poor, who were black or Asian or

Latina, who were bringing up kids—what about their needs for friendship and affirmation and art and political effectiveness? The community I was so proud of rarely attracted such women, although when, in addition to the cultural institutions, feminists organized homeless shelters and battered women's shelters and women's health clinics and rape crisis centers and prisoner support groups, women of color were more visible in these kinds of projects. (Hoffman, 2014, p. 134)

This parallels my own experience with the Women's March in 2017 in which I believed myself to be part of an all-inclusive group of like-minded women from various backgrounds, around the world, standing against misogyny, xenophobia, and racism, when, in fact, I was surrounded by women who looked like me, thought very much like me and shared a similar background as I did. Because of that sameness, I felt comfortable and included and did not question the lack of women of color, disabled women, transgender women, native American women, etc.

These are the ways in which I have become discouraged from doing the work of cultural humility. When I am feeling defensive and having thoughts like *nothing is ever good enough, so why even try* - this is when I must resist the urge to enter into the *retreat into White culture stage* (Sabnani et al., as cited in Jun, 2010) and cease to continue the work of self-reflection and challenging white supremacy. With this research, I am now more aware of how I tend to *oscillate between engagement and desire to disengage* and I can potentially be more mindful when I am feeling defensive so that I can let it pass and then continue to move forward.

### **Binary view of Race**

In my collage art work (Figure 1), I portrayed a very binary idea of race. Going into this research, I was conceptualizing race by thinking about Black people and white people. In the art, images of Black and white body parts cover one another, but are not really integrated. I was thinking about white privilege and my perception of Black women being seen as powerful and distant, almost unreal. At the bottom I included a picture of people fighting a fire. In 2003 there

were several very large fires around San Diego county. A young white female died in one of the fires. At that time, I heard a credible rumor that the arsonist was a Native American male. I don't know if that was true or not, but it always stuck with me. After creating this piece, I realized I was conceptualizing race through a very narrow lens. In addition, I was noticing some biases and fears I was holding onto from my past.

In my art reflection on Pala (Figure 5) there is white yarn covering up the brown palm frond. There is some green yarn, but it is not nearly as much as the white yarn. There is a feeling of wrapping or trying to preserve something in a way - as if the palm frond were a body being bandaged or mummified. The shape of the finished work looks like a leg and reminds me of the danger faced by Black and Brown bodies in the United States. This leg cannot do anything by itself and yet I am trying to preserve it. This is reminiscent of visiting the Pala reservation, which is supposed to be a place for the Cupeño people to live and keep their culture and traditions alive, but which in reality is not even located in the land they call sacred (Hill & Nolasquez, 1973; Smith, 2016). In 1902-1903, the Cupeno people were forced, by the United States government, to leave their ancestral land located in Warner Springs and were relocated to the area now called Pala, 45 miles away (Hill & Nolasquez, 1973; Smith, 2016). The Native Americans who live in Pala are the direct descendants of the people who were forced off their land. Palm fronds are found everywhere in San Diego but are often overlooked or thrown away.

In the art response to the border area, I also noticed the theme of duality as well as pushing aside or colliding. The blue sky with clouds is separate from the crowded bright colors of the area close to the border. There is less of a contrast between the border regions on both sides than between the colors and the clear sky with clouds. In my mind, the viewer is seeing the area from a distance and the sun and sky appear inviting and expansive. The other areas are crowded but

vibrant. It's like an idealized version of this area and indicates a separation between white communities (further from the border) and communities of people of color (closer to the border). This makes sense considering the areas I visited. I did not see the families being detained or those struggling to get by. The only remnants of negativity in the art are the black barbed wire like lines.

### **Sense of loss and sadness and feeling overwhelmed**

In each of my art pieces, I felt a sense of sadness while creating them and also while looking at afterwards. For the artwork is the feeling of being overwhelmed and sad. The collage image (Figure 1) felt disjointed and portrayed a Black woman with her mouth covered and a white arm beneath her where her body would be. As she gazes out at the viewer, her eyes are powerful, serious, and she is not smiling. Perhaps she is accusatory? In this piece, I seem to be reflecting the conflict stage of Sabnani et al.'s (1991) model in which a white person experiences "anxiety, guilt, depression" while realizing their privilege and their desire to have "non-racist values" (as cited in Jun, 2010, p. 295).

While creating the art reflection on Pala (Figure 5), I felt a profound sense of sadness as I wrapped the white yarn around and around the palm frond. I imagined the wrapping as a metaphor for taking over indigenous lands and culture and I began to take on guilt for the actions of my ancestors.

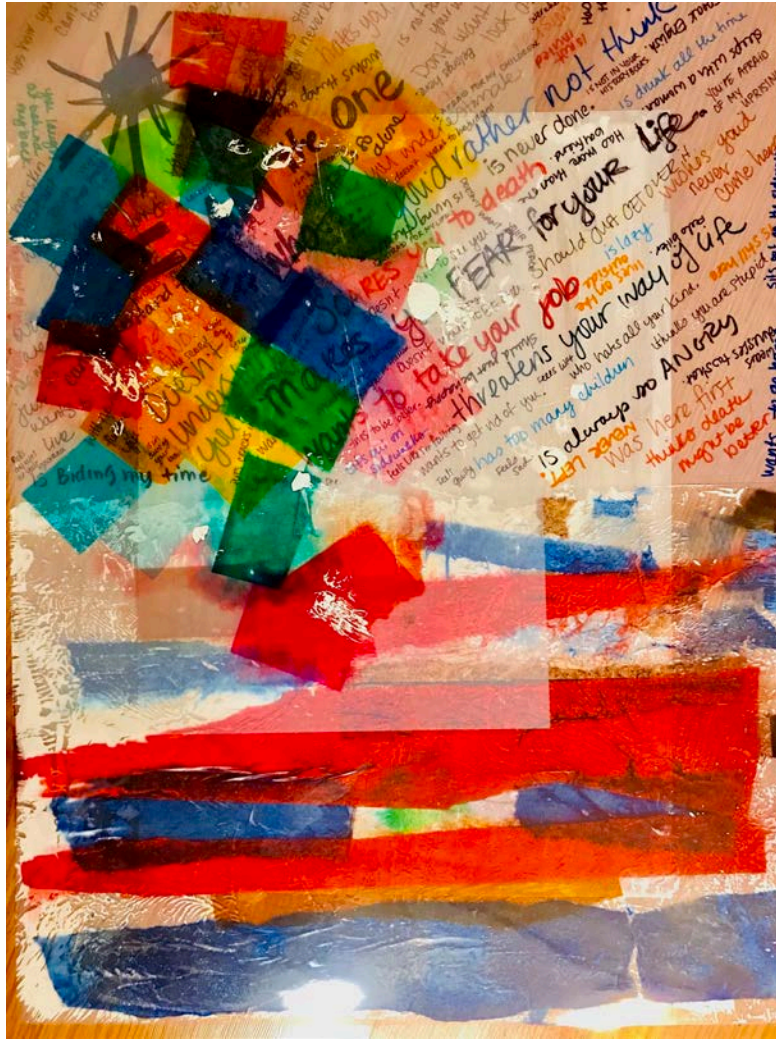
In my art piece on the border region (Figure 6), I felt a sense of discomfort and sadness related to the separation of communities, government boundaries, poverty, walls and barbed wire and my own distance from these communities due to my SES, my race, my citizenship and my privilege.

In the reflection on Pauma (Figure 8), I felt sadness related to looking back on my childhood and early adulthood and my sense of my place in the world. Now, regarding my education, my

family background, and those that I looked up to as voices for change with a more critical eye, through the lens of cultural humility, and feeling the flaws in my previous narratives about race. This felt uncomfortable.

### **Creative Synthesis Process**

My creative synthesis went through several phases and continued throughout the entire process of recording this research in a written document. First, I thought about the layers of identity that I had wanted to address in this research. I created art work on four separate 11x17 transparencies (Figure 9). The first one was made with bleeding tissue paper and was very colorful. The second one was done with marker, paint and bleeding tissue paper and represented my identity as an American (from the United States). The American Flag is a theme I have used in past artworks to express my disillusionment with our country as well as my pride in our country. I painted one transparency with white paint in an effort to “whitewash” the piece. This represented my view of white identity and white supremacy and privilege. Whiteness that covers and cannot be erased. Whiteness that is thick and opaque and changes everything it touches. On the last transparency, I used marker to write out my biases, assumptions, and beliefs related to my own identities, other identities I don’t hold, and various stereotypes I have held onto throughout my life. I used an art therapy directive in which one writes “I am the one who” and then fills in the sentence as many times as they can.



*Figure 9: mixed media on transparency*  
 Art reflection on personal identity, March 2019

I placed these transparencies in various configurations and tried to unify them into one piece. But it never felt right. I tried multiple combinations, but nothing felt like it was the answer I was looking for. So, I engaged in a period of indwelling, in which I looked at these pieces every day, arranged them and then put them away. Something was missing.

I decided to create another piece. This one would focus specifically on my identity as it relates to Native American people, and the Cupeño people in particular. I used a fifth transparency and created a collage. I glued images face down onto the transparency, so that I wouldn't be able to



see the final product until I turned it over (Figure 10). I did this in the spirit of feeling like I was working my way through all of this without really being able to understand what the results would be. I created an art piece which felt like a portrayal of my experience of learning more about the Cupeño people who live and lived in San Diego. How did I relate to them as a lesbian? As a white woman? I used excerpts from “Death Song” (Hill & Nolasquez, 1973) written in the Cupeño language.

In the book “Mulu’Wetam” edited by Jane Hill and Rosinda Nolasquez (1973), I also rediscovered the story of the Coyote and the Flood, which I’d first heard told by Jane Hill on the podcast I listened to from Rez Radio (Pala Life Past and Present, 2019). I read the English translation twice and still did not understand the story. This reminded me of the differences in culture and how often a translation is meaningless outside of the cultural context. When I included the Death Song, I did so because I felt more connected to that piece. I felt like I could understand it more. However, I cannot deepen my understanding of either of these two stories without more knowledge of the culture.

In my art work, I contemplate this idea of erasing histories of people. I added the phrase “Has your identity already been stolen?” in relation to my perspective on the Native American communities in San Diego. When I turned the piece over and looked at it, I felt like the pink color was blocking out my ability to see the colors underneath. Everything in the image looks pink and the images and words all look the same. The images that stand out the most are those of the trees. In addition, the word “fire” is seen twice in this image. Perhaps this is another reference (As in the collage piece - Figure 1) to the fires in San Diego in 2003. This piece felt powerful to me, but at the same time, I disliked it. I didn’t want to include it with my research. I was put off by the idea that I had created a “rose colored” lens with which to look at Native Americans.



*Figure 10: collage and bleeding tissue paper on transparency*  
Art reflection on Cupeño history and Lesbian identity

Finally, I put the transparencies away and tried another route. In my next piece (Figure 11), I used stencils to paint the word “STOP” in red. I was referencing my art piece from years ago (Figure 7) in which I also used stencils to depict the two different stories. I chose to use create a “stop sign” as I have often photographed stop signs in the past and have a collection of photos of stop signs in front of famous landmarks and various landscapes. I also took photos of stop signs on my visits to Pala and Pauma. Somehow this word related to my desire to “stop” engaging in behavior and beliefs that contribute to white supremacy. This word also conveys my desire to “stop” the erasure of indigenous peoples’ histories and culture. I want to “stop” the systemic oppression of Black people in America. At times, I want to “stop” thinking about privilege and race and cultural humility. I want to “stop” the policies set forth by the current administration, including

the ban of transgender people from serving in the military. I want to “stop” feeling like nothing will ever change. I want to “stop” time. I began this piece while thinking about my desire to “stop” all of these things. As I continued reflecting on it, I realized it reminded me of Nancy Reagan and the “Just say no” to drugs campaign from 1986. In this campaign, Reagan “attempted to simplify the complexity of the human experience into a three-word answer” (“Dream Center Recovery”, n.d.) Is that what I was doing in my art piece?

Each time I sat down to do this research, I added to this “stop sign” piece. I added lines. I used black sharpie, gel pens, glue, and colored pencils. I continued to explore through the art the idea that the more we try to grow and change, the more we may be making some things worse. The landscape is constantly shifting. I began adding lines and shading, roots and cracks growing out of and into the letters. It began to look like a landscape. It was getting messy. I continuously added onto the piece throughout my analysis of my research experience and photograph it in its various stages. I kept having the feeling that the piece was incomplete, and I kept adding onto it over and over again.

Finally, I realized that this piece also represents the work of cultural humility - in that it never ends. We grow, we make mistakes, we try to fix things, we try to cover up some things, we try to expose other things. We continuously try to “shift the landscape” - but in the end, the pain of the past is still there, the growth and change continues, and the piece is never really complete. So, what can we do about the desire to “finish” this work, to reach our destination, to feel a sense of accomplishment, to see what changes have been made, what parts have been integrated. We can keep the history - the records of the stages. We can see all the parts, not just some of them. We can illuminate aspects of our identity and let new parts emerge.

At some point, I cut up the transparencies I had previously made about aspects of my identity (Figure 9) and pasted pieces of them into the landscape. When I held the piece up to a mirror, I could read the words “wants to go home”. I then used bleeding tissue paper to add brown and pink colors. Several days later, I peeled back the layers. I peeled off the pieces of transparency. Some of them didn’t come off. Some of them tore the paper. Some of them bled through and left their mark. Some of them are still there, clear and can only be seen in a certain light. It still says “stop”, but this is just an empty word.

As much as we may want to “stop” we cannot go back in time. We can only keep moving forward. Stop signs are everywhere. Roads continue to be built and cars continue to cut through the land. Native American people are trying to hold onto their cultures and their sense of pride, but the systematic oppression of marginalized groups makes it impossible.

The growth and shifting will eventually fade the letters away. What’s left is who we are. What’s left is our stories. What’s left is our history. I found myself continuously picking at the small pieces of transparency remaining on the artwork. They wouldn’t come off. I wanted them all to come off. But I realized, they wouldn’t come off until they were ready. Until I can figure out a way to get them off.

This is a testament to the power of Art Therapy as a tool for developing cultural humility. As I went through this process, I realized that this is truly a journey of continuous self-discovery. I was able to use the art to look into my past and uncover some of my biases that I was not consciously aware of. McNiff (1998) argues that acknowledging our biases in our research is “the best way to arrive at relatively unbiased outcomes” (p.53). McNiff (1998) believes that heuristic inquiry can lead to “a more comprehensive understanding of how the personal bias of the researcher affects practice” (p.53).



*Figure 11:* mixed media on paper  
Creative Synthesis, Mar/Apr. 2019

### Conclusion

In this study, I aimed to answer the question of how art making might help me to develop a more culturally humble stance as an art therapist. This project has demonstrated that art making and reflecting on that art process can be a powerful tool in better understanding biases. This study also shows that the art process helps express emotions and memories that may have been previously inaccessible. Exploring these emotions and memories helped me to connect my life experiences to some of my racial biases. In addition, creating multiple art works allowed me to consider themes across the art. The unpredictable nature of art-based research led me in a direction I did not anticipate when I began this study. According to McNiff (1998) “No matter how systematic my inquiries may be, art-based research will always produce results that simply ‘happen’ as a result of the unique conditions of the particular process of investigation” (p.43).

When I retook the bias test on Native Americans at the end of this study, the result was now: “little or no automatic association between American and Foreign with Native American and white American” (“Project Implicit”, n.d. test completed on 3/17/19).

To summarize, the results showed less of a bias toward thinking of Native American people as “foreign” or less “American” than white Americans. I did not retake the test on preference for gay or straight people since my study did not address my sexuality as much as I had thought it might in the beginning. Engaging in this process of self-reflection and art making shifted some of my biases and challenged me to move further along in my racial identity development.

Before I began graduate school, I would say I did not have a clear concept of myself as a white person. In school, when I was asked to create a “mask of culture”, I remember thinking that ‘I didn’t have a culture’. I was in the *pre-exposure or pre-contact stage*, according to Sabnani et al.’s model (as cited in Jun, 2010). As I began this research project, I found myself in the *conflict stage*



(Sabnani et al. as cited in Jun, 2010) in which I felt depressed and did not wish to connect myself to other white people I perceived as racist. And, as mentioned before, I even felt myself drawn to the *retreat into white culture stage* in which I had the urge to go back to the way I used to feel before learning about my own racial privilege (Sabnani et al. as cited in Jun, 2010).

Reflecting on how I feel now, having completed this study, I would say I am headed for the *redefinition and integration stage* (Sabnani et al. as cited in Jun, 2010). I am just beginning to figure out a way of integrating and expanding the work I am doing to include “dismantling all forms of oppression” (Jun, 2010, p.295). I am growing. I have had the idea that in order to be a white person who fights against oppression, that I must always look for what is wrong. I had a negative view of what it was like to do this work. I feared getting it wrong, not knowing all the answers, or not taking enough blame.

I once asked activist Kim Katrin Milan how she is able to stay so positive in the face of so much adversity. Her message stuck with me. She let me know that she focuses on the people she sees every day who are doing good work and starting “grassroots movements” rather than worrying about politicians. She spoke of hope and optimism while emphasizing intersectionality, just months after Trump was elected president. In my art work, I think I had the idea that it needed to be ‘dark’ to reflect the horrors of the past with regard to racial injustice. I felt I wasn’t doing this subject justice if I simply talked about my own personal growth. Then I remembered Kim Katrin Milan, and I realized that it’s the small victories that I should celebrate and my learning and growing is important in its own way. I still wasn’t quite done.

The pieces of my identity (transparency) that I had peeled off of my previous art piece (Figure 11) stayed in a pile on my table. For some reason, I didn’t want to throw them away. As I sat down to begin the final phase of recording this research, I decided to glue the remaining loose

pieces onto a piece of cardboard. I had no agenda and no idea of what I was doing or what the outcome would be. When I saw the finished product, I realized, it looked like a tree. I had, in fact, created a piece about growth, in spite of myself. I had wanted my final piece to reflect the work that was left to be done, to not tie this research up in a neat little bow. I wanted it to be messy. I had the desire to focus on the negative. But in spite of this, I still made a tree. I created a tree out of the pieces of my identity that I was able to remove from the “stop sign” and integrate the ideas into one piece.

The phrase “wants to go home” can still be seen in the mirror. The biases are all still there, but they are being reformed, repurposed, reconfigured, reimagined. My concept of my identity is shifting. As an art therapist, I am learning new things every day. As a clinician, I am constantly challenging my biases, assumptions and beliefs. I am a work in progress and it’s ok to acknowledge that there have been improvements, even in the midst of having so much more work to do. This is what I will take with me into my clinical practice. This is how I have answered my question.





Art reflection, Apr. 2019

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