

THE PATH TO ART THERAPY:
A HEURISTIC ARTS-BASED INQUIRY ON MY CAREER CHOICES,
A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

THE PATH TO ART THERAPY: A HEURISTIC ARTS-BASED INQUIRY ON MY CAREER CHOICES, A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST REFLECTION

LILY JIMÉNEZ DABDOUB

This arts-based heuristic inquiry (HABI) aims to bring to light the authors' process of finding her career choice, to become an art therapist while living in a male-oriented society that constantly influences career decisions for women. Through this self-reflection, informed by decolonial feminist theories (Lugones, 2011; Segato, 2015), the author provides a space for herself and an invitation to the readers to cultivate compassionate cultural humility, explore the influences of socio-cultural values and pressures in career choices and reflect on the influences of privilege and oppression within this decision-making process. In the author's case, she resisted the *mandate for masculinity* (Segato, 2016) by choosing the *stronger* side within her academic interests: psychology – neurocognition, drifting away from her *true-self*: art and being a helper. Through an intricate path she found art therapy. While conducting the literature review, the author kept a narrative and visual journal where she proposed five questions framed within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979/1992). The author answered the inquiries using the Five Whys technique (Pojasek, 2000). These answers were used as prompts to create a series of artwork responses. The researcher reflected on her personal experiences about her career path and the possible cultural patriarchal influences through this process. The author grew up in Mexico City and locates herself as a Latina, multi-ethnic, middle-class, cis-gender woman. Through this research, she found that the narrative of women's minoritization (Segato, 2010) enforces oppression to **all** minorities, and post-colonial practices of land exploitation detriment mental, spiritual, and community well-being.

Keywords: cultural humility, career choices, art therapy, decolonial feminism, masculinity mandate, patriarchy, minoritization.

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To Earth, Madre Tierra, Pacha Mama, our homeland.
To Kanata, the land where I have the privilege to come to as a new settler,
may my actions always be respectful.

To my mom, who always has deeply supported me and who showed me the path to Psychology.

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Vatsí inká yoo tsi nikanchíí
tsaa ñàà ndaká'án ini kue ñuu
ndakíta'ángo tsí inká nivi
kuáña xoo nuú yoso
ñu'un va'a nuú tsitoo yivi
nuu chiíná raa kuú ndane'é ta'an
raa saán koó tono xíná

Vienen otros tiempos
nuevos pensamientos surgen
identidades encrucijadas
bosquejos de Páramo
lugar fértil de vida
sembradíos de encuentros
y así volverá a ser el principio

Celerina Sánchez
(tu'un savi/mixteca)

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The early pressures and gender stereotypes in a male-dominated world can frame career decision-making for people. These pressures may lead to a knotty and constant search for recognition and merits. Such has been my experience as I navigated the academic worlds of psychology, cognitive neurosciences, and art therapy. This research paper examines the complexity of this path and explores the connections among diverse subjects. As an academic, I am more inclined to understand the human experience from a holistic lens. Thus, the models I found most suitable to describe the phenomena are the Ecological Systems Model (Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1977/1992) and *decolonial feminism* (María Lugones¹, 2011/2020).

Rita Segato (2010/2018) coined the term *mandate of masculinity* to call us to break and deconstruct imposed gender roles that create oppressive experiences (Segato, 2016). This study develops a narrative about how post-colonial ways have perpetuated patriarchal structures that promote male domination through the *mandate of masculinity* and the *minoritization of women*². Therefore, to pursue a decolonized self-inquiry regarding career decision-making, this research's central goals are to invite creative arts therapists, including myself, to reflect upon the following subjects:

- the influences of socio-cultural values and pressures,
- the role of privilege and oppression,
- and our own lived experiences of privilege and oppression from a decolonial feminist standpoint.

¹ I will highlight the presence of female-identified researchers in this paper by using their full names. To follow the American Psychiatry Association (APA) 7th Edition style, the first time I mention these authors I will use their first and last names.

² These concepts will be furtherly explained in the literature review chapter.

The art therapist needs to work on cultivating awareness, knowledge, and skills “to provide treatment interventions and strategies that include awareness of and responsiveness to cultural issues,” according to the Code of Ethics of the *American Art Therapy Association* (AATA) on multicultural and diversity cultural competencies (2011, p. 1). Surprisingly, on January 26th, 2017, the AATA publicly announced through the *Art Therapy Today e-newsletter* their enthusiasm in connecting with former Second Lady Karen Pence. Her affiliation to the United States of America (USA) Republican party and their well-known xenophobic practices led many members of the art therapy community to voice solid arguments and demands of the Board of Directors (BOD) from the AATA to disaffiliate with Pence.

On March 13th, 2018, Leah Gipson, Program Director of the Masters in Art Therapy and Counseling at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), who works as an art therapist through social justice practices, wrote a WordPress blog letter to the AATA BOD. Backed by more than 600 signatures from AATA members across the USA and Canada, the letter manifested their opposition to the affiliation between the BOD and Pence. Gipson highlighted that the AATA’s alliance with Pence entailed an abusive power dynamic, dismissed their diverse community, and exposed the boards’ lack of alignment to its own ethical principles, e.g. “Ethical Principle 7: Multicultural and Diversity Competence”.

When discussing these subjects, it is essential to consider the work of Savneet Talwar, a well-known art therapist and social advocate. Talwar (2019) edited the book: *Art Therapy for Social Justice*. For Talwar, decolonizing the practice of art therapy, a social justice scaffold needs to inform critical inquiry and praxis for developing *critical consciousness*. Talwar (2019) notes that art therapists commit to recognizing how deep-rooted “inequalities—social, economic,

and political—have shaped the psychological make-up of the people they serve and examine the role of the arts and social action in the delivery of mental health services” (p. 3).

During my two years as an art therapy intern, I have conducted myself with a high sense of ethics and respect towards the people assigned to my care. My guiding ethical standards require me to create a safe and culturally aware space with cultural humility and recognize the privileges and power dynamics my formal education can bring to therapy. Thus, the importance of reflecting on the influences that impacted the intricate path that carried me to become an art therapist.

To address my positionality, I identify as a cis-gender, middle-class, Latina and multi-ethnic³ woman, born and raised in Mexico City. I come from a lineage of intergenerational migratory processes, encompassing four different countries of origin, each with its own distinct culture. However, there is a common thread in my family’s roots, and that is strong male-dominated cultures.

The intergenerational migration my ancestors have done stems from issues caused by post-colonialist practices. The latter include war, violence, corruption, crime, religious discriminatory practices, and climate change⁴. Filippo Grandi (2019), the current commissioner of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), stated that “forced

³ A construct the researcher defies and avoids using for herself is the term black, indigenous, persons of colour (BIPOC) and racialized minorities. To me, the term *minority group* is considered more appropriate for this research and distances it from oppressive academic writing. I argue that the most appropriate way to deconstruct oppression is to grant space for self-identification and define their own ethnicity freely, since the concept of race and skin colour has been a colonialist practice within academia to enforce otherness and alienation. Henceforth, these are the reasons to avoid using terms that have been constructed in an academic setting dominated by Western-oriented researchers. To be clear, I respect what others feel comfortable naming themselves, and I understand that becoming part of a larger group provides shelter and community support.

⁴ According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), climate change is “the change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods” (UNHCR, 2019). I conceptualize climate change as the direct impact of human activity in climate, as an umbrella term that encompasses global warming and related ‘natural’ disasters. Well-known activists, like Greta Thunberg, Naomi Klein, David Suzuki, and others, call on governments and world leaders to take concrete actions to stop global warming, and have addressed its relation to fossil fuels, deceptive “green policies” and exploitative post-colonial policies.

displacement across borders can stem from the interaction between climate change and disasters with conflict and violence, or it can arise from natural or human-made disasters alone. Either situation can trigger international protection needs” (UNHCR, 2019).

This research paper encompasses diverse themes that inform decolonial feminism and converge through an interdisciplinary view to grasp the systems that surround women’s career choices. The structure is as follows. Chapter 2 is a literature review chapter where research is unfolded based on the ESM by Bronfenbrenner (1977/1992) and informed by decolonial feminist theory. Chapter 3 discusses my methodology, including how I blended heuristic inquiry with arts-based methodologies to explore the personal process of career choice-generating information both narrative and visual. Chapter 4 details the process of generating and gathering information by engaging in journaling and creating specific art responses to five inquiries. Chapter 5 develops the themes that arose during analysis and reflection on the artworks I made. Chapter 6 is the discussion in which I detail how the artworks created seem to mirror and inform the investigation of each other. Finally, in Chapter 7, I conclude on this experience and share my reflections.

This investigation helped me reflect on my lived experience in my career choices and find my *true calling*: art therapy. At the same time, addressing the invitation to self-reflect through artmaking opened the gate for two accomplishments. On the one hand, the process facilitated the reflection about how patriarchal oppression can influence life decisions. On the other, this immersive experience helped me realize how decolonial feminism may help future art therapists to reflect upon and further develop both cultural awareness and cultural humility.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter examines the literature on different systems and factors that influence women's careers decisions, following the General System Theory (GST). The *Dictionary of Psychology* from the American Psychiatry Association (APA) defines General System Theory as an interdisciplinary conceptual framework focusing on the wholeness, pattern, relationship, hierarchical order, integration, and organization of phenomena. GST moves beyond the reductionistic and mechanistic tradition in science (APA, n.d., Definition 1). Biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1950) developed the GST. He posits that through the evolution of modern sciences, we have understood phenomena as interdependent and intertwined. I discuss the development of GST below.

General System Theory

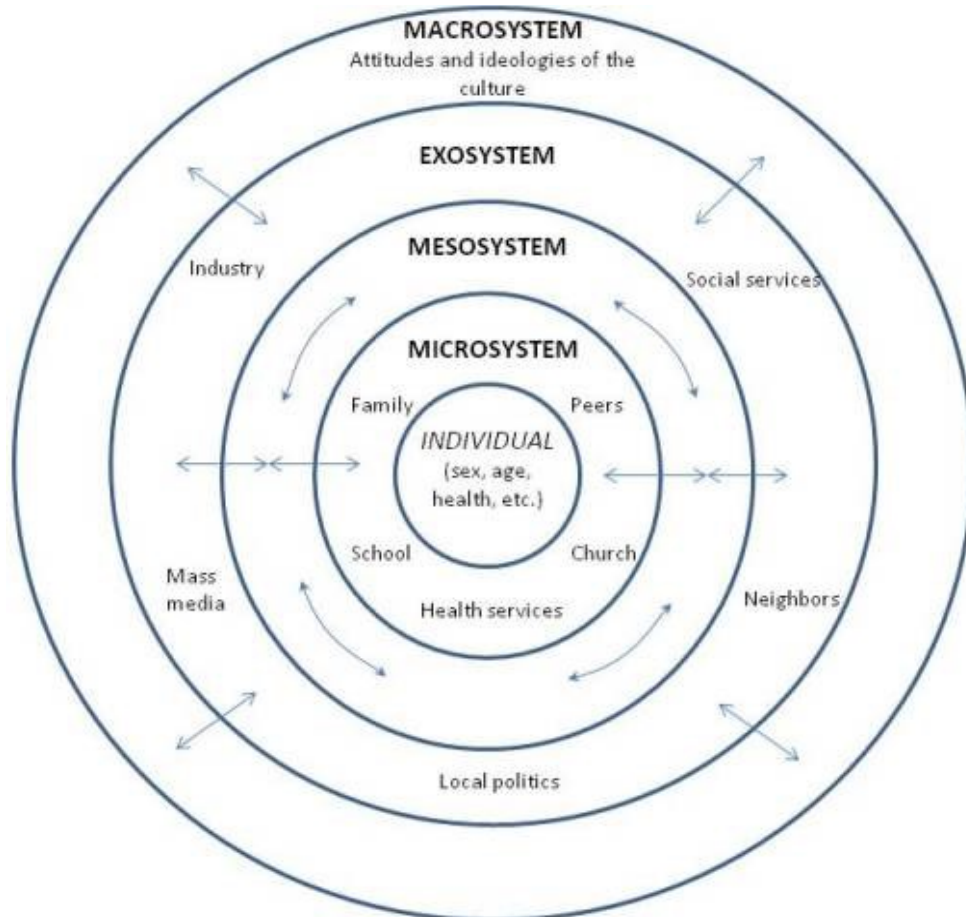
To understand how GST works, von Bertalanffy (1950) used Gestalt psychology as an example. By doing so, he aimed to facilitate the conception of wholeness as different systems within an organism that interact and influence each other (von Bertalanffy, 1950, p. 134). Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1975), Chilean biologists, expanded the GST and incorporated their concept of autopoiesis. Autopoiesis refers to self-generating and self-maintaining structures in living systems. These concepts help bridge biology and ecology to a philosophical perspective. Appropriately, this philosophical conception influenced the Systemic therapy model of Systemic therapy, first introduced by Gregory Bateson to the field of Marriage and Family therapy and further developed by clinicians and inspired by the GST (Joanie Connors & Richard Caple, 2005).

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977/1992) proposed an Ecological System Model (ESM) that helps understand the broader contexts that influence childhood development and learning in the

function of social interactions. Figure 1 illustrates the ESM and how individuals interact with the environmental systems surrounding them (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The ESM helps us understand human development from and within a systemic approach.

Figure 1.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model



Note. Hchokr (2012). *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development*. English Wikipedia. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution, Share-Alike 3.0.

The ESM is composed of embedded structures inside each other. The outermost layer is the macrosystem, followed by the exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem, which surround the individual. The following sub-sections of this chapter describe each of these systems from a

decolonial feminist standpoint. Each section encompasses an overview of how patriarchal oppression influences the development of women in the *public sphere* (Segato, 2016) and, consequently, in their career choices.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem consists of the attitudes and ideologies of the culture in which we live. For sociologists, ideologies are the cultural norms or systems of beliefs that validate social norms within groups and societies (William Little, 2014). Joseph Tainter (1988) warned about the possible collapse of complex societies. Tainter (1988) argues that the demands of patriarchal colonialism have promoted the economic, health and environmental crisis that we need to address in a state of emergency.

According to Diana Mitlin and David Satterwaite (2013), the Global South is a new term academics use for countries that were once referred to as *in means of development* or *developing world* by the United Nations. Coincidentally, the Global South, a construct from Economic Geography (Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, 2000), encompasses countries that were former colonies or still are. In the opinion of Wendy Brown (2019), this categorization has facilitated neoliberalism.⁵ In contrast, geography divides the North and the South Hemispheres by the Equator line.

To highlight the Global North and the Global South's socioeconomic distinctions, I will continue to use these terms from now on⁶. The Global North encompasses neoliberal values

⁵ Wendy Brown (2019) understands neoliberalism as a "governing rationality" through which everything is "economized" and in which human beings become market actors. Every field of activity is seen as a market, and every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, or state) is governed as a firm. Brown argues that Neoliberal revolution brought from the Thatcher-Regan era "aimed at releasing markets and morals to govern and discipline individuals while maximizing freedom, and it did so by demonizing the social and the democratic version of political life." (Brown, p. 11)

⁶ In the 1980s economists used the Brandt Line to describe and differentiate the separation of countries in terms of development and wealth (GDP: Gross domestic product).

(Brown, 2019). The following section provides an overview of the remnants of a *permanent colonizing state*, i.e. *patriarchal colonialism* (Rita Segato, 2011). Through this revision of the literature, we will observe that *patriarchal colonialism* particularly impacts women from the Global South, specifically in Latin America and the Caribbean (hereafter LAC).

In 2006, Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Heather Hofmeister collaborated on *Globalization, uncertainty and Women's Careers*, a book that mainly brings studies from the European labour market to overview the increasing and steady rates of women attaining paid work. According to Phyllis Moen and Patricia Roehling (2005), during the 20th Century, there was a *career mystique* across the West, which helped establish an institutionalized primary labour market. Blossfeld and Hofmeister (2006) specify that the blueprint for occupational careers consisted of a life course beginning with a period of education, followed by years of continuous, full-time productive work, and then retirement.

Segato (2016) contributes to explain *patriarchal colonialism* stating that “the history of the public sphere or state sphere is nothing less than the history of gender” (p. 617). Global North worldviews have prevailed, and gendered expectations have unraveled in the public sphere. In other words, the dominant historical narrative of the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) is *patriarchal colonialism*. Furthermore, Segato opened a critique of patriarchal systems by introducing the term *minoritization*: the collective positioning of women and their representation in society. She states that “minoritizing means treating women as lesser beings and relegating them to the realm of the intimate, the private, the particular, treating them as minority and consequently minor issues” (Segato, 2016, p. 615). Segato (2014) considers that *new wars* have relied upon former conquering ways to inflict fear in the conquered. In her

opinion, the main feature of *new wars* is their informality, as revealed in a liminal⁷ state defined as parastatal⁸.

In this point, it is interesting to note that, inspired by Naomi's Klein (2007) concept of *disaster capitalism*⁹ Rachel Luft (2016) used the term *racialized patriarchy disaster* to describe the phenomena as "political, institutional, organizational, and cultural practices that converge before, during, and after a disaster to produce injustice" (p.1). Even these feminist theories that advocate for social justice are distant from what Segato (2014) claims through the parastatal nature of the violence inflicted on women in Latin America.

Women in LAC experience the oppression of parastatal patriarchal abuse. According to the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEOLAC) (2019), a subsidiary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Brazil and Mexico are the countries with the highest rates of femicides in absolute numbers. LAC countries are experiencing a humanitarian crisis, where women's disappearance, abductions, and brutal femicides are happening (GEOLAC, 2019). According to the 2019 National Survey on Urban Public Safety (ENSU), 79.6% of Mexican women report feeling unsafe¹⁰ (INEGI, 2019).

⁷ Liminal means a *threshold*. The concept of liminal has been used in Anthropology, Sociology, Politics, Psychology and, in this case, in feminist theory.

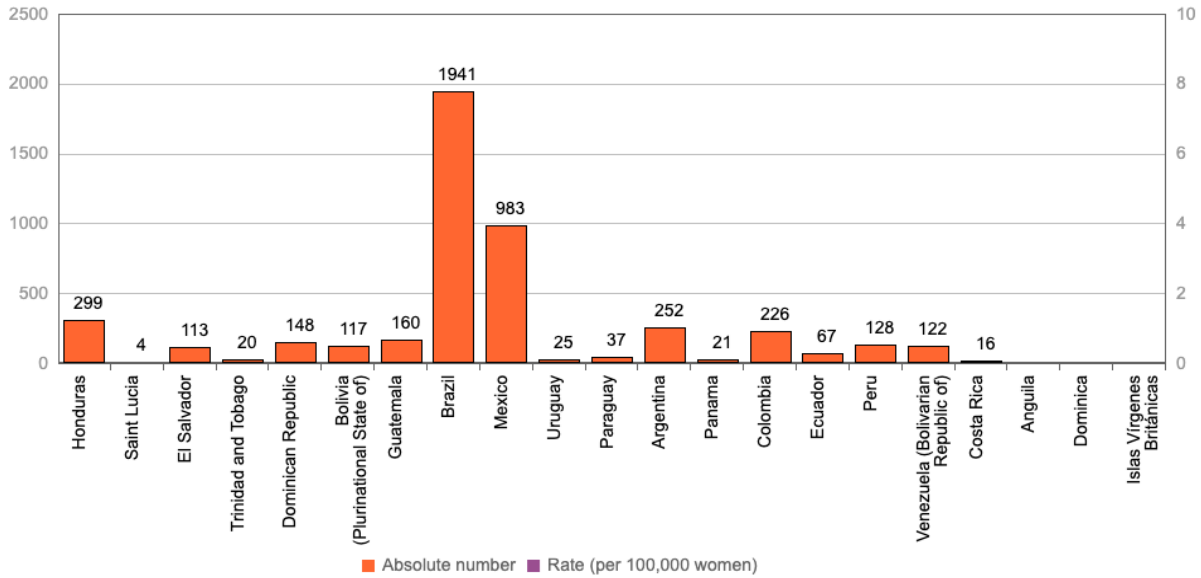
⁸ Parastatal means out of the ruling Government.

⁹ In 2007, Klein wrote an essay for Harper's Magazine where she explains how neoliberalist policies permeate disasters. "The truth is ... more dangerous. An economic system that requires constant growth while bucking almost all serious attempts at environmental regulation generates a steady stream of disasters all on its own, whether military, ecological, or financial. The appetite for easy, short term profits offered by purely speculative investment has turned the stock, currency, and real estate markets into crisis-creation machines, as the Asian financial crisis, the Mexican peso crisis, the dot-com collapse, and the subprime-mortgage crisis demonstrate".

¹⁰ Contrastingly, 68.3 % of men feel unsafe. The ENSU report does demonstrate that the perception of all Mexicans of insecurity has increased, and women report a higher sense of fear of insecurity. The report provides statistics about the perception of security in distinct areas of daily living such as taking public transport, walking alone at night, minors walking on their own, using cash machines, fear of being robbed or assaulted, etc.

Figure 2.

Femicides in Latin America and the Caribbean (21 countries) in 2019



Note. The ciphers depict the official information collected by the GEOLAC from 15 countries in Latin America and three countries in the Caribbean.

Figure 2 presents GEOLAC’s (2019) data on femicides for 2019: 4,555 women. If we add the information of five countries in the region that only report the murder of women committed by their partner or ex-partner (Barbados, Chile, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and Suriname), the total number of femicides would be 4,640 for the year 2019. GEOLAC (2019) reports that Honduras has the highest rates of femicide per 100,000 women (6.2), followed by El Salvador (3.3), the Dominican Republic (2.7), and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2.1). In the Caribbean, six countries recorded 26 women victims of gender-based violence in 2019, which marked a downturn from the 36 cases reported in 2018.

The statistics provide a gist of the complex levels of violence experienced in these countries. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that *new wars* (Segato, 2014) produce murders

among other groups, such as gender-diverse communities¹¹, human rights protectors and environmental protectors (Paul Angelo & David Gevarter, 2020), particularly those of indigenous origins (Global Witness¹², 2020). According to Amnesty International, Latin America is the world's most dangerous region for human rights activists (2021). Therefore, it is relevant for this study to consider this data as it provides the sociocultural context of women growing up in fear in Latin America. This tragedy has promoted Latin American feminists to contextualize their vision as decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2010).

Feminism: intersectional and decolonial

Suzanne Spencer-Wood, a scholar on feminist historical archaeology and nonlinear systems theory argues that feminist theories offer insights into different characteristics of power dynamics in social institutions executing *patriarchal colonialism* (Spencer-Wood, 2016). Furthermore, Spencer-Wood (2016) claims radical feminist theory reveals two facts: culturally condoned, systematic, and institutionalized violence against women often enforces male dominance; and European and indigenous men who have adopted a macho hypermasculinity enforce such violence (p. 489).

Lugones (2020) describes her understanding of decolonial feminism as influenced by Segato's work. Lugones (2020) explains that Segato's work with indigenous peoples from Amazonia and Southern Argentina allowed her to develop the *mundo aldea* (village world) concept. Segato (2015) notes that the continuation of a nation-state that inherited interventionism

¹¹ A study by Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM) showed that at least 286 trans or gender-diverse people were murdered in Latin America from October 2019 to September 2020. Brazil reported the highest number of victims with 152 homicides. Mexico was the second deadliest country for trans people in Latin America, with 57 murders in the same period.

¹² The report from Global Witness (2020) shows that there were 212 killings of environmentalists, and that two countries were the ones where half of these tragedies happened: Colombia and the Philippines, followed by Brazil, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, India, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Congo, Burkina Faso, Romania, Kazakhstan, Uganda, Peru, Cambodia, Bolivia, Ghana, Kenya and Costa Rica.

and colonized thought has wounded the mundo aldea to this day. Thus, Lugones (2020) argues that this:

weakens autonomies, trespasses into institutional life, renders the communitarian weave, generates dependence, and offers the discourse of egalitarianism. At the same time, it dominates with instrumental liberal reason and racism; it emasculates nonwhites and stresses them. (p. 31)

For decolonial feminist practitioners (Linda Martín Alcoff, 2020), it is crucial to highlight the pursuit of rights of all LAC populations, particularly those of indigenous origins, through a decolonial lens on gender and reaffirm indigenous understandings of gender. In a 2020 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, Martín deDios states that the indigenous people of LAC are approximately 50 million belonging to 500 different ethnic groups. The largest populations (in absolute and relative terms) are in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia. Indigenous people account for 8% of the region's population. However, they make up 14 % of the population living in poverty and 17 % of the population living in extreme poverty. Material poverty affects 43 % of indigenous households in LAC. This proportion is double the proportion of the rest of the population and extreme poverty is 2.7 times greater (de Dios, 2020).

Socioeconomic status and Higher Education

By examining statistics about the systemic increasing violence in Latin America, the mention of the *mundo aldea* (Segato, 2011) outlines a subjective reality that a minority group of people, particularly indigenous populations live within a bigger group of people who are considered racialized minorities in the Global North. These racialized minorities have some socioeconomic advantage over their co-national.

Higher Education Mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean: Challenges and Opportunities for a Renewed Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Diplomas is a study conducted by the UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC, 2019). IESALC shows statistics that a vast number of the students who move abroad do not have sponsorships and fully assume the cost of their education. It appears that in LAC, public financing is scarce, fragmented, and ineffective. For example, in Mexico, 48% of student mobility abroad in 2015-2016 was financed by families (IESALC, 2019).

Additionally, between 2012 and 2017, student mobility has increased from 198 to 220 million worldwide, which means a growth of 10%. In LAC, the increase has been even more significant. It rose to 16%: from 23.7 to 27.4 million in the same period (IESALC, 2019). Interestingly, this same study claims that in 2017 312 thousand students migrated from one country in LAC to study in another, 120 thousand (38%) stayed in the same region while 170 thousand (54%) chose North America or Western Europe as their destination, or what I am referring here as the Global North.

In contrast, Jairo Acuña-Alfaro and David Khoudour (2020), workers and blog collaborators on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), report that in the past decade (2010-2019), LAC has had an increase of 66% of immigrants within the region, making 42.7 million people living away from their birth countries. By the end of 2019, 4.8 million Venezuelans had migrated seeking asylum or refuge, 1,6 million moved to Colombia. Since 2014, 265.000 migrants (mostly unaccompanied women and children) are transient, seeking to move to the U.S.A; 1 of 5 are successful. The remaining 80%, are detained by Mexican or American authorities (Acuña-Alfaro & Khoudour, 2020).

Hence, this can provide a possible explanation to the waves of *distinct* migratory movements from LAC to the Global North. I highlight the use of *distinct* migratory groups since the IESALC (2019) report highlights (without clarity) that family resources finance student mobility for Higher Education in LAC.

Women's identities and career choices

Shelley Correll (2001) demonstrates a link between women's career choices and their identities or perceptions of their identities at a macro level. According to her, gender is a multilevel system consisting not only of roles and identities at the individual level. Correll states that it also comprises "ways of behaving with one another at the interactional level, and cultural beliefs and distributions of resources at the macro-level" (p. 1695). Hence, the multilevel nature of this system permits practices that facilitate the reproduction of gender inequality at the macro, micro, and interactional levels to co-occur (Correll, 2001).

In a quest to understand predisposed decision-making when choosing a career, Correll (2001) examined, from a sociological view, how cultural beliefs bias self-identity and gender-orient career choices. She concludes, "the gender system is overdetermined and represents a powerfully conservative system" (Correll, 2001, p. 1695). Thus, according to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS), less than 30% of the world's researchers are women. The women to men ratio in STEM is 1 to 7. In humanities, fewer women have higher degrees of education than their male colleagues (UIS, 2019).

Correll (2001) cites studies that found that students perceive math and sciences as subjects geared for males; furthermore, that there is a "cultural message that suggests that

women either could not or should not do math and science” (p. 1696). The lack of female STEM participation is also influenced by families and educators who have lower expectations of women to pursue these subjects (Correll, 2001). As a result, Correll explains the pattern of women pursuing *feminine professions* as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Despite efforts to encourage more women to pursue STEM careers, women in Latin America continue to face challenges of discrimination as well as unconscious bias on the way up to pursuing science careers (Camilo López-Aguirre, 2019).

Through this revision, we can observe that the macro-system to the Global North and Global South, in the current Globalized world, continues to dictate gender expectations, a *mandate for masculinity* (Segato, 2015) that influences personal self-assessment and personal beliefs (Correll, 2001) on women’s self-evaluation of their capabilities in the educational world.

Exosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1989) considers that the exosystem consists of the external systems others are in contact with, but the individual is not part of directly. The agents affect through indirect interactions amongst the mesosystems to the individual, examples of these systems are family, the neighbourhood, mass media (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This section outlines a brief history of women’s education in the Global North and a brief history of women’s education in Mexico.

Education: women in the public sphere

This section provides an overview of women in education from a historical perspective. While there is no single sourcebook that details the history of women’s integration to Education and Academia, the *History of Education Quarterly Journal* has numerous articles on the

different stages of how women got space to be part of higher education. The first known University degree to be granted to a woman was made in the 13th Century to Bettisia Gozzadini in Italy. Gozzadini was a lawyer in 1237 and, two years later, she taught at the University of Bologna (Janna Brancolini, 2014).

Ellen Jordan (1991) explores how it was until the 19th century that middle- and upper-class English women's education focused on providing them skills to become good wives—setting an example for Europe and North America. Jordan (1991) explains that discourses in this century were full of assertions such as “the true end of the education of women... is making good wives and mothers” (p. 439). Although girls' schooling set an example for public schools, the persistent narrative was to give girls skills to be good housewives (Jordan, 1991).

Jane Gaskell (2014) develops a brief history of women in Education in Canada. She explains that before 1850, generally, middle-class Canadian families would hire governesses and tutors to educate their children at home. Gaskell (2014) explains that after 1871 through the free provincial public schools, enrollment in Ontario for girls and boys was almost equal; however, advanced education for women was only available at private schools. The history of education in Canada and its provinces is complex, since similarly to the history of LAC, there are post-colonial policies to *minoritize* indigenous peoples, their languages, and their knowledge (Scott Rutherford¹³, 2010). Gaskell's research aims to overview how middle-class white women in Canada during the 19th Century gained some educational rights.

To fast forward this overview about women's education, Natalie Sokoloff (1992) describes professions, semi-professions, and women's place in them through a historical view

¹³ Rutherford's article is a very interesting interview with Bonita Lawrence, a m'kmak' metis academic, who develops on the Indian Act, the residential schooling system and social justice for indigenous peoples in Canada.

from the 1960s to the 1980s in the USA. Sokoloff made the distinction between professions and semi professions and the place of black and white women in them. Professions like law, medicine, architecture, ministry, dentistry, judicial positions, science and university teaching were the elite occupations that hold a high degree of honour and status in the USA (Sokoloff, 1992). During the decades of the 1960s to 1980s, they pertained to white males. Semi professions -elementary teaching, nursing, librarianship and social work- required fewer years of education and were occupied by females (Sokoloff, 1992).

Patsy Parker (2015) wrote about women in Higher Education and the changes in women's attainment in leadership roles over the past decades in the USA. In the first half of the 20th century, women faced legal restrictions, quotas, administrative regulations, and anti-nepotism rules for training or practicing professions. An example is Sandford's quota system, which allowed one female per every three males (Parker, 2015). Later, in the 21st century, according to the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 2003), women attained the highest number of degrees in traditionally female careers (teaching and nursing) (Parker, 2015). The USA and other Global North set aspirational examples for Global South nations in the current globalized world. John Douglas (2010) claims that, in the USA, higher education rates and employment bring "greater opportunities for both social and economic mobility and status" (p. 6983).

An empowering example of how girls' educational rights are changing in Global South countries like Pakistan is Malala Yousafzai's labour of advocacy (Yousafzai, 2013). Yousafzai's example is one of many that can help us understand resistance to oppression. At a young age, she recognized the need to speak up in the name of girls like her to achieve education. Her story portrays the fight against a male-privileged system. In her website, Yousafzai wrote in 2012:

After months of surgeries and rehabilitation, I joined my family in our new home in the U.K. It was then that I knew I had a choice: I could live a quiet life, or I could make the most of this new life I had been given. I was determined to continue my fight until every girl could go to school. (n.p.)

Yousafzai's non-governmental organization, *Malala Fund*, leads research that exposes many countries where girls are not allowed their fundamental human right to education. In the case of LAC, the history of education developed within the history of *Colonization* and Catholic education through *castellanization*¹⁴ or *Hispanicization* (James Vigil, 2011), a process of teaching in the Nueva España (New Spain) for the natives to learn Spanish, Spanish culture, and religion.

Education: a brief history in Mexico

In this section, I will outline the history of Mexico's education. Vigil (2011) states that education in New Spain was a sector dominated and controlled mainly by the Dominicans and Jesuits as part of the religious colonialist settlement. Henceforth, only after the Independence movement in 1821, Mexico's progressive leaders centralized the education system (David Scott, C.M. Posner, Chris Martin, & Elsa Guzman, 2018). The authors explain that Benito Juárez, the first indigenous president in Mexico and Latin America, facilitated a new Constitution and *La Reforma*. In 1857, *La Reforma* established the separation of church and state, and that education was a right. Juárez facilitated the liberal ideas of education to be secular, obligatory, and free (Scott et al., 2018).

¹⁴ Castellanizar – to Castilianize was the political process of linguistic expansion of Castilla/Spain for the populations in the colonies of the New Spain to assimilate Spanish language, culture and religion.

Stephanie Mitchell and Patience Schell (2007) found that before the Mexican Revolution in 1910, high-class women led the women's suffrage movement in Mexico. They supported access to funding and education for the betterment of women, creating Feminist Leagues and organizations (Mitchell & Schell, 2007). Nora Pasternac (1997) found that, between 1887 and 1889, Laureana Wright de Kleinhansz published *Violetas de Anáhuac* (Violets of Anáhuac). This generation procured the secular education of women, girls, indigenous children and indigenous adults (Pasternac, 1997). Here we can find another echo from the macro-system. A revision of the exo-system illustrates that the *zeitgeist* or spirit of the era has deeply impacted women's place in education.

The individual does not interact directly with the components of the exosystem. Such is the case of the acceptance and involvement of women in education throughout history. Even so, these conditions indirectly impact the situation and circumstances of each woman when making decisions related to their professional development.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem comprises the interrelations between two or more settings where the developing person actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). In Mexico, the complexity that influences career decision-making is related to the *mandate of masculinity* (Segato, 2014), as referred to on the macrosystem. So far, this research paper has presented examples of heteronormalized gender expectations from both macro and exo-systems.

Mexico and women's career choices

Different studies and institutions have explored how the socio-cultural and economic context influences women's career choices in Mexico. I will mention two examples in this

section: the survey undertaken by the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI) in conjunction with the Women's National Institute (INMUJERES), both Government institutions from Mexico, and the other example from the Technological Institute and of Superior Studies of Monterrey (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, ITESM).

In 2019, INEGI and INMUJERES revealed that the literacy rate for both women and men grew between 2000 and 2008. However, the literacy rate for women surpassed men's literacy rate from 2009 onwards. The report also shows that the completion rate for secondary education, trade school and undergraduate degrees is similar for women and men. However, high teenage pregnancy rates influence the female completion rate at the secondary and higher levels (INMUJERES, 2019).

Consequently, teenage pregnancy¹⁵ in a country like Mexico means that women are more likely to drop out of school (UNICEF, 2018). At the same time, women are more likely to be unsuccessful at the educational level because of teenage pregnancy or domestic duties (INMUJERES, 2019). Curiously, the most significant difference in academic accomplishments amongst women and men in Mexico is that there are slightly more boys in elementary school than girls (by 1.5%) and women tend to be involved in technical professions (INMUJERES, 2019).

In the Education section of *Women and Men in Mexico 2019*, INEGI and INMUJERES identified fields of study by gender distribution. Their report found that tendencies of career choices amongst women are law, psychology, educational sciences, and nursing (INEGI, 2019).

¹⁵ UNICEF (2018) reports that 9 out of 10 pregnant teenagers will drop-out of school in Mexico, due to unwanted/unplanned pregnancies and lack of sexual education. This makes them vulnerable to unwanted/forced matrimonies and sexual abuse. Sexual Education in High School level is still poorly taught and even censored in some states, hence, contraceptives and other methods to prevent and plan pregnancy are not available. Currently, in Mexico there are numerous collective movements of women rights' activist seeking for national approval for abortion, the last two years during demonstrations on Women's Day have been oppressed by militarized police forces, resulting in physically and sexual abused of the protesters.

On the contrary, men are more likely to choose law, administration, engineering, telecommunications, and medicine, which will provide a more stable and higher income (INEGI, 2019). This report also brings the most striking inequity differences amongst women and males in academia. The National System of Researchers (SNI), which aims to promote technological and scientific development in Mexico and gives grants and other academic benefits, has more than 27 thousand current researchers and candidates. Only 36.6% are women (INEGI, 2019).

The *Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey* (ITESM) recently surveyed their High Schools system in Mexico City and urban surroundings to learn how women make decisions for pursuing and choosing their undergraduate studies. The survey showed that teenage women consider their family opinions to make decisions for career choices. These family trends tend to influence them against choosing STEM-oriented majors since they are too male-oriented (ITESM, 2019). In other words, these young women are making career decisions that might adapt to the standards and expectations of their families' internalized *mandate for masculinity* (Segato, 2015). ITESM (2019) highlights that these phenomena could have a negative effect on its female students.

These examples help us get a gist of the lived realities in Mexico and the fact that sociocultural values and beliefs are still influencing women's career choices, feminine gender role expectations, family expectations. These sociocultural values permeate through the different systems leaching the microsystem and individual level.

Microsystem

The microsystem is understood as the individual's interpersonal activities and relationships when face-to-face interaction occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Bronfenbrenner (1989) considers that belief systems play a role in the microsystem. In this system, the direct actors of

influence are the neighbourhood, religious practices, school, home surroundings, close relatives, and family (Härkönen, 2006). As expressed in the introductory chapter, the mandate for masculinity (Segato, 2010/2018) influences the complexity of the decision-making process. This mandate affects all spheres of social interactions. Estella Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupperecht (1986) trace back the pressures on gender expectations to ancient narratives and archetypes.

Women's identities: archetypes, the wild-self, and the true-self

Estela Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupperecht (1986) edited the book *Feminist Archetypal Theory*. The relevance of this book is that the authors brought to light a discussion about Jungian absolute polar and unchanging constructs (Lauter & Scherier Ruppercht, 1986). The authors claim that the archetype may be universal, in the sense of being a tendency that women across times and cultures share. The images are transpersonal in that they partake the history of the image and the individual's subjective experiences. They are often numinous because of their cumulative energy. (Lauter & Scherier Ruppercht, 1986, p.14-15)

Considering Segato's (2015) *mundo aldea* and the cosmogonies of people who grew up in LAC, syncretism deeply embeds elements from the dominant Catholic religion and pre-colonial cosmogonies (William Madsen, 1982). Thus, I argue that, in LAC communities, the *collective unconscious*¹⁶ (Carl Jung, 1936) is alive and congruent to the individual's subjective experiences (Lauter & Scherier Ruppercht, 1986). Segato (2016) affirms that the European conquest of the Americas installed a binarism considerably different from previous *dualisms*, especially gender.

¹⁶ In Jung's analytic psychology any one of a set of symbols representing aspects of the psyche that derive from the accumulated experience of humankind. These inherited symbols are held in the collective unconscious and serve as a frame of reference with which individuals view the world and as one of the foundations on which the structure of personality is built.

Other decolonial feminists like Lugones (2003, 2012), Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997) and Nkuru Nzewu (2006) agree that colonialism launched a gender system entirely new for pre-colonial societies. Consequently, Julia Campos Clímaco (2020) states:

dualisms concern universes that have different meanings, but which are complete and specific in their own existence: they are not hierarchically opposed and antagonistic binaries nor a replacement or negating of the other... Binarisms reduce alterity to a purging and expulsion of the other, if not physically, ethically. (p. 2)

Through this profound change in the cosmogony of the *mundo aldea* (Segato, 2015), the conquest agenda meshed beliefs, symbols, archetypes. Psychoanalyst and anthropologist Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) wrote *Women who run with the Wolves*, a book that brings an in-depth study of legends, myths and indigenous stories from the Americas. She analyses the functions of the archetypal female intuition and unveils the collective unconscious that these stories hold. Estés (1992) reflects on the archetypal psychic forces women have to confront to trust their *wild self* when making decisions and choices. In this sense, their *wild-self* is related to the *true-self*, as “a set of innate, immutable characteristics that the individual needs to ‘discover’ to live a fulfilling life” (Rebecca Schlegel & Joshua Hicks, 2011, p.989). The present research seeks to identify ways to enhance the process of discovering the *true-self* when making career choices.

From the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) view, “true self is any self-aspect that feels autonomous, internally caused, personally meaningful, and self-determined (deCharms, 1968; Deci, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991; Ryan, 1993 in Schlegel & Hicks, 2011, p.990). The discovery of these inner and personal aspects may support the process of decision making reducing the influence of external and contextual forces.

Individual System

The ESM recognizes all the spheres of influence the individual has, and it also highlights the individuals themselves as the center of these experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). For Bronfenbrenner (1989), the uniqueness of these individuals relies on their experience of their human body, equipped with emotional, cognitive, and biological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

I will explore the individual system in depth through the distillation of information generated through the heuristic arts-based inquiry (HABI). As a piece of complementary information about my lived experience, the reader can learn about my personal academic history through a brief narrative in the Appendix section at the end of this work.

Chapter 3. Methodology

In the present paper, I chose a mixed-methods approach. This chapter presents the methodologies involved in the research. It will describe my adaptation to blend heuristic inquiry with arts-based research, informed through my research experiences as an Art Therapy student and former research experiences in the Music Neurocognition and Neuroaesthetics fields. Through this heuristic arts-based inquiry (henceforth HABI), I attempted to unravel from my personal experiences how a male-dominated culture has influenced my career decision paths.

My goal with this introspection was to provide, through self-reflection and self-awareness, compassion to my lived experiences of oppression and privileges and, through this process, invite the readers to engage in their own reflections. This study's leading research question is:

- How can engaging in heuristic arts-based processes deepen my knowledge about how my lived experiences within a male-dominated culture have led me on my career path as a neuroscientist and an art therapist?

And a subsidiary question is:

- How can this arts-based inquiry be of impact for other creative art therapists to develop cultural humility?

Heuristic Inquiry

It is relevant to mention what the word heuristic means to understand the heuristic way of knowing and making meaning, describe the history within the academic world, its conceptualization, and explain the link between heuristic inquiry and creativity. From its Greek etymology, *heuriskein* means to discover or to find (APA, n.d.). A word close in meaning is eureka, which from the Greek *heureka* means *I found it*. Patton (2002) considers that the

substance in a heuristic inquiry is to question “what is my experience of this phenomenon?” (p. 107)

The APA (n.d.) defines *heuristics* as a quick path for generating a judgement, deciding and solving complex problems. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1974) developed groundbreaking interdisciplinary studies on cognitive psychology and economics; they described three general heuristics as *rules of thumb*. In contrast, a heuristic inquiry is an immersive process (Clark Moustakas, 1990).

According to Lynn Kapitan (2010), Moustakas was one of the first academics to describe heuristic inquiry. Moustakas (1990) demonstrated how heuristic concepts and processes form components of the research design and become the basis for a methodology. Moustakas (1990) states that using this methodology, “the self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge” (p. 2).

Furthermore, Moustakas (1990) explains that there are six components involved in the process of heuristic inquiry, shown in chart 1. Moustakas’ phases are like Graham Wallas’ (1926) phases of the creative process. Chart 1 cross-references both authors’ phases, which, as appreciated, are similar in essence. Moustakas considers that heuristic research begins with the question that needs to be illuminated or answered. It represents a scientific search that involves seven concepts: identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, and the internal frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990).

Chart 1.

Comparative Chart on Wallas' and Moustakas's Phases.

<i>Wallas' Creative Process Phases</i>	<i>Moustakas's Phases of Heuristic Inquiry</i>
Preparation	Initial Engagement
Incubation	Immersion Incubation
Illumination	Illumination
Verification	Explication Creative Synthesis

As a qualitative methodology, heuristic inquiry allows the researcher to understand a phenomenon from direct-first hand. Moustakas (1990) argues that “the researchers’ personal reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry” (p. 4). Moustakas expresses that the heuristic discovery will co-occur through self-understanding and self-growth. Nonetheless, Sandy Sela-Smith (2002) criticizes Moustakas’s (1990) heuristic inquiry. Sela-Smith found that out of 28 heuristic investigations following Moustakas’ phases, only three researchers reported a subjective, open-ended inquiry that brought tacit knowledge and resulted in transformation.

To repair Moustakas' (1990) methodology, Sela-Smith (2002) suggests incorporating a “heuristic self-search inquiry” (p. 83), reinforcing the investigators’ subjective experience. Sela-Smith’s proposal is congruent to a feminist stance where one considers individual subjectivity (Segato, 2015; Lugones, 2020). Sela-Smiths’ (2002) *self-search* integrates well with the Five Whys technique (Robert Pojasek, 2000), a process that engages a “short-cut to get to the root cause of a problem” (p. 82).

Sela-Smith’s (2002) revision to Moustakas’ heuristic inquiry enlightened me to reflect how through the use of a creativity technique, the Five Whys by Pojasek (2000), it seemed

redundant to follow Moustakas' heuristic inquiry method. Moreover, I argue that using the term heuristic in qualitative research has confused investigators (Sela-Smith, 20002). Thus, I consider that heuristic inquiry could incorporate a mindset of heuristics as understood from Kahneman and Tversky's (1974) theories. The researcher can access self-transformation by reflecting on their *heuristics* (Kahneman & Tversky, 1974). Therefore, heuristic investigation can support self-knowledge, introspection and self-search (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Consequently, I decided to follow and honour Wallas' creative phases. According to Lilian Dabdoub Alvarado (2016), Wallas' description of the creative process provided the grounding to all derived research on creativity, creative thinking and creative techniques. Dabdoub Alvarado (2016) states that Wallas' contributions "helped more people understand that everyone can be involved in the creative processes in different circumstances and at different points in their lives" (p. 50).

Pojasek (2000) explains the Five Whys as a process that involves systematically asking *why* at least five times. First, the researcher poses a general question or problem, and then, they ask why. Afterwards, they ask again, why to each response. Therefore, each response provides the tools to dig for the root content (Pojasek, 2000). The Five Whys aims to get to the root reason or cause of a problem through an inquiry process. Creativity research and organizational psychology use this technique widely to engage divergent and convergent thinking teams to problem-solve (Oliver Serrat, 2017; Ivan Fantin, 2014; Danielle Kohfeldt & Regina Langhout, 2011). The Data Collection chapter will provide further details to clarify the rationale for following Wallas' (1926) creative phases and how I integrated the Five Whys technique (Pojasek, 2000) into this investigation.

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research (ABR) has become an accepted methodology to investigate the subjective human experience. Patricia Levy's (2020) position on ABR aligns closely with a social justice stance, a foundational position to this paper. Levy uses the metaphor that ABR researchers are carving their own tools in this growing field to present knowledge about a theme. According to Gary Knowles and Andrea Cole (2008), ABR "can be defined as the systematic use of the artistic process, this making of artistic expressions becomes the primary way of understanding, examining and embodiment of the research process" (p. 29).

Judith Butler and Athenea Athanasiou (2013) claimed that ABR is an embodied experience. The authors describe this embodied experience as dispossession, which signifies an inaugural submission of the subject-to-be to comprehension norms. Butler and Athanasiou (2013) explain that dispossession is a submission that constitutes the *ambivalent* and tenuous processes of subjection in a paradoxical simultaneity with mastery. It thus "resonates with the psychic foreclosures that determine which passionate attachments are possible and plausible for one to become a subject" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; p.1).

Therefore, dispossession seems to be a construct I might find helpful to integrate into my artmaking process. Throughout my art responses, I envisioned a way to help me deconstruct and construct the ambivalent feelings brought by self-inquiry about the patriarchal influences on my career choices.

Heuristic Arts-based inquiry: HABI

Blending the qualitative methodologies of a heuristic inquiry and ABR linked with a systemic understanding makes it possible to unravel self-awareness and self-knowledge of my

lived experiences choosing my career path. From now on, I will use the acronym HABI that stands for heuristic arts-based inquiry. As Moustakas (1990) proposes, heuristic inquiry involves an attuned, open and receptive researcher who, throughout all the facets of the experience phenomenon, will allow comprehension and compassion to circulate and recognize “the place and unity of intellect, emotion, and spirit” (p.16).

As mentioned in the heuristic inquiry section, I will follow Wallas’ (1926). Dabdoub Alvarado (2016) highlights that the creative process is not a linear one. Generally, it will involve an impulse to communicate the results, which adds a social dimension to the creative act. Thus, to Dabdoub Alvarado, creativity “involves serendipity, as the possibility of finding something you were not looking for” (2016, p. 50).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this work are not distant from any other qualitative research. Qualitative research presents challenges to navigate ethically, like respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participant(s) involved. Thus, I needed to consider an ethical aspect of how to respectfully bring up my own culture and family history with care since it reflects patriarchal influences on my career path. Consequently, as a personal lived experience, it is essential to acknowledge that the reflections and images created were a unique experience that is not translatable to others. However, they brought universal themes and symbols.

By being mindful of the personal emotional implications and impact this heuristic reflection brought, I planned spaces, times and breaks to take care of myself, be compassionate and kind. Pre-acknowledging that such a personal reflection on women's oppression and my own lived experience would trigger complicated feelings and relieving trauma experiences. Taking

care of myself¹⁷ consisted of committing to a daily short mindful walk and a weekly “forest bathe”, a hike in nature for at least an hour (I am fortunate to live blocks away from Mont-Royal in Montreal).

Furthermore, the art-based immersion process allowed me to engage in self-exploration, self-reflection, and some insights; nonetheless, this was not therapy. As Pat Allen (1995) also discovered, artmaking itself can prove to be therapeutic. Through this research, I gave myself space to reclaim time for personal growth. I also reflected on the ethical principles I want to cultivate to lead my personal life and art therapy practice. Agreeing to respect nature, respect my own culture (and acknowledge biases it can bring) and be compassionate of my complex family’s history.

Validity and Reliability

The blended methodology proposed recognizes that this HABI involves the realm of the lived experience as a unique subjective one. As mentioned in qualitative research, a strategy to address validity is to have triangulation. Patton (1999) defines triangulation as using numerous methods or data sources to develop a global understanding of a phenomenon. Thus, I doubled the narrative inquiry by posing the same questions twice with a slight difference to achieve triangulation. Then, responding to the questions visually without allowing myself to re-read the narrative answers.

¹⁷ I used the expression “taking care of myself” as a translation from Spanish “cuidarme” which is distinct from self-care or “autocuidado”. Self-care as a concept has a complex story of abuse from liberalist White feminist and the self-care industry. “Self-care” was first used by Black feminist poet Audre Lorde. Lorde described taking care of herself as a need for preservation in *The Black Women’s health book: speaking for ourselves*, edited by Evelyn White (1990). “Self-care” has become a mainstream concept to take advantage of personal needs and monetize people’s needs to take care of themselves through satisfying their emotional needs in whichever personal way those are satisfied, but encouraging a capitalistic consumption. For example: day in the spa, treating yourself to a fancy restaurant, etc.

By physically distancing and taking time away, I also aimed to disengage my thoughts from the thematic and come back with a “fresh” mind to answer a new question. Furthermore, I conducted the process of analysis of the themes in a systematic way. As an experienced researcher, I considered that as much as possible through the visual journal. I was able to keep systematic documentation of my research process. Hence, the generalizability of this project could be attained to a certain extent if the researcher would share similar upbringing experiences as mine.

The nature of heuristic self-inquiry (Sela-Smith, 2002) brings an opportunity for subjectivity. I recognize that the tacit knowledge, previous to the one collected through researching the literature, is unique to my lived experiences, influencing my artworks. Hence, the reproducibility of the present work would not be attainable. However, the contribution of this research involves an original way to apply a creative thinking technique to artmaking and blend ABR with heuristic inquiry.

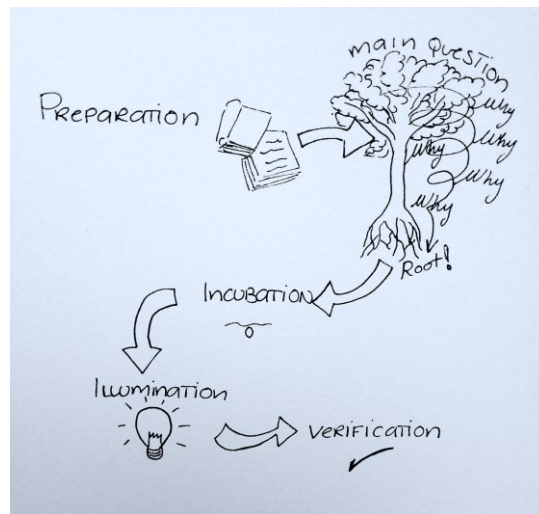
Chapter 4. Data Collection

In this chapter, I will share the different ways I collected data as I engaged in the HABI process to understand better my experience of choosing a career within a male-dominated culture and patriarchal system. I collected the data using a mixed-method, explained in the previous Methodology chapter, using Wallas' (1926) creative process as a guide for each step to guide the data collection.

The Figure below (Fig. 3) helps to illustrate how this HABI process involves two ways of creative knowing. These include a narrative approach (through the Five Whys inquiry technique) and a visual method (through art responses to each root answer).

Figure 3.

Flow Chart of the Blended Methods of Inquiry



Note. This image illustrates steps taken to gather data.

The following sections break down my creative process where I employed Wallas' (1926) creative four phases: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. I describe how I conducted this self-inquiry investigation throughout each stage.

Preparation

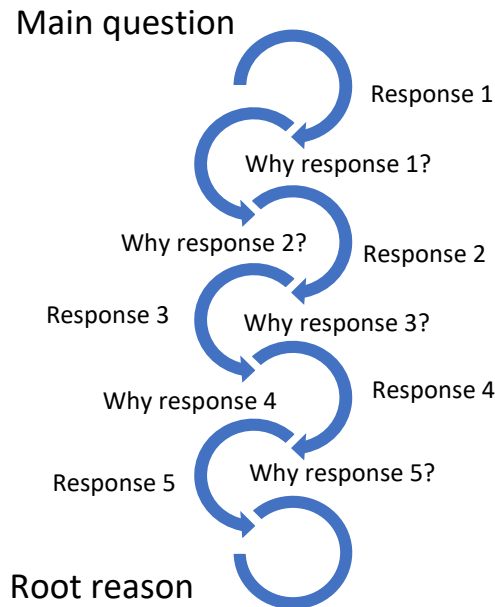
The preparation stage, according to Wallas (1926), is a stage of inquiry. Wallas (1926) explains that preparation involves the individuals' assessment of their desire for knowledge and their creative way of applying tools to research. Here, the person in the creative process works with factual, logical, tangible, and scientific information, and thinking is conscious mode (Sadler-Smith, 2015).

As described in the methodology chapter, this project blended ABR with heuristic inquiry to allow reflection, embodiment, and introspection to attain self-awareness of a lived experience. The preparation stage involved setting the physical and mental space to immerse in self-inquiry. While I was conducting the literature review for this work, I kept a journal where I took notes on theories and even sketched how I would map the questions I would inquire myself to prompt the art responses. It became evident that since I had mapped the literature review using the ESM (Brofrenbrenner, 1979/1992), it was harmonious and natural to ask myself questions that would address each system.

Consequently, I elaborated on five questions that would lead to art engagement. As explained in the methodology chapter, Pojasek (2000) described how the *Five Whys* technique of inquiry of a problem supports finding the root causes. Pojasek (2000) notes that analyzing the root causes allows us to guide our behaviour to avoid generating future problems and creative solutions with a deep understanding of the situation. I consider this technique helpful in guiding me through the self-inquiry process and, consequently, my creative art-making engagement.

Figure 4.

Pojasek's Five Whys Technique



The Five Whys technique (Pojasek, 2000) systematically asks “why?” at least five times. First, an inquiry presents the general problem. Why does the problem exist? The response to the question prompts a second “why?”. The researcher iterates this process five times, as illustrated in Figure 4. Since the Five Whys Technique stimulates creative problem solving, I gave myself a limited time to respond to each question. Thus, quickly responding evokes a heuristic process as understood from Kahneman and Tversky’s (1974) heuristic theory.

Art Responses Prompts

The leading questions that guided me in creating the art responses in my visual journal followed the EMS (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1992) structure outlined in the literature review (Figure 1; page 7). The questions I developed were:

1. *Macrosystem*: Why may post-Colonial economies impact women’s career choices?

2. *Exosystem*: Why may growing up in a “developing” country impact women's career choices?
3. *Mesosystem*: Why may educational systems impact women’s career choices?
4. *Microsystem*: Why may families impact women’s career choices?
5. *Individual system*: Why did I choose a particular career path?

To pose these questions, I employed a triangulation technique of generating the data. There were two approaches to the questioning. The first approach is general and relates to the problem as a societal issue. The other is personal. Here I responded by adding “In my experience” to the question. In this way, I had two sets of answers for each question to lead my creative engagement in artmaking.

Since the Five Whys technique (Pojasek, 2000) involves understanding the root reason of a problem, this process itself evokes immersion. Thus, following Moustakas’s (1990) heuristic inquiry process seemed redundant, as stated in the methodology chapter. It is essential to acknowledge I answered the five questions in a process called *freewriting* (Louise DeSalvo, 1999). To me, freewriting requires the person to let themselves write in a manner that engages the flow of ideas, avoids overthinking, pausing, or stopping the process. Although I avoided overthinking, it was a challenge to me as a person who tends to overthink and engages in intellectualization as a defence mechanism to process the struggles lived.

I consider I experienced dispossession (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) during this stage. Cropley (2001) explains that during the preparation of the creative process, the person can experience dissatisfaction and a certain level of anxiety since they could not have a clear idea of how the process will work. Although, during this stage, the process drives interest and curiosity (Arthur Cropley, 2001).

Incubation

Incubation occurs when the researcher detaches from direct involvement and does not overtly concentrate on the topic or question (Wallas, 1926). According to Eugene Sadler-Smith (2015), this process involves either conscious mental work on other problems or relaxation from all mental work. Taking a step back from the conscious work stimulates the free working of the unconscious, which is desirable for the creative process. Considering that this project happened over a year and a half, I benefited from having long periods of pause or incubation. For this research, the incubation process happened throughout and within each stage of the data collection.

Incubation also allows “on another level, expansion of knowledge” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). For me, the “other level” was the subconscious. Interestingly, Cropley (2001) mentions that incubation is the stage when the person tolerates ambiguity. As a person who has held a deep connection to her dreams, the investigation came to take part in my dreams at some moments of the final stages of taking distance from the project and letting it simmer or incubate. Thus, after responding to each of the five questions posed, I allowed myself a period to disconnect and distract myself from a deep self-reflective writing process.

Illumination

The incubation stage, when successful, leads to the illumination stage. According to Wallas (1926), the illumination phase is where the “final ‘flash’ or ‘click’ occurs” (p.97). To Wallas (1926), illumination is when the person involved in the creative process picks up their metaphoric paintbrush to paint on their metaphoric canvas. Dabdoub Alvarado (2016) explains that illumination is when the person experiences finding a solution. Thus, illumination is consistent with Moustakas’ (1990) illumination and explication phases.

This step is when I immersed myself in artmaking. I set my space and my *intentions* adapted from Pat Allen (1995). Allen describes the *intention witness* process to encourage self-reflection and self-knowledge. As an art therapist, Allen introspects about her artmaking process with self-compassion and generosity to the reader. The *intention witness* process invites creative flow to achieve spiritual fulfillment (Allen, 1995).

My artmaking process had intervals of stepping back from the process in between responses. I practiced my plan to care for myself and take physical distance from the creative space. I tried as much as possible to go for a walk or engage in different tasks to detach from the strong emotion-evoking images I had created.

There were images that I even struggled to accept as finished. Although I had planned five continuous days of artmaking, I did not constrain myself to time, so I worked over six. To embrace the creative flow, I tried not to have any other commitments scheduled. So, I could submerge in artmaking. During the days I engaged in artmaking, I spent a long time looking at the cut-outs I already had. I skimmed through all sorts of magazines in English and Spanish and cut out more images. Previously, during my winter holidays, I had the opportunity to visit home and collected little cut-outs of memories.

On the first day of artmaking, I grouped the images into five different packs, each related to the topic of the responses. I kept in mind that my heuristic narrative responses address a systems model. I created the first two collages on the same day. The third took me an entire day to do. I made the last two collages within a period of two days. I worked from the macro-level down to the individual level to create each collage. I scanned and put together a pdf of the five

collages it is available on my website¹⁸. Subsequently, the following five images are the art responses I created.

Figure 5.

Art Response 1. Global South: Post-colonial economies



Figure 6.

Art Response 2. "Developing" Country



¹⁸ My website is www.neruolotus.com

Figure 7.

Art Response 3. Educational Systems



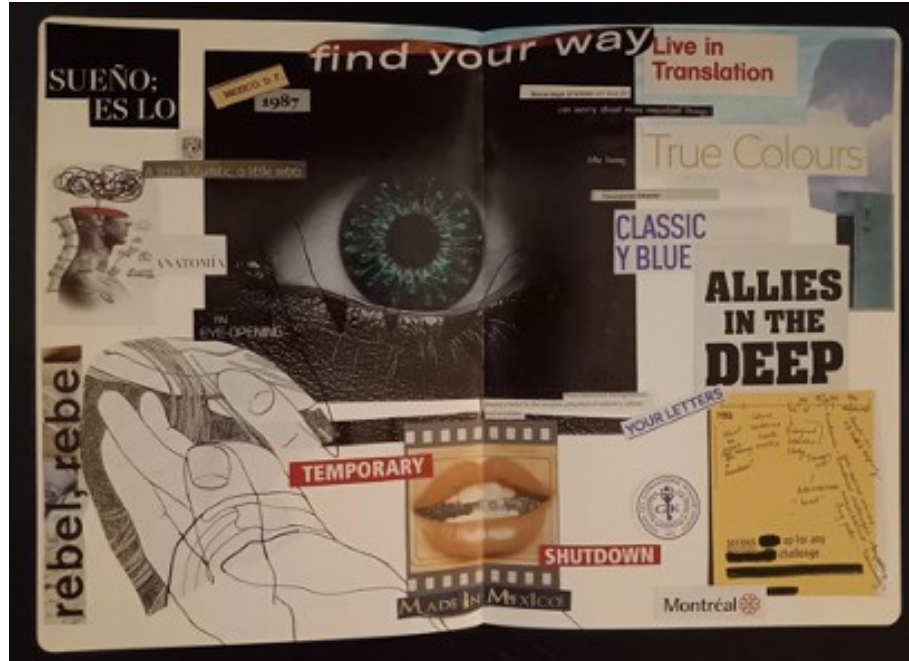
Figure 8.

Art Response 4. Family



Figure 9.

Art Response 5. Self



Verification

Verification, like preparation, is a return to the fully conscious thought process, as Wallas (1926) argues. As opposed to the analytical approach in Preparation, Verification is about taking account of and reflecting on the entire process from Preparation to Illumination (Wallas, 1926). The present investigation involved witnessing the creative ways of generating data: narrative and visual, and contrasting my own lived experiences. Dabdoub Alvarado (2016) states that generally, in creativity research, the verification process is dismissed. To her, verification is essential because it provides an opportunity to reflect on the relevance and effectiveness of the solutions (Dabdoub Alvarado, 2016).

Pat Allen (1995) recommends that to listen to herself; the art therapists need “to notice what calls for her witness. Where should she find her tent, her mishkin, the portable sanctuary she creates whenever she holds the space for images to arrive?” (Allen, 1995, p. 74).

Analyzing qualitative data generally requires coding. To Kathy Charmaz (2010), coding is simply the process of cataloguing and sorting data. In this case, coding is part of a process called qualitative content analysis (Charmaz, 2010). To paraphrase a definition by Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text or visual data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. I focused on comparing content, themes, and symbols that arose from the narrative root responses to the art responses in my analysis. I decided not to disclose the handwritten responses to the five questions to respect my privacy.

Qualitative content analysis may involve the participation of two researchers to compare codes. However, to address the lack of a co-coder, I created a way to *triangulate*¹⁹. Triangulation To triangulate I created a spreadsheet and transcribed terms for each of the two narrative responses and the artworks. I took breaks in between transcriptions of each response. The following chart shows the contents I depicted from each root response and their accompanying images.

¹⁹ Triangulation in social sciences combines multiple theories, methods, observers, or materials to overcome weakness in the qualitative nature of the data or control intrinsic biases.

Chart 2.

Contrast of the thematic content from two narrative responses and the art responses

	<i>Root response 1</i>	<i>Root response 2 (In my personal experience + question)</i>	<i>Art response</i>
<i>1. Why do postcolonial economies impact women's career choices?</i>	history narrative male-dominance need to control	individualistic societies neoliberalist policies history male-dominance power dynamics masculinity	blaming/ shaming women capitalism Mexico Neoliberalism outcast death femininity masculinity flowers nature industrializations religion
<i>2. Why do growing up in a developing country impact women's career choice?</i>	History male-domination	conquer domination minimize the other	past – history race – skin / hair color Eurocentrism urbanization war – force- domination revolutionary movement rebellion nature vs industrialization minoritization women re-solutions
<i>3. Why do educational systems impact women's career choices?</i>	knowledge is power male-dominance control conquer	Catholic church power colonization - education	Catholic church icons spirituality devoted submissive knowledge race – skin color schooling crazy magic union children corruption duality darkness – brightness Mexico history information

<p><i>4. Why do families impact women's career choices?</i></p>	<p>feminism salary inequity less favourable working conditions motherhood</p>	<p>developed countries oppression postcolonial settlement job opportunities exploitation of land and labour</p>	<p>division father mother house space break construction influences vacuum masculinity femininity family history dreams surreal academic achievement</p>
<p><i>5. Why do women choose career paths?</i></p>	<p>women attainment hurt masculinities resentment need for domination</p>	<p>big-fish nations exploitation of land smaller nations commodities</p>	<p>growth support - hands dreams future gaze rebellion own path true self ally personal history acceptance depression utopian temporality colours</p>

In this chapter the procedure to collect the data was detailed. By presenting the data in a chart I provide the raw data that helped me code (or group) all these words into major themes. I develop the analysis of the themes in the following chapter.

Chapter 5. Findings

This chapter provides an analysis of the data and describes the experience of collecting and generating it. As detailed in the methodology chapter, I investigated through a unique blend to engage creatively in an ABR through a heuristic process (HABI). This blend allowed me to engage in the scientific method organically and systematically. Conducting this research was a complex endeavour. Many challenges arose from studying online and working in a practicum in person for over a year and some months of a global crisis. I had to engage in creating personal space to decompress the stress of a world that had slowed down while my own academic world had not and remained very demanding. I had to continuously seek the self-motivation to continue studying in the art therapy master's program. Moreover, my closeness to surviving direct experiences of male aggression generated fluctuating feelings in continuing the present investigation.

As a researcher who has had the privilege and opportunities to work on interdisciplinary teams within the neuroscience field, I challenged myself to do an ABR project to expand my qualitative research tools. It was a new challenge for me to step out of the quantitative scientist role and take a different approach to explore the thematic content. For Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi (1975) *flow* is a mental state that brings a person to a state of happiness while being productive, creative, and focused or concentrated. To engage in artmaking, I expected to reach a flow state (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Nonetheless, the investigations' theme directly called out for an intellectualization mechanism to protect my privacy and my hurtful childhood trauma memories.

In figure 10, I present all the collected terms in a word cloud. Word clouds facilitate visualization of the thematic content and proportionately, displaying the words from the largest representing the most frequent to the smallest representing the least frequent.

Data Analysis

To analyze the vast themes and symbols that arose on the sets of data presented in the previous chapter, I immersed myself in free writing (Elbow, 1973, Allen, 1992). I sat down and re-read both sets of data, accompanied by the art images. I allowed myself to write in free-flow reflection. I found eight main elements that became evident since they encompass my journal's narratives and artworks. The elements were: the inner critic, portraying the self, organic engagement, nature, the gaze, incubation as self-compassion, male dominance, and cognitive aspect. We will now look at each of these elements in more detail.

Inner Critic

Gendlin (1981) conceptualized the inner critic within the framework of the client-centred theory. In this model, the inner critic consists of an integrated system of analytical and negative thoughts and attitudes that restrict the individual's experiences (Stinckens, Lietaier & Leijssen, 2013). Contrastingly, Allen (1995) considers that the power of the inner critic attains full force when "you are in a situation you have the opportunity to do what you want, something important and self-chosen, something with risk" (p. 47). Allen (1995) explains that the inner critic reacts to the awakening and resistance to change. Thus, she suggests artmakers get to know their inner critics so, with time, they embrace change and become compassionate helpers (Allen, 1995).

I reflected on my artmaking process, which consisted of collaging, using markers and oil pastels. I realized that my inner critic led me to choose these kinds of materials. According to the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC), these kinds of materials can be considered restrictive materials (Lisa Hinz, 2020). Restrictive materials tend to evoke the cognitive component. Hinz (2020) claims that complex experiences require several steps, which "involve mental

representation of materials and methods that amplify the reflective distance of cognitive experience” (p. 121). Engaging the cognitive component engages problem-solving (Hinz, 2020).

Curiously, as I stepped away from my journal and reflected on the engagement process in making my art responses, I realized that each artwork became a self-portrait. In each image, I can see myself, and through symbols or words, I can observe the omnipresence of the inner critic. This engulfing critical voice became the analytical thinker that I interpret as the internalized masculinity mandate (Segato, 2010/2018) I have.

Pinkola Estés (1992) mentions women's psyche share the predatory potentate, the predatory masculine figure that drains them and distances them from their "wild self" and following their intuitions. I reflect how at times, indeed, in my lived experience, my father's perfectionism and criticism towards my art engagement became an internalized non-compassionate critical voice. Unsurprisingly, my experience is similar to findings on how negative feedback and parental criticism become internalized in children²⁰ (Morgen Peck, 2015).

Portraying the self

Engaging in creating a portrait is a very intimate activity. In the art therapy practice, it is common to ask the participant/client to portray themselves so the art therapist can help reflect on bodily sensations, emotions and behaviours (Hinz, 2020). Allen (1995) states that all artmaking is a way of expressing the self. Throughout the book *Art is a way of knowing*, Allen (1995) explains how her way of engaging with artmaking facilitated insights and introspections of her past and present lived experiences. I am grateful for her beautiful writing. She led me to accept my images and art engagement.

²⁰ Researchers collected childhood memories from more than 4,000 adults of all ages and correlated them with the participants' self-reported mental health. The findings suggest that children with authoritarian parents will have a harder time adapting to adversity later in life.

If you allow it to, the image process will weave you like a bright thread through your inner personal world and back again into the fabric of life. Periodically, images may come that seem to summarize your work, your archetypal struggles. (Allen, 1995, p. 192)

After witnessing once and again each of my artworks, I have observed so many personal elements. It became evident that the images are self-portraits of different periods in my life and my ways of interacting within my social systems. I see pieces of my identity in each of them. I can't even recall from which magazine the cut-outs come. As they came together as one bigger image, many contrasting feelings arose. For example, on the individual system (Fig. 9 page 40) on the bottom right, I made a little sketch of my general educational path in a yellow cut-out piece of paper, where I obscured some words with marker and allowed visible: serious up for any challenge.

Organic Engagement

Reflecting on my creative visual process became an organic way to depict meaning from the roots responses and the artworks. Guzman (2020) expresses that “collage-making can provide a space to gain insight into different areas of your life” (p.123). As I witnessed my art, I encountered more profound symbols and subthemes. I reflect on the way these sub-themes came to me as reverberations. Reverberations can be looked at from their meaning in terms of sound quality: resonance or echo.

Thinking of the theme of “echo” made me recall nature. It became an opportunity to rethink the ecological model, natural cycles, and human experiences within the systems that sustain life on Earth. Because of these reflections, the artworks echoed each other, thus becoming a series. I can imagine creating a digital animation where these works have small elements of each other, and the visual could become a fractal.

Another organic part of the artmaking process was the way I set my space to work. I brought a long green plastic table²¹ inside my living room and placed all the art materials I thought I would use. As I engaged in artmaking, the way I had to seek cut-outs and images was like digging in for more information.

Nature and Climate Crisis

Figure 8 (page 38) contains an exploration of the family theme (mesosystem). It shows a deconstructed house, which reminds me of how I used to draw my childhood house. As a middle-class person, I had the privilege of being raised in a home with a garden: an oasis inside one of the world's most populated cities. Since it was tended by both my parents, it became a reconciliation space for me. It appeared to contain the love my parents forgot they had for each other. As a child, I played in the garden, imagining I travelled to great woods and worlds. The nature element, although not so visually evident in all the collages made, is present. It is there, discrete as a metaphor for my lived experience growing up in Mexico City.

During my childhood, I lived with constant smog contingencies. In Mexico City, when pollution levels are too high, the Government dictates measures such as discouraging exercising outside and in extreme conditions, closure of schools for the day or days air quality is bad. During contingencies, my siblings and I would be happy to stay home. As we reflected on this, to face some of the realities of pollution would fascinate us and make us sad. Post-colonial exploitation practices of natural resources have normalized this situation in various cities in the Global South (Klein, 2007).

²¹ As an international student with limited economic resources and a high sense for ecology, I have been deeply shocked and saddened when I walk around my neighborhood in Montreal and witness all the waste of furniture on moving days. That green plastic table was the first desk I had in Montreal 3 years ago, when I first moved to my studio apartment and needed one to work on my art projects. Maybe out of sentimentality I kept it, although I barely need it.

Hence, reflecting on the need to take walks in nature reminded me of these childhood memories that bring sweet and sad feelings. I had the experience of feeling safe in a garden within a house where I sometimes did not feel safe, within a city where I was taught not to trust anyone. The soothing experience of the garden kept igniting my desire to learn more about ecofeminism and nature-based expressive therapies.

The gaze

The inner critic led me to observe the pattern of the eyes in each image. The gaze seems to represent my personal history of constantly fearing but also seeking male validation. It has guided me to reflect on my reconciliation to understand how also men suffer from the mandate of masculinity (Segato, 2010, 2018) and how we can enroll in vicious circles of oppressing each other. As peers in a university environment, we compete and judge each other's majors or careers' strength, economic value, and productivity. We then continue to enact post-colonial economic values.

Figure 11.

The False Mirror



Note. Artwork by René Magritte (1929), image obtained from the Museum of Modern Art of New York (MOMA)

Figure 11 shows one of my favourite portrayals of the gaze: *The false mirror* (1929, by René Magritte. According to the Museum of Modern Art of New York (MOMA), the eye was an intersection of elements for surrealists since they considered it as a symbol of the limits between the world and the subjective self (2019). Surrealism is one of the artistic movements that have significantly influenced and fascinated me. It is interesting that André Breton once said that to him, Mexico was surreal (1936). Mexico had a vast influence on surrealist artists during the beginning of the XX century.

Figure 12.

Hombre Gato and Lily Jaguar



Note. “Hombre gato” by Remedios Varo, an image obtained from the Museo de Arte Moderno (MAM) of Mexico City / “Lily Jaguar” is a digital collage I made.

Remedios Varo was a Spanish artist who found refuge in Mexico City, away from the Spanish Civil war and the German occupation in Paris, where she last lived in Europe (Naomi Blumberg, 2020). Remedios felt sheltered and respected as an artist in Mexico City. She became close friends with Leonora Carrington, another European surrealist artist; both women nationalized Mexican (Blumberg, 2021). Thus, numerous artworks of both artists are part of

private collections in Mexico as well as Mexico's city *Museo de Arte Moderno* (MAM) collection.

Figure 12 shows *Hombre Gato* by Remedios Varo, next to an old intervention I made to use as a profile picture on social media a few years ago (2011) when I did not even consider myself an artist. In *Hombre Gato* we can appreciate the gaze again, a portrait that brings straight attention to the eyes of a humanoid cat. Interestingly, my eyes are the same shade as these cats. I have identified my spirit animal as the jaguar, a cat. Even more curious is that I inherit the colour of my father's eyes, the male gaze. Both Remedios Varo and René Magritte's works depict wide-open eyes without eyelashes, which give the eyes a particular strength and harshness.

Louis Bourgeois has also explored the theme of the gaze on the artworks *I held his eyes within my gaze* (MOMA, 2002) and sculptural piece *Eyes* (2001). To describe her intentions about exploring this subject, Bourgeois says that, with the eyes, we communicate without lies (Easton Foundation, 2020). Then, there is a duality; the gaze can also become our metaphor for truth (Easton Foundation, 2020). As an art maker, I allowed myself to explore and to reflect on how I have engaged with the dualities my inner critic has brought: oppressive and empowering forces.

Incubation as self-compassion

Incubation for this project came rather more as I needed to prioritize other requirements to fulfill my graduate studies. Thus, pausing the research facilitated the self-reflection process and the serendipitous feeling of connecting all the knowledge acquired throughout my life. I

spent three years living in Montreal as a mature student²² in the undergraduate program of Art Education to attain the prerequisites to apply to the Art therapy program. My learning experiences throughout the art studio courses led me to incredible amounts of personal growth.

The process of allowing myself to engage in artmaking reminded me of the *cositas/little things*²³ I have been able to explore through artmaking, the challenging process of learning how to paint and draw and feel like a skillful artmaker. Although I still do not feel like a technically masterful artmaker, studying to become an art therapist provided space for me to engage in artmaking as a therapeutic way to continue my soulful growth. In this sense, over the past years, I focused on the process of artmaking rather than on the product. I kept this lens for the artworks that pertain to this research.

Incubation became a need. As a self-compassion way that allowed me space to breathe, I practiced physically distancing myself from the art journal and my house. I would go and take walks in the park or do some gardening, tending my *plantitas*. Curiously, these spaces gave me the opportunity to detach and make sense of a process that at times became overwhelming.

On male dominance

I reflect on the "root" responses and how each of the questions is similar in conveying a message about how masculinity and male domination have impacted nations' development by the

²² I use the term mature student as a term that I learned was used in the United Kingdom, while I studied my first masters. During that time I was already considered a mature student since I was above the age of 25. Years later, in Canada, being a returning student to undergraduate, was an interesting experience. In most Canadian institutions, any student above the age of 19 without a high school diploma is considered a mature student.

²³ However, I also have lived another reality. I want to avoid saying microaggressions and aggression. Thus, as (Latina) tenderness embraces me, I decide to minimize these harsh problems and call them "cositas" or little things I have had to endure. Nonetheless, this is my personal decision to make peace and acknowledge the continuous and ongoing experiences I oversee will continue to happen to me as a racialized immigrant woman.

continuing postcolonial oppressive systems. I tried to answer each question from a personal point of view, but I realize my opinions are biased due to my experiences of oppression.

As an art therapist, one of the most engaging models that resonated in my internship practice was learning about the ETC (Hinz, 2020). This model has helped me examine my engagement in art. My journal brings to light that I have mainly chosen restrictive materials that involve the cognitive aspect. I discovered that my avoidance of more fluid materials was a means to contain my emotional responses. Growing up in one of the leading countries in femicides hurts me deeply, and it has also fostered the need to deepen my knowledge about the systemic oppression of women.

Cognitive aspect

The way I worked through both creative processes, the narrative and the artistic, I submerged myself into a highly cognitive process. When I was handwriting my responses, I was hyper-conscious about my very intimate personal stories of oppression, which involve a lot of childhood trauma experiences. Thus, I felt vulnerable to write them somewhere that could become public openly. Although the Five Whys technique does help engage in a creative flow, I found myself *restricting* what I felt I should write and what I wrote. Consequently, I sometimes reacted with an intellectualization defence (Anna Freud, 1937). This, in turn, links back to the use of restrictive materials (Hinz, 2020) that provided me with a sense of safety. As I let myself explore materials to create art responses, I think I was already predisposed to choose collage. As personal and cultural symbols, the cut-outs of images and words that called my attention had been around me for a long time.

Overall, the collages are full of words, overpacking the spaces with words. Collaging made me remember that as a young teenager, I used to collage all around my bedroom walls,

leaving no free space. Filling space, saturating images and spaces has been my way to cope with existential crisis and depression. Unsurprisingly, I have found my niche. Other artists and art therapists express themselves and have similar coping mechanisms. They claim to feel safe and soothed with cluttering spaces and their art. An example is Yayoi Kusama, an avant-garde Japanese artist.

The following chapter will discuss how these thematic links with the literature researched and my lived experience. It will also describe how experiences of self-reflection and the analysis of the factors that may influence women's career choices may contribute to cultivating cultural humility among other helping professionals, therapists, and CATs.

Chapter 6. Discussions

In this chapter, I discuss the findings bringing back the ESM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1992) to weave the results from the HABI back to the literature. The aims of this investigation were described as invitations to engage the author and the readers, to reflect on the influences of socio-cultural values, pressures, privileges, and oppressions in career paths. Moreover, it was an invitation to learn and reflect on modern forms of Colonialism and patriarchal minoritization (Segato, 2015).

Throughout this paper, four things became relevant. First, to open dialogue about the importance of deconstructing heteronormalized gender expectations in early childhood and adolescence to nurture true-self vocations. Second, to be a reference for other creative art therapists (CATs) seeking to reflect on their own histories and cultures through a complex systems lens (Arrington, 1991). Third, to support and encourage therapists, particularly CATs, to learn more about social injustices and the patriarchal systems of oppression still at play in LAC, the Global South, and racialized minorities in the Global North. Fourth, to shed light on how patriarchal influences impact career decision-making, not only in women but also in men, as the mandate for masculinity (Segato, 2010, 2018) dictates. This mandate is still not deconstructed. Nonetheless, thanks to the efforts of decolonial feminists (Lugones 2020, Segato 2015) and social advocate CATs (Talwar, 2019, Gipson, 2016), there is an opportunity to broaden the Western understanding of gender and decrease societal expectations.

This investigation wanted to address the leading question through the HABI: How can engaging in heuristic arts-based processes deepen my knowledge about how my lived experiences within a male-dominated culture led me on my career path as a neuroscientist and an art practitioner therapist? To answer, I followed Wallas' creative process. I defined the questions

to approach each of the EMS's systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1992). Then, I proposed five general questions to address the leading question. I delved into narratively answering the five questions following the Five Whys technique (Pojasek, 2000). Next, I created art responses to each root response to the five general questions. Finally, I was able to code the themes.

Decolonial feminism seeks to decolonize paradigms led by the Global North. With this objective, Lugones (2020) prompts us to avoid cultural stereotypes and cultural fundamentalisms. It became evident that I had set myself to accomplish a complex task. Hence, despite the scope of this Graduate research, I made my best effort to provide a general gaze into each of the systems from a decolonial feminist point of view. As a result, I reflected on my personal experiences and how each system influenced my schooling and academic path. I find evidence of this influence on all my artworks. It is now possible to trace it through the clustering of themes and the little details in each of the five images.

As I describe in the data analysis chapter, through the process of self-reflection, I found seven general themes that encompass the triangulation of the data collected from the narrative answers and the artworks: the inner critic, portraying the self, organic engagement, nature and climate crisis, the gaze, incubation as self-compassion, male dominance, and cognitive aspect. To discuss these results, due to the scope of the study and to respect my personal history, which involves my family and academic circles, I decided to distill only two themes: the inner critic and nature and climate crisis, since both topics encompass essential components of the ESM (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1992): the macrosystem, the microsystem and the individual.

The major themes that arose made me remember and reflect on distinct moments of my life. Despite my middle-class privilege, being a cis-gender **woman** made me feel *minoritized* throughout my educational path. The resistance to oppression from the *mandate of masculinity*

(Segato, 2010/2018) was part of what distanced me from art and my instinctive desires to nurture and help others throughout my academic life. I wanted to defy what the world dictated a woman should be.

Microsystem and individual: Inner critic and Portraying the self

Early childhood gender-stereotyped pressures (Margit Kanka et al., 2019) and the *mandate for masculinity* (Segato, 2010/2018) can influence the career choices of many people. Working on the collages from the microsystem (family) and the individual (self) system (Figures 8 and 9; page 40) brought memories from my childhood where I resisted genderized pressures. To me, both images show a reading of dualisms and contrasts. For example, in the family portrait, I added in huge lettering the words “pink ladies' ” on the left side, where elements of the image remind me of my father, in contrast to the right side, which reminds me of my mother. The inner critic, as explained, is an internalized voice.

My inner critic has become an oppressive male voice, reminding me of my father’s psychologically abusive talk. By contrast, my mother’s voice became the nurturing one. The polarity in these voices reflects the differences between a conservative man and a modern woman. My father, a physicist and mathematician from the 1940s generation, was raised in a rural area and expected to be a traditional housewife. My mother, a modern woman born in the 1950s, learned from her mother independence and self-sufficiency. After becoming a widower, my grandmother, a foreigner in Mexico, became an entrepreneur and created a business to sustain six children.

The opportunity to create this series of images was painful and fulfilling. It reminded me of the experience of holding painful and challenging experiences in Art therapy sessions. Still,

the pain decreased after creating an image, a transitional object to prompt a dialogue. The analysis of my lived experiences of oppression has guided me through a roller coaster of emotions. Nonetheless, it has also reaffirmed my ability to hold myself, nurture my soul and realize resistance has sometimes been the best survival mechanism to strive and find my path into Art therapy.

Macrosystem: Nature and Climate Crisis

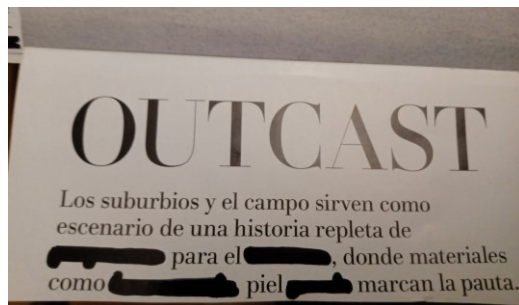
As a child, I had the privilege to have a private garden surrounded by tall walls filled with ivy and lush Bugambilias. I would play long hours out there, imagining I was having adventures in the woods. As I grew older, spent long hours at the university and at least 3 hours of commute, I was always mindful of having a daily practice of being in nature, spending time in my garden, or having lunch in a park, like those surrounding UNAM.

I have no recollection of when I first read about eco-anxiety, but I can claim I have it. As expressed in the data analysis chapter, the images evoked memories of my childhood and ambivalent feelings about school cancelling due to air pollution (smog). Figure 6 (page 39) portrays an industrialized space and roses in decay. In this scenery, I pasted a cut-out that reads: “OUTCAST los suburbios y el cambio sirven como escenario de una historia repleta de ... para el ... , donde materiales ... como ... piel ... marcan la pauta”²⁴.

²⁴ OUTCAST the suburbs and change are useful for a scenario of a history full of .. for ... where materials ... like ... skin ... set the tone.

Figure 13.

Artwork 1. Detail Global South



This phrase resonates with what I attributed as Climate Crisis (scenario) and minorities (skin, tone). I attributed this to concerns about my lived experiences, and how as a CAT, artist and feminist, I have a responsibility to care for our Earth. Consequently, I consider this demonstrates I engaged in self-reflections to address how I have chosen career paths and how cultural humility was present throughout my artmaking engagement.

James Hillman (1992) wrote that he could not differentiate between the individual neurosis (self) and the neurosis of the world. I will not expand too much on the term neurosis, although I will explain its context in psychoanalytic theory. A person in neurosis is considered one that has an inner (unconscious) conflict or experiences emotional distress (Hillman, 1992). Hillman (1992) criticizes psychology and claims the need to reach the community to discuss cultural and ecological concerns. Through his writings about the soul of the world, Hillman (1992) hinted at the incoming field of ecopsychology. As a bridge between ecology and psychology, ecopsychology focuses on expanding the understanding of human emotional connection to nature (Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995).

Roszak (1992) coined the term *ecopsychology* in his book *The Voice of the Earth*. However, Mary Gomes and Allen Kanner had also been using the term in the same period. In 1995 these three researchers co-edited *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth Healing the Mind*. Ynestra King (1990) highlights that ecofeminism is related to cultural feminism. King (1990) describes three main points to define ecofeminism. First, ecofeminism moves on individual transformations and emphasizes activism (King, 1990). Secondly, King (1990) considers that ecofeminism brings new roots for ethics and supports a promising way to reconcile people and the Earth (King, 1990). Finally, she acknowledges the interconnectedness of all women while also recognizing diversity between women (King, 1990).

Per Espen Stoknes (2018) is a well-known advocate, ecologist, psychologist, and economist. Espen Stoknes (2018) considers that through nature-based expressive therapy, we can heal in ways to help humanity with the current “western cultural neurosis” (p. 14). By restoring, through a sensitive way, shapes, and expressive forms of more than human nature, “we unlearn our destructive dualistic habits. Moreover, we relearn in a practical way to align with the presence and processes of the Earth itself” (Espen Stoknes in Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p. 14).

Atkins and Snyder (2018) propose nature-based creative arts therapy practices align with ecofeminist theories and ecotherapy. The three pillars that encompass ecotherapy are reframing pathology, reciprocity, and resilience (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). The authors consider that historians, philosophers, poets and writers have informed their ecotherapy model. For example, indigenous knowledge (Kimmerer, 2013), *sumak kawsay* or the good living (*el buen vivir*)²⁵ (Eduardo Gudynas, 2015), ecofeminism (Françoise d’Eubonne, 1978), feminist psychotherapies

²⁵ El buen vivir is a Quechua concept part of their cosmovision or worldview. Eduardo Gudynas (2011), the Latin American Center for Social Ecology (CLAES), states that el buen vivir is characterized by the harmony between humans, as a collective, and nature.

(Carolyn Enns, 1997), and nature-based expressive arts therapies (Atkins & Snyder, 2018).

These different ways of conceptualizing human experience shape proposals such as honouring humanity and our membership in the web of life.” (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p. 56)

“If all the world is a commodity, how poor we grow. When all the world is a gift in motion, how wealthy we become.” Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013, p. 31)

Chapter 7. Conclusions

Mapping a complex and multi-layer phenomenon, women's career choices, informed by the ESM, was appropriate and challenging. The biggest challenge was to submerge in qualitative research through arts-based engagement since I had never done it before. This HABI amplified my understanding, informed by Segato's work (2014), of how the development of humanity as we became a "civilized" society links to colonialist and post-colonialist practices that have facilitated the *minoritization of women* (Segato, 2015). The concept of minoritization helped me understand how the *mandate for masculinity* (Segato, 2008/2010) weaves itself through all spheres or systems within society and impacts individuals' self-fulfillment (Gewirth, 2009).

As a person who has experience in research from the individual or microsystemic view (provided by my studies on psychology and neurocognition), studying macrosystems (a more sociological frame) was a huge challenge. Nonetheless, I appreciated the opportunity to inform myself and learn through the investigation on Non-government organizations and Government Institutions' surveys, Economics and Social Sciences. This scope enabled me to outline the complex interactions amongst the systems and the individual. Furthermore, by challenging myself to take a different approach to understand behaviour, I attained an opportunity to deepen my cultural awareness about the patriarchal systems that influence women's career paths.

Consequently, I was able to reflect on my career path. I reflected on how I resisted *minoritization* (Segato, 2015) and the *mandate for masculinity* (Segato 2015) by trying to prove the mandate grown. As I explain in *My story* (on the appendix section) my career path was intricate. My *resistance* seemed to show when I chose the *stronger* side within my academic interests: psychology – neurocognition, drifting away from my *true-self*: art and being a helper. Thus, I found art therapy.

"Y esto es lo que está en mi corazón: *this is what is in my heart*" is a phrase commonly used by indigenous people in the south of Mexico, particularly Tzotziles and Mayans in Chiapas. When a person tells a story, they will use it to end their narratives, hold their hands to their chest, and express their hearts. I want to finish this paper with those words. With compassion to myself, my family, my ancestors, and the readers, my lived experience comes from my heart.

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Appendix

Individual system: My story

As expressed in Chapter 1, I grew up in Mexico City in a middle-class family. I had the privilege to study in a private non-coed Catholic school, where I was taught English as a second language from a very young age. In Mexico, high schools need curricular validation from the Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP) or a National or State (Provincial) university.

The high school I studied in is affiliated with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) high school curriculum. The high school curriculum mandates that 6th-year students need to choose an area of concentration. These areas are as follows: 1. Physics, Mathematics and Engineering, 2. Health and Biological Sciences, 3. Social Sciences; and 4. Humanities and Arts. As I wanted to pursue psychology, I had to choose area two, although I was also inclined to area four. This school has a double program where students can study a technical degree while studying high school. After approving a summer schooling program, I was able to be part of the program and study Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

I studied for my bachelor's degree in psychology at one of the largest universities in Latin America: UNAM²⁶. From the beginning of my studies and since early childhood I had a deep connection to nature and biological sciences. So, as soon as I started my studies, I deviated from my main interest: to become a clinical psychologist, into studying neurophysiology and cognitive

²⁶ UNAM's central campus (Ciudad Universitaria) is located in the South of Mexico City and hosts multiple Faculties, Schools and Research institutes. There are 130 majors being taught. According to the open statistics port from UNAM, in 2007 the year I started my bachelor studies there were 163, 368 bachelor students, out of those 47, 281 were in the Biological, Chemistry and Health sciences. There is no source to find out how many students are per Faculty or School.

sciences. This decision might have been led by the narratives of disbelief and stigmatization about mental health and psychology in Mexico. Therefore, the areas of study that seemed to have “stronger” scientific knowledge called my attention to prove scientific rigour within psychology.

During my studies, I was part of a high academic achievement program (Programa de Alta Exigencia Académica, PAEA) oriented to train students to become researchers. In honesty, my main interest to be part of this program was mainly to have the opportunity to easily switch my night schedule to a daytime schedule and attain economical support (scholarships). This also gave me opportunities to study abroad on two occasions, within my undergraduate studies.

Subsequently, as an undergraduate, within the UNAM, I was part of two interdisciplinary research groups on Neuroaesthetics (from the Physiology Institute) and Music Cognition (from the Laboratory of Psychology and Musical Arts). The research world fascinated me and through my bachelor’s thesis investigation, I was seeking institutes and universities that studied Music Cognition, I even mapped them to seek what graduate programs they offered.

Thus, I found an interesting master’s program at Goldsmiths University of London: Music, Mind and Brain. I was accepted to the program. For my research thesis, I reproduced and slightly changed a study to learn how implicit melody memory can aid explicit motor memory. During my graduate studies, I had the fortune to attain two scholarships, one from a Spanish banking foundation for Latin American students and one from the National Council of Sciences and Technology (CONACyT) from Mexico. The CONACyT scholarship grants Mexican students the opportunity to continue their graduate studies in doctoral degrees, if their current program is a master’s degree and provided, they get acceptance within the same university they hold the grant at.

As I felt the economic pressure to take advantage of this scholarship opportunity, I involved myself in a process of applying to a doctoral degree within the same university; as I sought a supervisor the person I reached out to, was honest and let me know soon she would be retiring, and it was unethical for her to accept new students and leave them in the middle of their doctoral process. With her support and orientation, I was guided to reflect on where I wanted to go in my academic career as a researcher.

The oppressive competence I witnessed through my parents, my personal, my supervisors and friends' experiences to reach financial stability and a secure position within Academia discouraged me to aspire to a full-time academic life. Furthermore, through the guidance and counselling of that supervisor in the UK, I was able to reclaim my place; as a migrant in seeking a better life, as the healer, I have always had in me, as the critical being I have always been against to oppressive normativity, which up until now, I have come to gain a gist of why I had been with such discomfort to Global North Psychology. As being tired of shelter behind the scenes, in the laboratory, researching behaviour and wellbeing without really servicing people. Finally, thanks to a friend, through my master's in England, I had the opportunity to volunteer in a Music and Movement workshop for patients with neurological conditions. There I felt I was myself, in service.

After an intricate path and being rejected to enter a doctoral program in Clinical Psychology, I reflected on my interests: my initial calling to study psychology: becoming a therapist and my passion for the arts. The "natural" academic path dictated for me to aspire to a doctoral program. But I am happy I was also guided to consider new options, the very person that had to reject me to the doctoral program, due to my non-extraordinary MSc grades, opened my horizon to consider studying a second master's degree to become a therapist.

I found Art therapy as the psychotherapy approach that perfectly matched my interests, but not fully my skill set. In Mexico Art therapy is not well-known, there are at least three main associations that I know of. Nonetheless, none of them has a recognized Diploma from a Higher Education institution. For a country where mental health stigma is big, this makes a loop to disbelief in practitioners. As I researched how a neurocognitive scientist/ psychologist passionate about arts could become an Art therapist, I found the program Creative Arts Therapies.

I was informed I would have to study Arts in a Higher Education institute. To attain this, I studied a year in Art Education focusing on developing art and painting skills. Then, I was accepted to the Art therapy program at Concordia University, and I am deeply grateful I got an entry bursary. Three years later, after arriving in Montreal, and two years of full-time studying I will become an art therapist.

I am thirsty for knowledge and always enjoy continuous learning. Although I narrated this as objectively and as a timeline, studying has never been easy. Failing entrance exams, numerous academic rejections and painful hours of all-nighters have been present as long as I can recall. I have been a full-time student and worked since I was 16 years old. Since then, I have also had the opportunities and privileges to have scholarships. I take deep agency in the deep efforts this has cost me, even times when I have jeopardized my physical, mental, and spiritual health.

I am grateful for all the wonderful academics I have worked with and supported and understood my mental health day breaks, my therapists, and my family (blood and chosen). To the ones who did not support me, I am happy and proud of myself that I *resisted* and pushed the *minoritization* to keep myself afloat and sometimes even gained full success. As an art therapist I am aware the growth path, both personal and professional, will be full of required continuous learning and openness to provide the best care for the people I will support in their healing paths.