Picturing lesbian, informing art therapy: a postmodern feminist autobiographical investigation

Susan Joyce
Southern Cross University

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Picturing lesbian, informing art therapy:  
A postmodern feminist  
autobiographical investigation

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Nursing and Health Care Practices

2008
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Declaration of Originality

I certify that the substance of this work has not previously been submitted for any other degree and is not being submitted for any other degree. I certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: .................................................................

Name: Susan JOYCE

Date: .................................................................
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to lesbian art therapists and lesbian visual artists, who despite homophobic attitudes and visual censorship, have retained the courage to openly practice as lesbian art therapists and lesbian visual artists and who share with us their stories and pictures about lesbian encounters with heteronormative cultures.

A special dedication is made to my partner, Christine Ruth Malcolm, whose continual interest, patience, and ongoing support, cannot be measured. A dedication also to my mother and father, Bet and Stan Broadbent, whose positive attitude in their later years has inspired me to look forward to basking in life’s wealth of pleasures.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my utmost gratitude to my PhD supervisor, Associate Professor Nel Glass, who supported me to pursue an unconventional research project and provided consistent support throughout my research process. My thanks go to Dr Kierrynn Davis and Professor Beverley Taylor for their continued interest and constructive feedback on my research topic.

My appreciation to the Department of Nursing and Health Care Practices for facilitating twice yearly seminars which offered invaluable opportunities for candidates to share their research ideas and progress which broadened notions of research and inspired rigor in my own research area. I appreciated financial support from both Southern Cross University Postgraduate Scholarship and Australian Government Australian Postgraduate Award.

My thanks to my partner Christine Ruth Malcolm for reading many drafts, and to Roz McHale for her proof reading and editorial assistance, to artist friends Donna Malone and Terri Shackley for their artistic critiques and overall enthusiasm, and to Amber Melody Bancks for her graphic design skills.
Abstract

Within art therapy discourses there is a dearth of scholarly literature related to the dilemmas of voicing lesbianism and picturing lesbians. This is the result of sustained discrimination and censorship worldwide. In order to address this issue, a research study was designed to investigate this topic and its relationship to informing art therapy.

There were two research methods and two research processes used in the project. Autobiography and art based research were the methods, and intertextuality and reflexivity were the research processes. The methodology that underpinned the project was postmodern-feminism.

Autobiographical material created through an art-based research method was reflexively viewed. The newly created visual texts stimulated intertextual links to past visual and written texts. These texts were used to map and track deeply held assumptions found embedded in essentialist, dualistic and modernist paradigms. By the use of postmodern-feminism deconstruction and reconstruction the investigation exposed and interrogated paradigm shifts resulting in subsequent personal transformations.

The study revealed how past personal experiences of homophobia, lesbian invisibility and mental health treatment were deeply embedded in gender/sexuality norms, visual art discourse and social stigmatisation. These experiences impacted significantly on the ability to verbally and visually reveal both lesbian and lesbianism, and as such impacted on perceptual shaping of multiple selves within self. The study further demonstrated how the postmodern-feminist investigation destabilised dominant paradigms and subverted their location in “truth”, allowing for reconstruction of selves to be explicitly pictured.

The significance of the findings for art therapy is three fold. Firstly, by offering a postmodern-feminist perspective through a lesbian lens, embedded modernist paradigms central to art therapy discourse are challenged. Secondly, the creative process of image making, within a postmodern-feminist frame is showcased. Within such a process change can be mobilised and self perceptions can be transformed. Thirdly, the study has advanced art therapy towards a more contemporary and critically informed discipline, one that can reflect on possible dilemmas encountered by lesbian clientele
when verbally or visually self representing. The implications of the study have several intersections for the broader arts and health care sectors.
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<td>AATA</td>
<td>Australian Art Therapy Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZATA</td>
<td>Australia and New Zealand Art Therapy Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZJAT</td>
<td>Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPD</td>
<td>Borderline Personality Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDS</td>
<td>Diagnostic Drawing Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSM</td>
<td>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (of Mental Disorders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLBT</td>
<td>Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPD</td>
<td>Multiple Personality Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/M</td>
<td>Sadomasochism</td>
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## Glossary of Terms

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<td><strong>Alters</strong></td>
<td>Two or more distinct states of being, experiencing, and perceiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artwork</strong></td>
<td>Visual representations within a printed text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art-based method</strong></td>
<td>A method of research that uses the process of art-marking to produce data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Binarism</strong></td>
<td>A system of binary opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Binary opposition</strong></td>
<td>Two concepts organised in opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender scripts</strong></td>
<td>Expectations assigned on the basis of gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heteronormative</strong></td>
<td>Presumption of heterosexuality as normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iconography</strong></td>
<td>A visual symbol associated with an individual or movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intertextuality</strong></td>
<td>The interrelatedness of a variety of texts, including visual and written texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Out</strong></td>
<td>Openly disclosing one's homosexual status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performativity</strong></td>
<td>Concept associated with Judith Butler, referring to acts performed to intentionally subvert normative scripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptual vertigo</strong></td>
<td>The destabilising effect of postmodernism on modernist assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Picturing</strong></td>
<td>Expressing through making visual art images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queer</strong></td>
<td>Encompassing non-normative, non-heterosexual desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflexive spiral</strong></td>
<td>Combination of reflexivity and art-making over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salvos</strong></td>
<td>Members of the Salvation Army Christian organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self investigation</strong></td>
<td>Utilisation of self in an investigative process</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subversion</strong></td>
<td>Undermining of structures of authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transgression</strong></td>
<td>Movement beyond the limits of social norms</td>
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Preamble

Joyce

Joyce is admitted to a large psychiatric institution in England in the late 1970’s. She is not sure why she is there. Joyce has identified as a lesbian since the age of eight and while in hospital she is offered art therapy as part of a treatment plan. Day after day she makes paintings and drawings without contemplation, the images just flow out. An art therapist is on hand to assist her in understanding the meanings of her images in an attempt to help her achieve self-understanding, although the subject of her lesbianism is never mentioned. Equipped with the ability for spontaneous creative expression and processing the meaning of her art imagery, Joyce leaves the psychiatric institution and continues her quest for inner discovery and self understanding through image making.

Joyce struggles with depression and lack of self confidence. Reclusive and easily overwhelmed, Joyce is careful how she expends her energy by limiting her social contact. At times, Joyce has difficulty reading, writing, speaking and thinking, yet doing her artwork does not require any of these. Her artwork is graphically representational and mostly on A4 paper. Joyce’s mental well-being is greatly assisted thorough the making of artwork, as a theme lesbianism often weaves through her images. Once complete, Joyce places the artwork in a folder which she then puts into a sealable plastic storage box. Joyce does not show her artwork to anyone.

Susan

Susan is an art student and an ‘out’ lesbian immersed in a visual art degree in the early 1980s. Day after day she makes paintings. An art teacher is on hand to discuss the aesthetic
components of the works in progress. Susan quickly learns that aesthetic contemplation and knowing before action is important, and that quality of paint application is the essence of a good painting. Equipped with the tools for aesthetic judgment and practical application of paint, Susan, as a visual art graduate, continues to make abstract paintings as a form of communication with outer society. The theme of lesbianism is inspirational, and sometimes a central theme in her abstract artwork, although never visually recognisable.

Susan is very self assured, sociable, and dynamic in her outward achievements. She has achieved much in her academic and working career. She initiates and facilitates workshops, teaches at university and speaks at conferences. Susan enjoys the public arena. Susan sees her upbringing as privileged and fortuitous. Susan paints on large canvases, she has established herself as a visual artist and exhibits work in galleries and exhibitions.
Chapter One: Introduction
Introducing the study
The two passages in the preamble above revealed how I had always perceived myself and organised my attributes into two dualistic selves. This dualistic compartmentalisation positioned aspects of my lesbianism and self visual representation as polarised into oppositional grouping. Arranging my attributes into dualistic oppositions resulted in my believing that I continually switched from one self to another self, and this had become problematic in managing life events. Having two artwork styles had also felt like a switch from one genre to another, and this seemed to diminish any perception of myself as a serious artist. Although lesbianism was a theme threaded through my artwork, it was also concealed in both styles by either hiding pieces of artwork in total or hiding the theme by abstract coding. It was my dualistic selves and artwork styles that provided the impetus through which to investigate the theme of lesbianism and self visual representation and to further explore how this investigation might have relevance for art therapy.

The idiom ‘Picturing Lesbian’ which leads the thesis title does so with intentional parody, for it is the relationship between ‘picturing’ and ‘lesbian’ that is significantly absent in art therapy discourse. ‘Picturing’ is doubly coded to imply both mentally picturing lesbian, and literally making an artistic picture of lesbian. The question then arises, what is so distinctive about mentally or literally ‘picturing lesbian’ and why would the area require an investigation in order to inform art therapy? Or put another way, as art therapy is predominantly about people making images in a therapeutic environment, why should ‘picturing lesbian’ and ‘art therapy’ yield any distinctive consideration?

The intention of this study was to address these questions through an autobiographical investigation. Feminists have long used autobiography and women’s life stories to illuminate how mainstream philosophies and discourses have been shaped through male views on men’s lives and values. Postmodernism has also sought to contest ‘truth’ claims in major discourses by presenting a re-reading through the lens of those marginalised or disadvantaged. In this thesis I have used both postmodernism and feminism as a framework to contest some underlying assumptions inherent in this research, by using reconstruction I have put forward an alternative reading of art therapy through my life stories. Yet to valorise the use of autobiography as a research method there must have been some interaction or personal immersion within the subject
area being researched. I will briefly clarify how my personal immersion within the areas of lesbianism, image making and art therapy rendered autobiography a relevant investigative method through which to conduct the research.

**Author’s positioning**

My early identification as a lesbian at the age of eight had been un-wavering. While I could not claim any slippage towards heterosexual tendencies, my relationship with the term ‘lesbian’ as a category of identification had slipped and shifted through time, place and situation. For instance, at sometimes I have experienced extreme danger and at other times unity. There have been times where my lesbian expression has felt shameful and other times erotic. My perception has been that the term ‘lesbian’ never seemed to be a constant, despite an urge to keep it so in order to make sense of it. In some situations it was in my best interest not to mention my being lesbian, yet at other times I refused to suppress it. In my youth lesbianism was scandalous, in my teens it was a mental illness, in my early twenties it was a disease carrier, in my thirties it was a sexual revolution, in my forties it became a trend and in my fifties it had melted away. Yet as a backdrop to the waves of definition and melting, is the consistent and very persistence of homophobia, discrimination, invisibility, unequal rights and bigoted attitudes.

My experiences within art therapy spans some thirty years and are geographically located predominantly in the UK and Australia. As outlined in the preamble, my initial introduction to art therapy was as a psychiatric patient when I was offered art therapy as a treatment modality in the late 1970’s. At this time art therapy had only just entered the UK National Health Service mainstream health sector. As a mental health recipient, my experience of art therapy became pivotal to my gaining self understanding both during, and long after hospitalisation. My interest in art therapy persisted and I undertook a degree in visual arts in order to eventually train as an art therapist. During my visual art training I became absorbed in making paintings and from time to time throughout my life, I sometimes have been fully dedicated to my visual art practice as an exhibiting artist. Post-qualifying as an art therapist in 1989, I migrated to Australia where I worked as an art therapy practitioner in various clinical and community settings. I became involved in the pioneering of a national art therapy body now called the Australian and New Zealand Art Therapy Association (ANZATA) and I am currently on the editorial
panel for their refereed journal, namely, the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art Therapy (ANZJAT). My involvement in art therapy has also encompassed the role of lecturer and supervisor for three Masters level Art Therapy programs, two in Australia: University of Western Sydney, Kingswood (1994) and the University of Queensland, St Lucia (2004-2007), and one in Asia: the first Asian art therapy program located in Singapore at Lasalle College of Arts (2006-2007).

Throughout my involvement as an art therapy recipient, visual artist and art therapist, the topic of lesbianism and any discussion of mentally or visually depicting lesbianism has been scarce. This scarcity has been reflected in the absence of literature on aspects of lesbianism and lesbian depiction in art therapy. Therefore, in order to address the scarcity and expose topics previously evaded, my research aim was to investigate my own multiple positioning within art therapy and visual arts. I claim that through investigating my own life stories and pictures, a lesbian view of self perception, making images and social positioning can contribute an alternative perspective on art therapy and image making, which to date has been given little outing in mainstream art therapy literature.

**Forming the research question**

There were several initial questions that were necessary to explore before finalising the specific questions for the study. For instance I explored,

- How will the study inform art therapy?
- What contribution will the study make to the field of art therapy?

I found the specific relationship between lesbianism and visual representation to be a neglected area in art therapy. Taking these terms apart, a significant body of work exists on lesbianism and therapy, particularly feminists’ critiques of psychoanalysis and historical shaping of perceptions of lesbianism. Therefore, in this thesis I have not critiqued psychoanalysis. In fact I intentionally resisted engaging in psychoanalysis in order to provide an opening for topics that had not previously been discussed and critiqued. However, as my autobiographical experiences were focused on ‘lesbian’ and ‘mental health’, I have addressed attitudes within the health sector, specifically, the historical and contemporary perceptions and positioning of ‘lesbian’. Notwithstanding that, this study is focused primarily on the relationship between ‘lesbian’ and ‘visual
representation’. However, it is not on ‘gay and lesbian’, it focuses deliberately on lesbian, due to the distinct historical marginalisation of women and lesbians in the arts, those who markedly are diverged from the centrality of men, and equally gay men in the arts. Lesbian artists and lesbian art theorists have engaged in a number of interesting debates on lesbian visual representation and I have suggested that these debates encompass ideas that relate closely to some of the missing themes within art therapy when considering ‘picturing lesbian’. In forming my research question, I utilised my multiple positioning, as a lesbian, a visual artist and an art therapist, to investigate my own relationship to lesbianism and visual representation in order to address some missing themes in art therapy. My specific research question had asked, what is the relationship of a lesbian’s self investigation of dualistic perceptions of selves and artwork styles to the discourse of art therapy?

**Framing the study**

My approach to the study was framed through postmodernism and feminism. While I had considerable theoretical understanding of feminism primarily due to my Master’s degree in Women’s Studies, my theoretical understanding of postmodernism at the beginning of this study was limited. My initial thoughts on postmodernism challenged my in-grained foundational beliefs and as such, caused me to experience ‘perceptual vertigo.’ However, I identified a creative opportunity due to such ignorance. I decided to reflexively record my perceptual vertigo, particularly the various ways that postmodernism confronted, confused, and dislodged my very platforms through which I had understood lesbianism and visual representation. However, the study also had to appeal to my feminist sensibility, it had to include some form of emancipation or offer opportunities for transformation that could be considered for deployment in the therapeutic context. So rather than resting at the point where I detected divergence from conventions, I sought to challenge my own assumptions and my own dualistically divided perceptions. Postmodernism, together with feminism, provided the means to deconstruct the dualistic way I had perceived myself and my artistic expression; it provided an emancipatory rearticulation and a reconstruction of my own view of ‘picturing lesbian’.

Central to this art therapy investigation then, is the overlap of the combined areas of lesbianism and making pictures. Since my primary mode of self understanding had long
been through making pictures, an art-based research method was a favoured mode through which to activate relevant autobiographical material on picturing lesbian. However, I perceived that making images during the study would only create visual data that embraced my current attitudes, whereas I wanted to resource my visual and written texts from earlier periods so that my past experiences and attitudes could also be presented as findings. Incorporating intertextuality into the research design provided a process through which this linkage to past material could be accessed, bringing present and past material together to collectively form the findings through which to discuss lesbianism, visual representation and art therapy.

As an autobiographical project, it was my intention to monitor processes while making images. I believed it was critical to monitor my response and the formation of links while creating the artworks as well as reflecting on the process of image making after the event. Moreover, I wanted my emotional responses to be also incorporated into the findings. Reflexivity became the practice through which I was able to identify my emotional responses and which enabled me to include my responses as findings. These reflexive responses became findings that conveyed my thoughts, confrontations, difficulties and dilemmas faced during the image making process. Using reflexivity also enabled me to record my emotional responses to the intertextual links while remaining immersed in the creative process.

The study revealed how past personal experiences of homophobia, lesbian invisibility and mental health treatment were deeply embedded in gender/sexuality norms, visual art discourse and social stigmatisation. These experiences impacted significantly on the ability to verbally and visually reveal both lesbian and lesbianism and as such impacted on perceptual shaping of multiple selves within self. The study further demonstrated how the postmodern-feminist investigation destabilised dominant paradigms and subverted their location in “truth”, allowing for reconstruction of selves to be explicitly pictured.

Having outlined the framing for the study, and the outcomes that emerged, I will now address the outline for each chapter.
Chapter outlines

Following this introduction, chapter two critiques the existing literature on lesbianism within visual arts and art therapy. This chapter reveals the literature in the areas of lesbianism and the making of lesbian themed images, as well as addressing what has been evidently overlooked and/or censored.

Chapter three delineates the methodology used to theoretically frame and therefore undertake the study project. In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical approach of postmodernism and feminism, viewing the affiliation and disparity between the two disciplines and also, how they ‘sit together’ as the framework for this study.

I have introduced autobiography as a research method and clarified the distinct ways in which it was implemented for storytelling framed by feminism and therefore as an alternative voice to phallocentricism while also embracing postmodernisms’ interest in marginal voices. I have explained how art-based research was used in this study as a means to generate findings, discover symbolic relevance and work through layers of meaning. In chapter three, I have explained how visual journaling was heavily utilised to develop ideas, record the processes, dialogue between aspects of myself, and work reflexively in all parts of the study.

In terms of research processes I have explained how reflexivity allowed me to witness my responses and changing self while simultaneously engaged in image making. In addition, I have addressed how reflexivity also involved dialoguing between aspects of myself in my reflective journals. I then elucidated how intertextuality permitted the links between present and past written and visual material. In summary, in chapter three I have described the postmodernist–feminist approach, autobiographical and art-based methods, and the reflexive and intertextual processes.

Chapter four reveals the findings that emerged through the autobiographical source, creatively and spontaneously triggered by reflexive processes and intertextual linkages. The findings in this chapter are represented in both visual and written forms. The various texts that made up the findings remain in the chronological order through which they emerged in the study. An ongoing commentary is included to assist the reader with following the unfolding of insights and mapping of the creative process.
Chapter five analyses the findings. The analysis is directed to the ways in which picturing lesbian informs art therapy, and how a postmodern-feminist approach can be used in art therapy to challenge and subvert mainstream doctrine to bring about new perceptions. The discussion has been organised into three areas:

- Self perception including transitions from initial self perceptions to new notions of subjectivity influenced by a postmodern – feminist epistemology.
- Lesbianism and self visual representation, including the potential for a postmodern – feminist perspective on lesbian visual representation in its relevance to art therapy.
- Lesbianism and social positioning, including the multiplicity of the social positioning of lesbian and such impacts on self perception and visual representation. Postmodern – feminist perspectives are put forward as a means to contest conventions providing gaps for the formation of new notions of social positioning.

After the discussion has scrutinised the shifts that occurred in my self perceptions, self visual representation and social positioning, the conclusion places the study in the context of health sciences and clarifies where the thesis contributes to a broader understanding of ‘picturing lesbian’.

Fonts and notes

Due to the use of many different fonts in this thesis, I have included a laminated ‘font chart’ that can be removed from the envelope at the back of the thesis and referred to while reading. However I will now explain the use of the fonts.

Within the written text, when referring to an image the title of the image was made distinct by underlining, for example, Breath of Life refers to an image and will be accompanied by a reference for example (Figure 4.1). When I referred to characters depicted in images, I used font style Courier New. Therefore ‘Flying Woman’ is a personified character depicted in Breath of Life (Figure 4.1).

I distinguished the reflexive notes from the main text, placing the font style Times New Roman into italics with an underlined heading Reflexive note. Dialoguing between aspects of myself also remained in Times New Roman and was placed in italics.
distinguished by a heading _Dialogue:_ with the names of the character speaking in the left margin. Stories, diary entries and journal entries are placed in _Comic Sans_ and accompanied by a heading such as _Diary entry 26th June 1984_ or _Story written 1995._

Within the pages, I attempted to position the images as near as possible to the relevant written text. However, at the back of the thesis is an envelope containing a CD which holds digital records of all images referred to in the thesis. The CD can be loaded onto a computer for easy access to images while reading the thesis. The majority of the images cited within the thesis and on the accompanying CD were included in the exhibition which formed fifty per cent of the thesis fulfilment.

**Exhibition**
The exhibition titled _Selves in Transition_ (appendix) presented selected artwork referred to in the thesis. The exhibition title relates the particular theoretical frame through which the art-based self investigation was implemented. However, within the study there was reference to over a hundred visual texts made by myself, some which I made during the study, and others I had made in the past. The past images were included because of their significance in comprehending the images made during the study. Collectively, these recent and past artworks appear in many different forms such as paintings, drawings, computer generated images, photographs, newspaper clippings, and images from my study journal. As the collection was too vast to exhibit all artworks, I had to select specific artworks for inclusion in the exhibition. In curating the exhibition, my intent was more on conveying the unfolding of the self investigative process rather than the displaying of an art object. Therefore, key or pivotal artworks to the investigative process took priority over aesthetic influence.

Another decision I made in curating the exhibition was the consideration of the intended context of the artwork as this distinction was critical in terms of dualistic positioning of artwork and artist. I therefore refrained from taking images out of their original context by placing them in frames on walls, instead, the majority of study journal images remained in the journals, and past sketches remained intact in old sketch books. The journals and sketch books containing images referenced in the thesis were made available for viewing at the exhibition.
In this chapter I have introduced the study in terms of dualistic selves of Joyce and Susan and dualistic styles of figurative and abstract. I have stated author’s position in relationship to the research and have stated the specific research question. I have outlined the postmodern feminist frame used in the methodology, and the methods of art based research and autobiography, together with acknowledging the reflective and intertextual processes utilised. I have outlined the chapters which follow and have clarified the use of fonts in this project. Finally, I have presented the purpose and curation of the exhibition of art works cited in this thesis.
Chapter Two: Painting the picture:
Literature on lesbian visual representation in visual arts and art therapy
**Introduction**

As my study is situated within the fields of visual art and art therapy, the making of images is a central feature. The literature review therefore encompasses both fields to view how lesbianism has been considered, what aspects have been discussed and whether the two fields identify similar or different aspects regarding lesbian visual representation.

The first section focuses on the visual arts literature regarding lesbian visual representation. This part of the review is directed to the literature on, or by, lesbian artists who particularly sought to visually represent lesbianism. The critique includes visual art publications that were exclusively on lesbian artists or lesbian art and those that had a major component. Whilst I recognised that lesbian representation in film, television, magazines, video and fiction has some influence for lesbian artists and has partly shaped the lesbian stereotypes, the focus in this study was on the visual expression of lesbianism and the relevance of lesbian self depiction in both the visual arts and art therapy.

A critique of both the visual art and art therapy literature specifically focused on lesbian rather than gay or queer due to the unique relationship that ‘woman’ and ‘lesbian’ has with the visual arts. For instance, Ann Gibson (2001) stated that in the 1930’s and 1940’s, being a gay man was not a disadvantage for an artist, but that being a woman, straight or lesbian, was … gay men could pass as straight when necessary. Women, however, could not participate as insiders in either gay or straight networks (p. 548).

The literature on lesbianism and visual arts was considerably more extensive than literature on lesbianism in art therapy. Therefore, in reviewing the art therapy literature for lesbian inclusion I often had to rely on broader definitions of sexualities.

As the topic of lesbianism is considerably limited in the art therapy literature, in the second section I review any art therapy literature that discusses lesbianism. This includes the experiences of lesbian art therapists and comments by art therapists who work with lesbian clients, together with any discussion on lesbian visual representation. Although there is a vast body of literature critiquing lesbianism and psychoanalysis, plus a considerable contribution of lesbianism and psychotherapy, I have limited my review to art therapy literature so as to be able to more specifically scrutinise how
lesbianism and lesbian visual representation has been presented and/or under-represented in art therapy literature.

Placing the review of lesbianism within the visual art literature at the forefront highlighted where the art therapy literature fell short of any in-depth exploration on picturing lesbian. In contrasting both disciplines’ approaches to lesbian visual representation, it became apparent that exploration into ‘picturing lesbian’ in art therapy has remained minimal and superficial. These gaps in art therapy literature assist in positioning where my study had addressed some of these shortfalls.

**Section 1: Lesbian visual representation within visual arts**

**Real artists wear pants**

It was not until the late nineteenth century that women were first permitted to attend art classes, however, women did not have access to human models. Elaine Hedges and Ingrid Wendt (1980) cited a photograph by Thomas Eakins that illustrated “women in 1883 studying the anatomy of a cow, their only studio model” (p. 78). Yet, cows were not to remain women artists’ only life drawing model.

Women used inventive ways to infiltrate the male dominated field of arts. In a similar way to which women writers managed to achieve publication by assuming a male identity, such as Mary Ann Evans and Charlotte Brontë who used pseudonyms of George Eliot and Currer Bell (Hedges & Wendt, 1980, p. 78), some early lesbian artists such as Gluck (Hannah Gluckstein) found that assuming a masculine identity held some advantage in gaining exhibitions and accreditation for their artistic efforts. Diana Souhami (2000) recorded a male art critic of the *Art News* 4th April 1926 responding to Gluck and her art work as “the fine delicacy of the woman artist and the humour and clear-cut vision of a man” (p. 65), implying the inability of women to attain any “clear-cut vision” in the arts unless infused in someway through masculinity. Gibson (2001) stated the attitude of that time was that only “woman in pants were real artists” (p. 549). Although, during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, wearing pants was extremely controversial and outlawed in some areas.
Lesbian artists who wore masculine attire risked police arrest and public persecution. Laurel Lampela (2001) specifically focused on the dress codes of three lesbian artists, Rosa Bonheur (b.1822-1899), Romaine Brooks (b.1874-1970) and Gluck (b.1895-1978). Lampela wrote about the ramification of their dress code in relation to their art and their public profile as artists. Rosa Bonheur sketched in the slaughter house in order to capture the anatomy of animals for her paintings, however, in France in the 1850’s, wearing a long dress was impractical for the work Bonheur was undertaking and she had to apply for an official permit to enable her to wear pants. Lampela (2001) recorded that the “laws required women to obtain the written permission of the police to wear masculine attire. This would only be given with a physician’s endorsement” (p. 46). Transgression from dress style was considered a crime unless permits were obtained; Bonheur’s permit lasted only for six months.

Wearing pants was not a simple matter; it took courage and a strong rebellious personality. The symbolic association between being a lesbian artist and wearing masculine attire became an established signifier of lesbian strength. Lampela (2001) clarified this was “not because they were men trapped in women’s bodies, as the sexologists asserted, but because they were women who were strong-willed, independent and with defiant personalities” (p. 46). Some of the early lesbian iconography was formed through picturing the politics of difference; lesbian artists painted portraiture of other lesbian artists in masculine attire, as a signifier for lesbians as bold, defiant, and self inventive.

Although the literature describes the historical signification of masculine attire, it is the more contemporary links to transgressing gendered dress codes that becomes relevant to this study through my own early identity formation. I am reminded here that in my mid twenties I went through my entire visual art degree wearing male Italian army gear because I felt it signalled that I was both a serious artist and a lesbian. The study demonstrates how dress codes are used to perform the intentional transgression and subversion of normative gender and sexuality codes.

It must be mentioned however, that the symbolic dress codes of lesbian artists did not always work in their favour. In the case of French lesbian artist Claude Cahun (b.1894-1954) the mis-attribution of her work and the mis-representation of her images are numerous (Cottingham 2000; Cole 2005). Born Lucy Schwob, she intentionally used
sexually ambiguous names such as Claude Courlis and Daniel Douglas until she settled on the pseudonym Claude Cahun from 1919. Cahun’s artwork from the 1920’s onwards played on a break from conventional representations of woman. She worked in collaboration with her stepsister and lifelong lover, Marcel Moore, an artist in her own right, who photographed Cahun in her performative sets. However, when Cahun’s work acquired success, it was often mis-attributed, as Laura Cottingham (2000) explained, “a notable feature of her [Cahun’s] obscuration is the number of times during the past fifty years that she was misnamed, in various publications, as being a man” (p. 200). In Cahun’s case, the success of an artist is immediately presumed to be that of a man, and when found to be the work of a woman in collaboration with her lover, the lover was presumed to be a man, as Cottingham pointed out, any “woman unknown is speciously determined to be or to have been a man” (p. 201).

Lesbian representations: heterosexual presumptions

When Cahun’s work has been critiqued by feminist artists, two important features have often been omitted, namely her lesbianism and her intended viewing of the image. Many of Cahun’s images when critiqued through a heterosexual lens lose their anticipated audience and performative intent. Cahun’s images were indeed the product of a private performance and viewing between the lesbian lovers Cahun and Moore and “the play of gazes from photographer to subject to viewer existed only between the two of them” (Cole, 2005 p. 345). Consequently, when presenting Cahun’s images, if the artist’s lesbian identity, lesbian collaboration and exclusive lesbian viewing/reading are omitted, then contextually the images are misconstrued and lesbian sensibility and representation is invisible. Cottingham (2000) raised the point that reading lesbian art solely through the phallocentric language of art can restrict the reading, and “as long as historians and critics insist on examining every artwork in relationship to the art of (more) famous (white) male artists, the possibilities for understanding lesbian art – indeed all art – will continue to be greatly curtailed” (p. 184).

Due to the heterosexual presumption in viewing lesbian artwork together with homosexual censorship within the arts, some artists intentionally used visual tactics of double coding images in order to enter mainstream art sectors. Maud Lavin (2005), for example, critiqued the art of Hannah Höch whose work is situated in the late Weimer period of Germany, a period when androgyny was a fashionable symbol of strong
women. Hannah Höch began a lesbian relationship with Dutch writer Til Brugman in 1926. Lavin cites a letter to her sister in which Höch expressed her deep love for Brugman (p. 329), nevertheless Höch went on to marry a man with whom she had a six year relationship (1938-44). However, during the period that Höch was in a lesbian relationship with Brugman, she made many images, mostly photomontage. One such image on which Lavin (2005) focused was a photomontage titled *Marlene* by Höch 1930. The image depicts a pair of woman’s legs, adorned with high heeled shoes, soaring up out of a building, with onlookers gazing up at them and the word “Marlene” scribed vertically. The image became consumed by mass media and with its popularity came a presumed heterosexual reading. However, the heterosexual reading misrepresents some of the sexual signification of the image. The stylistic androgyny in vogue at the time became a useful double code for the signification of lesbian sexuality. During the era when Höch made the image, Marlene Dietrich was a lesbian cult figure and to refer to oneself as ‘Marlene’ was equivalent to announcing oneself as ‘lesbian’ (Lavin 2005). By re-applying a female homosexual reading, the androgynous onlookers in the photomontage can lead the viewer to discover the considerable lesbian content within the image. Despite the mass consumption of Höch’s images and its heterosexual assumptions, Lavin (2005) points out that it is within the ambiguity of Höch’s images that lesbian viewers had access to construct their own interpretation.

**Lesbian art history: hidden fragments and normative smokescreens**

Historians who sought to retrace lesbian artists’ lives often had to first work with the most miniscule data, or as Cottingham (1996) articulated, historians have “first to rescue women from oblivion” (p. 74). Similarly, Nicky Hallett (1999) found that “lesbianism is frequently obscured by normative smokescreens” (p. 2) presuming a woman to be heterosexual unless substantially proved otherwise. Historical proof of lesbianism and lesbian lives becomes more problematic for historians the further back in history they search, as Cottingham (1996) verified, “the availability of written proof of lesbians and lesbianism is significantly less present and existent than lesbians and lesbianism in the nineteenth-and twentieth-century” (p. 72). However, in the twentieth century, the art historians, art critics and writers that omit the term lesbian when referring to a lesbian artist, maintained lesbian obscurity by concocting a relentless “normative smokescreen” (Hallett 1999). An example of the omission of the term
lesbian from an art historian’s publication can be seen in Andrea Weiss (1995) publication, *Paris was a Woman*.

Using private letters, memoirs, photographs and literary fragments, Weiss (1995) traced a group of women artists, writers and poets known as “women of the Left Bank”, from early twentieth century to 1960’s in Paris. Although Weiss disclosed the romantic relationships between women, she chose not to use the term ‘lesbian’ despite the sexual interests within the group of women being almost exclusively towards women. Weiss (1995) described the Paris scene as having “many women on the Left Bank for whom sexual freedom did not mean being readily available to men, but rather freedom from the heterosexual imperative. It meant freedom to love as they chose – in their case, other women” (p. 20). Two such artists from Weiss’s historical account of women of the Left Bank were painters Romaine Brooks and Marie Laurencin, both for whom lesbian depiction was central to their art practice. According to other authors (Ashburn 2004; Hallett 1999), the art of Brooks and Laurencin cannot be fully appreciated if the lesbian sentiment is obscured or omitted. For instance, Hallett (1999) explained that Brooks’s artwork gave, “the lesbian subject some control and which restructure the lesbian gaze, formulating new ways in which to conceptualise lesbian auto/biography” (p. 189), and Elizabeth Ashburn (2004) claimed Laurencin’s depiction of lesbianism as imperative to “both artistic and sexual liberation. Lesbianism, for many of these women, was a crucial element of their resistance to bourgeois social conventions” (p. 207). The “crucial element” (Ashburn, 2004) of lesbianism in Brooks’ and Laurencin’s political artwork is diluted in Weiss’s (1995) historical analogue by the frequent omission of the term lesbian. Yet it is the term, lesbian, through which their art becomes understood as a site from which to restructure the gaze, and a point of resistance to social conventions.

Cottingham (2000) associated the omission of the term lesbian with the general socio-political disapproval of lesbianism and argued that, “dis-acknowledgement of artists and writers who are lesbians, and of art and literary productions that are lesbian, colludes with the disapproval that lesbian meets in social and political life” (p. 179-80). Cottingham (2000) recounted her own experiences of being asked by heterosexual art historians why it should matter whether an artist is lesbian or gay, she stated, “for many of us it matters a great deal – and it is obviously of significant importance to governments past and present that have enacted, and continue to enact, laws and other prohibitions against us” (p. 179). The general exclusion of women from the arts,
combined with heterosexual presumptions and the omission of the term lesbian in recounting artists’ biographies, had resulted in a distorted historical account of the existence of lesbian artists and a narrowing frame through which to comprehend lesbian artists’ work.

However, the scarcity of sightings of lesbian art and artists in publications prior to the 1980’s was not a reflection of an absence of lesbian artists, more exactly it was that lesbians and women in general, were not granted any acclaim in the male dominated visual arts. Historically women artists were neither exhibited nor published in art history literature and lesbian artists received even less acclaim, despite their expertise. The scarcity was sometimes mis-perceived as the non-existence of lesbian artists as Hammond (2001) stated, “I am tired of everyone saying that there was no lesbian art in the 70s” (p. 556).

Although Hammond is tired of the negation of lesbian art, such negation reflects the limited dissemination of lesbian art through publication and its inaccessibility through public and art institutions. My own past experience also reflects this in that, despite having attended four years full time visual art education, there was no mention of lesbian artists or literature available on lesbian themed artwork. Therefore, as an art student, I too presumed that lesbian art and artists did not exist. The limited historical reference to lesbianism in art discourse is relevant to this study when investigating aspects of lesbian self depiction such as the artist, the image, the context in which an image is made, the content, the viewer, and the space for viewing.

**Feminist art and lesbian omissions**

Rebelling against the history of art as the complete story of art, feminists began to re-write the history of art from a woman’s perspective. As Hedges and Wendt (1980) expressed, “[n]ot to have access to the art of women means that we are deprived of the imaginative responses to the world, the unique perceptions and points of view, of half of humankind” (1980, p. xx). Some reasonably well recognised heterosexual female artists saw their art practice disintegrated upon marriage. For instance, established artist Sonia Delaunay (b.1885-1974) found her own art career became overshadowed upon marrying a male artist and his artwork became influenced by her style and painterly surface. Delaunay stated, “[f]rom the day we started living together, I played second fiddle” (in Chadwick 1990, p. 243).
In the ground breaking volume, *In her own Image: Women working in the arts*, Hedges and Wendt (1980) included a broad range of art and literary forms by women artists and during the next ten years other feminist art literature quickly followed (Broude & Garrard 1982; Parker & Pollock 1987; Robinson 1988; Rosen, Brawer et al. 1989; Chadwick 1990). Feminists perspectives on art, subverted the prior objectification of the female body which previously had only been perceived through male artists’ eyes. Feminist art literature revealed how women artists’ depiction of women, their lives and life events, differed from representations of male artists. Women artists who identified as feminists used their visual art practice to re-vision the visual portrayal of women through depicting their female friends, sisters, daughters or mothers resulting in a new and varied depiction of women by women. The significance of the feminist art movement was recalled by lesbian artist and art theorist, Harmony Hammond (2000). She recollected, when to be both a woman and an artist was considered a contradiction of identities, female-based content in fine art was a tremendous breakthrough with radical implications. Western art has never been the same (p. 19). However, feminist art was invariably from a heterosexual woman’s perspective and as such, excluded lesbian artists or lesbian themed artwork. It could be argued that early lesbian-feminist movements were perceived as anti-male and therefore far too radical for heterosexual women. Subsequently, authors of feminist art publications tended to either overlook or intentionally exclude lesbian art and artists from feminist art publications (Rand 1991). Hammond (2000) considered that the relative absence of lesbian content in feminist art literature had remained consistent, as she explained, “[i]n the heterosexist feminist art histories written today, lesbian art, if mentioned, is rarely described in any detail and never addressed in terms of its unique content or contribution to feminist art” (p. 10-11).

With the lack of inclusion of lesbians within feminism, lesbian artists sought their own expression of lesbian sentiment, triggered by Monique Wittig’s (1992) influential publication, *The straight mind*. Echoing French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s (1953) classical phrase “one is not born, but becomes woman”, Wittig translated as, “[l]esbians are not women … It is not as ‘women’ that lesbians are oppressed, but rather in that they are ‘not women’ ”. Lesbian artists’ consideration of the ‘not woman’ status allowed lesbians to envisage themselves outside of the heterosexual field, and in a separate feminist political category to heterosexual feminists.
Lesbian contemporary artists “out” in print

Several theorists have claimed that visibility of lesbians artists would not occur unless lesbian artists are explicit regarding their sexuality in the art sector. Accordingly, Cottingham (2000) suggested,

it is impossible for lesbian history to come into a recognizable cultural space until lesbians are themselves more visible … Unless we insist on our lesbian selves, unless we articulate ourselves visibly … history will no doubt continue to erase us, and the lesbian historians of the future will be left with fragments and puzzles not much better than the ones we possess of the past today (p. 180-181).

During the mid 1970’s lesbian specific art publications written by lesbian artists began to emerge. The recognition of lesbian art and artists thrust another art perspective into the visual art field, one that the phallocentric art discourse and the feminist heterosexual art literature had previously avoided. Whilst “[t]here have always been artists who were lesbian, and lesbians who were artists, … the category “lesbian artist” scarcely existed before 1970” (Hammond 2000 p. 7). Many lesbians of the 1970-80’s also identified as feminists, though in this era, feminism had taken affront against the objectification or sexualisation of the female body, and to depict women’s bodies in any sexual configuration was considered anti-feminist. Given that lesbianism was most commonly defined by who you had sex with, and the most common depiction of lesbianism was two women in a sexual bond, lesbian feminist artists found their loyalties split between either being feminist and denying their sexuality in their visual depictions, or defying feminism and making blatant images of lesbian sexuality. In the mid 1970’s, Hammond (2000) commented that most of the art by lesbians “was in keeping with the politically correct lesbian feminist position of not representing or objectifying women’s bodies and downplaying any sexuality” (pp. 23-24). However, lesbian artists defied adherence to feminism political correctness and a new wave of lesbian explicit images emerged.

Explosion of the blatant lesbian image

Lesbian artists who believed their lesbian sexuality was invisible by the patriarchal art discourse and feminism’s anti-sexualisation stance, focused their lesbian artwork in ways that immediately transgressed the accepted codes of representation. Therefore this artwork ignited new representations and codes of viewing. As Hammond (2000) stated,
Lesbian art is border art. It demands a gendered and sexual specificity that challenges and disrupts the universality of modern mainstream. For this reason, all lesbian artists, no matter what their work is like, are positioned on the margins simply by announcing their sexuality... Unless one chooses the periphery as a powerful place to be, a border site from which to interact between edges and centers, or to create new multiple centers, it can be debilitating. Relatively speaking, only a handful of artists choose to position themselves, to make art and write about it, from this engaged border territory, to travel back and forth between the art world, the feminist art world, and various dyke and ethnic-based communities (p. 23).

The first lesbian picture book *Cunt Coloring Book* was published by Tee A Corinne in 1975 (revised as *Labiaflowers* in 1981). This publication contained Corinne’s drawings of her lesbian friends’ vulvas. Subsequently Corinne collaborated with Pat Califia and produced *Sapphistry* (1988) the first graphic sex manual for lesbians. These publications were the first that showed sexual lesbian images by lesbians.

From the mid 1970’s it became apparent that the notion of lesbian identity, lesbian visibility, and lesbian representation markedly varied. Hammond was one of an eleven member editorial collective that focused on an art publication on lesbian creative work published in “Lesbian Art and Artists” issue of the feminist journal *Heresies* 1977. Hammond (2000) stated, “[i]t was clear that there was not one lesbian vision, much less one definition of lesbian art among us [however] … We did not receive any sexually explicit material for editorial consideration. So, strangely, this special issue based on “sexual difference” did not contain overtly sexualised material (p. 41).

In a matter of three years, the contribution and content of lesbian imagery changed from subtle emergence to upfront and blatant lesbian erotica when in 1981 a group called Samois published an explicit lesbian sadomasochistic book titled *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*. According to Susie Bright and Susan Hayes (1996) this was the “most banned book in the history of women’s liberation” (p. 27). The publication immediately split the lesbian feminist movement into two camps, those who wanted to transgress all the restrictive codes and stigma of lesbian sexuality through performative S/M, and those who believed S/M mimicked all they were against and was un-feminist. The split in feminist ideologies became known as the ‘Sex Wars’
and was used by the American right wing to confiscate a multitude of gay and lesbian publications at the Canadian border (Hart 1998 p. 41).

The drive by lesbian artists and writers to visualise lesbianism was not dissuaded, it was fuelled by censorship. During the mid 1980’s lesbian magazines began to appear, rich in explicit lesbian photographic images. However, Bright and Hayes (1996) stated “many women were afraid of being “outed”, terrified that lesbian visibility would destroy the civil rights’ goals of feminism. Plenty were just plain embarrassed by sex … they were standard-issue products of sexism” (p. 27). Throughout the 1980’s many lesbian business owners,

banned the new lesbian erotica from their bookshops and meeting places [yet]
the outrage over the lesbian sex magazines was not focused on the text, but
rather on the photography (Bright & Hayes 1996 p. 28).

During the 1980s, censorship occurred and many lesbian businesses and social networks refused publications that contained explicit lesbian sexual images. However, lesbian artists toyed with ingenious methods of concealing explicit lesbian images. To avoid male gaze and to protect the privacy of her models, Corinne (1982) used a kaleidoscopic technique to form mirrored patterns with a motif of a vulva in the centre, yet Corinne’s images did represent explicit images of female lovers. In Yantras of Womanlove (Corrine 1982) according to Tamsin Wilton (2004a) they placed her “at the forefront of the fight against censorship. Printers have refused to handle her work, and community galleries have declined to show it” (p. 90). Whilst Corinne’s art was eventually published the volume continued to cause controversy, it was seized by New Zealand customs however, it was finally released due to the abstract nature of her artwork. Wilton (2004a) found the, “open-hiddenness” to be a rich metaphor for lesbian sexuality, “invisible unless you know what to look for, and then, suddenly, it has been there all along” (p. 91).

**Appropriating mainstream imagery**

During the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, photography was the most popular medium through which lesbian artists made visible lesbianism, and through which they debated representational issues. Impressed by the inventiveness of lesbian photographers, Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser (1991) explained the impetus for their photographic book, Stolen
glances: Lesbians take photographs, originating from lesbian photographers who had ‘stolen’ and inverted mainstream heterosexual images for their own representational purposes. *Stolen Glances* focused on the inventiveness of lesbian photographers when new forms of social oppression were being introduced in both UK and USA. The infamous Clause 28 in Britain and the analogous anti homosexual legislation of Jesse Helms in the USA resulted in anti-homosexual legislations that targeted lesbian and gay representation in the public sphere (Vance 1994). Many previously funded arts projects did not receive continued funding at a time when the HIV AIDS safe-sex campaign needed affirmative acceptance (Gott 1994).

In the international sphere and particularly the homophobic climate, lesbian images that were visible remained controversial, risqué and were considered a political act against the regimes whose intentions were to silence and invisibilise homosexuality. Images of lesbians by lesbians that did get some light, received strong scrutiny from within and outside lesbian circles. Art theorist Cherry Smith (1996) described Boffin’s own images as her need to “investigate the paucity of lesbian role models and the need to appropriate historical fictions for our own ends” (p. 109). Boffin and Fraser’s use of the phrase ‘Stolen Glances’ in the title was an interesting choice. The play on the word ‘stolen’ conveys images were not readily available for lesbians and had to be taken without approval, endorsement, and against an authority’s permission and ‘glances’ conveyed a fleeting, momentary glimpse, explicating the severity of lesbian censorship.

*Stolen Glances* set out to acknowledge that lesbianism exists amidst a multitude of other identities and that issues of sexuality intersect with those of race, class, and the body. The text refrained from supporting notions of an essentialist ‘lesbian identity’, and a distinct ‘lesbian aesthetic’, rather, this work examined work that embraced and explored lesbian sexuality as a social construction. To expose the variability of lesbian identity, Boffin and Fraser (1991) distinctly focused on artwork where lesbianism was overt. Boffin & Fraser (1991) claimed contributing artists hold, the greatest potential for a progressive, and transgressive, lesbian … photographic practice, [while recognising that the] … politics of resistance can never be solely the product of lesbian experience, or of a ‘lesbian aesthetic’, since clearly no such unity or cohesiveness exists (p. 14).
**Postmodern influences – hijackers, transgressors and multiple signifiers**

Postmodern influences on art intentionally contested and confused the legitimisation of historical representational practices and their institutional frames that were produced from both male and heterosexual premises. In its dissembling of elite ideologies in art, postmodernism was seen to liberate previously marginalised artists and censored subject matter. Postmodernism also bought about new techniques for upturning conventions and exposing the power and truth claims imbedded in major discourses that shaped our understanding of concepts such as health, normal, right, and proper. For lesbian artists, any political or cultural codes of practice that excluded them became a potential source for artwork. Picturing lesbianism became a catalyst for subverting conventional codes which in turn questioned the legitimisation of such codes and exposed those they privileged. Postmodernism became pivotal to this study as I used postmodern informed methods to investigate the constructions of my own perceptions through an investigative process.

Although many lesbian artists were affiliated with the feminist movement of the early 1980’s, it was an elitist, white, heterosexual movement and tended to exclude or marginalise lesbians. Also excluded were black lesbians who maintained important ethnic bonds with their male counterparts (hooks 1981), lesbians who did not want their lesbianism to be common knowledge (Calhoun 2000), and lesbians who from time to time engaged in sex with men (Stein 1999) or lesbians who defied conventions of female sexual activity (Hart 1998). When feminists were forced to address the exclusion of lesbians, there was an attempt to clarify ‘lesbian identity’, ‘lesbian sex’ and ‘lesbian’. Attempting to fix ‘lesbian’ to set criteria of ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ merely showed that lesbian could not be defined with fixed characteristics or sentiments. With the influence of postmodernism, feminism has encountered a major shift in comprehending ‘lesbian’ not only as a social construction but has also become viewed as signifying a range of individually identified, culturally varying, historically changing, multiple layers of differences (Lloyd 2005).

Boffin and Fraser (1991) intentionally sought lesbian contributors to take advantage of postmodernist art. They commented that the postmodern interest in reworking available material has afforded lesbians the opportunity to use strategies of appropriation as an
assault on homophobia, and as an assertion of our right to a social and sexual existence (p. 14).

The “available material” that Boffin and Fraser referred to are heterosexual images and practices, that once appropriated and re-worked, can be re-read, offering lesbian meanings. For instance, in her contributing chapter “Dream Girls”, photographer Deborah Bright (1991), blatantly appropriated famous film stills, and by inserting an image of herself into a familiar heterosexual setting, she inserted lesbian text challenging heterosexual supposition. Bright explained that she uses “appropriation of given signifying systems as a useful and sophisticated weapon against our invisibility” (p. 153). Her blatant appropriation of imagery is part of the strength of her visual statement. Bright stated, “the structure be laid bare, revealed rather than mystified, postmodern appropriationists made their borrowing blatant, and used the ‘already given’ of their imagery to thwart conventional pleasures of fantasy and seamlessness” (p. 153).

The hijacking of images from mainstream discourse and their transformation into lesbian imagery has a striking effect of turning a commonplace image into a perverse image and thus juxtaposing heteronormativity and homophobia in a single image. This was effective in the photomontage and image appropriation by lesbian photographic artists Lynette Molnar and Linda Thornburg (1991). Inspired by a conversation with a friend who commented on a book they had just read called Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid To Ask) by David Reuben (1969). Reuben continually referred to homosexuality as blatant whereas Molnar and Thornburg perceived most homosexuals as either closeted or extremely discrete. Lesbian photographic artists set about depicting what ‘blatant homosexuality’ might look like. They roughly cut out a photographic image of themselves in embrace and using photomontage applied it to pre-published images of mainstream settings. Molnar and Thornburg stated they “attempted to illustrate what culture could look like if it were not so anti-gay, homophobic and more tolerant of difference” (p. 120). The roughness of the cut-out image was an intentional tool used to describe the discomfort and inability to fully integrate into a heteronormative space, a technique that was easily read from within the lesbian community. However, the works were rejected by art jurors on the basis of two so-called technical flaws: firstly, the figures were said to be not integrated convincingly into the scene and secondly, that the same pose had been used for montage
onto each work. Therefore it is evident that Molnar and Thornburg’s point was entirely missed by mainstream art jurors.

In a different type of image Ingrid Pollard (1991) contributed a series of photographic works titled “Deny: Imagine: Attack”. Using photographs and the handwritten text around the edge Pollard created an unusual yet direct effect. The first image, “Deny” has shown four photographs of a woman in a traumatised frenzy. Surrounding the images are the words “Oh no not my daughter, she’s a career woman, confident secretary, constant companion, friend”. The image provides a powerful description of a mother’s response to her daughter’s lesbianism that is shrouded in the loss of the daughter she imagined. The second image, “Imagine” played on historical texts forming the imaginary dyad of lesbians as being perceived as either butch or femme. The third image, “Attack” conveyed the hostility towards lesbians through name calling and the resilience that must be adopted by lesbians to survive abuse.

Love Bites is a compilation of photographic works by Della Grace (1991) with an introduction by Sarah Schulman (1991). Schulman made clear the intention, the uniqueness and the valuable contribution of Grace’s photographs which are taken in London and the US during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Schulman positioned Grace’s work socio-politically by declaring that “any disenfranchised group of people must struggle for the simple right of affirmative existence” (p. 4). Schulman wrote of the shift from anti-sex moralism that denounces particular acts as forbidden, to the introduction of anti-pornographic laws that result in the cultural acceptance of people’s entire lives becoming declared pornographic and obscene. It is in this context that Schulman suggested what makes a work of art a valuable contribution in confronting an unfree society, “[a]rtwork requires more than just a stance. There must be an investigation, an insight and a revelation. The artist must offer us something that has been learned in order for a work to be emotionally resonant” (p. 4). Schulman believed that Grace’s photographic work excelled, as visual artists are, “already burdened by the obstacle of using subjects who are considered, in and of themselves, deviant” (p. 4).

In Love Bites, Grace’s photographs highlighted complex representation through the presentation of a range of lesbian communities. One of the series of works entitled “The Ceremony” depicts two young women at their wedding ceremony. Effectively Grace captured one of the most sacred of heterosexual rituals, however, this was accomplished
with the women topless in public and also in leather. Schulman remarked, “[a]t no time is there any indication that these are stigmatized people at a forbidden event ... With or without their tattoos these two are revealed, vulnerable and sexual” (p. 5). Grace relied heavily on ornamentation as the crucial identifier of lesbianism. Schulman concluded that Graces work “documents, humanizes, but never sanitizes the women who make up her world and her sexual imagination” (p. 6). Grace made an important contribution in an era when homosexuality was becoming increasingly targeted and feminism had closed its doors to images that represented power over women by men and the lesbian butch/fem dyad. Arguably, this was a bold publication for 1991, because Grace had refused to succumb to the attempt to make invisible, criminalise, and sanitise lesbianism.

**Self depiction and public censorship**

In *Forbidden Subjects: Self portraits by lesbian artists* (Kelley 1992), twenty-six lesbian visual artists were presented as self-portraits. Kelley referred to the book as evidence of lesbian existence and a “range of work that would explore the spaces between our public and private identities” (p. 6). The contents of this work are a combination of explicit lesbian images and lesbian art. While Kelley commented that “explicit lesbian images are crucially important”, she also believed that it was not the sexual activity that delineates the lesbian identity, rather it is the “challenges we pose to a patriarchal and heterosexist order”. She believed that “when we integrate our pleasure in women with our self-knowledge and our stance within the body politic” (p. 6), the challenge to the social order becomes clear.

One of the contributors, Austrian born Heidi Zednik (1992), included one of her paintings titled “Two Women”. The figures are quite abstract, drawn in a sketch of black paint and not easily identified. Two rectangular brown shapes seem to intrude between their faces and across their hips. One figure has an outreached arm toward the lower torso of the other, suggesting lovers. The obscurity is made clear in Zednik’s writing where she played on the first word in the title of the main publication, “Forbidden”. In her writing she oscillated between knowing what is required of her, (to be quiet, nice, invisible) and her passion to paint her forbidden self. As she works, reworks and reworks again in her never-ending self re-invention and exploration, she recognised the torment of both social homophobia and internalised homophobia. Zednik explained,
[t]rying to recognize and say NO to self-censorship, NO to external censorship …nice edited words and images to fit and please others outside myself. Sometimes I try to fool myself, to trick myself into believing a lie as being true. But I can smell the stench. It won’t let me rest. …Remember we have been told to be quiet (p. 27).

Through her awareness, Zednik revealed her own responses to social homophobia as self censorship and self silencing. Through her images she worked on contesting the social censorship that results in self imposed censorship. Other lesbian artists have also used censorship of lesbianism as inspirational source for their creative work.

In Canada in the early 1990’s three lesbian photographers, Susan Stewart, Persimmon Blackbridge and Lizard Jones, formed a collective called Kiss & Tell, and using their own bodies they set out to make sexualised lesbian images. They exhibited one hundred of the images in travelling interactive photo events called “Drawing the Line”. Arranging the work from subtle to overtly sexual, patrons were invited to write their comments on the wall next to the photographs, and invited to contribute to interactive public debates. In Kiss & Tell’s (1991) publication, forty of the photographs from the exhibition were made into pull-out postcards and printed on the back of each photo-postcard were some of the comments from the exhibition wall. Readers were invited to respond to the photo-postcards by re-arranging the order, sending to friends, tearing them up or using the images in workshop discussions. The most potent message that emerged from Kiss & Tell’s (1991) inventive interactive exhibitions and publications was the existence of multiple viewpoints and the value of performative art based methods. There was no unified response to lesbian representation, there was no single vision of what lesbian sexuality might involve or reject and, in relation to visualising lesbian sexual activity, there was no agreement on where to draw the line. Lesbians seemed to respond to visual representations of lesbianism and lesbian sexuality in vastly different ways, and lesbians encountered a variety of issues in response to lesbian visual representation. These varied responses and varied issues provided the material for Kiss & Tell’s next publication.

In 1994 Kiss & Tell published Her Tongue on My Theory, this combined explicit lesbian sexual photographic imagery with erotic written text, personal histories and provocative essays inspired from the “Drawing the Line” exhibition. The combination
illuminated the political right to represent lesbian desire in all its complexities. The authors commented on the difficulty in obtaining publications containing lesbian sexual imagery, stating that the publications often did not make it through border control. They found that censorship and anti-pornographic laws not only regulate exposure of lesbian imagery, they also distract artists from the basic motivations to create art, “[w]e are so busy explaining ourselves … dealing with censorship issues, that sometimes we lose sight of some of the basic motivations that bought us to do the work in the first place” (p. 111).

*Her Tongue on My Theory* delivered two critical points, firstly it spoke of the censorship laws that restricted lesbian visibility other than those made by lesbians themselves; as Kiss and Tell explained, “One of the few ways we can count on seeing sex images and stories is by making them ourselves” (p. 1). Secondly, it revealed how lesbians perceive and visualise lesbianism in a multitude of ways. As Hammond (2000) had first observed in the *Heresies* Lesbian Issue, “[i]t was clear that there was not one lesbian vision, much less one definition of lesbian art among us” (p. 41).

As an interim summary, lesbian artists of the late nineteenth - early twentieth century had persisted in wearing what they wanted and painting whom they wanted despite social controversy. They provided portraiture of lesbians that was distinctly different from male artists’ representation of heterosexual women. This initial depiction of lesbianism provided the opportunity to question how do representations of lesbians emerge into the visual field and, how do they invite lesbian reading. While lesbian artists of the 1970-80’s (Heresies 1977, Corinne 1982, 1988) had unlocked the closet door on lesbian visual representation, the early 1990 publications (Boffin and Fraser 1991; Grace 1991; Kelley 1992; Kiss & Tell 1991, 1994) explicitly confronted the complexity and multiplicity of lesbian visual representation. With such diversity of lesbian representation revealed, several publications during the mid 1990’s (Ashburn 1996; McCartin 1996; Smith 1996a) provided a less provocative, more celebratory look at the contribution of lesbian artists to the visual art field through demonstrating that lesbian art need not necessarily focus on lesbian content. By the mid 1990’s, lesbian artists and their art were now firmly within the visual arts.
Gender and sexuality: Artists and female depiction

In their book, *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, Horne and Lewis (1996) highlighted the diversity of producing and reading in visual culture together with the prevailing issues that emerged in the work of lesbian and gay artists. One contributor, lesbian artist Veronica Slater (1996) found her approach to the arts was heavily influenced by the phallocentric discourse of art based on the *Story of Art* (Gombrich 1950). Slater claimed, “[i]t became clear to me why I had such difficulty in calling myself an artist when it signified a history that seemed totally removed from my experience. Gombrich’s story had excluded women and as a student I reacted with a sort of androgynous approach to the creative process in an attempt to be taken seriously” (p. 126). Eventually, Slater used her artwork to explore “how the language of painting itself was coded” (p. 126) while also navigating through “the values of an art establishment and their perception of ‘peripheral cultures’” (p. 131).

Artist painter Sadie Lee also in *Outlooks* (Horne & Lewis 1996), examined issues that arose from declaring that she is a lesbian artist (p. 120-125). While she perceived it was positive to refer to herself as a lesbian artist in that she was a role model for other lesbians and promoting lesbian visibility, she conceded that heterosexuals presumed a lack of commonality with her work and its viewing. Furthermore, when she used the term ‘lesbian artist’ she felt her skills as an artist were diminished. For Lee, these issues became more imperative as she approached her major solo exhibition in 1994. As a gallery complex, Manchester City Galleries was renowned for its thousands of daily visitors yet Lee noticed with her exhibition, titled “Venus Envy”, attracted two main viewers, intentional patrons (lesbian identified) and unintentional patrons. Lee, who regarded her artwork as “fairly tame” (p. 122), recounted the unintentional patrons remarks in the gallery’s comments book that voiced outrage at her artwork, while the permanent collection of old masters’ female erotic art in the adjoining gallery went uncontested. Lee (1996) recalled that patrons, complained that the gallery had given space to ‘disgusting’ art, or quoted homophobic passages from the Bible. [Yet in] the Gallery’s permanent collection are many paintings of semi-clad or nude women embracing … Of course, these paintings were by men and offered no explanation as to the meaning behind them (p. 122).
Lee (1996) arrived at a central conclusion. What had incited the comments did not lie so much in the depiction of lesbianism, as this already existed in the gallery’s prized collection. The comments were incited more by problems with the ‘lesbian artist’ and her depiction of women in possession of, and in awareness of, their sexuality. As Lee stated “my paintings engage the viewer by direct eye contact, their attitudes are depicted as confident, primarily within themselves” (p. 122-123).

Therefore the difference between the gallery’s permanent collection of lesbian erotic images and Lee’s artwork lay in the gender of the maker and the gender of the intended viewer. In the permanent collection, male artists had depicted women in such a way to render them attractive to men, subservient and available for male gaze and male consumption, whereas Lee’s paintings differed in that the artist is both a woman and a lesbian who explored the relationships between women, and sometimes between the model and artist, rendering the depiction of woman for female gaze and female consumption and female sexuality centred firmly within the female subject. In Lee’s experience, when a lesbian artist’s images of women reach the visual field of heterosexual monopoly, both the lesbian artist and her images are made problematic, and perceived as extreme by heterosexual viewers. Despite the acceptability of explicit lesbian themed artwork by heterosexual male artists, the reactions in scenarios such as Lee’s imply that any lesbian depiction by a lesbian artist is always extreme. Lee’s encounter with mainstream art praxis is relevant to this study in that it links to some of my own experiences where I found that my lesbian themed image had no avenue through which they could be viewed, whereas my abstract artwork was embraced by mainstream galleries.

The images the mainstream rejected

The exclusion of lesbian made images from mainstream galleries and publications is at the centre of Susie Bright and Jill Posener’s (1996) book *Nothing but the Girl: The Blatant Lesbian Image* where they collated over 150 lesbian erotic images that mainstream publishers had rejected. Bright, who was also editor of lesbian erotic/pornographic magazine “On Our Backs”, explained that the images contained in the book “have not been accepted by photography magazines or pornographic magazines: they do not fit in” (p. 10). Bright made and interesting connection between publication legislation, notions of community, and the exclusion of lesbian images; she
commented that lesbian images “don’t conform to the straight, legalistic notions of community standards, because the lesbian has never been included in the mainstream definition of community” (p. 10). Bright pointed out the sexism in American pornographic laws that only permitted images of women in sexual activity where the image included a penis, while categorising anything other than a penis as a foreign object, and therefore obscene. The restrictive laws effectively outlawed any depiction of lesbian sexual imagery while also denying female centred erotica to appear in women’s pornographic publications. Bright claimed that, “[c]orporate publishing does not understand female sexuality, and has never wondered if it should” (p. 10), subsequently, any sexual images that enter the photographic and pornographic magazine industry remain controlled by, and for, male consumption. Bright and Posener’s 1996 publication suggested print culture has some bearing on the parameters of our visual field in that images that are either sanctioned for public consumption or outlawed from public viewing. They explained that laws that prevent images of ‘women centred sexuality’ from entering print culture undoubtedly affect not only the act of lesbian artists’ depicting lesbianism, but also the response to lesbian images from within the public sphere; where lesbian images are always perceived as extreme.

**Multiple depictions of lesbianism**

From the mid nineties several lesbian art publications emerged celebrating the diversity of lesbian artists’ subject matter. English painter Mandy McCartin (1996) showcased her paintings in *From the Streets* which depicted nightlife of the London backstreets including some lesbian encounters. Elizabeth Ashburn’s (1996) compilation of Australian lesbian artists in *Lesbian Art: An Encounter with Power* showed the wide-ranging subject matter in lesbian artwork, and similarly, Cherry Smith’s (1996a) assemblage of lesbian artists artwork was showcased in *Damn Fine Art by New Lesbian Artists*, also demonstrated the extensive styles and subjects that lesbian artists incorporated into the work.

When it came to the subject of ‘lesbian art’, some art critics, such as Richard Axsom (2004), considered Hammond’s (2000) publication, *Lesbian Art in America: A contemporary history*, to be “the first survey of the subject ever written” (p. 84). Indeed, Hammond’s comprehensive record of American lesbian art and artists from the 1970’s through to the end of the millennium continued on from its predecessors of the early to
mid 1990’s that had first engaged with the complexities of lesbian visual representations (Corinne 1975, 1981, 1982; Boffin & Fraser 1991; Grace 1991; Kiss & Tell 1991; 1994; Kelly 1992; Lee 1996; Slater 1996; Bright & Posener 1996). Hammond acknowledged that “images of lesbianism by lesbians remain almost completely absent from the dominant history of Western art” (p. 10) and although she described contemporary lesbian art as having “shifting, permeable borders and migratory populations” (p. 9) it also “assumes and proposes difference … from art by men and straight feminists” (p. 8) and by its contribution to art, acknowledges “the existence and range of an extensive body of visual work from diverse lesbian subject positions” (p. 11).

**Sourcing discourses: deconstructing lesbianism**

Featured in Hammond’s (2000) publication is Millie Wilson who, Hammond stated, more than any other lesbian artist, “has consistently made work from and articulated a postmodern perspective” (p. 106). Wilson’s work engaged with past discourses but played with, and on, contemporary art praxis. Wilson stated, “any woman who undertakes the historic male act of painting is forced to engage in aesthetic cross dressing” (p. 106). This statement acknowledged both the historical and current climate where lesbian art and artists are neither given recognition nor their art taken seriously within the phallocentric and heterocentric field of visual arts. As Lampela (2001), (mentioned earlier in this chapter) had draw on lesbian artists Brooks and Gluck for their difference in attire and mannerisms, Wilson also drew on Brooks and Gluck to extenuate their absence from art history and their rise to recognition only after their deaths. Wilson’s installation was named after a portrait Brooks painted of Gluck “Peter, a Young English Girl”. Wilson used museum praxis to authenticate the fictitious artefacts in order to replay and celebrate the artistic accomplishments denied Brooks and Gluck in their lifetimes.

In another piece, Wilson again used the authentication of museum praxis as a method of validation. She obtained two historical documents and set them into separate wall mounted cases. One was a 1948 drawing of sexual variants of female genitalia claiming to be a study of ‘female homosexual patterns’ by George W Henry MD, and the other was a 1761 drawing of the variety of periwigs by William Hogarth. Both documented drawings shared an uncanny similarity in their drawn contours of vulvas and wigs; which when viewed together hinged female homosexuality to the legal system on a
humorous visual plane. Standing between the two mounted drawings was a freestanding glass case pedestal containing a large single white wig on a wig stand. The wig was a reminder of the enforced legislation that reigns throughout the history of homosexual detection and through male power and authority. Wilson made clear her artistic method of political engagement, “I’d rather seduce the viewer than coerce them - seduce the viewer with beauty, humor, some sort of social pleasure” (p. 109). Since Hammond’s (2000) major publication, there have been few publications to venture into lesbian artists and lesbian representation in visual art to the extent of Hammond’s publication.

However, there are some interesting developments in sectors such as education, information and culture. Some authors in the area of art and design education look at ‘lesbian and gay art’ entering school and tertiary education and “queering the curriculum” (Addison 2007; Stanley 2007), another focuses on the attitudes of art and design students towards lesbianism (McKenzie-Bassant 2007), and the limited lesbian art resources in British art and the effect on students art education is also explored (Walker 2007). Queer visual art reference books have to some extent incorporated lesbian art and artists (Summers 2004), and there are recent publications in the area of queer women representations in popular culture (Driver 2007; Tasker and Negra 2007).

**Sourcing personal experience for creative work**

Throughout this review of literature on lesbian visual art, Rosy Martin was one of the few lesbian identified artists and authors who straddled both the disciplines of visual art practice and art therapy, and therefore is important citing for this study. Martin was a contributor in both visual art publications, *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs* (Boffin and Fraser ed, 1991) and *Forbidden Subjects: Self Portraits by Lesbian Artists* (Kelley 1992). In the prior, Martin wrote about performing against the grain in her chapter entitled “Don’t Say Cheese, Say Lesbian” (1991). Through photography, she deconstructed gender and sexual stereotypes making use of autobiographical stories such as ‘coming out’ to her parents and the impact of Clause 28 on the London gay and lesbian community. She demonstrated the socio-political constructedness of sexual identity categories and the value of phototherapy for self exploration and political activism. In *Forbidden Subjects*, Martin’s chapter title, “Unwind the Lies that Bind” (1992) was inspired from an earlier image made in 1988 where Martin wrapped herself in bandage with words that her mother used when Martin disclosed her lesbianism.
Martin explained, “I choose to make visible aspects of my life which have been repressed from popular and personal memory, parts of myself which I had learned, out of self-protection, to hide” (p. 72). She enjoyed the tension between the static photographic image and the fluidity of subjectivity and found that, “when confronted with hundreds of images of “self”, where can one find the truth” (p. 72). Martin endorsed the personal therapeutic value of photography, “When the scenarios of shame, internalised oppression and isolation can be witnessed, recognised and mourned, I begin to move towards a freedom from the “compulsion to repeat” ” (p. 72). Prior to these two publications, Martin had begun working with British photographer Jo Spence in the early 1980’s, and together they pioneered the practice of ‘phototherapy’. 

In her book, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, Jo Spence (1988) used autobiographical material to uncover personal and political aspects of her life and to highlight photography as an undervalued tool in therapeutic self exploration. Spence wrote, “the most simple pictures can be used to start off a chain of ideas, or contradict notions of what we think we know” (p. 13). In one of the chapters, “Photo Therapy: New Portraits for Old 1984 Onwards” (Martin and Spence 1988), Martin reflected, 

> [t]hrough the politics of feminism and my shift from heterosexuality to lesbianism I have become aware of how my adolescent self was socially constructed. Through photo therapy I can acknowledge that I colluded in that, and can make visible the strange rituals and masquerades which I adopted. I can thus challenge the concepts of a ‘natural’ heterosexuality (p. 175).

Martin found that looking at family photographs assisted “challenging the ‘decisive’ or ‘perfect’ moment, and the ‘truth’ of the photographed image”. She saw that, “[p]hoto therapy is entirely about process, rather than fixed products”, this enabled her contest “‘fixity’ and rigid social roles. The work decodes sexuality and gendering and begins to show them as social constructions” (p. 175).

By consistently using a combination of photography and autobiography to demonstrate the potential of phototherapy, Martin (1991b; 1997; 2003) went on to contribute to a notable phototherapy publication (Spence & Holland 1991) and important art therapy publications which brought the subject areas of feminism and gender into the art therapy arena (Hogan 1997; Hogan 2003).
Summary of lesbianism in visual arts

In this first section I presented literature on lesbian art and lesbian artists. I particularly focused on how lesbian artists had centred their art practice on issues of lesbianism, and how censorship had become central to their work. Here, several themes were made apparent; namely, the smokescreen of the history of lesbian art and artists, lesbian artists’ transgression of gender norms as a sign of strength and determinism; double coded images that evade censorship; historical and contemporary public censorship of lesbian depiction; lesbian perceived by mainstream as always blatant, always too much; postmodern notions of shifting identities and multiplicity of lesbian depiction; the lingering attitudes that continue to link lesbianism as unhealthy or faulty; and, the therapeutic value of image making for exploring political and personal ramifications of identifying as lesbian.

With these themes in mind, I proposed that when a lesbian makes an image of herself, she inevitably engages with at least some of these areas of historical, political, social and cultural signification. These are likely to determine, at least in some part, a lesbian’s pictorial self depiction, including limited visual resources, decisions about disclosure, systems of symbolic representation and style, and the response from others to lesbian depiction.

The literature above on visual arts generally and lesbian visual art representation specifically, informed the direction of my research study significantly. However, of equal importance is the literature on art therapy and particularly in relation to lesbian clients’ visual self depiction. The latter literature is reviewed and critiqued in the following section.

Section 2: Picturing lesbian within the art therapy literature

In this next section, I first provide a broad view of where and how lesbianism has been presented in art therapy literature, and under what terms lesbian has been considered. Given that art therapy has a strong foundation in visual arts, it was expected that there may have been some interwoven presenting issues. In this section I review and critique aspects of lesbianism and how these were presented. I identify where art therapy literature is inadequate in terms of the critical subject of lesbian visual representation.
Overview of lesbian art therapy literature

From a review of the literature it was evident that sexual orientation was addressed in health related sciences. For example, sexual orientation was found in the literature from psychology (Bohan 1996; Burch 1994; Clarke & Peel 2007; Coyle & Kitzinger 2002; Greene & Croom 2000; Kitzinger & Perkins 1993; Omoto & Kurtzman 2006; Sahli & Cavallaro 1987) psychoanalysis (Dean & Lane 2001; Friedman & Downey 2002; Glassgold & Isenza 1995, 2004; O’Conner & Ryan 1993; Schwartz 1998), sexuality in psychotherapy and counselling (Evosevich & Avriette 2000; Bieschke, Perez et al. 2006; Chernin & Johnson 2003; Coleman 1988; Davies & Neal 2000; Perez, DeBord & Bieschke 1999; Drescher, D’Ercole et al. 2003; Neal & Davies 2000; Ritter & Terndrup 2002). Some literature focused specifically on lesbianism and psychotherapy (Burch 1994; Falco 1991; Glassgold & Isenza 1995, 2004; Goldstein & Horowitz 2003; Kitzinger & Perkins 1993; Sahli and Cavallaro 1987; Schwartz 1998). Within art therapy, some publications focused on sexual orientation in art therapy (Addison 2003; Bichovsky 2003; Ellis 2007; Fraser & Waldman 2003; Jones 2003; Loureiro De Oliveira 2003; Ward 1999), yet the majority of authors writing significantly on sexual orientation and art therapy were from a single publication (Hogan 2003). It was evident that there was an overall dearth of literature that focused on sexual orientation and art therapy and very few publications that specifically considered lesbianism and art therapy (Bichovsky 2003; Ellis 2007).

There were two subject areas in the art therapy literature where lesbianism was either covertly or overtly included. The first area was cultural diversity and the second was gender issues. However, some art therapy authors explicitly stated they had not included sexuality in cultural diversity, whereas the latter term is used exclusively to indicate racial diversity, while in other art therapy publications, especially concerning ethical issues, the term cultural diversity specifically stated an inclusion of sexuality. Furthermore, the inclusion of sexuality in cultural diversity is most often referred to as sexual orientation or sexuality with no specific mention of ‘lesbian’ per se. The second sighting of lesbianism in art therapy is in gender issues where lesbianism is most often grouped with gay and lesbian, with ‘GLBT’ (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender), or subsumed under ‘queer’.

While a few more recent art therapy publications had mentioned either lesbianism or homosexuality (Riley 1999; Wadeson 2000; Kramer and Gerity 2000; Hogan 2001),
they had not engaged in any in-depth discussion regarding lesbianism and art therapy. However, the relative dearth of literature on lesbianism in art therapy was ‘broken’ by a significant edited publication *Gender Issues in Art Therapy* (Hogan 2003). In Hogan’s publication the subject of lesbianism and art therapy was addressed considerably by several contributors (Bichovsky 2003; Addison 2003; Frazer & Waldman 2003; Jones 2003). Although lesbian was often grouped in with gay and lesbian, or GLBT, discussion of sexual differences and art therapy had at least emerged as a critical topic for investigation in art therapy. However, since Hogan’s 2003 edited publication there had been only one article that has significantly focused on lesbianism and art therapy (Ellis 2007). To provide more in depth review, I examine the gradual inclusion of homosexuality and lesbianism as a subject for discussion in art therapy literature, the terms of which it was sighted, the degree of its presentation and what issues have emerged in art therapy literature pertaining to lesbianism.

**Cultural diversity and ethics: the inclusion or exclusion of sexuality**

In the early 1990’s a group within the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT), formed the Art Therapy Race and Culture Group (ARC). They recognised that art therapy as a profession had emerged predominantly from a white middle-class Western ethos, and they set about questioning art therapy’s narrow practice ideologies. The ARC group circulated a questionnaire to practising art therapists and it returned some alarming findings. For example, “70 per cent of art therapists felt that their training did not equip them well enough to work ‘with clients from cultures and races other than their own’” (Campbell, Liebmann, Brooks, Jones & Ward 1999 p. 14). Although some art therapists had previously focused their publications on cultural issues in art therapy (Waller 1989; Case & Dalley 1990; Lewin 1990; Campbell & Gaga 1997), these were relatively scant given that the ARC’s questionnaire had also revealed that 81.5 per cent of art therapists worked with multi-ethnic clients (Campbell et al. 1999, p. 14). Partly as a result of this enquiry, four publications emerged which contributed to a new focus on art therapy ethics and cultural diversity (Dokter 1998; Hiscox & Calisch 1998; Campbell et al. and B Moon 2006).

The term cultural diversity is of interest here, for authors tended to explicitly state whether sexual orientation was excluded or included in their reference to the term cultural diversity. Take for example the two publications Jean Campbell et al. (1999)
and Bruce Moon (2006), Campbell et al. stated that their volume, titled *Art Therapy, Race and Culture*, would not include what they saw as the “wider aspects of culture such as age, gender, or for that matter physical disability or sexuality” (p. 15). Here then, sexuality fell under the “wider aspects of culture” implying that these aspects were more commonly or frequently addressed in art therapy literature. In contrast, Moon’s (2006) chapter “Multicultural and Diversity Issues in Art Therapy”, places sexuality in amongst ‘cultural issues’, in which Moon clarified, “[c]ulture is also associated with sexual orientation” (p. 196).

Although sexuality is excluded from culture in Campbell’s et al. (1999) publication on art therapy and cultural diversity, the three themes that steer the publication are most relevant to sexuality,

1. How does the race and culture of both therapist and client impact on the process, product and relationship in art therapy?
2. How can we harness the therapeutic possibilities generated by image, colour and language, which reflects people’s racial and cultural histories?
3. What are the content and meanings of the dynamics that arise in inter-cultural art therapy? (Campbell et al. 1999, p. 15)

By employing Moon’s (2006) inclusion of sexuality under the term culture, Campbell’s three themes are most relevant in relation to lesbianism. I suggest that a lesbian re-reading the three themes would have translated:

1. How does being a lesbian client and/or therapist impact on the process, product and relationship in art therapy?
2. How can we harness the therapeutic possibilities generated by images, colour and language, which reflects lesbian cultural history?
3. What are the content and meanings of the dynamic that arise in lesbian orientations and art therapy?

Despite the questions relevance to lesbianism and art therapy, this perspective was absent from Campbell’s (1999) and other key publications on cultural diversity and art therapy that excluded sexuality in cultural diversity. Moon (2006) adopted a broader notion of culture that is inclusive of sexual orientation. He stated that, “broad perspective of culture is important for art therapists because culture affects the way in which people adjust to their physical, psychological, and social environment” (p. 196).
Art therapy, when practiced from a multicultural perspective, not only takes into account “individuals who have a set of cultural beliefs and values [it also demands that] art therapists must attempt to recognise their own values, beliefs, and biases” (Moon 2006, p. 197). In looking at sexual orientation and more specifically at lesbianism, this suggests that it is important for art therapists to become aware of lesbian culture as culture effects the way a lesbian client may adjust to her physical, psychological, and social environment, and “therapists must attempt to recognise their own values, beliefs and biases” (Moon, 2006, p. 197) towards lesbianism.

When reviewing ethics and codes of practice, it is evident that the international registration bodies for art therapy explicitly include sexual orientation in the broad areas of cultural sensitivity or cultural diversity. For instance, the Ethical Principles for Art Therapists for the American Art Therapists Association (AATA) (American Art Therapy Association 2003) included sexual orientation in “multicultural awareness” (p. 6). In section 6, the document cites that art therapists respect “cultural, individual and role differences” and to “try to eliminate the effect on their work of biases” (p. 6). The ethical principles demand that art therapists “do not knowingly participate in or condone activities of others based upon such prejudices”, and that they “take reasonable steps to ensure that they are sensitive to differences that exist among cultures” (p. 6). In addition, section 6 requests art therapists to educate themselves, suggesting that they “are earnest in their attempts to learn about the belief systems of people in any given cultural group in order to provide culturally relevant interventions and treatment”. Further to this, section 6 requests art therapists to obtain education and information on specific cultural groups with which they are working and to “seek assistance from members of that culture” (AATA 2003).

Moon (2006 p. 207-8) suggested five tenets of ethical multicultural art therapy:

1. art therapists become aware of their own culture.
2. art therapists consider “how their own cultural and aesthetic biases influence their assumptions and values about clients’ artworks and behaviours”.
3. art therapists are “cognizant of culture-specific meaning associated with colors, form, and symbols”.
4. “the individual client’s dysfunction develops in a sociocultural context” which “influences the particular nature and form of the dysfunction, as well as what constitutes normal behaviour”.

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5. “treatment plans must be appropriate for people from different cultural backgrounds”.

Moon (2006) used a vignette of a lesbian client to demonstrate an example of cultural insensitivity. In short, for several sessions a lesbian client had presumed her therapist was also lesbian. Upon the client asking, the art therapist grimaced at the suggestion and asked the client why it would make any difference whether she was gay or straight. After a few more sessions the client abruptly terminated. Moon does not supply any answers but requested the readers consider the therapist’s cultural sensitivity guidelines (p. 206). The Australian and New Zealand Art Therapy Association (ANZATA) has a broad approach in their Ethics and Standards document which requires that, “[a]rt therapists recognise and respect diversity among people and oppose discrimination and oppressive behaviour” (ANZATA 2004).

**Feminist art therapy and lesbian absence**

The 1997 publication *Feminist Approaches to Art Therapy* (Hogan 1997) was an important contribution at a time when art therapy had received little feminist critique. Art therapists who worked from a feminist therapy perspective in the mid 1990s were considered fairly radical in that profession. Nancy Viva Davis Halifax (1997) wrote of her own association with feminism and claimed she felt an “ambivalence in claiming “feminism” as part of my identity”, and that she found a, “lack of advantages in that identification; indeed, because we live in a patriarchal society, there are distinct disadvantages” (p. 50). Yet, she described the importance of a feminist perspective to art therapy, citing an experience of her first internship in a traditionalist psychiatric setting in Canada. She observed her clients’ drawings, stating that there, “was no allowance for multiple points of view”. She explained her response as, “looking at the suffering and pain that these women endured, the doctors did not make connections to the conditions of all our engendered lives; never did they bring in an analysis beyond that of medical psychiatry” (p. 50).

During the mid 1990’s, Davis Halifax critiqued the lack of feminist perspective in art therapy commenting that, “a feminist practice of art therapy remains largely undescribed” (p. 54).
Out of the thirteen contributors to Hogan’s 1997 *Feminist Approaches to Art Therapy* publication, only one contributor mentioned lesbianism (Martin 1997) albeit briefly. As Mary Lynne Ellis (2007) confirmed, “there are scarcely any references in the book to lesbian, gay and bisexual sexualities” (p. 61). Arguably, this was not surprising given that the literature on feminism and the visual arts during the 1990’s frequently omitted lesbian art and artists, producing a purely heterosexual view of feminist art theory. With the roots of art therapy partly in art and partly in psychoanalytic discourse, the feminist approach to both art and psychoanalytic discourses had historically omitted lesbian from any critique, and feminist art therapy literature was no exception. However, the absence of lesbianism from feminist art therapy publications does not reflect an oversight on behalf of the editor, it accurately reflects the consequence of the pathologisation of homosexuality and entrenched homophobic attitudes in health services. As a contributor to that edition, (Joyce 1997), I believed to claim my feminist viewpoint was a radical disclosure yet declaring my lesbian identity felt like professional suicide.

**Sexual diversity and art therapy’s reliance on other professions**

Prior to 2003 art therapy literature that discussed sexual orientation, homosexuality or lesbianism remained limited especially compared to other health sectors. There were in fact only a few authors that addressed sexual diversity under issues of gender (Riley 1999; Wadeson 2000; Kramer & Gerity 2000; Hogan 2001; C Moon 2002). Art therapists interested in homosexuality and art therapy had to seek material on sexual orientation from other professions. Addison (2003) commented that, “current art therapy literature and resources are significantly limited. Thus, art therapists often have to rely on literature available in related fields instead of relying on information from their own field” (p. 56). This was also confirmed by art therapists Jean Fraser and Judith Waldman (2003) who stated that, “few art therapy publications have so far addressed sexual orientation, the dual identities produced by same sex object choice, and how either of these might manifest within the art therapeutic work” (p. 71).

With the publication of *Gender Issues in Art Therapy* (Hogan 2003), some of the first discussions on sexual diversity in art therapy began to surface. While for some contributors homosexuality and sexual diversity was the focus of their chapter (Bichovsky 2003; Addison 2003; Fraser and Waldman 2003; Jones 2003; Loureiro De
Oliveira 2003), the majority of these authors viewed a broader concept of sexuality such as homosexuality, or GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender) with only one specifically focusing on lesbianism and art therapy (Bichovsky 2003). Since Hogan’s 2003 edited publication there has, to some extent, been some increase in the mentioning of sexual diversity and homosexuality in art therapy publications (B Moon 2006; Kaplan 2006; Edwards 2007), however, only one article provides more in-depth theoretical considerations of lesbianism and art therapy (Ellis 2007). Some art therapists considered that the first point of call in addressing the scarcity of sexual diversity in art therapy was to confront the lack of incorporation of sexuality as a component in art therapy training.

Art therapy training: Sexuality as an absent subject

Whilst art therapy training was questioned in regard to its deficiency in addressing cultural diversity (Ward 1999), sexual orientation has only recently become a subject for discussion in art therapy training (Fraser & Waldman 2003; Bichovsky 2003; Addison 2003). Indeed, during my own art therapy training in 1989, the subject of sexual orientation and working as an art therapist was not mentioned. In the group work training component I refrained from disclosing my lesbian identification due to my awareness of homophobic attitudes amongst art therapy students rather than from art therapy tutors.

In terms of sexual orientation some of the issues raised in the literature were whether art therapists could work effectively with homosexual clients if their training did not explore therapists’ own sexuality, biases and social attitudes. Fraser and Waldman (2003) reasoned,

> it is particularly hard to see how, as art therapists, we can provide a safe space for lesbian and gay clients if our own sexuality and sexual anxieties have not been adequately worked through, or the complexities of lesbian and gay object choice and lifestyles is insufficiently understood (p.72).

Furthermore, Addison (2003) believed such curricular might be discriminatory. Addison (2003) stated, “the fact that graduate programmes fail to address GLBT issues, or even the personal belief that sexual orientation is never relevant to any art therapy situation, is almost as dangerous as blatant discrimination” (p. 59).
Fraser and Waldman (2003) explored art therapists’ experiences with verbalising their own sexuality. They reported, “lesbian and gay art therapists indicate that many have experienced a sense that their sexual identities could not easily be expressed in training (p. 71). They stated three major mis-perceptions or exclusions in training related to homosexuality and these prevent art therapists from confidently and efficiently working with lesbian and gay clients. In their words,

[first, there is a lack of awareness of how homosexuality is pathologised within traditional psychoanalytic theory. Second, there is a limited understanding of the effects of prejudice and stereotyping on lesbians and gay clients. Third and most important, there is the issue of our own potential to remain emotionally available when becoming the subject of homoerotic transference (p. 71).

This omission of sexual orientation was recently documented by Ellis (2007) drawing on her experience of training and supervising art therapists and psychotherapists. Specifically Ellis addressed sexuality within the complexity of therapeutic relationships. Of her trainees and supervisees she claimed,

many of them have admitted fears regarding erotic transference and countertransference: these have ranged from anxieties that there might be temptation for the therapist to become sexually involved with a patient to fears of not being sensitive enough to the patient’s vulnerability in their exploration of sexual desire in therapy (p. 61).

My art therapy training did not equip me to work with homoerotic transference and countertransference; however, I did gain understanding through feminist therapy and feminist psychotherapy literature.

As stated earlier, art therapy has relied on psychoanalysis to frame the understanding of therapeutic and psychodynamic principles. Fraser and Waldman (2003) put forward a key problem with this approach, “[p]sychoanalytic discourse has concerned itself more with why a client may be lesbian or gay, and has ignored how homosexuality is experienced by the client in his or her life, a causal investigation which is not paralleled in relation to heterosexuality” (p. 79). The tendency towards pathologising homosexuality is noteworthy, as part of this study reflects on my own experience of
psychiatric admission, diagnosis, and treatment, which shows significant links to the pathologisation of my lesbianism and my inability to make use of art therapy for exploring my sexuality.

Art therapy has been influenced by psychoanalytic theories which have positioned homosexuality in error and heterosexuality perceived as normal. Psychoanalytic influences were found to be problematic by art therapist Maggie Jones (2003) who believed that, “the psychotherapeutic land and the boundaries which define it are inscribed by a heterosexual taxonomy into which are encoded the rout-markers of psychoanalytical straightness” (p.98), rendering a homeostasis in art therapy. In agreement with O’Conner and Ryan (1993) who critiqued psychoanalytic theory for its positioning and pathologisation of lesbianism in *Wild Desires and Mistaken Identities, Lesbianism and Psychoanalysis*, Ellis asserted that the “uniqueness of patients’ language for their sexualities is often not attended to in classical psychoanalytic accounts” (p. 62), rendering psychoanalysis as somewhat inadequate in its theoretical underpinnings.

Pathologising difference in art therapy training

Arguably, art therapy’s dependency on psychoanalysis has raised significant prejudices, biases and judgments. Ward (1999) discussed equality issues that arose with her students. She recalled, “had been labelled as personal pathology and ignored or dismissed …We heard of other occasions of poor practice and sexist and heterosexist judgments being made by college staff, who were considered to be experienced tutors and supervisors” (p. 298). In assessing a student’s readiness to become a qualified art therapist, Ward (1999) warned of the danger that, “anybody who is different in any way can be seen as ‘not the right sort of person’ ” to become a therapist (p. 298), although this was not my experience when training as an art therapist.

Although art therapy training is aimed at equipping students and graduates for the workplace, homophobic attitudes towards health care workers has rarely been addressed. In terms of art therapy clinical placement experiences, Bichoivsky (2003) revealed the attitudes of clinical staff were not only homophobic, her non-traditional gender stereotypes placed her outside the staffs’ notions of ‘normality’. She recalled her supervisor gleefully consoling her, that when a client had asked outright whether Bichovsky was a lesbian, she had not let on. Nevertheless, when Bichovsky asked the
supervisor if she could just tell the clients that she was a lesbian to address their inquisitiveness, the supervisor advised against it, claiming that, “a previous worker who had been gay and who has discussed it openly had been asked to leave” (p. 50).

Bichovsky recounted, “I had been instructed not to say I was a lesbian – and that by probably the most liberal member of staff there – and I felt like a freak” (p. 51). Furthermore, Bichovsky (2003) recalled an educational psychologist assessment on one of the male clients. The psychologist reported, “I think he is defiantly schizophrenic; he’s got this lifelong feeling of never fitting in” (Bichovsky 2003 p. 51 emphasis in original). Bichovsky’s reflections in her placement diary were, “What is so pathological about that? What is there here to want to fit in with?” (p. 51). Bichovsky did not complete her placement or her art therapy training.

Bichovsky’s (2003) contribution is a solitary sighting in art therapy literature which considers art therapy training, lesbianism, and homophobia in the health sector. It makes the point that ethical training standards for art therapists should include working with diverse communities of people, and address the bigoted attitudes and discrimination towards homosexual students and graduates in the workplace. Art therapist Addison (2003) verified that “[s]elf-disclosure of the art therapist’s sexual orientation may lead to being ostracised within the profession” (p. 65). Arguably, it was Bichovsky’s work that demonstrated, as a lesbian art therapy trainee, she experienced discrimination and isolation from health care practitioners due to their homophobic attitudes.

Addison (2003), Bichovsky (2003), Ellis (2007), Fraser & Waldman (2003), Jones (2003) and Ward (1999) raised important issues concerning art therapy training and sexual orientation. They addressed the effects of the historical pathologisation of homosexuality the narrow attitudes towards sexualities, and the limited training regarding effective workplace practices and diverse sexualities, and learning the necessary skills to counteract homophobia in the health sector.

**Portrayal of sexuality categories in art therapy literature**

The way in which categories of sexuality have been presented in the art therapy literature is another important issue as it has influenced art therapists’ perception of homosexual clients. When investigating the category ‘homosexuality’, Fraser and
Waldman (2003) cited Foucault’s, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (1981), tracing the emergence of homosexuality through a range of discourses, namely sexology, religion, law and psychoanalysis. The history was focused in Europe during the late nineteenth century when such discourses began to regulate and investigate same sex behaviour (p. 72). Using Foucault’s emphasis on the construction of definitions and meaning through discourse together with examining the power involved in these constructions, they reject any fixed definition of homosexuality stressing that “[m]ost relevant to our work as art therapists is an understanding that the meanings we ascribe to homosexuality are not ‘natural’ but rather historical and ideological, as are the normative values Western culture attributes to heterosexuality” (Fraser & Waldman 2003, p. 73). Ellis’ (2007) scholarship also questioned the concept of ‘natural’, “in the assumption that heterosexuality is more ‘natural’ than homosexuality” (p. 67).

It was only as recently as 1992 when the World Health Authority declassified homosexuality as a disease and removed it from the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) (American Psychiatric Association 1994). However, the link between homosexuality and mental illness still appears evident in the minds of health practitioners and is historically imbedded in health discourses, including art therapy. As Fraser and Waldman (2003) declared, “there are still contemporary psychoanalysts who advocate the use of the profession to ‘cure’ individuals of their homosexuality” (p. 79). The ingrained view of homosexuality as a psychopathology continued past its removal from the DSM, with gay and lesbians seen as unfit to practice as therapists. Twomey (2003) confirmed, “until very recently, there was a ban on accepting gays and lesbians for psychoanalytic training in the UK” (p. 18).

With postmodern influences there has an increased suspicion of any fixed demarcation of populations and a move towards viewing subjectivity as more fluid, multi-layered and influenced by a variety of social, cultural and environmental factors. Ellis (2007) emphasised,

> [s]exualities and sexual identities emerge in diverse ways and hold more or less importance at different times in individuals’ lives. They are not fixed and they may be the source of, and constructed through, a multiplicity of complex experiences within specific social contexts” (p. 60).
Authors such as Ellis 2007, Fraser & Waldman 2003, and Jones 2003 have recognised that although the term lesbian is necessary to identifying populations that may be socio-politically marginalised, historically the term has been used to place prohibitions on same sex attracted women and to assume unitary qualities in those who identify as lesbian. Therefore, these authors (Ellis 2007; Fraser & Waldman 2003; and Jones 2003) also stress the multilayered and fluid sense in which term ‘lesbian’ should be perceived. Ellis (2007) emphasises this point in therapeutic work in “attending to the unique meanings which are associated with sexuality for each individual” (p. 60).

**Portrayal of homosexual clients in art therapy literature**

The art therapy literature has tended to present homosexual clients who seek therapy in three predominant ways. Firstly, as people with particular sexuality traits and therefore presumed to be in ‘need’ of therapy (Addison 2003); secondly, as people who face frequent social discrimination and homonegativity that accumulates as life stressors and brings them into therapy (Fraser & Waldman 2003); and thirdly as clients who have identified as homosexual, however sexuality was not the principal issue for therapeutic exploration (Edwards 2007). The distinction being that the first has placed the emphasis with the client, the second has focused on the impact of social prejudices on an individual, while the third has brought sexual orientation into context as only one aspect amongst multiple identities and life experiences.

The first example can be seen in Addison’s (2003) chapter, the purpose of writing she explained as “an effort to increase art therapist competency when working with non-heterosexual clients” (p. 53). However, when writing about working with GLBT clients, Addison has overused the term ‘special’, arguably stigmatising the GLBT client group as one with excessive problems. At its extreme, Addison used the word ‘special’ five times in one paragraph (p. 64). Certainly, such a fixation implied an oddity or peculiarity that lay as special to homosexual clients in contrast to heterosexual clients. This notwithstanding, Addison has illuminated some important points regarding sexual difference and art therapy. For instance she has addressed unethical treatment and practices, and most critically questioned the position that “GLBT clients are seeking art therapy because of their sexual orientation” (p. 59).
In contrast, the second example is seen in the work of Fraser and Waldman (2003) when considering gay and lesbian clients and the importance of social contexts and its effects. For lesbians and gay men, homophobia means the attack on the self embodied by day-to-day experience of prejudice and discrimination. This can take the form of stereotypes which have the effect of reducing gay men and women to what they do in bed... regardless of how clear lesbians and gay men are about their sexual identity, few escape without some degree of self-hatred or doubt (p. 77).

Arguably Fraser and Waldman were effectively asserting that lesbian and gay people are not subject to excess mental health problems, however they are subjected to mental health stressors as a result of hetero-normative social discourses “[l]esbians and gay men are defined and categorised as ‘other’ by a dominant heterosexual society and the sense of ‘outsidership’ is likely, … to be embodied in the issues which are brought to art therapy” (p. 76).

The third example is cited in Claire Edward’s (2007) chapter where in a case study she clarifies her client’s lesbian identification, however, this aspect of the client is fairly peripheral amongst the more predominant material conveyed for consideration.

**Art therapy practice: Practitioners call for inclusion of sexual diversity**

In a bid to open up discussion on sexual diversity and art therapy, a group of UK art therapists met to discuss the problems of sexuality. The meeting identified four main areas,

- the pathologising of homosexuality within traditional psychoanalytic literature;
- the inappropriateness of certain key psychoanalytic concepts for working with gay clients;
- the complex issues relating to disclosure of lesbian and gay sexuality both for clients and for practicing and training art therapists; and
- the massive silence around homoerotic transference and countertransference (Fraser and Waldman 2003, p. 69).

At this time Addison (2003) asserted that it is essential to address the major concerns with heteronormative presumptions. In her view it was imperative that art therapists consider,
Do application forms present gay-friendly wording? Is heterosexism conveyed through the language of the art therapist? Is discussion of ‘alternative’ sexual orientation discussed in a casual and open manner? Does the art therapist apologise to heterosexual clients for the inclusion of gay-orientated material during art therapy? (p. 64).

She claimed it was essential that these issues were redressed. In particular she identified gender confusion, relationship difficulties, religious conflicts, stigmatisation, discrimination, ‘coming out’ issues, gay parenting, loss of family support, prejudices, scapegoating, rejection, and physical danger. As well as acknowledging the therapists’ internalised homophobia, Addison spoke of how clients’ internalised homophobia may result in the form of depression, fear, shame, guilt, and self-loathing that can sometimes result in mis-diagnosis and mis-treatment.

The possibilities of misdiagnosis through pathologising the effects of homophobia are challenges art therapists face when working with diverse cultures. As Moon (2006) stated, “[t]he real challenge for art therapists lay in understanding cultural beliefs and social norms and protecting them from being categorised as pathological simply because they do not match the dominant view of “normal” ” (p. 198).

Fraser and Waldman (2003) emphasised the importance of working with the transference and countertransference in art therapy. They examined the issues of the unprepared or unresearched therapist who responds in a defensive manner to homoerotic transference and therapists who interpret homoerotic transference through classical psychoanalysis as infantile eroticism.

Further to art therapists addressing their own presumptions, belief systems and biases towards homosexuality, the issues of visual representation and symbolic systems contained within the art work made in the therapeutic context must also be addressed. Central to the work of art therapists is image making and part of the preparation and research that art therapists can absorb is to have appreciation of, and to become familiar with, some of the representational issues that homosexual artists have encountered when creating images that encompass aspects of sexuality. Such issues of visual representation are clearly more evident in the visual art literature than they are in the art therapy literature.
Linking visual arts with art therapy: Visual language and symbolic systems

The influence of the visual arts on art therapy has been well documented. In *Healing Arts: The History of Art Therapy*, Hogan (2001) provided a comprehensive account of the emergence of art therapy and citing the first use of the term art therapy by Adrian Hill in the UK in 1942. Hill was a practising painter who taught in art schools from 1926 until his own hospitalisation for pulmonary tuberculosis; which triggered the idea for art therapy while rehabilitating. Upon his recovery, Hill found art therapy to be useful as a diversion and the process encouraged a more in-depth process of analysis.

Other art therapy publications have also emphasised the link between visual art and art therapy. Gilroy and Dalley’s ed. (1989) *Pictures at an Exhibition: Selected essays on art and art therapy* took into account various theoretical modes when investigating the psychology of artists and their artwork. However, there is a gender bias typical of visual arts literature, the work of seven male visual artists - illustrator Edward Lear, painter René Magritte, Marc Chagall, Vasili Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and sculptor Henry Moore - are offered as perceptive links towards understanding the predominantly female dominated profession of art therapy. No female visual artists appear in the volume and no lesbian artists either, though a reference to Edward Lear and his apparent lonely isolated life as a homosexual is referenced (Woddis 1989 p. 72).

From a broad cultural perspective, B. Moon (2006) suggested that art therapists who work with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds are, faced with theoretical and practical problems in their efforts to understand and respect imagery and visual forms. There may well be culture-specific meanings for visual symbols and images, as well as culture-specific differences in artistic style and form … it is [therefore] important for art therapists not to rely upon the false assumption that art is a “universal” language (p. 199).

However, while art therapists are encouraged to supply picture magazines for collage and art books for creative inspiration (Betensky 1987; Charlton, 1984; C H Moon 2002), these are invariably heterosexual in their representational content. This predominant heterosexual material limits those wanting to express sexual difference and who rely on
a different symbolic system (Addison 2003). Such visual expression of sexual difference, however, is often portrayed by subtle symbolic clues that visually “show what they cannot ‘tell’” (Addison 2003 p. 60).

It is within Addison’s (2003) chapter that I found some overlap with lesbian representation in the visual arts. Her observations of images containing subtle clues, is similar to the double coded image in lesbian visual arts that can be perceived through both heterosexual and homosexual readings. Addison acknowledges that social prejudice and public censorship has an effect on self depiction which correspond to the visual art literature on social attitudes to lesbian visual representation. This is most relevant to this study in that the censorship of lesbian images and homophobic responses to lesbian depiction limited my own ability to visually communicate my lesbian identification as an art therapy client.

A brief reference to ‘gay’ and ‘art books’ was also found in Studio Art Therapy: Cultivating the Artist Identity in the Art Therapist by art therapist Catherine Hyland Moon (2002). Explaining the importance of the studio environment in contrast to the clinical room where art therapy so often takes place, C.H. Moon pointed out that for a client to be inspired to create, the environment must resemble that of a studio rather than a clinic. While describing important aspects of setting up an art therapy studio, she comments on the provision of literature, images and publications that might furnish the art therapy studio environment. C.H. Moon stated,

[i]t will be important for people to be able to find others like themselves - old, young, disabled, black, white, Asian, Native American, Latino, gay, straight … in the literature in the waiting area, the art on the walls, the magazine’s used for collage, the music played, and the art books on the shelves (p. 95).

The social invisibility of any marginalised group can be confirmed by the lack of mirrored images in popular visual culture. Both social invisibility and distorted representation of one’s sexual identification can contribute to a further sense of isolation, negativity and low self-esteem. Fraser and Waldman (2003) acknowledged the effect of societal invisibility through a case study in which a lesbian client makes an image of herself standing in front of a mirror where her reflection is a blank, conveying the under-representation of herself in a dominant heterosexual culture (p. 77-78), however they did not comment on whether the art therapy environment itself mirrored a blank for
the lesbian client. Nor did they comment on the potential for art therapists’ to counteract the invisibility or a blank reflection through providing relevant referents within the art room. The lesbian client cannot be existent without her sexuality, but where is her sexuality reflected in the art therapy environment as she makes self images?

**Attributes of art therapy for exploring sexual diversity**

The question can be posed, how relevant is sexuality to image making, and can sexuality be separated from the process or act of image making? Ellis (2007) drew on the work of Merleau-Ponty to contest the dualistic notion that creative expression is somehow distinct from the unconscious inner world. Through Merleau-Ponty’s ideas, Ellis paralleled sexuality contesting its separation of body from existence, she stated, “sexuality is not an object of conscious intention; instead sexuality and existence are interfused” (p. 65). Ellis proposed that artistic expression is not a separate interpretation of inner emotion, art expression *is* emotion. With this in mind she viewed sexuality in a similar way, proposing that sexuality is not distinct from experience, there is no non-sexuality, but sexuality is “co-extensive with life” (p. 65). Ellis critiqued psychoanalysis for pathologising the ‘cause’ of homosexuality which then denies the patient their own language. She advocated that if as art therapists we attend “sensitively to the specificity of clients’ language and suspend any desire to generalise or universalise we can allow questions to emerge for us which might address the complexity of each individual’s experience more fully” (p. 63). Ellis put forward that,

> [a]rt media are extensions of our embodied subjectivities [therefore] … art material do not express inner representations of sexual drives; they are in themselves experiences of sexuality” [and as a vocabulary, visual language] “allows for ambiguities, subtleties, and complexities more extensively than is possible in verbal language” (p. 65).

This view is somewhat paralleled in Jones’ (2003) chapter where she utilised the analogy of the mainland (heterosexuality) and the peninsular (homosexuality) to consider border lines. She observed that the difficulty of integration for some lesbians may be more “easily tolerated if the demand for a mainland sense of wholeness or completeness carried less weight and value” (p. 102). Jones recognised that the border line is neither simplistic nor straight. Drawing on the work of Virginia Woolf, Jones found an example of multiple fluid subjectivities positioned “simultaneously outside,
beside and inside the borders of heterosexuality” (2003, p. 103), transgressing notions of fixed borders of sexuality. Jones (2003) found that art therapy is itself in a conflicting position, on the one hand trying to combine the normative control of psychoanalysis while on the other hand acknowledging the fluid ambiguous qualities of art (p. 98). Furthermore, Jones (2003) maintained that when art therapy leans further towards psychoanalytic informed psychotherapy “an opportunity to walk and encompass the borderline between art and therapy, to develop ambidextrously, appears to be lost, with art therapy assuming the character of psychotherapeutic partisan. The result of this is a rather dull homeostasis” (p. 99), yet when art therapy takes a non-straight line through emphasis on art and with its “deviant potential for ambiguity. It has the capacity for holding many notions, many angles, many colours and places, in a way that the written or spoken word rarely allows” (p. 98).

There are similarities here between Ellis (2007), Jones (2003) and also Fraser and Waldman (2003) in that they view sexuality as mutable, shifting and un-containable although recognising the necessity for naming sexualities. They find art therapy’s relationship with psychoanalysis as problematic in viewing subjects through fixed heteronormative criteria, as Jones stated, “encoded …rout-markers of psychoanalytical straightness” (2003 p. 98). However, they see properties inherent in art as conducive to expressing that which is fluid, ambiguous and multilayered. They have advocated that art therapy is an affirmative agency for exploring the subtle and multi-layered complexities of sexual identities; however, they concede that art therapy is only effective when conducted in a therapeutic environment where generalisations are suspended and the art therapist has researched their own biases and attitudes towards homosexuality.

**Summary of literature on lesbianism within art therapy**

Viewing the literature on lesbianism from both the visual arts and art therapy reveals some interesting overlaps and omissions. While the critique of lesbian within the area of visual art gained momentum during the early 1990’s, the critique of lesbianism in art therapy literature remained extremely scarce until 2003. At this point, the art therapy literature shows a tendency to group ‘lesbian’ under terms such as ‘cultural diversity’, ‘sexual diversity’, ‘sexual orientation’ or ‘GLBT’. When grouped under these broad
terms, specific issues relating to lesbian and visual representation within the art therapy context seems to be lost.

The visual art literature in the first section of this chapter clarified, lesbian visual depiction emerged through a unique path when to be a woman and an artist was a vast contradiction in terms, but to be a successful lesbian artist was considered impossible. Lesbian artists were rarely recognised or recorded in art history literature, and when they were, their lesbianism was concealed. Some lesbian art work could only be appreciated if perceived to be the work of men. During the 1980’s and 1990’s lesbian artists and authors rectified this lack through generating a significant body of literature specifically on lesbian representation within the visual arts. Of great concern to this study, it is evident that critiques of art therapy through the visual arts, continue to rely on the work of men as a referent, despite art therapy being predominately a female profession.

In their depiction of lesbianism, lesbian artists effectively subverted the gaze. Male artists’ portrayal of the female for male consumption became subverted by the portrayal of the female for female consumption. In terms of historic and contemporary art therapy literature, the perspective on art and its relationship to art therapy remains fixated as a phallocentric view. The absence of lesbian visual artists in art therapy literature and the absence of lesbian depiction or lesbian perspectives in art history related to art therapy renders art therapy unexplored. This is paramount when critiquing the area of picturing lesbianism in the art therapy context. For instance, there is little mention in art therapy publications of the subversion of the male gaze where a lesbian depicts a ‘lesbian body’. The art therapy literature has not addressed difficulties of heterosexual presumptions in lesbian representation. With the exception of two authors, phototherapist Martin & Spence (1988; Martin 1997) and art therapist Hogan (1997; 2001; 2003), art therapy publications have rarely brought into debate the history of the male gaze on the female body, and how lesbian depiction for lesbian consumption automatically becomes a subversive act. Where art therapists had critiqued the feminist art therapy literature for its absence of lesbianism within its feminist perspective, no link was then made with the feminist visual art literature where ‘lesbian’ had also disappeared over a decade earlier under essentialist feminism.
Chapter summary
In this chapter I have critiqued the literature on lesbianism in both the fields of visual arts and art therapy in order to compare where the themes of lesbian representation are either explored or overlooked. Both visual art literature and art therapy literature recognise ‘lesbianism’ as having multiple meanings and that meaning will vary from one individual to another, and will also shift with time, place and situation. The value of art for exploring multi-layered, fluid, and ambiguous notions of self is described in both the fields of visual art and art therapy. However, the visual art literature shows that although lesbian visual artists were energised to embrace the expansive possibility of exploring multiple possibilities of lesbian visual representations, their images were often blocked by censorship and their exclusion from mainstream art galleries limited the circulation of progressive artworks. The censorship of ‘lesbian’ had not been a topic taken up in art therapy literature, and the effect of censorship of lesbian images had not been considered as to its relevance for lesbian clients self depiction in the art therapy setting.

The visual arts literature presented how lesbian artists found ingenious ways of inserting themselves into the mainstream art world, finding inventive means through which to subvert conventions and invite lesbian readings. Methods such as double coding and images such as androgenous figures meant some earlier lesbian art could integrate into the mainstream art world. Some of this coded symbolism remains important in the development of a lesbian symbolic system which remains iconic of early lesbian visual representation. Art therapy literature has not approached how the art therapist may receive clients who may be familiar with iconic images of lesbian representation. How might the double coded image be read, or would it be missed altogether? How would the androgynous figure be perceived by the art therapist? Would these symbolic codes of lesbian representation be appreciated for their roots in historic lesbian representation or would the double coded images or androgynous figures be pathologised as sexual dysfunction? Issues such as these have not been discussed in art therapy literature.

The visual art publications explain how lesbian artists and their art are often performative acts of transgression that set out intentionally to mess with a range of normative concept such as, gender norms, sexuality norms, health norms, and sanity norms. The lesbian visual art practice of performative transgression, together with contesting unitary notions of ‘lesbian’, resulted in creative techniques unique to lesbian
art. Although there are citings in art therapy literature about lesbian clients experiencing cultural invisibility, very little has been written regarding how an art therapist might support a lesbian client to gain access and utilise some of the rich technical resources and culturally specific symbolic language of lesbian art.

While art therapy literature is only prepared to consider ‘lesbian’ when included under broader terms such as ‘gay and lesbian’ or ‘GLBT’, the specific historical features, censorship issues, artistic techniques, coded systems and cultural symbolism unique to lesbianism depiction is rendered unexplored and unlikely to amount to in-depth discussion on lesbianism and visual representation. As a lesbian, a past art therapy client, a visual artist and an art therapist, my life experiences can contribute data to some of the areas of lesbian experience omitted from discussion art therapy literature. These are presented as findings in chapter 4, and further discussed in chapter 5, concluding in chapter 6. The following chapter, I have outlined the project design; clarifying the particular theoretical approach I chose to frame the project and the methods through which I conducted the autobiographical investigation.
Chapter Three: Research design:
Methodology, methods and processes
**Introduction**

This chapter configures and justifies the elements of my research design. I see these elements as non-linear, inseparable and interwoven. Early in my research journal I drew the image of a woven fabric that combined the main threads of the project design (Figure 3.1).

![Figure 3.1 Woven Project Design](image)

The image of the woven fabric is uppermost in my mind in my explanations within this chapter.

This chapter has been organised into three sections, and each section elucidates an aspect of my research design together with its relevance for this particular research project. The first section addresses postmodernism and feminism. I explain how I used this theoretical frame, why it was chosen and the impact the postmodern feminist approach has had on myself as the researcher and the research project. To clarify my rationale for using a dual methodological approach, I divided the first section into two segments, and although I gave postmodernism sequential precedence, I am more comfortable envisaging postmodernism and feminism as a bordering parallel.

I began the first section with a brief overview of the term ‘postmodernism’ introducing some of the key theorists whose focus on subjectivity has dramatically changed notions of subjectivity. I identified what qualities and characteristics determine research to be postmodern and I explain how postmodernism has been useful in framing my particular research study. I introduce feminism and feminist research and the influence of postmodernism on feminism and my reason for having selected postmodern feminism as the theoretical framework for the study.
The second section outlines my chosen research methods of autobiography and art-based research through which I conducted the study. In this section I discuss the reasons for these two methods. I will also explain how the theoretical context of postmodern and feminism shapes the implementation of both autobiographic and art-based research methods used in this study.

The third section details the particular research processes of intertextuality and reflexivity. I will explain the appropriate utilisation of both intertextuality and reflexivity for my particular research area and detail how these processes provided momentum throughout the project, playing a significant part in generating the research data.

**Theoretical underpinnings**

**Postmodernism**

Defining ‘postmodernism’ as a theoretical discipline becomes a conflict in terms, for to give something a definition involves imbedding it into a set of criteria, designating it as a fixed category, and/or implying it as having permanence. Defining postmodernism would be analogous to defining the fluid aspects of water by observing it captured in a glass. Postmodernism does not reveal itself through fixing it to a rigid set of parameters or characteristics. It can be more aptly and loosely described as being attuned with fluidity, mutability, flexibility, multiplicity and pastiche. It is this difficulty in describing what postmodernism is and what it does that initially had postmodernists in some entanglement. However, Melville (2004) suggested that “What looked at first like an uneasiness or real trouble with the term is in fact a direct consequence of its actual strength and value” (p. 83). The strength and value of postmodernism which Melville raised, is the release from the confinements of modernist ideology. Nevertheless this freedom is not without its difficulties, as freedom from any fixed ideology “seems to make agency or concrete decisions impossible” (Nealson & Giroux, 2003, p. 130).

**Postmodernism – theories and theorists**

Writers, philosophers and theorists who have contributed to postmodernism, namely Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Umberto Eco, Felix Guattari, Luce Irigary, Julia Kristiva, Jacques Lacan, Jean François Lyotard and Richard
Rorty (Grbich, 2004, p. 17) may not share anything in their theoretical positionings apart from a critique of modernism. Modernism, with its ideology of order, knowledge and universality, has been dismantled and deconstructed by these and many more theorists, to expose dualisms such as the powerful and the powerless, the central and the marginalised, the authority and the subjected, the truth and the uncertainty and the winners and the losers. The position of centrality in modernism has been occupied by mostly white, Western, heterosexual, middle class, wealthy, men, who have benefited most from maintaining such discourses as unequivocal ‘truths’

Postmodernism, therefore, can be seen as the crumbling of the modernist universals, and it is this shift away from the modernist universality of ‘truth’ in terms such as ‘natural’, ‘normal’ and ‘proper’, that results in postmodernism only ever being local, deliberate and dispersed. Melville (2004) explained, “[p]ostmodernism is just the collapse of universals, and so it can only ever be local and strategic, announcing itself only in order to disqualify all those terms that would let it mean and matter the way “modern” and “modernist” have” (p. 83). The shift from central to local, from fixed to provisional, is further explained by Alvesson and Sköldberg (1999),

dominant discourses [are] replaced by microhistories – local, always provisory and limited stories. Claiming to be no more than they are, these microhistories at the same time do not try to repress the power aspects, fictions, contradictions and cracks which unavoidably emerge in any discourse (p. 148).

Modernity was based on the assumption that given the right framework and observation the universe could become completely knowable and that object reality exists or could be found. Postmodernism critiqued and deconstructed dominant discourses, thus challenging the validity of attaining ultimate knowledge. The deconstruction of dominant discourses, together with acknowledging historical, cultural and social contexts, began to read more like a narrative or story rather than a ‘truth’. Once deconstructed, these major discourses were named by philosopher Lyotard as “grand narratives” (1984). The process of deconstruction challenged the seemingly natural validity of ‘truths’ imbedded in dominant discourses Glass & Davis 2004).

In postmodernism, the previous modernist notions of knowledge, order and object reality gave way to chaos, ambiguity and multiple realities. The modernist rigidity of discourses as a fixed ‘truth’ was challenged by postmodernism through an emphasis on
Postmodernism – subjectivity

In postmodern terms, subjectivity can be viewed through two interwoven concepts, the construction of the individual by outer contexts, and the individual’s control and influence upon herself. The construction of, and influences on, the individual are stated succinctly in this passage by Carolyn Grbich (2004),

> [i]n the postmodern era, individuals are seen as social beings constructed by the systems or networks they inhabit, but these comprise many socialising contexts with different meanings and practices and through interaction in these, individuals become situated, symbolic beings. For example, a person becomes situated geographically, culturally, sexually, educationally and with regard to work position as well as in terms of sport and other interests. But in each of these contexts another facet of personality is called on to be creatively structured *in situ* and added to as other contexts impinge. The individual has creative reflexive capacities and can control the impact of the ideology of each social context, incorporating aspects that he/she is most comfortable with in an ongoing and changing manner (p. 21).

This passage makes clear that the historically, culturally and socially constructed individual is not only a multi-situated symbolic being, but also has the reflexive capability to regulate various influences. Furthermore, the individual is not multi-situated in any fixed sense, rather mutable as she/he moves from situation to situation and from moment to moment, picking up, resisting and discarding influences. In postmodernism, subjectivity then is neither fixed nor singular, but is seen as fluid, shifting, mutable, multiple selves in a constant state of flux and change according to the many situations, moments, influences and choices.

Postmodern research – author positioning

Postmodernism effectively downgrades the author as the all knowing authority figure and as such, the importance of the reader and the readers own interpretation of the text becomes heightened. Therefore, there is a shift in power from the modernist vision of the author having privileged knowledge that the reader desires, to a more equitable
balance of power where the postmodern author recognises that their offering is taken up by readers and through multiple readings. This decline in authority of the author was coined by Barthes (1968) as the “death of the author” (Sim, 1998, p. 187). Thereby the author forgoes the privileged entry to the meaning of the text, and the reader then becomes the creator of the meaning. This shift of emphasis onto the reader’s discovery of their own meaning of the text results in meaning produced by the readings of the text rather than found within from the author. As Nealson and Giroux (2003) explained,

[the question we ask of the text is no longer “what did the author really mean?” but rather “how does this text produce meanings?”] Certainly one of the ways a text can produce meanings is by reading it through a lens of its autobiographical, historical, and cultural contexts; and obviously authorship and the author’s inventions are helpful with such an inquiry. But theory (and its use-value, its necessity) begins in the freeing up of meaning from the iron grasp of the author. Meaning is always more slippery and multiple than any given author’s intention (p. 18).

The purpose of the author in postmodern terms is to facilitate the development of an open text that avoids one interpretation and favours multiple interpretations. In terms of postmodern research, Grbich (2004) elaborated,

[the author is now seen as writing from a shifting network of places, and the various texts …that … she has access to as data link to these places. The researcher can be viewed either as a juggler playing with many balls - theories, contexts, concepts, events and signs which are drawn together as one temporary entity in an attempt to illuminate various aspects of a research question - or as an interpreter who presents the opinions and is involved in the debate regarding these (p. 68).

The positioning the author in postmodern research is decentred. There are several techniques employed to facilitate authors decentring, one is to make transparent the views of the author who represents the research through her own lens. Through acknowledging the constructedness of the author through her transparency, previously unheard views can contribute to a body of theory.
The positioning of the author into the text is a more recent mark of postmodern influence on research where “the postmodern researcher can be located spatially, culturally and within the research process” (Grbich, 2004, p. 69). The term ‘reflexivity’ is often used to refer to the author’s process of announcing their transparency in the research process, offering thoughts, feelings and reflections throughout the study. This multiple entry and exit of the author into the text allows for multiple subjectivities and a freeing up of the fixed space which also sustains a flexible, ambivalent and ambiguous flow to the research where feelings and imagination border with theoretical deduction.

**Postmodern research – deconstruction and multiple interpretations**

Postmodern research resists endeavours that form a decisive point, a neat conclusion, or any final outcome, “the idea is to strive for multiplicity, variation, the demonstration of inconsistencies and fragmentations, and the possibility of multiple interpretations” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 1999, p. 152). Postmodern research seeks to dismantle and contest modernist rules. Some postmodernists would claim that to confuse and also to be playful is part of theoretical critique. Nealson and Giroux (2003) have elucidated their threads of similarity,

> [t]here seems to be a certain sense of *style* shared by many of the things labeled “postmodern”, a sense of disjunction, or deliberate confusion, irony, playfulness, reflexivity, a kind of cool detachment, a deliberate foregrounding of constructedness, a suspicion concerning neat or easy conclusions (p. 126).

The resistance to conclude postmodern research allows for multiple readings and an emphasis more on processes than results. This open endedness is also seen as the decentring of the author who has ‘handed over’ the production of meaning to the reader. Postmodern research identifies uncertainty and possibility as replacing certainty and predictability. Grbich (2004) identified that,

> objectivity, certainty, legitimation and predictability are not sought. In place of these, doubt, chaotic possibilities, complex, interconnected systems, multiple selves and multiple critiques of findings in the transformative process, replace linearity, rationalism, closure and simple hierarchies (p. 52).

**Positioning myself within the research**

This research project used a postmodernist frame to acknowledge:
my constructed nature as a Western, white, middle class, European,
my particular experiences as a woman, lesbian and mental health client, all
experiences positioning me outside of the dominant regime,

A postmodern frame allowed me to:

- convey transparency, revealing my thoughts, feelings and uncertainties through
  a reflexive process,
- present my views through a particular lens (lesbian),
- acknowledge my multiple positioning within disciplines such as art therapy and
  visual art, such as, practising art therapist; past mental health consumer; art
  therapy author; art therapy lecturer; academic; mental health worker; and
  practising visual artist.

I have depicted some of my multiple positionings in my research journal while
considering the suitability of postmodernism in my research design (Figure 3.2).
Whilst a lesbian lens did not position me as having any authority on knowing
‘lesbian’, it did provide a view from a particular subjective position, even though
that is open to multiple interpretations from readers.

Figure 3.2 Researcher's Multiple Positioning

In this study my multiple positionings and multiple subjectivities were brought to the
fore of enquiry into art therapy and its interconnected discourses. The perspectives that
will be revealed in the study are those that are seldom verbalised within the field of art
therapy.
Feminism

Over three decades of feminist scholarship has contributed to feminist perspectives that have challenged the assumptions made about women, critiqued how discourses have positioned women, and examined gender/power issues imbedded in institutions and language. The feminist contribution has created extensive social change and has advanced women’s status, rights and conditions. There has been some complacency in regard to the necessity for continual feminist critique now the hard work has been done. However, there is “no country that treats women as well as it treats its men” (Walker, 2004, p. 68) and while this remains the case, a critique that centres on the lives, experiences, positioning, commodification, and oppression of girls and women is still a relevant one.

Some of the initial crucial work of feminism has now been taken up by post-structuralism, postmodernism, and queer theory. However within these theoretical disciplines, women from marginalised groups may still be marginalised, experience invisibility and/or be discounted through phallocentricism. In my study journal I drew my experience of how the various camps have sometimes omitted lesbian inclusion (Figure 3.3).

![Figure 3.3 Lesbian Exclusion](image)

Within feminism, the debate on how to speak on behalf of women has always been a contentious one. In the 1970s, feminist empiricism emerged from mostly white middle-class Western women. Women of colour who resented white women speaking on their behalf, began to challenge colonialism within the feminist movement by including their distinct positioning (hooks, 1984; Collins, 1990), a position in which black women were often aligned with black men in their fight against racism. Lesbian scholars also called
on feminism to address the presumption of heterosexuality within the feminist movement (Rich, 1980; Radicalesbians, 1973; Atkinson, 1974; Daly, 1978; Bunch, 1973). Lesbian feminists made clear that lesbianism occupies a different positioning within gender relations to that of heterosexual feminists, a position where lesbians functioned from outside of the conventionality of heterosexuality (Wittig, 1992). Lesbian feminists claimed that it was this positioning that provided an important contribution to the development of social change. The challenge to feminism by both black women and lesbians led to the recognition that all knowledge, even feminist knowledge, was partial and situated. This gave way to the critique on Western models of feminist thought and a move away from feminist empiricism to feminist standpoint in which multiple positioning and reflexivity were key concepts.

Within the feminist movement diversity and difference within the term ‘woman’ was acknowledged and encouraged through feminist scholarship. Through academia and the emergence of Women’s Studies programmes, a broad range of studies emerged that embraced women’s diversity while adhering to feminist theory and feminist praxis. The taking up of postmodernism by feminists, with its endorsement of complexity and multiplicity, has allowed for a multitude of explorations in women’s experience, giving precedence to voices from positions of marginality, whilst also maintaining a feminist critical political focus. Postmodernism also complicates feminism with its insistence on the instability of any category including the category ‘woman’ and ‘lesbian’, and that there are many versions of social reality all of which are equally valid. Feminist scholars, like myself, who intentionally embrace postmodernism are aware that nothing can remain fixed, stable or known and everything is open to interrogation, including feminisms, women and lesbianisms.

My positioning within Feminism
My relationship with feminism and feminist values spans a thirty year period and can be seen as both a consistent involvement and an irreconcilable union. My consistency with feminism can be seen to fall into three areas: feminist analysis of major discourses in relation to gender power differentiation; local and global feminist social activism towards bettering women’s lives; and utilising feminist theories in art therapy practice. Within these areas, my feminist contribution has been the continued feminist critique of art therapy (Joyce 1997); social activism through visual arts; participation in feminist
political events; and adhering to feminist philosophy of therapy practice when working as an art therapist and art therapy educator. Given my commitment to feminist principles, practice and activism, this research project was constructed and positioned within a feminist politic.

However, my involvement with feminism has also been one of irreconcilable union. As a lesbian I have almost always felt my lesbianism to be problematic within feminism as the latter seemed to be imbued with heterosexual presumptions. As a self identified lesbian since the age of eight, I have no experience with the heterosexual order and I have, from time to time, perceived my lesbian existence to be an agent muddled feminist essentialist ideologies. Feminisms heterosexual idealism was reflected in the literature in which there was often no reference to lesbian, and if there was, it was often tagged at the end of the publication with the forgotten women of colour or/and women with a disability. On occasions when the spotlight has shone on lesbians through feminism, it has been presented with a global assumption of what lesbians are, particularly what they look like, what they do, and what they should not do if they want to remain in the feminist flock. This essentialist lesbian category merely served to further ostracise lesbians if they believed they did not fit the feminist model of lesbianism.

The exclusion of lesbian artists and lesbian imagery is echoed in the feminist visual art literature where reference to lesbian artistic contribution or depiction is often absent. I surmised that women’s visual art contribution may not have made it into the history of art, yet lesbian feminists’ contributions to the visual arts do not make it into the feminist art literature. In a somewhat juxtaposed position this exclusion resulted in my own mobilisation as an artist and social activist.

As a lesbian, I have chosen to use feminist methodology to contribute to the inclusion of lesbian perspectives within feminism. Importantly as a postmodern feminist study, part of my rationale for conducting a study on myself was to refrain from speaking on behalf of any other persons that identify as lesbian or presume any authority on the category ‘lesbian’. My position within a postmodernist feminist study is to use autobiographical material as a base through which to explore the relationship with (my)self, sexuality, artwork, and mental health, and to explore how this material informs art therapy.
Research methods
As outlined above the research design utilised two research methods, autobiography and art-based research. I begin by outlining how I used autobiography to instigate the creative process through which material could be generated. My multiple selves and multiple positioning became a relevant source for investigation through the art-based research. In this section I will make clear how both methods are informed through postmodernism and feminism.

Autobiography
I took heed from Fiona Williams’ position on autobiography, when she stated, “it is important to acknowledge personal experience, in terms of your location in society, as a lens through which you make sense of the world and reshape existing knowledge” (Williams 1993, p. 12). My journey began by sketching the importance of autobiography within feminist discourse. I then reflected and critiqued the postmodern shifts that have in some way complicated feminism, whilst at the same time ‘holding up’ autobiography as an inventive and challenging genre. I was then in a position to detail my particular autobiographical design with its postmodernist and feminist influences, both of which transgress the traditional boundaries of autobiographical genre. My journey in terms of this outlined process follows.

Autobiography and feminism
The use of autobiography has enabled women’s ontology to be revealed where once only a single gendered voice dominated ideologies of experience. During the 1960s and 1970s when women’s lives were virtually unrecorded (Stanley, 2000), feminist scholars encouraged women to tell of their experiences and their lives. This immediately told of a different reality than that of the mainstream (male) view. Women’s lives were pieced together through scholarship in Women’s Studies which was concerned with “women’s excised selves, women’s silenced selves, [and] women’s selves seen as ‘other’” (Stanley, 2000, p. 42). It was through the retrieving and theorising of women’s lives by women scholars that alternative histories began to emerge. Liz Stanley (2000) commented on the importance of autobiography stating “the self has been not only articulated in, but more particularly written into existence through, autobiographies, diaries and letters” (p. 42). Through storytelling, woman’s emancipation and unification began to emerge, and through close examination of single gendered autobiographies, it became clear that while men tended to speak of their independent chronological journey
from one event to another, women tended to speak of their multiple roles in relation to others’ needs. Women’s autobiographies have therefore always tended to be equated with multiple subjectivities and were often relational in context. Autobiographies in feminist research “are consequently directed towards a wide range of social practices which articulate notions (often competing) of selves, identities and lives” (Stanley, 2000, p. 41).

Consciousness raising, activism and social change were central to the purpose of autobiographical writing and became an important research method through which women’s positioning in relation to power, discourse and representation were revealed. Early feminist autobiographies tended to seek to reveal the ‘truth’ of women’s life through a confessional style of autobiography.

**Autobiography and postmodernism**

Postmodernism influenced intent and style of autobiography. Morwenna Griffiths (1995) made the distinction between “confessional, individualistic, a-theoretical, and non-political linear narrative of a life” with what she termed “critical autobiography” which “in contrast, makes its use of individual experience, theory, and a process of reflection and rethinking, which includes attention to politically situated perspectives … [it is] critical autobiography … [that] uses experience in order to reflect and re-think, using theory” (p. 70).

The postmodern shift of the late 1980s and early 1990s changed the way in which autobiography was perceived and was utilised in research studies. I have described these postmodern influences on autobiography under four headings, namely,

- the autobiography,
- the author,
- the self in the autobiography,
- the process of telling the autobiography.

Firstly, with postmodern influence, autobiographical story ceased to be used as an attempt to reveal a single ‘truth’ about a life. There was increased recognition that there are multiple truths and realities and therefore multiple stories. These stories change during the telling of a life story through a variety of factors, for example, who the story
is told to, why it is told, what memories are at the forefront when the story is told, the cultural location, environment or institution in which the story is told, are some of the variable factors that will influence the version of the story in which all versions are ‘true’ and none are ‘true’, as Richard Rorty (1989, p. 3) put it, truth is made, rather than found.

Secondly, the author as a stable fixed identity is contested in postmodernism where recognition of multiple subjectivities as fluid and mutable (Gergen, 1995) together with the social cultural and historical constructedness of selves is viewed as temporal notion of who we are (Deleuze 1990). As Williams (1993) described,

[m]y ideas are representative of what I am and who I am within a certain time and place, and they are only original in so far as they fuse together an individual perception and interpretation, which is shaped by both personal history and social location (p. 12).

There is a more conscious awareness of multiple and constructed aspects of self in postmodern autobiographical work in comparison with earlier, more cathartic autobiographical writing. Autobiographers, Atkinson and Shakespeare (1993) remarked: “our aim has been to make our autobiographies of knowledge and research a little more conscious and explicit and a little less involuntary” (p. 8). Contemporary autobiography also brought more awareness of cultural specificity viewing “personal narratives of the author’s life experiences within a particular cultural setting” (Grbich, 2004, p. 64).

Thirdly, with postmodern influence, the self in the autobiography is perceived as separate from the self that is telling the story. The self in the autobiography has entry through language which is perceived as producing a gap between the ‘I’ that perceives and the ‘I’ that is perceived. This gap is seen as two contradictory selves, the contradiction being between the self which appears in the autobiography through language and “which is only partially represented there, and the self which speaks” (Belsey, 1980, pp. 64-5 in Radstone, 2000, p. 203). Therefore, the text does not produce the subject, the subject is produced by the text, as Radstone (2000) explained, “it is autobiography itself which produces the subject: the subject, that is, is textually constituted” (p. 203).
In the fourth area of postmodern influence, the autobiographical process, there tends to be less emphasis on outcome or rationalisation, rather the influence is on the valid reflexive process of enquiry. The postmodern autobiographical process is typically non-chronological and flips from one historical moment to another and from one area of interest to another sometimes referred to as “cut and paste” autobiography. Considered the inventor of postmodern autobiography, Michel Leiris in 1925 “drops out the dates, breaks up the different events of his life, and scatters them all over, rendering the narrative a complex puzzle for the reader to solve” (Mwantuali, 2001, p. 215). This mixing up of chronological events and the lack of respect for any ‘truth’ together with a loss of belief in the future effectively-blurs the boundaries between present and past (Radstone, 2000).

I incorporated these four postmodern viewpoints in shaping how I used autobiography in this project. It was not my intention to claim a ‘truth’ in my telling of life stories; stories provided material for further investigation. Myself as storyteller was not perceived as fixed by myself, the stories were multi-constructed and multi-positioned. As the source of investigation my subjectivity was not seen as constant and established, it was seen as the researcher participant continually produced by, and changed by, the texts. Time and events were not valued for their memorised linear sequence, blurring between past and present, between art genres, and between life events, exposed new links previously undetected. These postmodern and feminist influences shaped how autobiography was used in this project.

**Designing a postmodern feminist autobiographical method**

As postmodernism values autobiography from marginal, local and culturally specific contexts, my impetus for using autobiography as a method for research was due to my desire to contribute a lesbian perspective in an area where there was extremely limited research, and to ‘unravel’ my curiosity and intrigue regarding my dualistic selves and artwork styles. Within the field of art therapy I envisaged my multiple positioning of past client, student, practitioner, therapist, author, educator and academic, as being advantageous in providing a multi-contextual viewpoint. I envisaged that the above multi-positionings would provide a rich base from which to conduct a lesbian autobiographical research study.
The influence of feminist and postmodernist theoretical assumptions informed the design of a distinctive autobiographical method. I was not interested in a linear traditional autobiographical mode commencing from birth to youth, adolescence and adult. Nor was I interested in a ‘confessional autobiography’ where the author intends to reveal a ‘truth’ regarding their life experiences. I wanted the autobiographical design to reflect the spontaneity and ambiguity that currently existed in both my visual art and art therapy practices. It was a desire to allow the creative process of art making to lead the storyline. It was my perception that it could be similar to processes of self discovery in both art therapy and visual art. While maintaining openness to spontaneity and ambiguity, the production of new artwork would effectively steer the autobiographical content and this would demonstrate the multiplicity of life stories and selves. Therefore, the path that the study explored was one of many emerging possibilities, and again to reiterate one where there was no ‘true’ story to be told, no ‘true’ single ‘self’ to be revealed and no pre-identified particular conclusion sought.

Having outlined autobiography, the influences of postmodernism and feminism on autobiography and the way I used autobiography in this research, I next will discuss the second method of art-based research.

**Art-based research method**

**Visual representation and lesbian sensibility**

Social activism was partly a motivation for conducting the research project and my identification as a lesbian feminist was central to my social activism. I envisaged that my study would inform art therapy of a lesbian perspective and therefore benefit lesbian art therapy clients. As I cannot separate my lesbianism from other aspects of myself, I considered my various visual and written texts made before or during the study to have imbedded lesbian significance.

The ability to be artistically expressive about lesbianism has been problematic for me. Homophobic response to lesbian depiction, political censorship and gallery protocol have shaped not only what I depicted but how I depicted images and what I did with the images I have made. In conducting this study, I was aware that I relied on the academic institution to legitimise lesbian art within a research study. The importance of the particular design of autobiography mentioned earlier in this chapter is relevant here, as I
did not intend to deliberately enforce lesbian visual representation per se, nor to adhere
to essentialist notions of what lesbianism is. However, I did claim that the entire
research methods, (the images, stories, diary entries, journal entries) were developed
through my lesbian lens. This lesbian lens I also recognised as having a multitude of
socially, culturally, historically and experientially constructed nuances. The project
therefore investigated my own perceptions of myself, my artwork and my social
positioning as a lesbian.

An interwoven interest in conducting this research project was to provide a lesbian
perspective on self-depiction. I was extremely curious to discover if my own creative
experiences as a lesbian visual artist might offer any reflections towards broadening art
therapy theory in relation to lesbianism and visual representation. My intrigue initially
centred on the two very different styles of artwork I had consistently produced over
some twenty years. I was not only interested in the distinct dualistic styles of visual
representation, I was also interested in the stories I relayed when describing the two
artists that had made the two distinctly different artworks (such as in the preamble). The
two sets of artwork styles looked so unrelated that it would seem more likely that they
would have been produced by two unconnected artists therefore I also wanted to
investigate the different motivations, the processes of art making, and intentions of the
final work. From an art therapy perspective I was interested in what aspects of myself
were represented by the dual styles and why I required two styles to fulfil my
expressive needs rather than just one. I surmised that the answer to these questions
might become evident if I were to attempt to integrate the two styles of art work into
one. I hoped that the integration process might clarify and perhaps rectify my
investment in having two separate creative styles.

In terms of art therapy research, this intrigue about the researcher’s own artwork as the
impetus for conducting a research project is becoming increasingly valued within the
field as Gilroy and Lee (1995) stated a,

[1]ongstanding preoccupation about one’s work can provide fruitful material:
simple curiosity about why, how, and when something occurs is the seed of
research which is intrinsically interesting for the individual. Research that
stems from the individual clinician/researcher, that gives rein to the ‘bee in the
bonnet’ that we all have, will be satisfying for the researcher and relevant to
the clinician and thus have the potential to significantly influence clinical
practice. Such research can have its origins in the most personal of interests (p. 8-9).

Although my study stemmed from my intrigue about my dual artwork styles, the stories that described the selves that made the two styles of artwork were of equal interest. Therefore, to enable regard for both visual and written texts, my research design included intertextuality (I will elaborate on intertextuality later in this chapter). Including intertextuality enabled me to perform the process of self investigation through a broad range of texts that incorporated both visual texts such as paintings, drawings and photographs, and written texts such as stories, poems, diary entries, dialoguing, reflexive notes and written journal entries.

**Art-based research and art as research**

There are two terms that are easily confused, ‘art-based research’ and ‘art as research’. These two terms distinguish the use of art making as a research method (art-based research) from researching art (art as research). Although in this project I could justify using both terms (as I use art making as research and also research my past artwork), in relation to the project ‘art-based research’ is the method I used. This notwithstanding, ‘art as research’ was used as the process of interextuality. This is expanded upon later in the chapter.

Shaun McNiff (1998) offered a significant contribution in relation to art therapy research and the use of art-based research as method of inquiry. Other art therapists have also contributed to the potential in using art as a method of enquiry (Politsky 1995; Allen 1995 and Moon 1994). According to McNiff, the full potential of art-based research is only just being realised by art therapists who advocate the use of artwork as a form of art therapy research (p. 28). The majority of research in the area of art therapy has traditionally involved an inquiry or analysis into others’ artwork (clients or patients) for research purposes. This distancing and impersonal evaluation between the ‘case study’ and the researcher, according to McNiff was, “among the most basic doctrine of the research code” (1998, p. 28).

For the relevance of art-based research in art therapy studies to be fully understood, McNiff claimed that a paradigm shift is necessary. The more traditional and typical art
therapy research has relied on methods that are often based in psychology and where the object of study is usually other people and their artwork. The paradigm shift McNiff suggested is in relationship to more contemporary art therapy research in which ‘method’ is creative art expression and the data becomes the process of creating the object.

McNiff (1998) outlined a variety of possibilities in the use of art as method of enquiry for art therapy research. For instance, he argued that,

[t]he researcher might use personal or “first-hand” artmaking experiences over an extended period of time to determine if there are correlations between aesthetic quality and therapeutic efficacy. This type of inquiry can draw conclusions directly from the researcher's encounter with art materials rather than making interpretations about other people's expression. (p. 176)

Using art-based research method

In this study the process of image making commenced within the first month of the project and continued over a three year period. This “first-hand” experience (McNiff 1998) was used initially to explore the boundaries between my artwork styles and selves. However, my art-based research design involved several art-based methods. To explain these methods I have discussed them under three headings, new artwork, past artwork and journal artwork. I first outline newly made artwork before explaining past artwork and journal artwork.

New artwork

The new artwork was made during the study and encompassed two purposes, one was to use artwork to intentionally disrupt and the other was to use artwork for exploration. I will explain the distinction. The first art-based method was used to consciously disrupt my dualistic artwork styles by insisting the styles and selves were combined onto one surface. This method generated four artworks and I distinguish these by naming them ‘integrative artwork’ numbered one to four. To explore the layers of meanings in the four integrative artworks, a second art-based method was used that generated new artwork through which the integrative artwork could be better understood. It was important to distinguish the new artwork that was the outcome of my intentional strategy to disrupt the dualistic artwork styles (integrative artworks), from the new
artworks that were revealed by exploring the integrative artwork’s symbolism and meaning (exploratory artwork).

Past artwork
While making new integrated and exploratory artworks, a further art-based method encouraged links to artworks I had previously made. Some of these artworks were created over thirty years ago while others were more recent. All images under the term ‘past artwork’ or ‘past image’, were made prior to the commencement of the study. Some past artworks were located in old portfolios, others in sketchbooks, some were loose in folders. For artworks that were no longer in my possession due to being sold or destroyed, I was able to sometimes locate photographs or slides of the image and digitalise these for computer production. With some past artwork or images I was inspired to generate a new artwork to explore the incentive towards forming dualistic styles and selves.

Journal artwork
A third art-based method was visual journaling where I used A4 spiral bound journals with one hundred page cartridge paper. I used the journals consecutively to creatively explore the linkage between new and past artworks, symbolic meanings, and the relationship to my perceptions of artwork styles and selves.

Notwithstanding the above specifically defined artworks, there were some images that did not neatly fit into these three areas. For instance, one past artwork that had been destroyed I remade from memory during the study, and although it was a new artwork, I related to it as if it was the original past artwork. Some past official records and old photographs were digitally altered which resulted in an overlapping of past and new content. A very old newspaper clipping too yellowed to distinguish the features was digitally enhanced, bridging a past image with new technology.

By bringing into play images from a variety of contexts such as art college, psychiatric hospital, school, community, art therapy training, effectively juxtaposed both the contexts in which artworks had been made and the intended viewer. These juxtapositions offered considerable significance during the research process.
McNiff (1998) suggested that a research project could be designed where “the researcher conducts an ongoing assessment of the way in which particular images and qualities of expression affect emotional states and therapeutic outcomes” (1998, p. 176). During this project the continual use of visual journals recorded how my “qualities of expression affect emotional states” (McNiff, 1998, p. 176). I recorded issues and emotions that emerged in relation to both the research process and the art work being made. The same journal was used for both written and visual modes of expression to record “therapeutic outcome” (McNiff, 1998, p. 176).

McNiff (1998) also asked, “[d]oes the personal experience of quality in artistic expression influence feelings of therapeutic satisfaction?” (p. 176). I relate to use of McNiff’s term “therapeutic satisfaction” in two ways; firstly, in that I sought links between my dualistic artistic styles/selves and my identification as lesbian, and secondly, in that I assumed some sort of therapeutic outcome. Along the lines of McNiff’s suggestions, I planned to explore whether the “quality of artistic expression” from one style had more “therapeutic satisfaction” over another style. If so, was the selection of one style motivated by the desire for “therapeutic satisfaction” and one that was presumed unattainable through the other style.

**Art-based research: deconstructions and reconstructions**

The process I put into place to answer these questions was influenced by Glass and Davis (2004) who suggested that interrogation lay not so much in examination of the dualities as they stand, rather in disrupting their attachment to their positioning. It was not only the two oppositional styles that intrigued me, it was also the gap that allowed the styles to be distinctly oppositional and different. I not only wanted to know what selves were represented by the dualistic artistic styles, I also had a desire to know what selves lay in the gap and were not visually represented. The gulf between the two styles seemed already vast and I surmised that amplification of their differences would reveal their oppositional definition, and could contribute further to their differences. Therefore my intent was to shift the styles from their oppositional positioning by collapsing the gap in an attempt to render the gap invisible. This would effectively bring the once oppositional styles into a single space/place, the artwork surface.
My focus therefore was not on the dual elements, it was centred on the gap that permitted their duality. To investigate the gap that separated the two styles I aimed to combine the two styles onto a single surface. Their different physical qualities together with their “belonging” to different artistic genre would effectively deconstruct by disruption, the assumptions, beliefs, codes, or discourses that rendered them separate. I surmised that this process would clarify what investment I had in the separation of styles/selves, was my lesbian identification relevant in the segregation of styles/selves, and what styles/selves might lay previously unexpressed in the gaps? Through designing art-based research methods through which to investigate, I proposed reconfigurations and reinterpretations of these dual dynamics would eventuate (Glass & Davis 2004).

Research Processes Incorporated into the Research Design

I have outlined the theoretical approach of postmodern feminism and the methods of autobiography and art-based research; further to these are two important processes that propelled the research project while also generating data. This section outlines intertextuality and reflexivity as tactical processes incorporated into the research design. I have demonstrated how both of these processes are utilised in the research project and also how both intertextuality and reflexivity are construed through the postmodern feminist theoretical approach and art-based, autobiographical research methods.

Intertextuality

Although the term ‘intertextuality’ was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 and became popular from that time, the work of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in the late 1920s provided the initial concepts that shaped notions of intertextuality which were translated in the early 1970s to mid 1980s (Bakhtin 1973, 1986). Bakhtin proposed using ‘polyphonic’ extra-literary texts to offer a multiplicity of ‘reality’ (Landwehr, 2002). Intertextuality as a term has since tended to be used very loosely wherever more than one ‘text’ is being scrutinised, utilised or adopted. Through post-structuralism the term came to be understood as the structural relations between two or more texts. Intertextuality therefore can be seen to have its roots in a complex history that involves the intricate work of many theorists that have focused on the area of language, symbolism, semiotics and power within discourse (see for example the scholarly works

**Intertextuality, Postmodernism and Disruption**

For the purpose of this study I used the term ‘intertextuality’ from the context of postmodernism. In postmodern terms the reference to ‘text’ applies to any sign or symbolic system that is imbedded with meaning and it therefore encompasses all genres namely, written, visual, performative or musicological. Authors such as Bakhtin 1973, Barthes 1990b, Kristeva 1980b, Morgan 1985) have argued that no text can operate or be produced in isolation and that all texts are interrelated. The impact of one text upon another has a radiating effect and therefore all texts are considered repetitions of other texts. ‘Intertextuality’ therefore describes the inevitability of textual interrelated and interconnected linkages; as Roland Barthes (1977) claimed, “[e]very text, being itself the intertext of another text, belongs to the intertextual” (p. 77). Upon recognising every text as part of a web or “mosaic” (Landwehr 2002, p. 2)) of intertexts, the possibility of originality, exclusivity and inimitability becomes unachievable.

Postmodernism influences how texts are worked with, in that rather than seeking order and analysis of isolated texts, postmodernists seek to admire disorder and the infinite play of one text upon another (Morgan, 1985, p. 2). In the postmodern sense, the play of text on one another, how, why and when they interconnect, is seen as the intention of the architect of intertextual work rather than as the author seeking to convey a definite point. Derrida’s argument against ‘logocentrism’ claimed meaning to be simply a ‘system of signs’ and that there were no extra-textual truths, or extra-linguistic facts to which to refer, there was nothing ‘out there’ but a play of signs (Derrida 1976). In postmodernism therefore, attention on a text is not to discover its single meaning or specific point as a text’s meaning is viewed as a fabrication, (Fox 1995). Therefore, in postmodernism there is more emphasis on the appreciation of intertextual linkages of the text, the multiplicity of meaning and the role of the reader in creating the meanings, in other words, “not thinking that either the language game, or any language game, reveals ‘the way it really is’ ” (Steier, 1991, p. 8).
From a postmodernist perspective, the weight of a text is sometimes on its ability to reveal linkages to other texts, its textual interrelatedness, and not only to reveal links, but also to expose where links are missing and gaps have appeared. The formation of gaps can illuminate where texts have been negated, avoided or prohibited. Clippinger (2001) stated, “an intertextual reading explores the deep context of any act of textuality, and it pursues the various paths of associations that are, in fact, the crux of the text” (pp. 190-91). It is in this postmodern sense that working with texts through intertextuality can expose textual prohibitions.

**Intertextuality: Postmodern and Feminism**

From a feminist perspective, an advantage of intertextuality as a process of textual enquiry is its potential to ‘open up’ texts to offer an alternative reading. It is through the deconstruction of texts that the muddling of conventions and transgression of boundaries in the reconstruction can reveal a reading that may have been previously overlooked through mainstream discourses that are designed to profit some and silence others. Julia Kristeva (1980; 1982; 1987) exploring linguistics and psychoanalysis claimed that discourses favour the ‘symbolic’ attributed to the male, over the female ‘semiotic’. In Kristeva’s view, only new forms of language would change dominant histories and patriarchal oppression.

Intertextuality can give weight to marginalised and minority populations by deconstructing grand narratives and dominant discourse, exposing the gaps where textual reference are negated or given negative connotations, and where existing textual rhetoric, be it historical, legal, medical or political, favour the dominant (white western wealthy male) as the only voices represented. From a feminist perspective, Laurel Graham (1992) suggested that with “careful observation, mythologies can be deconstructed; that is, their hidden presence in the text can be made explicit and their capitalist and patriarchal underpinnings can be critiqued” (p. 31).

**Intertextuality as used in this project**

In this project, intertextual links gather up an assemblage of texts that form the research findings. From the onset, the interrogation of a newly painted image links to an old story, which links to an old diary entry, and also may link to new study journal images. As such, this brings intertextuality into effect. Intertextuality was also used to collect
textual data from any points in my life. By gathering data in a non-linear fashion, the certainty and conviction of linear time was transgressed, rendering texts more ‘open’ to the emergence of new themes and new readings that may previously have been concealed. A study journal image shows the intertextual findings crossing genre and crossing time (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Intertextuality

In line with a postmodern frame of research, as well as transgressing linear time, I also set out to disrupt other boundaries, for instance the boundaries of artistic genre. Art historian David Novitz (2001) stated, “[p]ostmodernist art begins with an assault on the modernist boundaries of art; a refusal to see art as purely formal and as distinct from life” (p. 163). The texts, gathered from different times in my life, comprised of varied genera such as stories, poems, drawings, journal entries, photographs, paintings, diary entries, newspaper cuttings, and medical records, and together these configure the intertextual assembly. Compiling data from a variety of genre can also render the interrogation ‘open’ to an alternative interpretation, one that has not been evident when genre have remained cohesive in their exclusive grouping that maintain ideological readings. As Graham (1992) explained, the “fragmented nature of archives permits active, interpretive involvement … [t]he benefits of including archival research in intertextual analysis stems from this openess to contrasting ideological interpretations” (p. 49). In line with postmodern feminism I recognised the infinite possibilities and pathways for the data I was about to collect. Furthermore, “the order of the parts is not meant to imply any one domain as a necessary starting point” (Steier, 1991, p. 9), as the
last point could be the first. Importantly, the interpretation of the data is also seen as one reading, my reading at a given time where many others readings are possible.

In explaining intertextuality I have discussed the particularity of intertextuality used in this study, how such a process focused on linkages, considers the intentional use of the text, promotes the openness to multiple meaning, exposes gaps in the interrelatedness of texts, transgresses time, and confuses the boundaries of genre, in order to bring texts towards an unpredictable state of ‘openness’, thus providing an opportunity for new readings.

**Reflexivity**

As Steier most aptly reflected, “Why do research (if you cannot say anything about what is out there, and all research is self-reflexive)? My reply is: Why do research for which you must deny responsibility for what you have ‘found’? (1991, p. 10 Emphasis in original). The initial appeal for incorporating reflexivity as a process for conducting research was the familiarity with which I associated reflexivity with two areas of my experience.

Firstly, reflexivity mirrored the process I have used in my art therapy practice where I have been consistently attentive, ‘watching’ my changing self, my responses, my reactions, my thoughts while also acknowledging the client’s continual shifts, together with the evolving therapeutic relationship. My art therapy training emphasised, awareness of movement and change in the transference and countertransference strengthened sound therapy practice. Secondly, reflexivity had become a central dynamic in my own self development, influenced by being the recipient of psychotherapies together with having practiced meditation. Both resulted in my developing a witness position which enabled me to watch myself while also being part of my moveable changing state. In my study journal I pictured my reflexively witnessing my process of change (Figure 3.5).
For this project I wanted to ensure I valued my multiple positionings and that it was transparent within the research process. Reflexivity would enable such processes whilst simultaneously providing momentum to the research.

**Reflexivity: Term defined**

The term reflexivity describes a process or dynamic whereby ourselves and our positionings can be acknowledged to be in continual movement and change (Mead 1962). This continual change is seen as a circular configuration while the forward movement activates the dynamic into a spiralling formation (Steier, 1991). The term reflexivity, however, distinctly specifies conscious awareness and openness to recognise and explore shifting psychological and social states.

It was G. H. Mead (1962) who first described the term reflexivity as the “turning back of ones experience upon oneself” (Mead in Steier, 1991, p. 2). The “turning back” that Mead refers to allowed “for multiple perspectives, and acknowledge that ‘the same self’ may be different as a result of its own self-pointing” (p. 2). The subtle distinction between reflective and reflexive is important to clarify. Steier (1991) explained that, “we might be reflective (in showing ourselves to ourselves) AND reflexive (being conscious of ourselves as we see ourselves)” (p. 5, Emphasis in original). Reflection can be a process whereby we reflect back to ourselves, but reflexivity is a process whereby we are consciously aware as movement and change is occurring.
According to C. Willig (2001) reflexivity can be divided into two types, “personal reflexivity” and “epistemological reflexivity” (p. 10). Willig differentiated the two explaining that,

‘Personal reflexivity’ involves reflecting upon the way in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers.

Willig (2001) regards epistemological reflexivity as the recognition of our influence on our research, especially around our formulating the research question and consequentially what is included or excluded. Such reflexivity also includes research design, how it effectively constructs the data and results, the impact of assumptions on research findings (Willig 2001). Finally Willig (2001) claimed that an important acknowledgement that a different investigative design may give rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under examination.

Similarly, to Willig and Steier, Nightingale and Cromby (1999) have commented that reflexivity, “requires an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meaning throughout the research process.” The usefulness of reflexivity in research design urges researchers “to explore … a researcher’s involvement with a particular study [and how it] influences, acts upon and informs such research” (p. 228). As a process for research, reflexivity allows the researcher to be conscious of their ability to construct and induce meaning throughout the research process. This “acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of’ one’s subject matter while conducting the research” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228) concedes the researchers part in the shaping of data and findings.

Reflexivity in terms of research process permits the researcher to be aware of themselves in the position of researcher while also acknowledging their influence upon their research outcomes. Reflexivity also provides the means for the researcher to acknowledge their weight in the formation of the research design, concedes that the design elevates or limits certain data, places the construction of meaning and research outcome squarely on the researcher’s shoulders, and accepts that a different project
might reveal different outcomes. When reflexivity is combined with autobiography in a research project, reflexivity provides the means for the researcher to acknowledge their multiple subjectivities and multiple positioning as both researcher and research participant, while also acknowledging their shifting changing selves together with their influences on the research process.

Although the use of reflexivity in the research design opens up research inquiry, working with multiple selves and multiple positionings deems the writing and representations of research inquiry complex. As Guba and Lincoln (2005) have stated “the multiple selves we create and encounter give rise to more dynamic, problematic, open-ended, and complex forms of writing and representation” (p. 210). In this project, I expected the writing and representation would be further complicated not only through my multiple positionings as both researcher and research participant, and also my multiple positioning as art therapist, visual artist, past art therapy client, together with my research intention to explore lesbianism through dualistic personalities of Joyce and Susan, the figurative and abstract artists.

As transparency is exemplified through reflexivity, qualities such as ambiguity, paradox and ambivalence are embraced while knowledge claims, clear cut data and conclusive results are treated with suspicion. The incorporation of reflexivity in the research design intentionally de-centres and deconstructs the researcher’s authoritative stable position, a prospect which is in alliance with both postmodernist and feminist views on the researcher’s location with the research.

**Reflexivity and feminism: Power and gender**

Reflexivity from a feminist perspective can provide a process in which data can be critically surveyed. With issues of power and gender pivotal to feminism, reflexivity through a feminist frame permits the researcher to examine their data for research outcomes in relation to power and gender. Reflexivity from a feminist perspective allows recognition that all languages and representations are steeped in issues of power in relation to gender. While it becomes necessary to use language that is gender weighted for recognisable communication, reflexivity can mark our awareness of the imbedded power issues while using such gender weighted modalities.
Reflexivity allows the recognition that we create data rather than ‘discover’ data and that our collection, correlation, and findings can never be arbitrary or isolated from power, as Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) explained,

> Just as data is not waiting around to be collected, so meanings are not lying in your data waiting to be found. Data do not speak for themselves. You have to do the work of deciding what data mean, whether they constitute ‘evidence’, and so whether your data are just ideas, or whether you want to claim that they can suggest connections with something else (for example, power relations, gendered inequalities, the power of ideas) (p. 160).

Therefore the position of researcher, is never a neutral position of power, it is a position which is inevitably shaped through our social, historical, cultural and political construction and influences. The power of researcher interpretation of data cannot be eliminated. However, as Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) suggested, “[a]t best you can be as aware as possible that interpretation is your exercise of power, that your decisions have consequences, and that you are accountable for your conclusions” (p. 161). Using a reflexive process “attempts to unpack what knowledge is contingent upon, how the researcher is socially situated, and how the research agenda/process has been constituted” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 118).

Reflexivity, then, gives rise to making the research process as explicit and transparent as possible which includes interpreting data, justifying knowledge claims, acknowledging researchers’ positioning, and dealing with issues of authority and certainty (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 161). As well as making the research process explicit, incorporating reflexivity into the research design illuminates the decisions regarding what has been included, presented and declared as data, and also what was absent, left out or remained silent. Making explicit these research processes can itself reveal the influences and consequence of imbedded power relations. Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) summarised, “as an intention, reflexivity opens up the possibility for negotiation over what knowledge claims are made, for whom, why and within what frame of reference” (p. 119).
Postmodernism and reflexivity

In postmodern research reflexivity equips the researcher with a process to investigate and make explicit their influences and biases in all aspects of the research process as well as the research outcomes. Grbich (2004, p. 28) identified four main styles of reflexivity that are relevant to postmodern research: reflexivity as self-critique (power, class, culture, experience); reflexivity as a process (diversity, intertextuality; subjective reflexivity); epistemological reflexive positioning; and the researcher’s reflexive response to how others respond to the research product.

In postmodern research the ability for the researcher to be objective is viewed as an illusion, while reflexivity announces and is prepared to interrogate the researcher’s position which replaces the myth of the objectivity. Grbich (2004) explained,

Reflexive subjectivity and the politics of position replace objectivity. Self-reflexivity involves a heightened awareness of the self in the process of knowledge creation, a clarification of how one’s beliefs have been socially constructed (self-revelation) and how these values are impacting on interaction and data collection in the research setting (p. 28)

Using a reflexive process in postmodern research reveals the impossibility for the researcher to be impartial to, and separate from, any part of their research project, as Steier (1991) stated: “the recognition that what I describe in my research is in no way existent apart from my involvement in it – it is not ‘out there’” (p. 1). Our political allegiance, our socialisation, class, culture, and experience all impact on our research, or as Grbich (2004) explained, the “researcher cannot be separated from his/her background ...self is not a clean slate waiting to be written on. Through feedback loops and emergent patterns we interact, react, incorporate and shift in a never-ending process” (p. 60).

Choosing to use reflexivity with its dynamic of spiralling and bending back does not acquit us from responsibility of our impact upon our research in any way. Steier (1991) referred to this, stating that, “the self to which this bending back refers, and the experience upon which the process is predicated, must also be seen as socially constructed” (p. 2). Therefore, the relationship between researcher, the reflexive process and the research matter are enmeshed, “the research process itself must be seen as
socially constructing a world or worlds, with the researchers included in, rather than outside, the body of their own research” (Steier, 1991, p. 1-2).

In postmodern research, incorporating reflexivity enables researchers to observe and acknowledge their fluid, mutable, multiple subjectivity and countless, shifting positionings within the research. Grbich’s (2004) suggestion for the researcher is, not to see oneself as a static, centered object, but as interlinked with others and undergoing processes of change. There are several selves in this process – the central, historically constructed self, the self that is currently undergoing change, … and another self, the reflexive observer of this process (p. 60)

Reflexivity in alignment with postmodern thought de-authorises the researcher position while the researcher partakes in the research production, or as Steier (1991) put it, “de-privilege the research class (of which we are members) even as we continue to participate in it” (p. 8).

**The use of reflexivity in this project**

My intention for employing reflexivity was to enable me to contemplate the many facets of myself, myself as researcher, and my role in the research project. The use of journals, written dialoguing between selves, and visual artworks play a significant part in reflexive awareness throughout this research project. This section explains my particular use of reflexivity and reflexive process where I drew on the ideas from both Willig’s and Grbich’s groupings of reflexivity, and added some additional elements related to the uniqueness of my study. These are addressed below.

**Experiential reflexivity**

I used the reflexive process to ‘watch’ myself as a form of autobiographical experience for the duration of the research project. Some areas of experience arose directly in relation to conducting the research project while others were occurring as ongoing life experiences running alongside or crisscrossing through the research period. Considering the autobiographical design and content of the study, I was not attempting to ‘extract’ just the researcher out from myself, but rather to remain open to incorporate any autobiographical material that arose either directly as an outcome of, or during the process of the research project. Hence, experiential reflexivity in this segment includes
the experience and recording of many aspects of my changing shifting selves during the research project period.

Positional reflexivity
I was aware of my multiple positioning as researcher within the research process while conducting the research. Due to my Western European mindset, central discourses such as psychoanalysis and visual art are premised in my cognition. Even though I critique these philosophies, they still nevertheless underpin my perceptions. My cultural positioning as an English, middle class, white woman therefore must be acknowledged in my reflexive process along with my political allegiance to feminism. My particular historical position is most relevant especially in relation to changes that have occurred during my lifetime in relation to the categorisation of mental illness, rights of women, and views on homosexuality. In positional reflexivity I acknowledged my gendered position and my lesbian lens through which the study is intentionally viewed. Alongside these social, historical, political, cultural and gendered positions within the research, there is my multiple positioning within the research that includes my various roles in art therapy and visual arts. As researcher I did not position myself within my research with any singular sense of therapist or recipient or educator but through a positional reflexive watchfulness from a multitude of art therapy and visual art locations.

Epistemological reflexivity
In opposition to some traditional research methodologies where ‘proof’ and ‘truth’ were sought and uncontested, epistemological reflexivity focuses on how the researcher designs the research methodology and method and creates the data or findings. We cannot evade our responsibility as researchers in how we create and influence all aspects of our research. Therefore, epistemological reflexivity acknowledged how I selectively developed the research design, how I produced my data and how I created the research outcomes. Epistemological reflexivity permits exposure of the influence that the researcher has in creating all aspects of the research project. Epistemological reflexivity prevents alluding to magically ‘finding’ the data or ‘concluding’ a fixed point. Self-reflexivity enabled me to ‘watch’ my insecurities when adopting a postmodern frame where I initially struggled with more modernist notions of research as forming a single focus, a single idea, a single viewpoint and sticking with it. Once I unleashed myself from adherence to modernist conventions, my experience of multiple
subjectivities, my shifting positions, my multiple selves, and my fluid changing state, opened up a reflexive attitude within the study.

Responsive reflexivity
As this study can be seen as having a controversial element in both research design and thematic content, reflexive process assisted me to observe my responses in relation to how others responded to the study. This in turn affected me during the process of the study. From the start of the project, my supervisor’s response was most informative, providing me with reflexive opportunities where I became aware of my internalised beliefs, these subsequently changing during the research and my own intrapersonal awareness. Given the autobiographical aspect of the project, together with my awareness that the subject matter can be viewed as controversial in some sectors, my response to other’s responses to the project has been an important part of the data, findings and research process, one that is aided through the use of responsive reflexivity.

Chapter summary
I have outlined the theoretical framework of postmodern feminism, the methods of art-based research and autobiography, and the processes of intertextuality and reflexivity. I have explained the particular ways these research elements have been put into play in this research project and I have explained the rationale for each of the elements that are interwoven and in combination make up the fabric of my research design. The methodological design did not come together through any laboured search; rather the elements seem to gravitate towards me as I recognised that each component of my research project required a framework through which I could conceptualise that particular component. In other words, I did not toy with one, then another element but fairly promptly found a research design that supported my conceptual and political philosophies, my interest in subjectivity and art representation, and my attraction to self inquiry through creative processes. Having said that, I was aware that the elements that were coming together to make up my research design were far from those more frequently used in the area of art therapy research. To this effect, by not colluding with customary art therapy research practice, my research offers an unconventional design that opens up the research field to reveal a somewhat different project: a different voice, one from the margins of both social experience and research design, and one that intentionally set out to confront and disrupt rather than comply with the conventions and traditions within the field.
Chapter Four: Revealing the selves
**Introduction**

This chapter reveals the findings of this self investigation utilising a postmodern feminist theoretical approach. As discussed in the previous chapter the methods chosen were autobiography and art-based methods. These methods supported my position as both researcher and research participant, and enabled me to reflexively respond to the self investigation as it unfolded. My postmodern feminist ontological process arose from my postmodern feminist epistemology and therefore was congruent with my methodology. By conducting a postmodern feminist investigation the intent was not merely to cathartically produce autobiographical material for display, it was to intentionally critique modernist realist conventions, and further disrupt such conventions through a postmodernist feminist deconstruction process.

A rhythm can be identified throughout the unfolding of the investigative process. This begins with revealing my self perceptions prior to making an image. My self perceptions are again revealed during image making, upon reflection on the image and also with links to various other texts. Relaying this movement in self perception provided a reflexive account of how the investigative process transformed my self perceptions. Furthermore, having investigated through a postmodern feminist framework, my process was intentionally transparent and any concerns as researcher or as a research participant were relayed reflexively throughout this chapter.

The chapter has been divided into three phases. In each phase dualistic selves collaborated by working on the same artwork surface of canvas or paper. Four of these artworks were made throughout the findings and I have distinguished these collaborative images by using the term ‘integrative artwork’ numbered one, two, three and four.

Phase one investigated my perceptions of dualistic selves and dualistic artwork styles. These dualistic selves and styles were intentionally disrupted through an art-based challenge resulting in making the first two integrative artworks. Through these two integrative artworks together with their intertextual links, my perception of selves and artwork styles were seen to align to modernist conventions. These conventions have influenced what is considered a healthy self and good art.
Phase two brought about the third integrative artwork through which four symbols are identified. These symbols were investigated through making further artwork forming intertextual links to past texts. The amalgamation of present and past texts exposed issues of gender, sexuality and mental health as prevalent themes, which were articulated from a multitude of contexts.

Phase three included the fourth and final integrative artwork through which changes in self perception and artwork styles were considered. Here the divisions and borders that first separated selves and artwork styles and on which the dualisms rely, were shown to be uncertain, ambiguous, and vague.

I pictured the overall process of self investigation as a spiralling motion which I recorded in my study journal (Figure 4.1). Towards the end of the spiralling process, many of my previous self perceptions are shown to have been contested and deconstructed, providing opportunities for new notions of selves to be constructed. The autobiographical findings accrued from this investigative process have been discussed in the next chapter.

![Figure 4.1 Spiralling Motion of Research Process](image)

**Phase one: Dualistic multiple subjectivities**
I began this first phase by showing the initial steps in self investigation through art-based research. This first phase explained my thoughts, leading to what I named
‘integrated images’ where Joyce and Susan, figurative and abstract artists, collaborated in making two artworks, which was an intentional ploy to disrupt their dualistic positions. During this phase, the first two integrated artworks depicted many selves and through intertextual links to past texts their relevance to various selves was made clear. The postmodern feminist approach intentionally sought to confront embedded beliefs and challenge previously uncontested ‘truths’ in relation to my self perception and my perceptions about my artwork styles.

**Setting the scene – my initial awareness of dualistic selves and artwork styles**

My intrigue around my two distinct artistic styles instigated the research process through which I sought to ascertain any connection between my dual artwork styles, my identification as a lesbian, and its potential contribution to art therapy. In this first phase I sought to investigate my dualistic artwork styles which had been unwavering over a twenty year period. In conjunction with these dualistic styles were my distinct selves of Joyce and Susan which I also sought to further investigate. The intended route of self investigation was through making images reflexively while remaining open to intertextual links.

I juxtaposed one image from each of Joyce and Susan to exemplify the disparity between the two artwork styles (Figure 4.2). Bottom left shows Joyce’s small torn cardboard figurative drawing which was hidden in a folder, and a large abstract canvas painting of Susan’s which was sold at a solo exhibition.

![Figure 4.2 Contrasting Size of Figurative and Abstract Artwork](image)

In viewing my past artwork, I found several pictorial representations of dualistic selves where they were either directly facing one another, acknowledging their difference...
(Figures 4.3 & 4.4), or had their backs against one another facing out towards their different environments (Figures 4.5 & 4.6)

In some past artworks, two selves are clearly in a perpetual cyclic conflict (Figure 4.7), while in other past images (Figures 4.8 & 4.9) Joyce is affiliated more with introspection, isolation, stillness, darkness, concealment, depression, death, and low self esteem, while Susan is depicted as being more affiliated with health, energy, lightness, prominence, and confidence. Typically found in these past images depicting dualism is a distinct colour differentiation either in the background of the image or in the foreground such as figures clothing.

Figure 4.7 Selves in Perpetual Conflict #1
Although I was aware of dualistic selves and artwork styles, I had not investigated their premises. I was not aware of perceiving selves or artistic styles in a negative or positive frame. For example, attributes of darkness or being “in black” is clearly expressed as a positive attribute in this poem I wrote in the mid 1980’s,

Poem mid 1980’s

In black
Today I am the colour black
Black is an inner colour
It is the depth within me
It is warm, strong and independent
Cut off from outside world
Cut off from others
The centre of a shell
Still, quiet, echo
A soft place, a dark place, a contemplative place
I stay in the colour black for a while
I draw some images from this place
I get clear messages from this place
Being in black tells me where I’m at
I allow myself to stay here
Head foggy, eyes not able to see
But my emotions are full and varied
A bit cluttered and confused at first
But if I stay in black and be gentle with myself
I will get clear images of where I am at
When I am in black, I don’t respond well to pressure or expectations
I want to be left to be in black
Black is OK

As this poem explained, the relationship between the two dualistic characters are more complex than simply ‘good’ and ‘bad’, or ‘positive’ and ‘negative’, although selves depicted in these earlier artworks are sometimes in conflictual opposition that is often depicted as an interlocking conflict (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10  Selves in Perpetual Conflict #2

A diary entry clearly describes such conflict,

Diary entry 9th March 1991
I have two people that I identify with and whom I see very different aspects of myself in. Am I able or disabled, am I sane or insane, am I a therapist or a patient? At times I feel so confident, capable and positive and things go well for me and I make things happen. Then I doubt my perception of myself and what I think I can realistically cope with and I resort to a sick woman having uncontrollable anxiety attacks and intolerable mood swings. I can do anything - I can do nothing, I am significant - I am a grain of sand.
**Dualism and the naming of Joyce and Susan**

Clarifying the relevant naming of ‘Joyce’ and ‘Susan’ has conveyed the subtext. In 1992 I changed my name by deed poll, effectively dropping my family name and using my middle name ‘Joyce’ as my last name, my full name becoming Susan Joyce. The connotations attached to names, and the original positioning of Joyce as my middle and somewhat hidden name is symbolically relevant in relation to my dualistic selves, as is my perception of the whole of who I am, referenced as ‘Susan Joyce’.

Joyce was the name of my Aunty who died when she was only 22 years of age. The circumstances of Aunty Joyce’s death were concealed in my mother’s grief as she seemed unable to discuss any detail without her words being muted with tears. However, my parents did tell me that upon my birth they wanted Aunty Joyce’s name to be part of my name but deliberated whether Joyce should be my first or middle name. They finally chose Joyce as my middle name. As I grew up, my parents would often comment on the similarity between myself and Aunty Joyce (Figure 4.11) both visibly and in temperament. The comparison was made when I was quiet, introspective or when my parents were perplexed by my personality. With Joyce as my middle name it was symbolically sandwiched, hidden between two more conspicuous names, therefore it was hardly used or seen, it was as if it was not there. The name was like the story of Joyce’s death, it was never referred to but known to exist in a dark place. I came to affiliate the name Joyce with my more introspective, hidden, dark, contemplative personality traits.

![Figure 4.11 Aunty Joyce](image)
Susan being my first name was used with considerably more frequency than my middle name, it was up-front and came first. I had little emotional association with it other than that it was an incredibly common mainstream name for a girl and the sound of the name with its concise ending linked with the confident, socially assertive aspects of myself. In this study I used the names Joyce and Susan to refer to these different aspects of selves and also to distinguish the different artwork styles.

Having ascertained that my dual self perception and artwork styles had a lengthy history, and that I had no particular framework for one as ‘good’ and the other as ‘bad’, a critical reflection concerned why do some of the images (Figures 4.7 & 4.10) portray the two in conflict? Why do the extremes of artwork styles seem problematic? From an emotional perspective, I have experienced the switching from one extreme to another, from Joyce to Susan, as a dramatic contrast, one that has been a destabilising experience in my life and one that has often caused me to hesitate when making commitments to anything, having been unable to predict my capabilities or desires at any give time. Equally, I have experienced my dualistic artwork styles as destabilising, having been made aware in my visual art training that a ‘good’ or ‘real’ artist has adopted a sound solid single artwork style for which they become renowned and well recognised. These past art journal entries expressed my creative dilemmas.

**Visual diary entry 21st January 1984**

It seems as if I am split between a composition that you look into as a viewer and one that you are totally involved in, surrounded by. The latter seems more powerful to explore in a more relaxed way. Whereas the first seems more coldly designed, more difficult to move and you feel less involved.

**Visual Diary entry 25th July 1985**

I’ve done a few [abstract] paintings in the studio. While I am doing the work I am involved, but once I step away from the pictures sometimes it seems so impersonal and I feel a real distance virtually as if someone else has made this thing because it hasn’t got any of me in it.
In my study journal I had drawn an image describing the two artwork styles in relation to my emotional body (Figure 4.12) where the artwork of Joyce is an integral part of her body, while Susan holds her artwork out separate to her body.

![Figure 4.12 Internal and External Relationships to Artwork](image)

**Disrupting dualisms through integrative artwork**
My interest in disrupting Joyce and Susan from their polarised positionings was partly to relieve the discomfort of switching from one self to another and partly to investigate if my identification as lesbian had any bearing on my formation of dualistic selves and dualistic artwork styles.

In contemplating how to disrupt the personalities and style from their oppositional positioning, I set a challenge to integrate the two selves and artistic styles onto one surface. The rationale for this was an attempt to dislodge Joyce from her small hidden figurative artwork and dislodge Susan from her large public abstract artwork, thereby effectively integrating the personas of Joyce and Susan. However, as I tried to mediate, difficulties between the two selves arose and I began to scribe their dialogue in my study journal.

**Dialogue in study journal**
Joyce - I don’t know how I would go about painting abstractly without getting my stuff come up.

Susan - Hey, what would it look like if we combined my work with your work on the same surface?
Joyce - For a start off we work on a vastly different scale, and also we use different materials. How would we sort that out?

Susan - Meet half way on the scale and use whatever materials we want. We could exhibit the results.

Joyce - I would not want to exhibit personal imagery. I can't imagine displaying my guts on the walls for all and sundry to mock. I'm not brave enough.

Susan - But for me, as I finish a painting it expires in its usefulness to me. It is made to be passed on, sold off, to afford new life.

Joyce - Well, I can't do personal work then.

Susan - Then there is no point because that's what you do.

Joyce - Well, there is no risk for you. You exhibit your aesthetic pieces without risk of personal disclosure and the consequences.

Susan - What consequences? What would happen to you if everybody saw your images?

Joyce - I don't know but it feels 'way scary'. I've always put images I've made into a folder. I put the folder in a plastic box and I stack unused art materials on top of it. I rarely open it up.

Susan - I can understand your apprehension around disclosure, but you are always keen to take another step towards furthering your self-understanding. Wouldn't this be another opportunity to advance your self-awareness?
Joyce - I admire others that tell their story, especially if they are taking risks in doing so. I'll sleep on it.

A compromise on scale of the work was reached and an agreement made where both would adhere to their respective artistic styles. The first combined painting was generated from both Joyce and Susan.

**Integrative artwork 1 - Breath of Life**

*Breath of Life* (Figure 4.13) is the first artwork in a series of four artworks where Joyce and Susan embody the same artwork surface. On a practical note, the representation is fair, using both Joyce’s and Susan’s artwork styles and a compromised canvas size, bigger than Joyce’s and smaller than Susan’s usual size artwork.

![Integrative Artwork 1 - Breath of Life](image)

The painting depicts two characters; one holds a skeleton in her arms while propelling life force into the skeleton’s mouth. These two figures were immediately familiar to me and I recognised them as having appeared together in past images during the early 1990’s (Figure 4.14) where *Flying Woman* was depicted rescuing *Skeleton* from sinking into darkness and death.
The character Skeleton had first appeared in a drawing I made when feeling depressed. Sometimes when feeling depressed I would not eat and became thin, weak, and my body would feel lead heavy as if weighted down. Flying Woman would often appear with Skeleton and with her incredible weightlessness was able to pull Skeleton out of her heavy darkness. Flying Woman was always positive in her outlook, while pulling Skeleton up with one hand, she would point the way to a positive attitude represented by bright light. Flying Woman had excess energy, and while in flight she was able to pour some of her excess energy into Skeleton through her hair as the details of these two past artworks show (Figure 4.15 & Figure 4.16).

In these past artworks (Figure 4.15 & 4.16), Skeleton makes eye contact with Flying Woman, however, in the first integrative painting Breath of Life (Figure 4.13), Skeleton seems unengaged, resistant and looks apathetically out of the picture frame. Energy is also transferred through the hair in Breath of Life (Figure 4.13), however,
here the energy transference is considerably more intimate than just hair touching, the mouth to mouth action might symbolise a long relationship but it may also represent the urgency with which Flying Woman needs to act in order to bring Skeleton quickly to life. Although Flying Woman attempts to ignite Skeleton into immediate action, Skeleton seems impartial to being filled with life and seems reluctant to comply.

**Deconstructing symbolic meaning in Breath of Life**

My interpretation of this symbolic pictorial dynamic, where urgency is placed in opposition to apathy, can be seen in terms of Joyce and Susan where the motivation for Susan to do the PhD study is far greater than it is for Joyce. The characteristics of Joyce, with her reclusive lifestyle and hidden attributes do not complement the expectations, commitment and public exposure indicative of an extensive PhD study, whereas Susan has continually sought career advancement to further her professional profile. In this regard, the image *Breath of Life* (Figure 4.13) depicted Susan’s enthusiasm to start the study that provoked her to urgently propel life into Joyce in an attempt to ignite her into action for the mammoth task ahead. Joyce however, was seen as not just a little bit ‘dead’, but very ‘dead’ indeed. Joyce having ascertained that her power lay in Susan’s desperate need for her to come to life and collaborate.

Another interpretation of *Breath of Life* (Figure 4.13) was that the painting served as a forewarning, to not let Susan’s enthusiasm for the research project run ahead without checking Joyce’s emotional vulnerability. This interpretation was supported by a journal image made simultaneously (Figure 4.17). Here Susan, having enticed Joyce to come out of the safety of her dark solitary space, was seen as a bully in that she prevented her from returning.
Joyce, having already mentioned her fear of exposure in the above conversation is in danger as Susan has insisted Joyce steps away from her safe sanctuary. Susan’s forceful influence may render Joyce unable to maintain her mental wellbeing and unable to control what personal material is revealed. This was noted in a reflexive passage written in my study journal,

**Reflexive entry in study journal**

> Although I felt incredible enthusiasm to conduct the study, I did not want to induce a state of anxiety with the emergence of all my stuff. I felt it imperative to closely monitor my emotional health during this process of self enquiry and take breaks when feeling overwhelmed. I also felt it important to establish an open and emotionally honest relationship with my supervisor. It was more likely that Susan rather than Joyce would present at my supervision appointments within the academic stream and populated environment of Uni. However, I wanted an opportunity for Joyce to show as well, and that would involve first establishing considerable trust with my supervisor.

**Integrative artwork 2 – The Gathering**

For the second integrated painting, I had selected a large canvas measuring 1110 x 1140 mm, the size that Susan puts into exhibitions, however the style of artwork that was created on the canvas was much more Joyce’s style. The media of Susan’s large canvas and paint together with the artistic style of Joyce seemed to suggest some balance or negotiation had taken place. The decision to bring both Joyce and Susan onto the canvas pictorially was an intentional one. I wanted to visualise them in negotiation to examine
how they related to one another and to view what might exist in-between their polarised positions. I consciously decided to depict them sharing or exchanging their artwork as a token of collaboration. I decided to paint Joyce offering Susan her folder of small paper images and Susan offering Joyce one of her large abstract canvases. I wanted to see how they might relate and how they took up positioning in the compositional space.

While painting the second integrative image my emotional state became erratic. I made this reflexive entry in my study journal.

*Reflexive entry in study journal*

As I contemplated the execution of the painting my emotions swung from excitement to dread and from confident to fearful. My intuition told me to proceed with caution and awareness, for if the main characters were flung together haphazardly, without monitoring emotional reaction, the result could see Joyce or Susan in emotional crisis and backing out of the research project altogether. It seemed wise to take gradual steps checking in with how the two characters were responding and to observe how they tolerated the integration onto one canvas and pictorial positioning.

Using thin paint I sketched in two figures of Susan and Joyce facing each other and making direct eye contact. I needed them to face one another so a visual dialogue could commence. I instantly identified which one was which. Even in sketched form their stance and expression suggested a confrontational exchange. Equipped with their respective artwork their arms configured into a circular form (Figure 4.18 detail).

![Figure 4.18 Integrative Artwork 2 (detail)](image-url)
The circular configuration of the arms reminded me of the past artwork where two characters are in perpetual conflict (Figure 4.7 & 4.10), and I again became concerned that a static deadlock might be eminent. As I became absorbed in the process of painting, and without conscious decision making, the canvas became filled with a gathering of many figures. I called the painting The Gathering (Figure 4.19).

![The Gathering](figure4.19.jpg)

Figure 4.19 Integrative Artwork 2 - The Gathering

The collection of figures reminded me of an image on paper I had made around 1991 where I had pictured myself as several selves and titled the picture Multiple Me (Figure 4.20).

![Multiple Me](figure4.20.jpg)

Figure 4.20 Multiple Me
I remember taking the artwork *Multiple Me* (Figure 4.20) into one of my weekly psychotherapy sessions with a therapist I had been with for over two years. The image seemed to scare or shock her into silence and her lack of comment seemed to render me unable to explore the artwork with her.

The second integrative painting *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19) also caused me considerable discomfort and I feared others’ interpretation upon viewing this image. In my study journal I wrote a reflexive entry.

*Reflexive entry in study journal*

*I am quite aware that some practitioners might interpret such images as The Gathering and Multiple Me with immediate suspicion of mental health disorders such as Multiple Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder or Bipolar Disorder. However, within the postmodern sense, my interest is in investigating multiple subjectivities and multiple selves for their collusion with modernist values and not to establish a psychopathology.*

In *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19), I recognised all figures as having appeared in past artworks and I already had descriptive names for each one of the figures. Having already presented Joyce and Susan in earlier passages I will now briefly outline the other figures while making intertextual links with past texts. I have also suggested how or why the character might have emerged, and have explained their current relevance.

In *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19), hanging over Joyce’s shoulder was Skeleton. As already mentioned, Skeleton was often drawn with Flying Woman which can be identified above Susan and pointing to bright light. Screamer resides above and slightly to the left of Joyce. Screamer also had a long history. At times of intolerable emotional pain the image of a scream would resonate. On the outside I may be performing a perfectly normal task, working, shopping or driving, however, on the inside a shrilling scream would ring out. Screamer is depicted in several drawings and sculptures (Figures 4.21, 4.22, 4.23, 4.24 & 4.25).
This previously written story is related to the three sculptures. Furthermore, making three sculptures was necessary to depict and describe the scream.

**Story written 1987**

When in depths of depression the feeling inside me, at the centre of my belly, was an actual scream. Although not audible to others, it was real and I could hear it and feel the vibration of the scream in my belly. It would be there almost continually for perhaps five or six days and then subside and be there only occasionally and then not at all for a while. It was an inner scream of absolute desperation, a scream of agony and pain. It was the type of scream that would be heard if a captive were undergoing torture, a shrill
of acute pain and intense fear. For me it was the torture of having to endure living in depression and the thought of getting through the next few minutes, hours, days.

Once the peak had passed, I would feel light headed as if drugged and very exhausted. It was at this point, when my body and mind were in silence, that it was possible for me to do some artwork and express some of what I had just experienced. There would be no ideas in my mind; I would just let the art making process guide me.

The touch of smooth clay I found soothing and calming after the ordeal. At one time I worked the clay and ended up making three models of faces. I call them faces rather than masks as the word mask has a connotation of a layer in front of a face, like a facade. These faces were no facade; they resembled raw emotion and the visual expression of the scream.

There are three faces because initially I thought I had been unsuccessful in capturing the full expression of emotion in the first or the second face which prompted me to produce a third. No single face seem to represent the feeling I experienced, but collectively and after the glaze firing, all three faces as one piece, represented the three different aspects of the inner scream.

The first face, Lead Face [Figure 4.23] was heavy and dark in appearance and represented the feeling of having a heavy body and my inability for action. The absence of cognitive functioning made it difficult for me to express. The eye area depicts the feeling of absence or apathy and there is limited energy for the jaw to widen or to stretch into a scream. The mouth lacking both teeth and tongue represents the incapacity to eat or speak. Although the scream is there in full effect, it remained locked in a body that
was unable to muster full movement. The dark lead like glaze expresses the heaviness of my depressive state.

The second face, Ghost Face [Figure 4.24] is like a scream from a ghost. The white chalky mat glaze gives a ghost like appearance, and like a ghost in pain, it screams but communication is useless. It screams the scream from either life or death, it is impartial to destiny. The face is representative of the feeling of, not near death, but as if in death. My frequent contemplation of death would sometime feel as if I were half living and half dead, the line between the two being very fine or non-existent. I had heard somewhere that suicide was a sin and you would go to hell if you committed suicide. I was already in hell and although a gamble, suicide seemed an attractive option and worth the risk for the relief from pain. This face expresses the lack of preference to life or death, it is also representative of the inability to reach out or be heard.

The third face, Rage Face [Figure 4.25] is ample in its ability to express the scream. The glaze is a fiery orange red with a gloss surface to convey the rage. As if nothing held back, the scream could be heard travelling great distance as if the unreserved shrill of a primal animal. This face is representative of the scream itself; it is pain, the excruciating pain that lay screaming in my belly. I had to take this scream with me no matter where I went. I had to take the scream to the bathroom, to the bank, to work, and to my friend's house. I would sit with this scream inside of me while my parents visited me in my flat. I would take this scream to bed hoping that the next day I would feel better and that the question "what is the point of living?" would subside, and the fact that I was still alive would have some meaning.
Returning to The Gathering (Figure 4.19), having discussed Joyce’s allies Skeleton and Screamer and Susan’s Flying Woman I now looked at Foetus. On Joyce’s side a figure appeared curled up in Joyce’s belly. This curled foetus-like figure appears in several artworks where the feeling of complete retreat is depicted. In one image Foetus has retreated away from people into a womb-like void (Figure 4.26).

The physical retreat is visually described as feeling separate from other people, represented as many eyes and many mouths. Symbolically this clarified that Foetus was not able to respond to other people. In two other images (Figure 4.27 & 4.28) Foetus was seen curled up and existing without any direct contact with the outside world.
Being Foetus was recorded in a past diary.

**Diary excerpt 26th January 1991**

The inside of my head is like a chicken carcass after roasting, empty brown slimy. Nothing in there for thoughts to cling to long enough to be deciphered so nothing stays and the void remains a void. ... My physical self has become sensitive to light and sound. I crave silence ... The air is thick with the stench of my mood ... I have a visitor bring me a book, after a while their presence and the noise of their speech becomes obscure ... I am better on my own when I am like this. I can just exist. I don’t have to exist in relation to anyone else.

This state of existence was not conducive to social activity or thinking. Foetus became ultra sensitive to light, sound and temperature. By curling up in a warm place Foetus resort to total withdrawal from outside life allowing the senses, the body and the mind to rest. The only single aspect that prevented Foetus from total shutdown was the bodily call to urinate. It was this bodily call that frustrated Foetus, and in turn, this feeling of frustration also resulted in the mind never being able to completely shut down for any duration.

In *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19), the figure above Joyce and to the right was named Star. I had related to the card ‘Star’ in a Tarot deck (Figure 4.29) where a young naked woman is seen opening Pandora’s Box from which all manner of previously hidden things fly out in all directions. The picture in the Tarot deck and the name Star came to symbolically represent family taboos. Star is always depicted in past images as a young girl. In one image painted in 1991 and titled “Shhhhh” (Figure 4.30), Star is cramped into the picture frame, unable to move and vulnerable in her naked state, she looked out to the viewer with her finger up to her closed lips in a gesture of “shhhhh”.
Family taboos were visually represented within this figure by the combination of immobility, vulnerability and silencing. In *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19), *Star* has child-like hair and a pink cardigan aging her to be about 9 years old, her eyes are covered with her hands, she does not want to see or be seen.

*Reflexive note in study journal*

*I did not want to expose family taboos. My symbolic representation of the existence of these was more the point.*

On Susan’s left side (Figure 4.19), *Work Person* is close behind Susan’s head. *Work Person* has been the least depicted figurative visual form. Pictorial positioning of *Work Person* in almost sharing a head with Susan revealed their similar mindset. *Work Person* takes on an almost robotic productive persona. Usually distinguished by her slick hair and white shirt, *Work Person* is often portrayed in past artwork with various props such as a clip board, brief case, or a geometrical background (Figure 4.31 & 32).
Work Person is able to override any emotional state and has become a super performer at a moment’s notice, enabling her to professionally and academically achieve in adverse circumstances and/or to execute a prior commitment with unequivocal precision despite her mental state. With high expectations of herself, Work Person has insisted on excellence in her delivery in all aspects of professionalism.

Earth Woman resides in the bottom corner in The Gathering (Figure 4.19). The character Earth Woman can be seen in several past artworks where the qualities of physical strength, lack of fear, independence and wisdom are symbolically depicted. These qualities were not simply given or inherited, they are the prizes for having endured the struggles of a difficult life. Earth Woman can be seen in relation to these life struggles in past artwork. In one image (Figure 4.33) Earth Woman is trapped in a sack that is sealed tight by two men. The two men emerged from the centre of huge eyes that symbolically represent patriarchal systems and discourses aimed at diminishing women’s strengths and wellbeing. In another past image Earth Woman was depicted as refusing to comply with becoming a ‘perfect’ woman (Figure 4.34). She emerged out of the back of Barbie as a statement of non-conformity. Earth Woman also displayed her full beautiful unshaven body without curtailing to beauty myths.
In another past image, swimming underwater, Earth Woman’s feet were caught in seaweeds (Figure 4.35). The weeds represented the ways institutions devalue girls and women, effectively holding them back, resulting in a feeling of stagnation or drowning. Earth Woman has represented resilience, fearlessness, and independence. In another image she can be seen out in the bush at night (Figure 4.36) using the wisdom handed down, her heritage, she sits on her purple velvet rug with her brew of herbs and her runes and, lit by her sister moon, she feels complete.

Another image (Figure 4.37) depicted Earth Woman as a skilled warrior, hunter and gatherer where she is at one with the land. Earth Woman represented the strengths I have gained through refusing to be subservient to men, refusing to be seen as not ‘feminine’, refusing my labels of mad and perverse, refusing my status of less than,
refusing to be invisible, and refusing any locations that a phallocentric heteronormative society and its discourses attempted to position within me.

![Woman Warrior](image)

**Figure 4.37 Woman Warrior**

The last self to view in *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19) was *Witness* who was neither attached to Joyce nor to Susan but was in central position as an overall witness or observer. *Witness* first appeared in images from the time of my art therapy training in 1988, when ‘watching’ group dynamics, and again re-appeared when I engaged in personal intensive psychotherapy in 1991. I began to ‘watch’ how in one session I would describe aspects of myself and then the next session, although I remembered my previous explanation, my description of myself had completely changed. *Witness* helped me observe my changing states. In the mid 1990s I became even more skilled at watching my various selves through being taught meditation. At first I was taught to ‘watch’ my breath, and then ‘watch’ my actions, eventually I ‘watched’ who it was that was ‘watching’ the breath and doing the actions. In *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19), *Witness* was depicted with her back to the viewer as if looking into the picture and observing the content (Figure 4.38 & 4.39). She sat crossed legged and is often dressed in orange and red or sometimes drawn sitting out in the open space (Figure 4.40). She has represented her ability for contemplation. The usefulness of *Witness* is that she has offered observations of all other characters and therefore has represented my ability to watch my various selves partaking in the study, and this process of watchfulness is documented through reflexivity.
Summary – Dualistic multiple subjectivities
In this first phase of findings the focus was on disrupting the two styles of artwork and the corresponding selves, Joyce and Susan. Through challenging both selves to work collaboratively on the same surface their dualistic positing was disrupted. Two integrative artworks emerged, the first symbolically depicted conflicting oppositional reactions and a power play in regard to commencing the research project. The second integrative artwork provided a more complex visual statement about multiple selves and was useful in ascertaining self perceptions about my multiple subjectivities. Both integrative paintings called into question any notion of a unified, singular or static ‘self’. However, the findings in phase one revealed that the researcher participant perceived multiple selves as a negative attribute and a possible sign of questionable mental health. The multiple selves were clarified through intertextual links with past texts, which demonstrated that multiple subjectivities had developed over time through necessity to adapt selves in order to manage adverse situations and difficult regimes. Both Breath of
Life (Figure 4.13) and The Gathering (Figure 4.19) demonstrated that selves are socially constructed and are in a constant state of transformation as emotional responses, various life events and cultures continually change.

Furthermore, the integrative paintings also centred on conflicting and dualism and the data from this phase found further research is necessary. The dialogue between Joyce and Susan that follows elucidates the momentum for further research. This was scribed in my study journal after completing The Gathering (Figure 4.19) and demonstrated that perceived dualistic attributes continued to generate conflict.

**Dialogue written in study journal**

Susan - About the painting [The Gathering Figure 4.19] - I don't like it. It's traditional cathartic crap with no aesthetic or conceptual interest.

Joyce - It's what I do - it arrives, it is what it is. I don't judge it along the way, I just let it out, I don't really care how it looks.

Susan - Well I do, it's on my canvas and it's my reputation as a contemporary artist that is at stake with this little expose piece of crap.

Joyce - You just worry about some surface reputation that you mustered up for yourself one day. I've got my whole world of madness being displayed out there.

Susan - Well don't do it then, then we can both be happy.

Joyce - I'm not happy 'cos I want to explore more and understand more about myself and my relationship with you.

Susan - I don't want to do these graphic paintings. It's not what I do. It's boring, un-contemporary, and has no artistic merit. There are so many ways of thinking and presenting ideas other than straight representation.
Joyce - Well, I'll do it in another way then but I'm not prepared for it to be lacking in emotional content. I mean I'm not 'gonna' do a detached piece of decorative lounge-room art.

Susan - That shows you've got no understanding of my stuff. Just 'cos it ain't got screaming 'friggin' faces all over it doesn't mean it hasn't got emotional content. And my work is NOT decorative, it is abstract.

Joyce - Well I'm prepared to do things differently but I don't want to be without a say.

Susan - I'll give you a fair deal but I can't go on doing this - I mean it will have to change a good deal for my interest to stay in it. I'm a thinker not a spewer.

Joyce - You are insulting and aggressive.

Susan - I'm just frustrated. I feel that canvas, paint and time is being wasted and I can't even hold interest in what is happening. You want to plonk things down in a static position to stay and then pretty up. The fixation on a static known position drives me crazy. I'm used to all the surface being on the move, shifting and changing at my whim. That is exciting for me, the not knowing, not planning, ever-changing unpredictable surface. That's how I see everything, it's all made up. We make it all up and none of it is real.

Joyce - Images that come out of me are very real indeed. They are so real that they can frighten me even though I may have seen them many times and made them years ago. They explain what it's like inside, what I could never describe in words. You shouldn't devalue my experiences.
Susan - I didn’t mean to. There is a different energy involved. When I go out to the studio I want to invent, manipulate, and explore. When I’m faced with your painting I feel dead and I can hardly bring myself to fill in the set composition. It’s the difference between being a creative writer and doing time writing lines cos you’ve been bad at school. They both write, but the creative scope is vastly different.

Joyce - You can’t compare my paintings with writing lines at school. My work is creative expression, immediate and honest, I just don’t do a head trip or ego trip on myself when I paint.

Susan - Now who is being insulting? Look we got to do something. I really can’t do this static figurative factory work. Let me have a think and see if I can work something out.

Joyce - OK but get back to me, we are in this together remember, don’t just exclude me and do your own thing.

Susan - Like you’ve been doing you mean? I won’t, I’ll check it out with you.

Phase two: Creative processes and symbolism

The second phase of the investigation sought to find meanings for four symbols that had emerged through the integrative artwork and study journal images. Finding meanings involved considerable intertextual investigations and further exploration through making additional artwork. The material that arose from the investigation demonstrated how perceptions of selves are formed from many social experiences and through many discourses. Moreover, these perceptions are often imbedded within individuals as ‘truths’ regarding identity and rarely given the opportunity to be contested or deconstructed. In this section my perceptions of gender, sexuality, and mental health were shown to have been influenced by major Modernist discourses.
Integrative artwork 3 – Portrait Crossed Out
My desire for the next integrative painting was a more spontaneous, less conscious beginning, however, I had to ensure that both Joyce and Susan contributed collaboratively. A neighbour had given me a large used canvas which was neither the dimension nor the quality that either Joyce or Susan would normally work on. Using a second hand canvas encouraged a less orderly start than using a white freshly stretched canvas. With work underway and with no visual preconception, I became absorbed and ‘lost’ in the image making process, until after a while, I began to experience heart palpitations. I recognised the feeling as fear, and I realised that the image arriving was scaring me. I spontaneously reached for a stash of dried sage, lit the sage, and began smudging the canvas (Figure 4.41 & 4.42). Through feminist influences I had learned to recognise vulnerability as strength (Glass & Davis 2004) and learned to protect and nurture myself through women centred traditions. Whilst I had often smudged a room with sage to induce safe clean energy, however I had never smudged a painting before. This occurrence provided an example of my feminist process in conjunction with the image making process.

Upon completion, my immediate response to the new painting Portrait Crossed Out (Figure 4.43) was one of both surprise and exhilaration. Some of my reflections of this creative process follow, including the dynamics between Joyce and Susan and the pictorial outcome. Joyce had placed her portrait central on the canvas as she would often place her self central on paper. Susan, however, made energetic sweeping
movements with red paint crossing over the face as if in total disregard for Joyce’s portrait. From the last dialoguing Joyce had sensed Susan’s intent to work vigorously and Joyce was not about to argue and remained silent. Instead, Joyce depicted ‘silence’ by blacking out the mouth area on the portrait. Once Susan had exhausted her energetic use of red, she became content painting stripes this time respecting Joyce’s portrait by painting the lines behind the portrait. However, this foreground of red and background of stripes seemed to sandwich Joyce’s portrait between Susan’s abstract expressions. Susan was very particular about the colour and order of the stripes in green and cream and giving the stripes an old worn look. While Joyce corrected some neck and facial features on her portrait, Susan zig-zagged black paint and water energetically across the chest area of the figure.

Initially the painting Portrait Crossed Out (Figure 4.43), made no sense to me. However I had learned to take notice of my reflexivity, evident in my bodily response when viewing an image, and to use this as an indicator to whether an image was embedded with significance. The rush of feeling in my body whenever I glanced at the new painting signalled that there was great significance embedded in the image. All I had to do was unravel the symbolic meanings. I began to draw prolifically in my journal, which led me to recognise four reoccurring symbols. Three of these symbols are visually present in the new painting and the other arrived through the further exploratory journal work.
In this second phase, I investigated the four symbols that emerged through unravelling the meaning of Portrait Crossed Out (Figure 4.43). These four symbols are named Black Tape, Red Cross, White Mask and Straight Lines. While investigating the meaning of the four symbols I remained open to simultaneous intertextual links to any past texts.

**Black Tape**

I investigated the black area covering the mouth on the figure of Portrait Crossed Out (Figure 4.43), through making further paintings. In one such painting the black area resembled black tape across the mouth (Figure 4.45). The positioning of the face and the intrusion on the mouth resembled another painting I had made about a year prior.

![Figure 4.43 Black Tape & Red Cross](image1)

![Figure 4.44 Bandage Interrupting Mouth](image2)

Upon hearing that my PhD proposal had been accepted I applied to the U.K. health record archives to obtain my old UK medical records. The thought of receiving my health records stirred memories which evoked my making images in my study journal and on canvas. On a small recycled canvas, the previous owner had stuck a strip of canvas which had reminded me of hospital bandage. I loosely painted a self portrait rendering the bandage to appear stuffed into my mouth (Figure 4.46). I was bemused by the appearance of a sullen or sleepy face and wondered why the bandage was stuffed in the mouth.
On the day I received word that my medical records had arrived in the post I had already departed on a three week interstate trip. The undetermined contents of the package rendered me unable to sleep and instead I drew four images in my study journal. The first depicted my curiosity as to the imagined contents of the package (Figure 4.47).

![Figure 4.45 Awaiting Medical Records](image)

The following three images all depicted a face with the medical records interrupting the mouth in some way or other (Figure 4.48, 4.49 & 4.50).

![Figure 4.46 Mouth Interrupted #1](image)  ![Figure 4.47 Mouth Interrupted #2](image)  ![Figure 4.50 Mouth Interrupted #3](image)

Upon my return home, I apprehensively read my medical records which noted my medical history from the age of 4 years old (1959) up to my migration to Australia at 34

128
years old (1989). However, I was more interested in a particular period, the details of which my memory was unable to accurately recall. I searched the medical records for the period 1977 to 1979 when as a young woman of 22 years of age, I remember driving away from the laboratory where I worked full time as a microbiology assistant in a food research centre to attend a prescheduled appointment with my G.P.

**Story written 1996**

My local G.P. that I had been seeing for anxiety and asthma had taken me a little more seriously this time and had popped me two little yellow pills. She had lead me into a spare surgery room and asked me to lie down and relax until someone came to get me to see a specialist. I was relieved to have the pills for my anxiety and the thought of being able to talk things through with a specialist was also a relief, though I hadn’t a clue what I would say.

The yellow pills were coming on a bit strong. Perhaps that was the specialist I could hear in the room on the other side of the thin wall. I lay fully clothed on the surgery bed into which I had now fully sunk. When the door opened I had no idea how long I had been laying down. The G.P. told me that these two men were going to transport me to the specialist. At first glance I thought they were a couple of Salvation Army volunteers and that the specialist must be in the building next door where you get blood samples taken, so I accepted the generosity of the ‘Salvos’ and sliding my bottom off the edge of high surgery bed I attempted to stand which bought both G.P. and one Salvo man lurching to my rescue.

I was heavily assisted either side by the two ‘Salvos’ who quickly glided me through the central isle of the fairly crowded doctor’s waiting room. With some substantial embarrassment at my state I took a brief glance at the occupants in the waiting room and was relieved not to recognise
anyone as we made our scuffled chase out of the surgery's front double doors.

Once outside I was faced with the open back doors of an ambulance. I rechecked the uniforms of the two men but my vision had become blurred. Once inside the ambulance I guessed that the specialist must be a very good one and must own a large house up the road, or have a private surgery like the Ear, Nose and Throat specialist I'd been to a year or so before. I presumed that the ambulance crew had just completed a task and were doing me a favour by dropping me off up the road at the specialists, but as the journey progressed I started to worry how I might get back home from the specialist.

The ambulance picked up speed and I slipped and slid over the plastic covered bench seat while hanging onto handles and straps. My cabin companion gestured the offer of the stretcher type bed occupying the centre of the cabin, which I declined as I was neither sick nor injured. As the journey became longer and longer I became more concerned about where we were and where we were going. I started to feel anxious about how I would get home as I had not told anyone where to collect me.

We started to drive parallel to a stone wall some eight foot in height that went on and on with the occasional small wooden doors inset in old ornate stone carved archways. A feeling of familiarity made me look out of the other window. I recognised the shops as the ones we had been to as kids, I recognised the town and the wall we still ran alongside where we would play "spot the loony" from the safety of the back of mum and dad's car. But nothing could have prepared me for the shock as the ambulance started to turn into the main entrance of the place I only knew as the "loony bin".
As we went through the huge gates my body and mind went into a spin of total panic and disbelief merged together with sudden great dread and fear. I remember thinking "no, no, this can't be so, this can't be". The ambulance drew up outside the main entrance of the huge old Victorian asylum and as the back doors of the ambulance opened, without a thought and with all my might I leapt off the back of the ambulance and attempted my escape to anywhere other than here. The uniformed men were very matter of fact about my escape attempt and calmly but firmly led me into the building.

In a huge pale green room with pipes running around the walls and ceilings a young nurse asked me to fill in a form with quite a few questions on it. I refused and I said to her "this is a mistake and I want to go". She compromised and just asked me to write my name on the form. The ambulance men were now gone and the heavy front door had closed behind them. The nurse then proceeded to take me on the most bizarre mystical mystery tour of this ancient building and with the tour enlightened me as to the rules and regulations herein.

I walked in a shocked daze as she took me through her routine which included showing me the three small cell type rooms painted yellow and furnished with only a bed. The nurse was not into subtly or breaking you in slowly. As we stood in a yellow room doorway she said "these are the lock-up rooms where you go if you are bad". Well it worked, it installed more fear and I resigned myself to comply, a sort of "anything but the lock-up room" type of compliance.

A curtain was being pulled around one of the 24 beds that lined opposite sides of a huge ward painted in the same pale green with the pipes running around the ceiling. I was put into a surgical gown and put into a bed where I lay cold in the white stiff gown on white stiff sheets and in robotic shock. This was far from my idea of agreeing to chat with a
specialist, this was a trick, and the other trick was that they had taken all my clothes.

A doctor came and did a couple of blood pressure and temperature type tests then either the same or a different doctor with a couple of nurses said they would give me something to relax me, they lifted my gown and jabbed my bottom with a needle that hurt like hell. As they pulled back the curtains my mum and dad came running towards me, my mother shouting and crying saying “what are you doing, what are you trying to do to us”? I tried to explain it was a mistake but staff pulled mum and dad away from my bedside and I was left alone to sink into the bed yet again on the same day, what a day!

My U.K. medical records showed a somewhat erratic psychiatric diagnosis with continual inconsistencies. For instance, within a seven month period I had been prescribed fourteen different medications of which five were prescribed for depression, five for anxiety, two for insomnia, one for psychotic disorders, and one for schizophrenia. The amount of medication may explain why my memory of having one psychiatric admission was recorded in the medical records as four separate psychiatric admissions between 1977 and 1979.

Whilst reading my medical records I felt the need to paint. I painted my head tilted back against a hospital pale green wall and a huge pill blocking the whole of my mouth preventing me from being able to speak, I titled this painting Massively Medicated (Figure 4.51).
Indeed my memory of the psychiatric hospital and the amount of medication I had been prescribed prevented me from being able to do much at all. I was certainly not able to do as my G.P. had intended and “talk about my troubles with a specialist”. In my study journal I drew the extent to which I remember feeling powerlessness in my failed attempts to negotiate medication (Figure 4.52). This excerpt also describes the effects of the strength and changing of medication.

**Story written 1996**

Some of the people seemed very mad and some didn't seem mad at all. The non-mad ones I thought must have been tricked like me. As time went on even the non-mad ones had mad spells and I felt like the only non-mad one in the place. Then the doctors got into a pattern of changing my medication every two weeks causing my sanity to become severely challenged. I would go from not being able to retain the saliva in my mouth due to massive doses of muscle relaxants, to having such an enormous burst of energy that I felt invincible. I complained that the medication was too strong but to no avail. With yet another change to my medication I felt I had super strengths and I attempted walking through walls, furniture and windows convinced that I could come to no harm. In my drug induced invincible state I hurtled myself through a glass door presuming I could come to no harm. Following this, I was aware that any new arrivals to the hospital would be sure to put me in the mad category.
While reading through my medical records and physicians’ diagnostic notes, I made a second painting that I named Lost in Labels (Figure 4.53).

![Figure 4.50 Lost in Labels]

Again, the hospital pale green formed the background while a thinly painted portrait seemed reminiscent of the effects of medication and my watery, floating vague state. Crossing the face are lines of writing lifted from my medical records, the prominence of which effectively pushed the watery features of the portrait into the background, mirroring feeling unheard and undervalued. Some of the terms painted are diagnostic such as “psychosexual conflict”, while others seem to be opinions such as “inadequate personality”. Given that I was heavily medicated upon arrival at the hospital, and from then on, such assessments were conducted whilst I was laden with a powerful cocktail of medication. I scanned the medical records into my computer and collated some of the medical record terms into a cut and paste digital image, calling the image Cut & Paste Medical Records (Figure 4.54). On further reading of my medical records brought to my attention some of the terms used to describe my sexuality or sexual behaviour. The term ‘lesbian’ does not appear in the medical records at any time and I was never once asked if I was a lesbian or had sexual desires towards women. However, the medical notes have shown several clinicians were thinking along those lines. I again used digital means to cut and paste some of the terms used to illuminate issues of my sexuality. I named this digital image Cut & Paste Psychosexual (Figure 4.55).
Although I had known I was a lesbian since the age of eight, I had also observed and learned at school that lesbian and gays were tormented with names, hated, bashed or sometimes killed. It was my belief that to disclose one’s lesbianism was very dangerous. Lesbianism was seen as form of madness and to announce oneself, as lesbian was to announce oneself as sick. As I had already felt incredibly powerless in the psychiatric hospital, it was unlikely that I would risk making my incarceration worse or longer by volunteering my ‘lesbian sickness’. However, a turn of events while in hospital did worsen my situation. A reflective story of these events was written in 1996.

**Story written 1996**

With great concern for my mental health I planned to boycott the medication by hiding the pills in my cheek while swallowing the cup of water issued by nurse. After a week or so I began to feel much better as the collection of pills in my bedside cabinet grew. Because of some confusion over my diagnosis, I was to be brought before a panel of psychiatrists who would banter their expertise to enable a diagnosis to be confirmed. As the day of the panel grew nearer I became more nervous. I had watched some of my fellow inmates go off in a mini-bus and come back looking like frail old confused corpses. I was scared that they would do the same to me and take my mind away. My thinking was that if I behaved alert, clear and
confident then they would let me go home. Anything short of that would see me on the next medication guinea pig run or coming off the bus like a corpse.

The night before the panel session I tried to get some sleep but the ward was filled with mad people’s noises. I could hear singing, crying, whining, humming, chattering and snoring. I could not sleep and I began to panic about my ability to perform in front of the panel. The next day, about four hours before the panel session time, I was in desperate need to get some preparatory rest, I asked one of the nurses if I could rest quietly in one of the yellow lock up rooms and she gave her permission. But even in the quiet of the yellow room I still could not get to sleep and I became very anxious. I remembered the accumulation of pills in my bedside cabinet. I snuck out of the yellow room, consumed a few pills and returned to the yellow room for an insured rest.

In my deep restful state lights were shone in my eyes and I was being questioned. “What have you taken” and “how many pills”. I answered “six” but I was not believed. I was piled into an ambulance and driven to the emergency wing of a medical hospital and placed under more bright lights. As the full effect of the pills subsided I denied the accusations of having taken an overdose explaining my need for a rest but they didn’t buy it.

I missed the appointment with the panel and I was transferred to a twenty four hour observation ward nicknamed ‘the tower’. The tower was on the third floor and only staff had access to the elevator which was the only way in and out of the ward. In the observation ward there was no freedom to roam. I was put on very strong medication and my mouth was checked thoroughly after each
dispensing. The other inmates were mostly non-verbal and I became the same, I slept a lot and was in a continual zombie state.

By the time I returned to my previous ward I felt my life was over and I decided to plan my suicide. While reconnecting with this period of my life during this study I painted myself planning to leave the earth through two forms of self harm and head towards the brilliant sun, I named the painting Out of Here (Figure 4.56).

![Painting Out of Here](image)

In the lower section of the painting I identified the buildings I would leave behind as (bottom left) the large psychiatric hospital, (above) my work place, (to the right) a house where I had unsuccessfully tried to comply by living with a man, and (lower right) my parent’s home. I wanted to be away from all these places as I had believed none of these places were conducive to my lesbian identity, thereby detrimental to my mental health and well-being. Feelings of hopelessness, my reclusive behaviour within the hospital and my suicidal thoughts lasted some time. However, my overall psychological state was to eventually change significantly, instigated by my making a small drawing. These events are recorded in this 1996 story.

**Story written 1996**

After a few weeks I was transferred back to my original ward. I became more and more withdrawn, slow and quiet. I had become totally reliant on
verbal prompts for everything, food, medication, appointments and bedtime. I didn't need to think for myself anymore, it wasn't necessary. If the hospital doors had been flung open and a red carpet laid out for me to leave the hospital I would not go, for I was no longer equipped to cope with all the trappings of outside everyday life. I had become successfully institutionalised.

A nurse commented one day on my body odour. I had forgotten about my body, no one had told me to wash so I hadn't. The nurse took it upon herself to run a bath and wash me every other day. The bathroom was in a huge empty pale green room with black and white floor tiles. The bath stood central in the room and faced a long high window. The nurse would gently wash my body with a hot soapy wash cloth and chat about her life. I wasn't listening and she knew I wasn't, I just lapped up the hot water on my body and watched the steam rise like smoke in front of the tall window. The bathing sessions became my ritual for physical pleasure; it reconnected me to my body.

I discovered a small room at the end of the ward that no one seemed to use. It had large bay windows on three sides which looked over lush green gardens with huge old vintage trees. Too cold for anyone to use, the stone cold chill of the room was just about tolerable in return for the isolation and peace. Curiously, I learned that the room was referred to as 'the sun room' and indeed had once lived up to its name prior to the trees reaching full maturity. Wrapped in a thick blanket and huddled in what became my favourite big chair, I spent all my time there gazing out onto the green splendour, drifting in and out of sleep.

The only disturbance I encountered was the occasional spate of occupational therapy to experience the joys of basket weaving, an occasional excursion to a local town café that the public didn't use because it was too regularly frequented by patients, and the fortnightly
session with a psychiatrist which often only lasted minutes. With the exception of these disturbances, my life became quiet and still. Absorbed in the warmth of my blanket and the panoramic view, I slid through time.

From the large windows I had been observing a branch of ivy growing week by week across the lower part of one of the windows. Each day revealed a miniscule change in the angle or the opening of a leaf as it travelled across the window. While its growth captivated me I was resentful of it impeding my view of the gardens. I felt that everything had been taken away from me, my freedom, my body and my mind. I could not tolerate having anything else taken away, especially not my view of the gardens. The growth of the ivy continued to fascinate me while also causing me to feel anxious. Each day it was the first thing I would look at. I became very familiar with its twisty stick shape and leaf make up. I came across some paper and coloured pencils and started to draw the ivy.

My eyesight was damaged from the medication and detail was hard to focus. I did one drawing of the ivy and a few days later I drew the ivy again. A nurse remarked with some surprise at the quality of the drawing. The next day a psychiatrist came to see my two drawings of the ivy. She said that she would refer me to the art therapy department within the hospital complex. I had never heard of ‘art therapy’ but I bargained with her that I would go only if I could substitute it for basket weaving. However, my real preference was to be left alone, I didn’t really want to go anywhere or do anything.

The ward sister issued me with an appointment time and directions to get to the art therapy department. Although the journey might have been a mere two hundred metres, the notion of stepping out of my routine was scary. Along the journey I met mad people I had never seen before and more gardens with beautiful flowers. The building complex included a music department, the art therapy department and a small shop. I was
thrilled to discover the shop and imagined all the treats I was going to buy from now on.

The ward sister had phoned ahead so as I opened the double swing doors to the art therapy department I was greeted by two friendly women.

I still have the image of the Ivy drawn in 1977 (Figure 4.57), however I do not have any of the images that I made in the psychiatric hospital’s art therapy department. Referring to previously written stories and from memory, I repainted the first picture I made in art therapy, named Dead Black Dog (Figure 4.58).

![Figure 4.54 Ivy](image1)

![Figure 4.55 Dead Black Dog](image2)

**Story written 1996**

'Dead Black Dog' tells the story of a family of black dogs like Labradors. They appeared from the outside to be a regular family and hung out together doing black dog stuff. But when the night time came all but one of the black dogs would turn into large ferocious wolves. Bearing their long white pointed teeth, the pack of wolves would set chase to the black dog in an instinctive drive to tear the dog into pieces. Every night the black dog would have to run for its life often using its agile quality to jump up trees or over high fences leaving the heavy set wolves snapping, howling and growling furiously below.
When daylight came all the wolves were transformed back into the black dog form and would have no recollection of the night events. Only the unchanged black dog would know what had taken place during the night. As the sun went down each evening the black dog would be in such great fear of what the night ahead would hold, having to think ahead of new tactics of survival, places to hide and heights to climb.

The black dog tried to tell the family what transitions happened nightly and of the terrible occurrence, but they laughed at the madness of the story and branded the dog 'the mad dog'. The black dog also tried to confide in other dogs that resided nearby but the neighbouring dogs repeated what a lovely family of kind dogs they all were and how ungrateful and sick the black dog was to tell such awful mad tales about such a nice family of dogs.

With no one believing or helping black dog, the horror of surviving the nights went on and on until one late afternoon as the sun started to go down, black dog lay down on a large round wool rug, exhausted and emotionally broken. As the sun slipped down behind the hills, with the wolves waiting to set chase, the black dog slipped into a deep, deep sleep and passed away into another realm.

In telling the story of the painting to the art therapist, I had indeed surprised myself that the story existed without my knowing. She seemed to like the story a lot, for she spent quite a lot of time asking and listening. If she had not spent the time asking me I would never had known the story was there. I felt it was quite a good yarn and left the Art Therapy department with a bounce of achievement in my step thinking I like art therapy.

The following session the art therapist asked me if I would like to continue looking at and talking about the picture. I thought it was a bit of
overkill but I liked the attention and thought she must either like me a lot or was a bit lost for something to do. I agreed and we sat together facing the painting. The art therapist again started to ask questions but this time they not only related to my picture and accompanying story, but also to my life at home and work. The art therapist asked me about the round rug in the painting, the one that the dead dog was lying on. She asked if it was familiar to me, had I ever seen such a round rug with the patterns and fringed edge? I was surprised. I thought I had just painted a rug, but it was a definite rug, in fact the exact same old rug from the family home. I had a close attachment to the rug and would knap or daydream on it, watching and feeling the warmth of the fire on cold winter nights. The rug was also a place where I entered another realm to be away from the family. The dead black dog took refuge in the same round rug and slipped away into another realm. This realisation made the dead black dog me and me the dead black dog. So then, why was I dead? Who were the other black dogs in the story and why did they change into a pack of attacking wolves at night?

What was once just a silly picture of a dead dog on a round rug, turned into a good yarn, then began to turn into a black hole of very scary and confused emotions. The emotions included betrayal of my family by the mere mention of them. At the end of the session I remember feeling dizzy, drunk and sick. I could not think straight and I felt as though something terrible had happened. I just wanted to lie down and die.

Sitting telling a relative stranger about my family life felt very uncomfortable. Talking about my feelings and myself felt totally unfamiliar. However, insight was unfolding, research was beginning, the process was happening and connections were being made from this point on. I began to understand that what was depicted in the picture I made, and the story I told, was of no accident, nor was it intentional, but emerged from a place within me that wanted to express something and
had suddenly found an outlet; it was sneaking things out in a code that with the therapist’s help, I could decode. Once this process is recognised and acknowledged one can’t undo that acknowledgement, and anyway, I found it fascinating. With the two art therapists we launched into researching the pack of black wolf - dogs and all my further images with twice daily sessions.

My time in psychiatric hospital suddenly turned into a project of self-enquiry. Art therapy provided me with an expressive outlet through image-making, enabling me to externalise my emotions into pictures. Art therapy also equipped me with the tools through which I could analyse my artwork, making better sense of myself and my situation. After many months of intense twice daily art therapy, I was able to decipher my images and make meaning of them as a way of gaining self-understanding. I began to engage with other patients and enquire about their images.

Through the art therapy experience I gained the ability to explore not only the symbolic meaning of my images but also the symbolic relevance involved in the image making process. The influence of art therapy assisted my creative self-exploration over the past three decades. It is this process that still provides me with the ability to understand the meaning of the four symbols, black tape, red cross, white mask, and straight lines and these follow below.

The symbol of the black tape over my mouth correlated with the images of my mouth stuffed with bandage and medical records together with the image of a huge pill filling my mouth. Although these images may represent many life experiences where I have felt silenced, the silencing I experienced from having been a patient in psychiatric hospital in the late 1970’s seemed most significant for me during this part of the self investigation. In the psychiatric system I was silenced by medication, removal from society and the psycho-pathologisation of my sexuality. Upon leaving hospital I was further silenced by social stigma and family shame around mental illness.

I scrutinised my medical records for the period of my four psychiatric admissions. While reading one of the more disparaging diagnostic reports (Figure 4.59), I began to rewrite the report. I found this rewriting to be both an empowering and a clarifying
process and called it **Rewriting My Medical Record** (Figure 4.60); it can be viewed alongside the original 1978 clinical record (Figure 4.59).

**Red Cross**

I wanted to investigate why a red cross had appeared over the face in **Portrait Crossed Out** (Figure 4.43). I believed it was Susan who had painted the abstract red cross over Joyce’s figurative portrait. I questioned if this action was simply Susan demonstrating her frustration with Joyce’s tight figurative style as the above conversation between the two had demonstrated, or if there was further significance in the symbolism of the red cross over the face.

I investigated the red cross by repeatedly and spontaneously drawing the theme of red cross over a face in my study journal. The initial journal images saw the red cross and face in a similar ratio to **Portrait Crossed Out** (Figure 4.43) as seen in the journal images (Figure 4.61), and these images gave me no further clue as to the meaning of the red cross. However, in a further study journal image, the red cross was considerably larger and almost obliterating a small figure (Figure 4.62). When looking at this later journal image I experienced a strong bodily response which to me indicated the image contained relevance.
I interpreted the small figure as representing me as a child and the large cross as my overwhelming feeling of my being ‘wrong’, as if as a child I felt ‘wrong’ and therefore ‘crossed out’. Intertextual links led me to an old photograph of myself and an old newspaper clipping with me in it. I scanned both the photograph and the newspaper clipping into the computer and digitally placed a cross over the face. The red cross over the face in each image strongly resonated. The photograph Sports Cup Winner (Figure 4.63) was of me having won the annual school sports cup for the overall sports person at the age of ten. Upon being awarded the cup at the sports event I immediately ran home excited to show my mother my prize sports cup. However, my mother could not hide her lack of enthusiasm for my achievement. I wanted her to take a photograph of my prize in the same way she would when any one of my three brothers had won a sports trophy. My mother’s chores took priority and it was a few days before my sports outfit was re-washed and she met my persistent request to take a photo.
The second image Swords Boy Girl (Figure 4.64) was of a newspaper clipping. Every year on the 1st of May, the May Day Fair saw all the primary school girls dressing up in frilly white frocks to carry the long train of the newly announced ‘May Day Queen’ while all the boys danced the traditional ‘Sword Dance’. I was accepted to be the first Swords Boy girl possibly due to my refusal to wear a white frilly frock and this resulted in being photographed for the local newspaper. Whilst I was thrilled with the newspaper picture my mother was unimpressed. In my pre-adolescent years I found the expectations of being a girl very confusing and I could not always understand the distinction that was made between my three brothers and myself, as this story explains.

**Story written 1996**

In my early years I did not remember being treated any differently to my two brothers. We all had a pair of ‘Ladybird’ brand navy blue swimming trunks and on the occasional English warm summer weekend dad would fit the rose from the watering can onto the garden hose and loop it around and around the washing line and we would run and play under the shower of water. In the cooler months the three of us would play indoors with our collection of metal ‘Dinky’ toy cars, lining them up in traffic queues, fixing breakdowns and making makeshift garages out of shoe boxes.

My third brother was born when I was five years old and now we were a family of six, Mum and dad, three boys and a girl. My youngest brother had just started to walk when my father won forty seven pounds from his stake in his office football pools. He was not a gambler but on a draftsman’s wage in 1961, forty seven pounds was a strike. He was so happy that in the excitement he pledged that each of us would receive thirteen Christmas presents. … On Christmas day there were four large brown carry bags each with our names on, brimming full of thirteen presents.

As we eagerly unwrapped the presents each checking out what the others had got. A light caught my eye and I looked up to see one brother holding
a torch and shining it around the room, then the other brother joined him and two beams of light danced like fairy lights that had escaped from the Christmas tree. I searched for my package in the shape of a torch with no avail. Instead I opened a larger parcel. It was a pale pink lamp with a white lamp shade. A small button on the base clicked it on and off and the batteries hid in the centre shaft. By the time I reached the end of my thirteen presents I realised that I had no torch, I had a lamp. I was very confused to why the gift should pose such a problem. It had batteries, a bulb and shone out light as did my brothers torches, but while my brothers ran around with their torches shining then into dark places, I remained still with a similar object but unable to do any of the exciting activities they did. My mother explained that I was to put the lamp beside my bed as it was a bedside lamp. I instantly felt I got a bad deal and was not able to join and play the torch game with my brothers.

The distinction of my gender felt forced upon me like trying to walk in someone else’s shoes. I so regretted the day that my mother started to accept my Aunty Dorothy’s offer to pass on my slightly older cousin’s loud and vibrant frocks. I wanted to remain in my brothers cast off jeans and shirts. The brightly coloured thick cotton frocks with full skirt made me feel very silly. I could not relax and be myself in them. Wearing the frocks disabled me for I was unable to roll and fool around with my brothers without exposing my underwear. I dreaded everyday that my mother might insist that I wore one of the frocks.

I could not grasp my mother’s sudden interest in my hair. I had always had a short back and sides cut the same as the boys, but for some strange and unexplained reason suddenly my hair and my hair alone, had to change. I was horrified at what I saw happen in front of my very eyes through the hair salon mirror, but I felt powerless to say anything for fear of disappointing my excited mother. I now had a head of curls through which I didn’t recognise myself. My mother was so thrilled with
the hair-do, I don't remember being asked if I liked it. Once home I was to sit on the garden swing posing as photos were taken by mother. I remember not wanting my bothers to see me for they would surely laugh at me.

I began to dread both Christmas and birthdays as my mother tried to give appropriate gifts to her girl child. My ninth birthday was certainly one I had not foreseen. As I unwrapped the enormous structure with mum and dad in excited suspense, the blank expression on my face and my inability to speak must have given some sort of a clue. I stared at the two shades of green large metal pram complete with hood, large doll and blankets. ... I felt devastated, confused, embarrassed and lost.

If I wanted to play and have fun I would go to my brothers room. There I could romp around in the chaos, play with guns, cars, bow and arrow, dress up in cowboy outfit or simply play, fight and roll around laughing with them. They would never come into my room to play, why would they?

Dad made us things constantly, mostly out of wood. He made us a go-cart out of timber vegetable boxes and finally the vintage dolls pram came into its first use as he disassembled it to gain a good strong set of wheels for the go-cart. I loved the go-cart and felt justified in calling it mine by the fact that the four wheels belonged to me.

A general feeling that I was ‘wrong’ presided over my childhood. I didn’t think I was a girl as I didn’t do things that girls did, neither did I look like other girls. I knew I was not a boy because I had seen my brother’s genitalia when we all bathed together as small kids. So I adopted the name ‘misfit’ to describe my gendered self. As I neared teenage years my mother’s frantic attempts to ‘pretty-me-up’ had sent me running. During the study I painted my memory of my mother’s desired reflection of me as a ‘proper’ feminine girl/woman in That’s Not Me (Figure 4.65).
At seventeen I bought a motorbike, full protective leathers and cropped my hair short, my mother gave up trying to change me. My recognition of my mother’s disappointment is depicted in a performed photograph where, at 50 years old, I openly confront my only-daughter / ‘boyish’ status in Mum’s Only Girl (Figure 4.66). Making this image felt liberating, as if coming out to my mother about my ‘boyish’ traits that had caused our relationship to be so strained in earlier years.

Continuing along the gender script theme, I made another performed photograph where I ‘tried on’ both masculine and feminine, performing both in the one image in Boy Meets Girl (Figure 4.67). In the process of making the photograph, as I switched from suit to dress, I was aware of how different I felt in both attires and although I wear neither in my day to day wear, I found that I was more comfortable in the suit and tie than the dress; wearing the dress made me feel as though I was a player in a drag show.
In summary, the red cross represented many situations where I perceived myself to not be complying with social conventions. The red cross symbolised my digression from traditional gendered scripts and my inability to kowtow to ‘feminine’ conventions. Some of the images that emerged from investigating red cross also acknowledged others expectations and disappointments in whom I had become, effectively, a daughter crossed out.

An artwork made during the study process and called Discounted Dissident (Figure 4.68), incorporated both the symbols of black tape and red cross with their respective descriptive words ‘silenced’ and ‘wrong’.

**White Mask**

As I was investigating the symbols of black tape, red cross, and straight lines, the symbol of a white mask also appeared in my study journal with some frequency and
alongside the other three symbols. I wanted to investigate the significance of the white mask, what it symbolised, its expression and purpose. For this investigation further artwork was made.

When I commenced the investigative painting of the white mask, it seemed imperative that the surface of the white mask was shiny and smooth, like highly glazed porcelain and also opaque so as to create an effective visual barrier to what lay behind the white mask. It was my desire to create this particular surface that provided some clues as to white mask’s meaning. In the early stages of a painting the shiny surface of the mask can be seen photographed from an angle (Figure 4.69). The appeal of a shiny surface provided intertextual links to a past painting where ten layers of glaze formed the imperative shiny surface in With All Left Unsaid (Figure 4.70). This represented family dinners past and present where issues were repressed causing tensions illustrated by red energetic lines under the table, while on the top of the table the shiny melamine surface demonstrated all that is easily wiped clean. The surface quality and meaning in With All Left Unsaid when applied to white mask’s shiny surface resonated, and provided the meaning that nothing could stick to, or blemish the white mask’s surface. The opaque quality ensured its concealing role.

I was also intrigued as to why the white mask had minimal expression. In order to experience how I would respond to being white mask, I set up a photo shoot and took an image of myself as the unblemished white mask (Figure 4.71).
My response to being white mask was as bland as that of white mask. With eyes absent and mouth minimal, white mask seemed unemotional, lacking in personality, as if just having come off a mass production line. White mask revealed nothing, offered nothing, expressed nothing. However, white mask excelled at concealing and with its stand or handle, could be taken up and used at a moment’s notice in the study journal (Figure 4.72), or equally depicted as a floating figure (Figure 4.73) as if having been brought in to perform where the floating figure could not. Therefore the white mask was used by other selves to conceal as well as perform.
Having discovered the meaning and purpose of the white mask, I then wanted to investigate what the mask concealed. It was my feeling that something frightening lay behind the white mask as is evidenced in Figure 4.74 and 4.75.

Following the above reflective drawings I found that the investigation of the white mask led to its demise, revealing that which it concealed (Figure 4.76).

To gain further clarity I began work on a large canvas allowing enough room to explore what the mask concealed. The composition of the painting Behind White Mask (Figure 4.77) took form immediately and was completed in five days.
The white mask was painted tilted enough to one side to privilege the viewer and reveal the selves it concealed. Some of the selves are reminiscent of selves in previous paintings. Skeleton, Star and Screamer from *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19) are in similar positions. The middle figure with head tilted back was reminiscent of *Massively Medicated* (Figure 4.51); another figure appeared peeping out from behind the base of the mask and it seemed as if all the other figures were behind this figure. Using the painting *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19) as a point of reference, where selves almost sheltered behind the protection of Joyce, I surmised that the self peeping out from the base of the white mask was Joyce. This suggested that white mask had a role in protecting or shielding Joyce and her entourage, all of which were symbolised by the red cross.

I questioned the need for protection. What did the mask protect Joyce and the other selves from? The key may be found between the painting *Behind the White Mask* (Figure 4.77) and a study journal image (Figure 4.78) where white mask and what seemed to be *Screamer* appear together with red cross.
As if seen from above, the viewer is again provided a privileged position, permitting what lay behind the mask be made visible. Over Screamer’s face is red cross, one prong of the cross pierces through a heart and I construed that as Screamer’s heart. Of significance is that the pierced heart is covering Screamer’s eye. As I contemplated the relevance of white mask, red cross and Screamer’s eye covered by a pierced heart, an old story came to mind. In turn this story ignited the memory of three past artworks (Figure 4.79, 4.80 & 4.81) all of which were made in 1982 in close succession.

When I was about fifteen, the family gathered to watch an evening movie on television. About a third of the way through the
movie I watched enthralled as two women started to kiss. At this point my mother immediately jumped up and announcing her disgust, switched the television off. I was beside myself; my first precious image of those like me had been ripped away. I could hardly contain myself, but I did. My mothers reference of disgust was also a reference about me, her only daughter. I remember feeling a great sense of loss for the image I needed so much and shame that I was also disgusting. I became very depressed for several months after.

At twenty six I was at art school studying in a Degree in Fine Art Painting. The art college boasted its flavour of expressionism, especially abstract expressionistic style. At the top of the three story complex I shared a large studio with several other students, and as we went about trying to work out what to paint and how to paint, our ideas would often converge. Every two weeks the head tutor selected what he considered to be a well achieved painting to hang in prize position on the large white wall at the very top of the stairwell. We all worked hard and wanted to see our painting hanging in the prize place.

While at art college I had my first sexual encounter and became deeply involved and enthralled in the erotic pleasures with my female lover. Other women in my studio were painting their sexual activities and fantasies in a sort of Chagall style with naked men and women entwined and flying with pleasure, sometimes a few beasts accompanied them for additional symbolic undertones. I was influenced by the erotic outpourings of sexual energy but decided to try a more concealed cubist style.

My painting of my lesbian lover and I, partially clothed and in gentle embrace was set in our bedroom. Although much tamer than
other students’ paintings, it excited me as I had made what I had not been able to find, an image of passion that I could relate to. The tutorials had begun with a vibrant and vivacious start but when my slot came and I turned my painting around, the room fell silent – no words were spoken. I waited for assistance from my tutor but he fell unusually silent. Eventually, overriding the two central figures, his comment was on the window décor behind the figures, “nice blinds” he called out, at which all the students burst with laughter.

A few days later the same tutor came to see me in my studio. He explained that he could not continue to be my tutor as he no longer related to me and I would be assigned someone new. My new tutor said she was a lesbian but we never really got on.

Determined to express myself (in the expressionistic college) but not wanting to encounter further ridicule, I started to paint in a totally different style, an abstract style with no recognisable imagery. I had a new lover whose beautiful black body made mine look translucent. The tonal contrast of our skin and the full sensations as she moved inside me gave way to my first abstract expressionistic painting. My tutorial went well as I described the aesthetic composition omitting all personal details. The painting was hung in the prize position for two weeks and with this success I continued with my new found coded system, expressing all the heartaches and pleasures of lesbian sex, love and passion in full abstract expressionistic style.

Returning to the study journal image (Figure 4.78), this image may well have represented many instances where responses to homophobia have resulted in feeling humiliation or pain. However, at this point I was drawn to the significance of the pierced heart and the positioning where it covered Screamer’s eye, and it was the
significance of this positioning that linked the study journal image, my story and three accompanying past images. Starved of lesbian visual representation I had made a painting of myself and my first lover in moderate embrace (Figure 4.79). The painting was publicly mocked and my previously supportive tutor not only lead the mockery but further rejected me. What I desired to visualise had become equated with pain, rejection, and perceived by others as ‘wrong’. As I clarified earlier, Screamer is symbolic of intolerable pain and in this instance, the pain was the result of homophobia which resulted in defeat of both depicting my desired images and making lesbian visible. The defeat was depicted by the red cross which crossed out the face, representing the ‘wrong’ sexual attraction, and the pierced heart that obscured the eye of Screamer represented the pain endured with making a lesbian image.

After this event at art college I felt judged as a court would judge and condemn a criminal. I drew a picture at the time (Figure 4.80) showing myself being scrutinised in a court-like setting (Figure 4.82), while also retreating into Foetus (Figure 4.83).

I surmise that through experiences like these I developed a protective mask, one that would shield me from humiliation, shame and the pain caused by others’ homophobic attitudes, and one that would conceal my desire to visually depict lesbian experience and visualise lesbianism. By adopting an abstract artistic style I was able to visually express my sexuality without homophobic repercussions, albeit in a coded visual system such as Feeling Faith (Figure 4.81). Overall, the white mask concealed aspects of self deemed unacceptable while also permitting the expression and experience of selves from behind white mask. The white mask was therefore a product of prejudice and discrimination, and if Joyce was behind the white mask with her entourage, then perhaps Susan was partly the white mask that protected.
The abstract style of painting first adopted in 1982 became entrenched. While abstraction continued to provide me the freedom of expression, it effectively concealed lesbianism from public scrutiny. Six years on from the initial adoption of abstract style this 1988 painting made during my training as an art therapist, Self Portrait - Femininity (Figure 4.84), demonstrated the continuation of masking lesbianism to visually express.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 4.78 Self Portrait - Femininity

However, the abstract style did not always satisfy my expressive needs nor my desire to visualise lesbian, as this previously written story revealed.

**Story written 1996**

Through exhibitions and competitions my developed style of abstract painting was a success. Despite this success, I often felt starved of visual representation of lesbians and erotic imagery. Away from the taunts of others and in the privacy of my home I decided to make my own. Using my imagination and some anatomy books together with a mirror and my own reflection I set about making my visual pleasure.

I found it very confronting to visually depict lesbianism. I came across many thresholds of taboo in my portrayal of anonymous lesbian lovers; aspects of sexual activity I had never seen in books, television or art. Having completed several pen and ink drawings I would put them away in a
folder, inside a case and there they stayed for years. At one time I pulled them out and made some photocopies and gave a couple of images to close lesbian friends but I did not want to be seen by my lesbian community as sex crazed.

Several years later, I had another attempt at representing lesbian visually. ... [at the time] a new lesbian club had just opened and the collective was calling for lesbian artists to provide artworks for the walls of the large venue.

I took my slide projector and slides of my paintings along to the collective's meeting. Although all the work was subtle in erotic content, I had placed the two most subtle images at the fore and the slightly more risqué ones to show last. As the first projected image bounced onto the wall, a couple of the lesbian collective said “Oh no”, with no further clues I flashed up the second image. The collective were a gasp and all said “Oh no sorry we can not have these on our walls, it would put women off coming”, I personally thought it would help women with “coming”. ... lesbophobia seemed so deeply seated that even subtle images of lesbian desire can be too overwhelming for some lesbians.

One of the paintings which was rejected by the lesbian collective for the lesbian club can be seen below (Figure 4.85)

![Lesbian Lovers #1](Figure 4.85 Lesbian Lovers #1)
Despite the above negative responses to my images, I have occasionally drawn lesbian erotic themes (Figure 4.86 & 4.87), yet it is clear that lesbophobia is so dominant that, I have made the images small enough to conceal and I have refrained from showing them to anyone other than close friends.

Ironically, in London in the mid 1970’s the printed bumper sticker announcing “Lesbians are Everywhere” gave me reassurance and hope that I would find others like me. At the time of my first psychiatric admission at the age of 22 years old in 1977, I had not knowingly met a lesbian. During this study process I painted the contrast between the reassuring message from the bumper stickers and my actual experience of utter isolation. The study painting Lesbians Are Everywhere (Figure 4.88) illustrated the slogan stretching boldly across the sky indicating lesbians abundant. My disillusionment was depicted through the slogan emerging from a flying pig’s bottom and reading “Lesbians are everywhere, and pigs may fly”, while an image of myself looking out over the abyss represented isolation.
As a psychiatric patient on an art therapy treatment program, I was unable to visually depict that which I had not seen, namely a lesbian. I was also apprehensive about visually depicting an aspect of me voiced as “disgusting” by others. I questioned whether I looked like a lesbian, and if so, what aspect of me was lesbian looking? Towards the end of my psychiatric admissions some of my questions were answered, as this story reveals.

**Story written 1996**

My first verbal utterance of my lesbianism was at the age of 21 when talking to an ex-workmate Stephanie who had left work to study. … [Sometime later] I had been in [the] psych hospital for a few weeks, the medication had caught up with me and I was almost unable to walk or talk. I was cold and tired all the time. Curled up in a chair, I glanced sideways at a line of nurses laughing [and] I recognised Stephanie in uniform amongst the nurses and was immediately concerned whether Stephanie had told anyone of my disclosure. ….

There was one nurse that I liked. She would sometimes sit with me, she seemed calm in my company, she didn’t try to disturb me, she
didn’t ask questions or try to chat; she would just sit with me. Her name was Lillian. Occasionally Lillian and another nurse Mary would take a group of us past the high dark stone walls of the hospital and down to a town café. I was aware of Lillian and Mary’s closeness as they leaned into each other gripping each others arm as they walked and chattering with intermittent bursts of laughter. I enjoyed their vibrancy and watched them with intrigue as we slowly scuffled behind them to the café. ...I had been worried about whether Stephanie had told the other nurses about my being lesbian and what would happen to me if the medics found out. After all if I could be incarcerated and drugged for no reason, what would they do to me if they knew I was a lesbian? The next time I saw Lillian I asked if we could go and talk in private. We used an empty room and with much hesitation I told her about my predicament, about my lesbianism, about Stephanie showing up and about my fear of ‘treatment’. She was very blasé and seemed to brush the whole thing off in one statement implying not to worry. I did worry, I had told my second person. Could I trust her, what would she do with this information and more importantly what would the medics do to me?

The next time I saw Lillian she was in normal clothes. A patient had given me a message that Lillian was waiting to speak to me at the front door of my hospital wing. She looked excited and happy. She told me that she and Mary had been asked to leave nursing as it had been found out that they were in a lesbian relationship. Mary was pregnant and so they were going to move in together and have the baby. She had come to say goodbye. She gave me a hug and ran off waving. I wanted to call out after her “take me with you - I want to come with you”. I went back to the ward with a smile, my first lesbians were under my nose all the time ‘Lillian and Mary’, how about that.
My view of lesbians changed because of Lillian and Mary. Instead of thinking I was the only lesbian amongst a total heterosexual population, I started to look at all women as having lesbian potential and would give them a possibility rating based on the Lillian and Mary model. Lillian was short, rounded and slightly rugged in her looks, with short hair and didn’t appear to wear make up. Mary was tall, very feminine, with long curly black hair and perfectly applied make-up with a different set of adorned earrings each day. Based on the Lillian and Mary model of lesbian detection, I had eighty percent of all patients and nurses in my ward rated potentially lesbian by the end of the week. …

The Psych hospital had offered me a broader view of diversity amongst others and the opportunity to express myself through art therapy. However, I found it even more difficult to survive my conservative family where adding to my silenced lesbianism was now my silenced madness. My having been in psychiatric hospital being [a] major family taboo and one that I was clearly instructed not to utter. One night I drove into my nearest large town, not for any other reason than to create physical distance between myself and my stack of medication that tempted me as a way out of the conservative conformity of family life. I can’t remember how I arrived, but I found myself in an emergency counselling service talking to an older white-haired woman about my inability to find other lesbians. With my permission she called a lesbian and gay group and two people were on their way to talk with me. I was excited but also very nervous - I was about to talk openly with others like me.

First a skinny small young man walked in followed by an extremely large masculine looking woman. The man barely got a word in as the deep voiced lesbian began to fire questions at me asking, “How do you know you are a lesbian …have you had any boyfriends …what do
you want from us?” I didn’t know how to answer these questions and I felt overwhelmed and intimidated by the lesbian and identified more with the small man sitting silently with arms crossed. For the first time I doubted my lesbianism, I felt so different to this lesbian in whom I had yearned to find a mirrored image of myself. Having searched for lesbian existence for most of my life, I found myself questioning my identification as a lesbian for the first time...

In the first half of my twenties my isolation and confusion around lesbianism remained. I continued to question, where are other lesbians, what do they look like, was I a lesbian, and are there others like me?

Feelings of isolation and identity confusion together with experiences of homophobia and secrecy undoubtedly caused my mental health stress. During my four periods of hospitalisation the subject of my sexual identity was not approached by clinicians despite medical records revealing diagnostic notes on my possible “homosexuality” or “psychosexual conflict”. Although I experienced art therapy as a rewarding treatment program, I was fearful to bring issues of lesbianism into the psychiatric setting; neither did I have the visual means to picture lesbianism. In art college my figurative painting of lesbianism was mocked by homophobes and my male tutor ceased to be my teacher. The lesbian theme continued in code in my artwork, and thereafter I was rewarded for my abstract style both at art college and in a career as an exhibiting visual artist. However, my abstract art did not always fulfil my need for in-depth personal enquiry, nor did it satisfy my desire for lesbian visual representation. I needed both the abstract and the figurative style of artwork.

In summarising the white mask, it concealed selves I had perceived to be unacceptable by the measures of ‘normal’, ‘sane’ and ‘proper’. It concealed selves I believed had been crossed out, and selves I felt had been silenced. The white masks smooth shiny surface ensured an unblemished façade, the non-descript production line mask eradicates peculiarities and alleviates marks of trauma, allowing participation in social life. The mask of Susan concealed the emotions of Joyce; likewise, the abstract style concealed the forbidden figurative lesbian. However, the space behind the white mask
provided room to investigate, encounter and celebrate my awareness of my multiple subjectivities.

**Straight Lines**

Having interpreted three of the four symbols and suggested their relevance in relation to my self perceptions, I next investigated the symbol of the straight lines to ascertain its meaning in relation to how I perceived myself. Out of the four symbols that had arose from the painting *Portrait Crossed Out* (Figure 4.43), I was most perplexed about the meanings of straight lines. Only by further exploration through making study journal images and further paintings did I comprehend some of the relevance of straight lines regarding my self perception.

Straight lines had appeared in the background simultaneously with black tape and red cross in *Portrait Crossed Out* (Figure 4.43). Searching for meaning, I traced straight lines back to when they first appeared during the study and found that in this study journal image, straight lines connected floating figure and white mask which appeared at opposite edges of the paper (Figure 4.89). A relationship between floating figure and white mask was mentioned earlier in this section where floating figure operated white mask like a puppet (Figure 4.73).

![Figure 4.89 Straight Lines Forming](image)

In the study journal image where straight line had first appeared (Figure 4.89), the lines appeared to come out of the floating figure’s head in a black chaotic zigzag, straighten out uniformly, before going into white mask. The connection between straight lines and white mask seems almost mutually reliant. Not only did straight lines support white mask in many study journal images and paintings by providing a platform for white
mask (Figures 4.72, 4.77 & 4.90), straight lines also was directly effected by white mask or visa versa, that is, when one broke up, so did the other (Figure 4.91).

Still seeking relevance to self perception, I further investigated straight lines through a new series of paintings. I made three paintings in succession over two days. In the first painting (Figure 4.92) I painted black tape as a background upon which red cross was overlayed. I then painted straight lines directly covering the hub of red cross. In contemplating the images, straight lines had the appearance of having been stuck on and reminded me of a sticky plaster or tape placed over a wound. Again it became important for the straight lines surface to be smooth, shiny and opaque. I had glazed the surface of the straight lines with as many coats of varnish as I had with white mask, and realised that straight lines and white mask had merged into one symbol.

Figure 4.92 Four Symbols Merge

Figure 4.90 Four Symbols Intact

Figure 4.91 Four Symbols Breaking Up

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Still seeking meaning in relation to self perception, in the second painting I literally zoomed in on straight lines which seemed to cause red cross to calm (Figure 4.93), however, this painting had no further relevance to straight lines other than a stepping stone to the next image.

![Figure 4.93 Straight Lines](image)

In the third painting I zoomed in even further, taking black tape and red cross out of the picture, and magnifying the straight lines/white mask area (Figure 4.94). As I contemplated, my eyes jumped from one colour stripe to another, from green to fawn and the words “conform” and “conceal” leapt into my head, and without question, I began writing these words across the canvas in white paint (Figure 4.95). While doing this task, first monotony and then drudgery set in as I laboured the repetitive writing.

![Figure 4.94 Conform Conceal](image)  ![Figure 4.95 Conform Conceal (detail)](image)
The drudgery of writing ‘conform’ and ‘conceal’ across the painting (Figure 4.94) inspired a study journal image (Figure 4.96) which depicted a figure in a blue shirt holding white mask by the handle and walking along the length of the lines. The image was viewed slightly from above, making part of the face visible but also showing the straight lines to be never ending as if she walked the straight path of never-ending drudgery. The drudgery implied that conforming to walking along the straight lines and concealing by the mask were not necessarily generated from a desire of the self, more so, that this was a mandatory or enforced path.

![Figure 4.96 Drudgery](image)

The straight lines and the word ‘conform’ provided intertextual links to an old painting with similar line and colour configuration which had ‘conform’ in its title, *Conform Express* (Figure 4.97). The lines represented large power systems that impose order, while the line that zigzags across was resisting or defying the imposed regime. The stripes had reminded me of the uniforms forced to be worn by the Jewish people in the Nazi concentration camps. The connection between the stripes of massive power regimes could explain the drudgery depicted in the figure walking the lines. However, in this case, the massive power regime was not that of a Nazis regime but of the power of dominant discourses that imposed the status quo of ‘normal’, ‘sane’ and ‘natural’, and the life of drudgery for those who do not fit, or who attempt to fit, the status quo.
For instance, the presumption that I was heterosexual, and that my partner was a man was made with such tremendous frequency that on any single day I seemed to correct someone’s assumption by declaring my sexual identity. Homosexuality is a regime so ingrained that in my exhaustion I sometimes found that I complied without comment and simply accepted the extra video card handed to me for my “husband”, I complied in filling out the joint couple’s form with my partner by taking the column that says “male”, I said nothing when a woman who sold me a car battery told me to “get my husband to help”. I said nothing when asked why I was not married to my partner of ten years. This continued imposed heterosexism became drudgery. These three short stories came to mind.

**Three Stories written 1999**

At 40 years old I made an appointment to see a woman GP for a pap smear in the new location to where my partner had recently moved. I entered the doctor’s surgery the conversation preceded;

“What can I do for you?”

“I would like a pap smear test”

“When did you last have sex?”

“Two days ago, why?”

“What method of contraception do you use?”

“Oh no sorry, I’m a lesbian”

“Well when did you last have sex with a man?”

“I haven’t had sex with a man”

“No, I mean, when was the last time you had sex with a man?”
"I have always had sex with women"
"Oh, you are a virgin then"
"No, I am a lesbian"
"Well your medical term is 'a virgin' if you have never had sex with a man, and if you have not had sex with men there is no need for you to have a pap smear".

***

My partner and I were experiencing relationship issues so we booked an appointment to see a marriage guidance counsellor as the waiting list to see a feminist therapist was up to two years long. I had previously checked that they would see a lesbian couple. The receptionist gave us a form with no recommendation on how to tackle the gender specific questions. The left of the form was for the female to complete and the right of the form was for the male. Neither my partner nor myself wanted to assume the 'male' by filling in the male side of the form and this complexity added to our stress.

We were shown into a counselling room and after a name introduction the counsellor immediately asked "so can you tell something about what it is like to be a lesbian that is different from being a normal person so I have some idea of how to tackle this one?" As we stumbled for answers, she started to tell us of her 'children', one who was a successful business woman and her son who was in the army. We left the session without having mentioned our issue which further impacted on our relationship difficulties.

***

When I applied for migration to Australia I was asked to have an interview with a psychiatrist to establish my level of current
mental stability. I was near completion of my post graduate training in art therapy and lived in a crowded house with other art therapy students, plus our various friends, lovers or partners. My personal art therapy tutor had supplied me with a glowing reference to take along to the appointment which included her comments on my excellent grades, full participation on the course and two successful clinical placements, one at a large psychiatric hospital.

The woman psychiatrist asked questions from her list on which she ticked boxes as I answered. All was going well until she asked; “Are you married?”

“No” I replied

“Are you living with someone?”

(I took this to mean are you having sex out of wedlock).

“No” I replied.

I did not volunteer my lesbian identity, for if she was homophobic my chances for migration might be ruined, and if she was not homophobic my having several lovers would most probably not advance my case.

A couple of days later I collected the sealed report to forward to immigration and decided to open the envelope. I read the psychiatrist’s report where she had “concerns about my ability to interact on a personal level” as she had noted that I was “not in a sexual relationship and lived alone in isolation”. In contrast, I contemplated my chaotic dwelling packed with people and my equally chaotic love life.

These three stories revealed how powerful discourses and individual’s assumptions affect the daily life of those who are marginalised by such discourses. The three stories
showed how people who are marginalised, or are negatively portrayed, might make compromises to achieve a simple task. The stories also described the relentless drudgery of continually having to state my sexual preference, and my partner’s gender while heterosexuality required no explanation.

Straight lines therefore, described the drudgery of conforming and complying with institutional conventions. Perhaps depicting drudgery not only depicted reluctantly kowtowing to conventions, but also the sometimes seeming absence of significant change within the larger systems of education, law, politics, health and the media viewed from the position of those living at the margins of conventions.

In summarising the four symbols investigated in this section, it was apparent that art-based research and intertextual links provided the method and momentum through which self perceptions could be investigated. In addition, the postmodern feminist approach to investigating subjectivity continually contested ‘truths’ embedded in the dualistic arrangement of my attributes which led to layers of meanings being revealed. In this section I demonstrated the postmodern feminist investigation by challenging oppositional ‘truths’ such as inner versus outer, wrong versus right, unheard versus heard, unacceptable versus acceptable, not seeking to reveal yet another alternative ‘truth’, but to demonstrate the epistemological and ontological instability. Through investigating the four symbols, this section demonstrated the constructedness of self perceptions, the changeability and self-shaping potential of subjectivity, and the mobility of subjectivity. Investigating the four symbols through a postmodern feminist frame demonstrated that when a meaning is applied to a symbol, it is not isolated from doctrine; it is not flattened to a solitary meaning neither is it unwavering or committed.

The postmodern feminist framework showed that meanings applied to symbols are constructed, multidimensional and transitionary. Therefore, symbols can never be understood as independent or secluded but are viewed as contingent and relational. Symbols can never be understood as genuine or known but are appreciated as approximate and multiple, and symbols can never be realised as static or constant but are seen as temporary and fluid. Furthermore, a postmodern feminist approach to investigating selves through the image making process has shown the process to be multilayered, as exploration moves through layer after layer after layer.
The third phase that followed was much shorter than the previous two phases, and arrived at a point of revisiting some of the initial elements from the beginning of the investigation. In this regard, the investigation seemed to offer a point to pause in data collecting, while recognising that a postmodern feminist self investigation can never be finished, completed or concluded.

**Phase three: Contesting borders**

In this third phase I again invited the dualities of Joyce/Susan, figurative/abstract to take part in making another integrative artwork. In the first phase the two integrative artworks *Breath of Life* (Figure 4.13) and *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19) had contested the neat dualistic duo by demonstrating multiple subjectivities. In the second phase, and through the integrative artwork *Portrait Crossed Out* (Figure 4.43), the exploration of four symbols and their meanings demonstrated how perceptions of selves were constructed, multi layered, and changeable. In this third and last phase, the self investigation continued through art based research and by the making of a fourth integrative artwork. Through this last integrative artwork, some of my self perceptions introduced at the start of the chapter were revisited and reconsidered. It became noticeable that changes and shifts had occurred through the postmodern feminist self investigation and new conceptualisations of subjectivities had transpired.

The aesthetic quality of the three previous integrative images, *Breath of Life*, *The Gathering* and *Portrait Crossed Out* (Figures 4.13, 4.19 & 4.43), had steered towards the more typical figurative style of Joyce and the more typical art material and size of Susan. For example, all three integrative images were by and large figurative artworks and all three were paintings on canvas. I was reminded here of the postmodern feminist critique of binarism which points out that “one term in the opposition must always be devalued” (Thornham 2001, p. 44). I had observed that the three integrative images thus far seemed to uphold this theory of binary oppositions. Firstly, in the figurative/abstract binarism, Joyce’s pictorial representation is more dominant while Susan’s abstraction seems devalued. Secondly, in the aesthetic binarism of size and materials, Susan’s larger artwork and paint on canvas dominates while Joyce’s small work on paper is unrepresented. A mode of critique utilised by postmodern feminist researchers seeks to represent those marginalised or overlooked by mainstream discourses while remaining immersed in those same seemingly impartial discourses, thus exposing the discourse as value laden (Derrida 1976, 1978; Foucault 1977). Therefore I sought to investigate my own dualistic creative practices that had become overlooked in the research process by
intentionally turning the tables and representing the marginalised and devalued aspects of my own creative expression and bringing them into central view in the research study. Furthermore, in contemplating the production of a fourth integrative image, I insisted that Joyce’s typical small size of artwork and dry art materials become predominant while Susan’s abstract style be also detectable, all the while remaining attentive to reflexive outcomes.

I chose an old used yellow cardboard folder, from which I roughly cut out a rectangle shape, and I opened a box of oil pastels. Both the card and drawing material were such as Joyce might use. I then contemplated an abstract style such as Susan might depict. However, as this reflexive note explained, the image did not come easily,

*Reflexive note in study journal.*

This seemed to pose a difficult task and I procrastinated for several weeks. This new integrated artwork was never going to simply “flow” out of me, and so it had to be intentionally produced. On the yellow card I drew a thick black border. It felt like trying to force two kids that had fallen out with one another long ago to play together in the same room. The thick black boarder seemed to lock the door to force the two to play along.

**Integrative Artwork 4 - Same Shadow**

Eventually the artwork was started and then completed in less than an hour, considerably less time than any one of the previous four integrated artworks, some of which took a week. The last part of the artwork to be completed was a spontaneous piece of writing scribed with a red ball point pen on a space at the bottom of the card which said, “The same shadow falls on us both, we just colour it differently”. This provided no immediate meaning but when eventually investigated, it did give way to the artwork titled *Same Shadow* (Figure 4.98).
Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) depicts two long rectangles in two hues of blue with a yellow/orange/red ring circling around the two blue rectangles. The background is two tone pale grey and a thick black border frames the image although the writing remains outside the border. Using The Gathering (Figure 4.19) as a point of reference, shades of blue on the shirts of Susan and Joyce correspond with the shades of blue and positioning of the two rectangles in Same Shadow (Figure 4.98). The two tone background in The Gathering also corresponded with the two tone background in Same Shadow albeit more distinct in The Gathering. The colours of the ‘figures’ and their two tone backgrounds therefore correspond in both The Gathering and Same Shadow (Figures 4.19 & 4.98). This practice of paralleling a theme through distinctly diverse artwork styles has already been given some explanation in phase two where intertextual links revealed that at art college, homophobic responses to my depiction of lesbianism resulted in my continuing the theme, but enveloping it in an abstract coded visual system. However, I had three enquiries,

- Why is there a resistance requiring such a black border in order to capture the two ‘figures’?
- What is the ring that circles them?
- What does the written passage mean?

Another intertextual link helped further facilitate the investigation.

The resistance to the figures meeting requiring a retaining thick black border had only occurred on the small sized paper artwork. There was no sign that such a retaining border was necessary on the three previous integrative artworks on canvas. This indicated that the quality of the artwork surface (roughly cut piece of yellow folder),
together with the materials (oil pastel and red ball point pen) in *Same Shadow* (Figure 4.98) was a significant factor that required the figures to be locked in by such a border.

A story that I had previously written in 1996 revealed that a degree of elitism segregated my visual art influenced artwork and my art therapy influenced artwork.

**Story written in 1996**

In my first year of my art degree I had noticed the distain on the faces of two tutors when I told them that I was studying fine art in order to gain entry onto post graduate art therapy training. But during my three year fine art degree I forgot about art therapy and gradually learned about the aesthetic play with line, form, colour and composition. My abstract expressionistic style became in line with the art college genre and by the time I left art college I had entirely forgotten or even down played any interest in art therapy. I was above all that and I was pursuing a career as a practising artist.

Living in London post-art college, to do anything other than paint was considered to be a betrayal and a waste of an art education. The elitism went even further when only those practicing painting full-time were considered worthy of being included in our artists’ social network. Others who had to find employment, or who had engaged in other professional training were thought of as letting the side down. My doing anything other than abstract painting was far from my mind.

Despite this, and after two years as a full-time practising artist, when I saw an Introductory Art Therapy course advertised I eagerly applied for a place. In the first few sessions I could only paint in my abstract style, my fine art standing was important to me and I was determined to communicate to the group that I was a serious fine artist, way beyond drawing figuratively, for I was a ‘real’ artist with a fine art degree. It wasn’t until some personal issues became prominent as a collective group
theme that in a deep emotional state a picture arrived out of me that portrayed everything in recognisable figures and faces, and along with other group participants, I shared the depth of pain through my picture. The process felt similar to when I was in the art therapy department at the psychiatric hospital where I was a patient. The feeling of familiarity was so strong that I felt as if I had found myself again, as if I was 'at home' with myself again.

This story revealed that my art education had instilled considerable elitism in relation to artistic genre and that this elitist attitude had overshadowed my pursuits in art therapy. Indeed, my first solo exhibition was at the opening of the new London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1987 where I exhibited entirely abstract paintings with no recognisable imagery. Rarely have I exhibited figurative artwork. I suggest that a degree of elitism in relation to art genre resided within part of me identified as Susan, and that it was this part of me that resisted and rebelled at being presented on a roughly cut out piece of old yellow folder, but I had no problem adorning a fresh white canvas. The resistance was so intense that only a thick heavy black border could retain them both.

However, another issue seemed relevant. Upon completing the artwork Same Shadow (Figure 4.98), someone pointed out a spelling mistake in the writing at the bottom, a reflexive note relayed my response,

\[ Reflexive\text{\hspace{1mm}}note\hspace{1mm}from\hspace{1mm}study\hspace{1mm}journal \]

\[ \text{I'm really pissed off about my spelling mistake. I don't feel I can put it in the exhibition without chopping off the words at the bottom and I wanted them there because of how the words happened and what they say - it's just as important as the picture. I hate it when my spelling shows me up.} \]

I suggested that a degree of artistic elitism was mixed together with a degree of academic elitism and a degree of professional elitism which renders part of me extremely resistant to being affiliated with an image on a roughly cut piece of used yellow folder with scrawled note in a red ball point pen which contains a spelling error, and for it to be displayed openly as part of my PhD exhibition. Only the thickest black
border could retain such desire to flee. I have also been pedantic about keeping study artworks protected and clean, however, I have noticed that I have moved Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) from place to place around the studio surfaces and I have lost it amongst papers several times, or dusted it off having found it dumped in a neglected corner of my studio. This neglect also seemed to point to a devaluing attitude towards the small paper artwork in comparison to the canvases which have been stacked in boxes or sealed in bubble wrap. Having suggested some relationship between selves and the thick black border, I went on to investigate if I could track any relevance of the ring that surrounded the two ‘figures’ in Same Shadow (Figure 4.98).

My initial reading of the ring around the ‘figures’ was two fold. Firstly, it seemed to signal a potential embrace, as if about to hug. Secondly, I was reminded of similar circular configurations between two figures that had appeared in past artworks such as Selves in Perpetual Conflict #1 & #2 (Figure 4.7 & 4.10), and Rescuing Skeleton (Figure 4.14) and in the second integrative painting (Figure 4.18). In seeking to further understand the relationship of the ring to the ‘figures’ in Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) I turned to a note I had made in my study journal part of which read,

Reflexive note in study journal

The image did inspire the writing below the image which spontaneously flowed out of me. In this artwork I perceive the wording to be more significant than the image.

I contemplated the words that appeared at the bottom of Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) which read “The same shadow falls on us both, we just colour it differently”. While reflecting on the words, I produced a further artwork which I named Rescue from Shadow (Figure 4.99).
In this painting two figures are depicted dressed in the same clothes, one is crouched protecting her head with her hand as an impeding shadow descends. The other figure is almost out of the picture frame and attempts to pull the crouching figure away from the shadow. The background to the painting is a graded orange which verges more towards yellow at the bottom and towards red at the top. A closer examination of the words “The same shadow falls on us both” when viewing Rescue from Shadow (Figure 4.99) implies that both figures have the same experiences, “we just colour it differently” relates to the dissimilarity in the background colour directly surrounding each figure which is coloured differently.

In rereading the image, Same Shadow (Figure 4.98), I interpreted the ring as being a variety of experiences that encircle both ‘figures’ and which lays the same shadow upon both ‘figures’. However, each figure painted the surrounding background a different colour. This implies that it is not the experiences that differ between the dualities such as Joyce and Susan, figurative and abstract, skeleton and flying woman, but how these experiences are perceived. I was reminded of a study journal image that I had made upon receiving my medical records (Figure 4.100) where both have the same records, but one becomes burdened with the backbreaking load of the medical records while the other simply uses them as a table from which to use for self advancement.
I was interested here in the changing relationship of ‘same’ and ‘different’ throughout the study. At the beginning of this chapter ‘difference’ was paramount. Acknowledging perceived differences between my selves, my artwork styles, and my social positioning seemed to be an important part of the investigation in both phase one and phase two. Phase one centred on the difference between Joyce, Susan and artwork styles. Phase two centred on differences in social positioning, between the seen and the hidden. However, through the investigative process, phase three and the making of Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) highlighted that while ‘difference’ is important to acknowledge, a degree of ‘sameness’ also runs through all of these selves, all artwork styles and all social positionings. Indeed, in Rescued from Shadow (Figure 4.99) the clothing of the two selves is the same colour and shade of blue, and the evenly coloured ring that encircles both figures in Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) also conveys an element of ‘sameness’.

A postmodern feminist investigation is able to accommodate the complex dynamic interplay of ‘difference’ and ‘sameness’. It recognises that while embracing ‘difference’ through acknowledging that race, sexuality, ability, age, and class impact on individual experience, women’s lived experience may be affected by the ‘same’ conditions of inequality which politically expands to a notion of collective ‘sameness’.

The latter phase of this investigation has bought about the importance of acknowledging the interplay of ‘difference’ and ‘sameness’. For my own continuing investigation, my acknowledging the weaving ‘difference’ and ‘sameness’ indicated that I had become aware of similarities and consistencies, through investigating dualities. Immediately I was drawn to further investigating the position of Witness, who consistently bridged
dichotomies. I was eager to explore themes that appeared across figurative and abstract styles, and I was keen to investigate how becoming de-silenced through this study project has permitted an opportunity for any number of selves to be heard. At this point I realise that the process of self investigation was a never ending process, and although I will undoubtedly continue this self investigation, for now it has accumulated an adequate amount of data and seems to indicate a reasonable point at which to pause.

Chapter summary

The reflexive process offered a demonstration of how art-based research, when conducted through a postmodern feminist approach, can deconstruct previous fixed perceptions of selves and lead to reconstructing new perceptions of selves, and that these can remain open to further investigations. The postmodern feminist informed investigation challenged essentialist modernist paradigms that had previously supported the fixed qualities and dualistic oppositions, a paradigm through which I had formed self perceptions and which I had relied upon to distinguish one self from another, one style from another and one positioning from another. The postmodern feminist self investigation effectively loosened the dualistic oppositions enough to form gaps in the binarism where the deconstruction of the qualities previously firmly linked to a self showed inconsistencies, in the reconstructions of selves there were no longer rigid, settled and fixed attributes, but selves viewed more fluidly mutable and transitionary. The postmodern feminist informed investigation did not seek to establish new ‘truths’ or define fixed ‘results’ but instead permitted selves to remain in motion of change, artwork styles to retain a level of ambiguity, and perceived social positioning left lingering, transient and available for further investigation.

The self investigation in this chapter was divided into three phases. The first phase began by investigating dualistic selves through art-based research and the making of the first integrative image Breath of Life (Figure 4.13). The dualistic selves identified when commencing the study were presumed stable in their respective oppositional attributes and were verified as unwavering through identification in previous artworks. However, during the postmodern feminist investigation, the fixity of perceived attributes become muddled, thus creating gaps and openings in order to reconsider perceptions of selves. The multiplicity of selves depicted in The Gathering (Figure 4.19) was presumed to neatly segment into two factions. However, the investigative process revealed
anomalies in the dualistic arrangements rendering the dividing borders indeterminate. The study process further demonstrated the constructedness of selves through investigating how selves had come about through the necessity to adapt to often adverse situations. Multiple selves where shown to have juggled in order to fulfil both conventional expectations and personal expressive needs. Various selves were shown to have been employed so as to manage day to day social expectations and inclusive regimes while also being able to express the emotional consequence of marginalisation within the regulations of gender, sexuality and mental health.

The second phase further investigated selves in the context of perceived social positioning. The fourth integrated artwork, Portrait Crossed Out (Figure 4.43), led to identifying four symbols; red cross, black tape, white mask and straight lines. A more detailed investigation of each symbol provided a deeper analysis identifying particular self perceptions that had developed in relation to social positioning. The continued investigation of these four symbols through further artwork enabled the distinction between public selves and private selves to be visualised through images such as Behind the White Mask (Figure 4.77). In this image the effect of conformity to social regulation and adherence to social expectations had led to masking-up and toeing the line in the public sphere, while suppressing aspects of selves hidden in the private sphere. Here perceptions of selves had become distinctly divided into binary oppositions such as wrong/right, hidden/visible, unheard/heard, and abnormal/normal. Although these public and private selves had been equipped and fashioned to navigate social prejudices while remaining emotionally authentic, they had become internalised as fixed and ‘true’ perceptions of selves. However, the postmodern feminist approach enabled these selves to be viewed in the socio-political context rather than as a secluded, personal pathology. The reconstruction of selves was seen to be taking place in the progression of this study where previously silenced aspects of self were becoming de-silenced, mobilised and transformed.

The third phase set out to investigate the relative absence of certain aspects of artwork style and materials. The fourth integrated artwork, Same Shadow (Figure 4.98), together with intertextual links, exposed further dualistic oppositions in the form of elitist attitudes versus professional vulnerabilities. Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) led to making a further artwork which pointed towards the coexistence of ‘sameness’ and ‘differences’. This third phase pointed the way to further ongoing self investigation through art-based
research, but also signalled a suitable place to pause the study, having accumulated adequate findings while acknowledging that postmodern feminist investigations do not seek to conclude with a neat defined ending.

This chapter has demonstrated how an art-based investigation, when in conjunction with a postmodern feminist approach, can deconstruct notions of self perceptions, artwork styles and perceptions of social positioning, and in the reconstruction offer a more flexible notion of subjectivity, creative expression, and social positioning. The investigative process has demonstrated the weaving of a multitude of selves as a means for managing situations for those where difference, marginalisation, ostracism and vulnerability are continually experienced. The autobiographical intertextual findings presented in this chapter demonstrated that issues of gender, sexuality, lesbian invisibility, visual censorship, homophobia and the psychopathologisation of homosexuality were significant in endorsing self perceptions, self representations and perceptions of my social positionings, and that these were often experienced as perceiving self as different, marginal, excluded, silenced or invisible. The dexterity of my multiple subjectivities was shown to not only enable my survival, but also to aid my determination to succeed and achieve.

It is through reflexivity and art-based research that I have been able to demonstrate the use of the creative process in a postmodern feminist investigative study. I have been able to demonstrate how the intertextual links thread across time, across genre, and across selves. I have also been able to demonstrate how the postmodern feminist approach together with art-based research process can offer a dynamic process through which subjectivity can be investigated. In the following chapter, the findings are discussed in terms of perceptions of selves, visual representation of selves, and perception of selves in relation to social positioning. They advance the theoretical underpinnings of postmodernism and feminism and provide further thought on political, cultural and social contexts.
Chapter Five: Discussion and analysis
Introduction

From the onset of the research project I wanted to discover how a postmodern feminist framework and an art-based method could combine for self exploration. In order to examine this combination, I chose to source autobiographical material, and as a starting point investigate my dualistic selves and dualistic artwork styles. The findings have shown that the process of investigation that developed was relevant no matter what theme was under investigation. For this discussion I have termed this process the ‘reflexive spiral’. I used the two terms ‘reflexive’ and ‘spiral’. Reflexive emphasised reflexivity as pivotal to observing transformations while immersed in a process of continual change, and ‘spiral’ described the never ending process of self investigation.

I identified through the findings that the reflexive spiral of investigation moved through five stages, which I have named:

- Theme
- Context
- Deconstruct
- Subvert
- Reconstruct

The reflexive spiral depicted in my study journal (Figure 5.1) pictures the five stages of investigation.

![Figure 5.1 Stages of the Investigation](image)

These stages of investigation can briefly be described as follows, a theme came under scrutiny with its dualistic qualities and positioning; the dualistic qualities were viewed in terms of their location in a modernist context that supported dualisms in social
positioning. The dualistic oppositions were *deconstructed* and their contested separateness revealed mutual reliance, thereby locating seepages in their dualistic status. Creative strategies were employed to *subvert* the modernist informed social codes; and the *reconstruction* brought new perceptions and new selves while remaining vulnerable to further deconstruction.

Having outlined the reflexive spiral in terms of its phases, I censure a literal interpretation and emphasise that in postmodernism and therefore in this study what follows will not be a neat, step by step, linear motion process. As I have demonstrated through the thesis, the various phases tended to merge, entwine, came in and out of play and were sometimes skipped entirely. However, articulating the points of investigative movement through suggesting phases ensured a deeper level of discussion and analysis.

The discussion and analysis of the findings is organised into three sections, these are:

- Self perception
- Visual representation
- Perceived social positioning

The first section focused on the subjectivity identifying my previously uncontested notions of self which I had arranged into two dualistic selves. I discussed how, through the art making process, these were disrupted forming gaps through which new notions of subjectivity could be reconstructed. The second section investigated three aspects of visual representation; my two artwork styles, my depiction of multiple selves and my attempts to make lesbian visible through artwork. Each of these aspects of visual representation were discussed in terms of their dualistic positionings, social contexts, deconstruction and reconstruction, offering a more expansive potential for my visual art practice. In the third section I identified my perceived social positioning under the themes of gender, sexuality and mental health where I found some of my deep seated assumptions to be reflected in social discourses. I traced how the deconstruction of belief systems changed my perception of my social positioning and in the reconstruction, enabled me to envisage new ways of perceiving my place in the social sense.

In each section I referred to the ‘reflexive spiral’ to identify the phases of change. I have referred to ‘realist’ when discussing ideologies stemming from modernity, I have identified the graduation from modernist realist concepts to postmodern feminist
concepts. I have demonstrated how the reflexive spiral, informed by a postmodern feminist theoretical frame, assisted in identifying themes, forming contexts, deconstructing the theme to reveal gaps or ‘intervals’ through which to subvert conventions, and reconstructing, even though both the ‘interval’ and ‘reconstruction’ remains vulnerable to ongoing disruption and change.

Postmodern and feminist scholars have been pivotal in challenging modernism’s reliability, authority, and assumptions and there are several key philosophers who have influenced my thoughts and shaped this discussion chapter. Amongst such thinkers is Jacques Derrida (1976, 1978) whose work provided a way to deconstruct dualisms, interrogate their oppositional status and reconstruct an alternative reading. Michael Foucault’s (1970, 1977, 1978) attention on societal structure and order with a focus on power and hierarchy within discourses was critical to the discussion. Judith Butler (1990, 1992, 1998, 2004) who was influenced by both Derrida and Foucault, was also an important theorist, and in particular her critique of the binarism of gender and sexuality through performativity prised previously firm categories from their claim of originality. Linda Nicholson (1990, 1995) brought the complexities of postmodernism and feminism to the forefront, along with the notions of rejecting and also retaining categories in quests for equity and identity. Lorna Doan (1994) was also influential as she situated lesbianism within the postmodern and feminist frames. Doan identified some key points that underline the intricacies and academic appeal of lesbian existence, while also acknowledging the diverse ways in which postmodernism has been approached and utilised by lesbian feminists.

Postmodern feminism, in its critique of modernism, challenged the taken-for-granted or ‘grand narratives’ of the modernist era by refuting their boundaries and transgressing their borders of neat classifications. I put forward the utilisation of a postmodern feminism in the context of art therapy and visual art practice, while also claiming that a postmodern feminist critique of both discourses challenged many major assumptions.

I began the discussion by viewing the findings in relation to my self perception and I discuss how dualistic oppositional arrangements were challenged through the postmodern feminist study process.
Self-perception
In this section, I have examined the findings in relation to self perception. I have discussed my initial realist themes and how, through the postmodern feminist deconstruction, my initial perceptions of self were challenged, leading to a reconstruction of new perceptions of my subjectivity. The discussion has been arranged into three themes:

- From dualistic selves to fluid subjectivities
- From whole self to multiple subjectivities
- From stable self to mutable subjectivities

Firstly I have demonstrated how I had unconsciously arranged my personal attributes into an oppositional and dualistic frame, and how this frame had become self limiting and unworkable. I have examined how feminist scholars perceive dualism as a condition of Western modernism ubiquitous within major discourses and social concepts and their assertion that women have been persistently positioned as subservient through pervasive dualistic binarism. I have discussed how our notions of mental health are also steeped in rigid dualisms such as mad or sane, and how I had positioned my own range of mental states into the dualism of mad or sane by delegating my mood states as residing in either Joyce or Susan. I have shown how the influence of postmodernism, and in particular deconstruction, enabled me to contest the constraints of a dualistic self perception, allowing me to access a broader range of possibilities and a more fluid perception of my self.

Secondly I have focused on the findings to show how I had perceived my multiple selves to be a sign of madness and how I had also dualistically attributed multiple selves. I have argued that many of our fundamental perceptions of a healthy self are aligned with idealistic notions of ‘a whole single self”, and I have demonstrated that this perception is also prevalent in therapy discourses. I have retraced how contesting these perceptions through deconstruction led to my being able to reconstruct my understanding of multiple selves as a healthy disposition.

Thirdly I have scrutinised the symbolism that visually conveys various aspects of selves in the findings. I have shown how I challenged my previous perception of a particular symbol allocated to a particular self. I have demonstrated how symbols were neither attached to, nor inevitably consistent with a particular self being described. Moreover, I
have demonstrated how symbols were capable of shedding layers and mutating those layers onto other symbols and other selves. I have shown that the mutating layers of symbolism could reconstruct selves in a constant stream of renegotiation and rearticulation of subjectivity.

The artworks made during the study were pivotal to my investigations of my previous notions of self and through them new notions of subjectivity transpired; therefore a close re-examination of the artwork made during the investigative process was an effective means to discuss the movement through the reflexive spiral towards new notions of subjectivity.

**From dualistic selves to fluid subjectivities**
Reflecting on the visual and written texts from within the findings, it is evident that I have always arranged my attributes into oppositional positions and the data has shown the problematic effects of this within my daily functioning. I have illustrated how feminist and postmodern theorists dismantle the premises of dualistic perceptions that stem from Western ideologies, and how they contest the ‘truth’ claims invested in such idealism. Informed by postmodernism and feminism, I further demonstrated how during the study I contested my own dualistic positioning of my attributes through deconstruction and reconstruction. I have shown how this shift from modernist self perception to postmodern feminist self perceptions made available broader options and more fluid notions of subjectivity.

The findings have shown that dualism was a principal frame through which I arranged my self-perception. The dualistic framework placed my qualities as ‘belonging’ to either Joyce or Susan and therefore pitched all qualities of Susan to Joyce, and Joyce to Susan in direct opposition. The effect of placing qualities in oppositional positioning has inevitably resulted in two oppositional selves. The following table (Table 5.1) was compiled from the preamble and the findings where descriptions of Joyce and descriptions of Susan are placed in separate columns with the attribute descriptor along the left column.
Table 5.1 Qualities of Joyce & Susan in Opposition

Table 5.1 highlighted the oppositional positioning through which I had developed my self perception. Through postmodern and feminist theories and perspectives, I next discussed how oppositional dualistic arrangement of self might be further conceptualised.
Modernist influences on self perception and oppositional development

The term ‘self perception’ is related to the unique way I have understood and dynamically organised my being. Understanding and organising aspects of myself has not occurred in isolation, rather there have been multiple influences in cultural and historic discourses and practices. The dualistic frame in which I had perceived myself was fairly typical of the Western ideologies through which people were perceived through a system of binary oppositions. Modernity, as an era, relied on rationalism, an ideology that identified a singular knowable reality to liberate humankind from oppression by relying on optimism and progress (Grbich 2004). Attaining a singular reality in the name of progress saw a division made between what was held as vital for progress, and what was seen to be less imperative or an obstruction to progress.

The modernist system therefore typically placed one element in opposition to another while privileging one over another. Donna Haraway (1991) identified “troubling dualism” as “self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilised/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial” (p. 177), which exposed the extent of binarism in Western culture.

Early feminists (Mitchell 1966, Janeway 1971, Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974, Elshtain 1981,) identified the disadvantages of dualisms for women, especially the public/private divide. They contested the division as based on organised oppression and control of women by men. The division saw the vast majority of women’s domestic work and bodily experiences relegated to the private sphere while men’s experiences belonged to both the public and the authentic. This public/private divide was seen by feminists as a false division that set personal experience and nature apart from knowledge and culture. Haraway (1991) saw that dualisms served more to oppress than to liberate. She explained that, “certain dualisms have been persistent in Western tradition; they have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others” (p. 177).

Mary Daly (1978) put forward another opposition in women’s experience; she saw that women experiencing the influences of patriarchy have to develop both a true self and a false self due to their alienation from authentic experience, her premise being that
‘authentic’ existed in the public domain of the male. Cultural critics such as Susan Sontag (1967) perceived modernism as being opposed to all that was popular in culture and called for “new sensibilities” in the hierarchy of cultural value where popular productions might be valued alongside machinery and mathematics, already highly valued in the name of modernism and progress.

What has come to be valued as good, normal and proper, or bad, abnormal and improper, is therefore often steeped in binary oppositions intended for progress, power and control. Regulating populations were strengthened through dualistic oppositions as Michael Pickering (2001) explained, “Normality became such a key structuring notion of common-sense thinking over the past two centuries by ushering in a host of dualistic oppositions for the regulation of what is rational, responsible and conventional” (p. 177). Sherry Ortner (1998, p. 23-24) identified three types of data that can expose such systems: firstly, explicit devaluation of roles, tasks and products, secondly, implicit symbolic devices that produce statements of inferiority, and thirdly, social structural arrangements that exclude. In terms of health and sexuality, modernist philosophy on the human subject had been based in biological science which prevailed as the central determining discourse that determined normality and would correct all ills, thus fixing any deviances from normality through curative practices. Brown, Crawford & Hicks, (2003) described where “a modernist ambition might be to try to find out what the patient’s real problem is” and that “however incoherent the patient’s symptoms, there must be some unitary underlying pathology that can be discovered by the skilled clinician” (p. 241). Brown et al. (2003) cited a classic study by Herzlich (1973) that revealed how middle-class people thought of their illness “around a number of binary oppositions such as internal versus external, healthy versus unhealthy, urban versus rural, natural versus unnatural, individual versus society” (p. 273).

The findings have demonstrated that I segregated any qualities that were not stereotypically ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ into the Joyce self marked as a self of peculiar traits and illness through affiliation with deceased Auntie Joyce. My perception of my more problematic disposition in Joyce, was influenced by elements typical of the modernist era and in particular medical and social discourses. I could see how Ortner’s (1998, p. 23-24) terms could apply to Joyce in that I had expressed in the findings explicit devaluation of my gendered role; statements of inferiority of both gender and sexuality; and, a social structure arrangement that excludes lesbianism. Further self
debasing was through my four psychiatric admissions which I took as ‘proof’ of my inherited mental health condition. As such, I was continually kept vulnerably teetering on the side of either mad or sane, in or out, abnormal or normal, Skeleton or Flying Woman (Figure 4.13 & 4.14), either Joyce or Susan (Figure 4.3 & 4.4).

In segregating myself into two selves, Joyce and Susan, I had unwittingly, yet very efficiently, embraced the Western mindset of binary oppositions as a framework and had organised my less socially favourable qualities into the private self of Joyce, and the more socially acceptable qualities into the public self of Susan. The division of myself into two selves, Joyce and Susan, was supported by binary oppositions ingrained in modernist social discourse such as education, family, politics, medicine and law, which uphold value laden divisions of the desirable and the undesirable.

It has to be noted that I had aimed the study to induce personal change, and as such, I was open to contesting my ‘truths’ that had been embedded in the frameworks through which I perceived myself, visually depicted myself, and positioned myself in the world. My openness to personal change was also a desire to resolve some of the difficulties encountered through adopting oppositional selves and the restrictions that impeded my personal progression through not taking up opportunities. For example, in the findings I reflected:

> From an emotional perspective, I experience the switch from one extreme to another, from Joyce to Susan, as a dramatic contrast, one that has been a destabilising experience in my life and one that has often caused me to hesitate when making commitments to anything.

The findings have shown that I had painted a large canvas titled Behind the White Mask (Figure 4.77). I contemplated the free standing White Mask as creating a barrier between social expectations and my seemingly ‘unworthy’ attributes, attributes I had perceived as in opposition to ‘normal’ expectations. Hidden behind the White Mask were aspects of myself I felt compelled to keep secret, such as my lesbian selves deemed by others as disgusting, madness or abnormal, selves that had been hospitalised and medicated in the psychiatric system, together with other aspects of selves that I had perceived as falling outside ‘normal’ such as my lack of interest in traditional ‘girl’ pursuits and clothing. Therefore, immersed in the Joyce/Susan duality were feelings of
social marginality, the more marginalised selves attributed to Joyce, the less marginal allocated to Susan.

When I commenced the project, I had a strong desire to shake up my fixed ‘truths’ of Joyce and Susan, those that had placed my artwork styles as either figurative or abstract. I wanted psychological movement and because of the discomfort I had when experiencing a switch from Joyce to Susan or from Susan to Joyce, I welcomed change.

As outlined in chapter four, the investigation began by requiring Joyce the figurative artist and Susan the abstract artist to paint on the same surface. This imposed merger became pivotal in messing up my ‘truths’ that had previously maintained the neat oppositional divides. Painting on the same surface immediately confused dualistic personalities, dualistic artwork styles and dualistic social positioning. The postmodern feminist shifts occurred through the integrative artwork and the reflexive process enabled me to watch while in a constant process of change.

**Contesting dualistic divides – Skeleton takes on Flying Woman.**

The assumed deep division between Joyce as ‘disabled’ and Susan as ‘able’ was tested in the negotiation of making the first art piece and the interpretation of Breath of Life (Figure 4.13). At first sight, the painting Breath of Life visually portrayed Joyce as a lifeless, apathetic Skeleton and Susan as Flying Woman wheeling dynamism in an almost vampire like urgency. The pictorial representation of Skeleton and Flying Woman was consistent with the written description of Joyce’s abilities described in a 1991 diary entry as “I can do nothing ... I am a grain of sand” or merely self labelled “disabled” and Susan’s abilities described in the findings as “dynamic in her outward achievements”. Skeleton and Flying Woman positioned oppositional as were Joyce and Susan.

Initially termed by Ferdinand de Saussure (b1857-1913) and more recently by Jacques Derrida (b1930-2004), ‘binary opposition’ was used to identify literary and linguistic systems where one term was set against another and where one term is privileged over another. Skeptical of such oppositions, Derrida sought to deconstruct the structure through literary analysis (Derrida, 1976). Two scholars, Wheeler (2000) and Wolfreys (1998), have clearly explained Derrida’s ideas of deconstruction. Wheeler (2000)
explained that “[b]inary oppositions are crucial to a grasp of what Derrida’s deconstruction is about” (p. 220). Put simply, in Derrida’s deconstruction, the oppositional terms must first be identified and then individually scrutinised for that term’s investment in its oppositional status; the division that separated the terms is then contested as being upheld by one or both the terms’ investment in the division. This points to the binary oppositions being in effect of the other rather than in isolation from the other; the division between two entities are considered constructions rather than a given ‘facts’ or ‘truths’. As Wheeler (2000) explained, “the most characteristic strategy of deconstruction as practiced by Derrida is to discuss a particular text and show how that text undermines itself by implicitly denying the division it is explicitly promoting” (p. 202). In this instance, the “explicitly promoting” division was Joyce versus Susan, disabled versus dynamic, where in the painting Breath of Life, Skeleton signified disabled and Flying Woman signified dynamic.

I again clarify that the term ‘text’ and ‘language’ in postmodernism do not just apply to written or spoken script. They encompass anything that has the capacity to signal communication, whether it is a book, film, road sign, person or painting; these are all considered ‘texts’ and ‘language’ as are any of the multitudinous ways where meaning is transferred. Wheeler described ‘text’ as “any language consisting of any kind of marks, whether marks on paper or marks on the soul” (2000, p. 217). Therefore, in terms of Joyce and Susan, or Skeleton and Flying Woman, ‘text’ and ‘language’ can be understood according to their construction as ‘texts’ and how they are ‘language’. Their meaning is both inscribed onto the text, and articulated from the text. Therefore the deconstruction included what was inscribed onto the text of Joyce and Susan, what was inscribed from the text of Joyce and Susan, what holds them in such a textual relationship, what Joyce and Susan articulated, and the basis for such articulations.

Through the painting Breath of Life, the notions of Joyce as disabled and Susan as dynamic become deconstructed. The interpretation of Skeleton’s and Flying Woman’s mannerisms, together with their dialoguing begin to break up the truths of their dualistic qualities that enable their separateness. Deconstruction, as Wolfreys (1998) stated, has “loosen[ed] up the text enough to show it not harbouring the absolute truth at all, but being merely a structure which in various ways produces various meanings which we mistake for truth” (p. 67).
In *Breath of Life*, the mischievous gleaming eyes of Skeleton look away from Flying Woman and out of the picture frame to make exclusive contact with the viewer. Skeleton is said to be playing “not just a little bit dead, but very dead”; her deader than dead status together with roguish eye contact give a clue as to the intention to manipulate Flying Woman. The subtlety wears thin when in a later dialogue between Joyce and Susan, Joyce explicitly states her powerful position to Susan in a threat, “I’m very useful to you … if I don’t get somewhere, you’ve got no study”. Keen to get on with the study, Flying Woman acts with urgency, as the later dialogue is reflected in Susan’s words, “I don’t want to lose everything”.

There are two points I want to consider here. Firstly, this partnership has demonstrated Skeleton (Joyce) and Flying Woman (Susan), not as separate entities, but rather in direct effect of one another. Secondly, the relationship is already confusing the criteria that separated Joyce from Susan, namely disabled Joyce (“I can do nothing … I am a grain of sand”) versus abled Susan (“dynamic in her outward achievements”), which through the painting Breath of Life has now changed. Joyce is able and capable enough to manipulate herself into a powerful position and make it well known. Susan is now seen as having to succumb to Joyce’s demands in order not to “lose everything”.

One of the central aspects of Derrida’s deconstruction is the recognition that the two oppositional entities are not in fact detached or segregated, rather, they are totally reliant on one another for their validity. As Wolfreys (1998) explained, “the oppositional values or terms are only apparently oppositional; one term always informs and serves to determine the other, each term being contaminated by the imminence of the other within its identity” (p. 65). Therefore it is possible to deduce that the oppositional relationship between Joyce and Susan, and the line that segregates the two, is under question. Furthermore, it is evident that one personality may be totally reliant on the existence of the other and visa versa, and the configuration is more cyclic and dependant than oppositional and separate. In past depictions, Skeleton and Flying Woman (Figures 4.13 & 4.14) are equally reliant on one another, whether they are rescuing or in combat (Figure 4.7 & 4.10). Also noticeable is that there had been an assumed powerfulness in Susan as Flying Woman, over Joyce as Skeleton. Derrida’s notion of binary oppositions is that when there is the existence of two terms that are
seemly distinct and separate entities, one term is usually more central, pivotal or positive while the other term is the marginal, lesser, negative, ‘other’. Terms are not arbitrary here, but are embedded with meaning and power and therefore can be deconstructed for their allocation of power to one, to the other’s deficit. In the Breath of Life (Figure 4.13), the dualistic disabled/dynamic attributes which distinguished one self from another became muddled, enabling the reconstruction of selves to be considered.

The disruption of neat divides began with Breath of Life (Figure 4.13) where the distinction of disability from dynamism that once situated Joyce and Susan as oppositional and distinguished the two from one another “undermines itself denying the division it is explicitly promoting” (Wheeler, 2000, p. 202). With the deconstruction and subsequent collapse of the distinguishing traits of Joyce and Susan, other defining characteristics were automatically bought into question. I refer to the table 5.1 on page 194 and suggest that instead of being disabled, Joyce as powerful and cunningly manipulative, automatically brought into question her previous characteristics such as recluse, introspective, difficulty thinking, and easily overwhelmed. Meanwhile, the deconstruction of Susan’s dynamism as reliant on the whim of Joyce, has also brought into question Susan’s other characteristics of who comes first, assertive, self assured.

Postmodernists and feminists are critical of the modernist dualities that place interiority or inner depth as distinct from an outer social self. They contest the division of attributes into private/public domains and discount the autonomy of freely defining selves. Feminists have long exposed the allocation of attributes into private or public as a gender-laden construction that limited women’s access to social, cultural and political power (Glass 2000). A postmodern feminist critique on subjectivity deconstructs the divides of inner and outer, male and female, public and private, and views the subject as constructed through a multitude of discourses and representations. Anthony Elliott (2001) stated, “seductive powers of style and image define the postmodern self through and through; there is no repressed self or depth of meaning, since in the new postmodern universe all is explicit, marked, seen and imaged” (p. 142). Elliott’s self as “explicit, marked, seen and imaged”, speaks of the constructed notion of subjectivity that has partly come about through postmodernists and feminists contesting binary oppositions. For instance, Derrida (1978) identified the limitations in binary oppositions within linguistics where one term would be sanctioned over another; deconstruction of
binarism was an “invitation to re-think it from a position other than the ones it had sanctioned; a call, in other words, to re-inscribe it in a language which puts its mastery at stake by forcing it to acknowledge its limits” (Margaroni, 2000, p. 93). Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) perceived social framing in the opposition of penis/vagina where the term ‘woman’ was always in the shadow, as the poor copy of the male/penis/original. Michel Foucault (1970, 1980) worked across the boundaries of history and philosophy looking at how signs and symbols within discourses were used to control populations. Especially interested in madness and sexuality, Foucault contested the ‘value free’ in discourses by tracing historical events that exposed repetitive patterns of power and control. Foucault’s work on what he called “disciplinary societies”, changed the notion of a self as a freely defining agent of self-legislation, to an entity inscribed and constructed by the signifying practices, or ‘grand institutions’, that manage it. Julia Kristiva’s (1980, 1986) work centred around contesting dualism in psychoanalysis, Judith Butler deconstructed gender dualism by revealing its performativity and Elizabeth Grosz (1994b, 1995) deconstructed the body for signs of cultural construction. Amongst many others, these philosophers dismantled previous stable modernist dualities by which the ‘self’ had been perceived and exposed not only the constructedness of subjectivity but also the multiplicity and fluidity of subjectivity.

Through deconstructing the Breath of Life and disrupting previous uncontested divisions, all qualities of dualistic selves were placed under question. My perception of my dualistic selves shifted from an inflexible oppositional schema to a site of contestation. I viewed dualistic arrangements as suspicious, simplistic and limiting. As Anna Tripp (2000) stated, “binary thought can be seen as both reductive and restrictive: it attempts to polarise plurality, complexity and nuances into a simple question of either/or, collapsing a multiplicity of variations into a single opposition” (p. 7). As an outcome of deconstructing the findings, I was moving on from perceiving selves in binary oppositions and towards seeking gaps that may lie in-between the oppositional selves and searching for aspects of selves that defy neat divides. Further deconstruction contested not only dualistic perceptions of self but also notions of self as ultimately whole and unitary.

**From whole self to multiple subjectivities**

Haraway (1991) has discussed the impasse of multiple selves as, “One is too few, but two are too many” (p. 177). The findings have indicated that I needed more than two
selves to depict how I manage the multitude of situations; I in fact needed multiple selves. During the study process the painting, The Gathering, brought forth many selves. These selves were familiar to me, I had painted them many times before, and I had perceived my multiple selves as a more detailed personification of aspects of my dual selves, Joyce and Susan. I presumed that each multiple self could be easily traced back to residing in either Joyce or Susan and that Joyce and Susan, when combined with all their allies, was the totality of me.

Having multiple selves was not an aspect of myself that I disclosed with any frequency. I had equated my multiple selves as part of my inherited condition of madness and a sign of psychological instability; exploring multiple selves in the initial stages of the study caused me considerable fear. As I commenced the study, I feared that having multiple selves would impede my decision process, perceiving each self as influencing me in one direction while another self swayed me in another direction. The findings have revealed that my perception of my multiple selves had, “caused me to hesitate when making commitments to anything, having been unable to predict my capabilities or desires”. I believed that multiple selves were whole entities in their own right and that when combined they made up my total real self.

As a consequence, at the onset of the study I had hopes as well as fears. One of my hopes was that the study may integrate my multiple, mad selves into a real, single, sane, healthy self, and one of my fears was that unknown selves could jump out and do something unexpected to me, my perception being that sanity resided only in my known whole selves. Several modernist themes of dualism are identifiable here in which one term is preferable to another, for example, whole versus fragmented; known versus unknown; singular versus multiple; origin versus no origin; normal versus scary; real versus faulty; where a whole, known, singular, normal, real, self is preferable to a fragmented, unknown, multiple, scary, faulty self.

Of course having multiple selves to deal with a multitude of situations is not necessarily the most common experience of ‘normal’ people or an experience that people are willing to articulate. As Anthony Elliott (2001) reinforced, for many people it has been “a sense of cohesive identity that presides over, and responds to, the social challenges and contexts of day-to-day life” and that people “regard a core sense of self as central to the navigation of personal and public life” (p. 47). Self as a cohesive core entity can be
seen embedded in contemporary discourses, and prolific in contemporary health rhetoric. In either their work as practitioners or their own personal growth, therapists from various disciplines can be seen to align themselves with the promotion of a core self as a healthy whole self. Psychotherapist John Rowan (2001) recounted his own personal transformative experiences and stated, “I became able to contact my real self at will” (p. 121-2) and could “choose to be my real self” (p. 122). He continued with his achievements by saying that now “I am at one with my feelings as well as at one with my body. The integration, the wholeness” (p. 123). In a similar way to how I had pitched parts of selves in opposition but assumed that all selves make a whole self, psychotherapist Alvin Mahrer (2001) theorised the oppositional qualities that form a whole self, where parts of selves “are pictured as relating to one another in ways that are friendly or unfriendly, loving or hateful, integrative or disintegrative. This is just about all I am, or you are” (p. 137). Here he has concluded that dualisms result in the ultimate “whole self”. Interestingly, in a similar way to how I understood Joyce as the psychological interior and Susan as social outer, Mahrer (2001) also differentiate his inside and outside as two entities that can both inform and become merged, “I become what my insides allow me to become as the experiential session discovers my insides and helps them become more and more integrated and actualised” (p. 143).

Having depicted the same selves over many years, each individual multiple self seemed complete and whole, and together formed a sequence of different selves that came in and out of play as I went about my life. Multiple selves are recollected in the personal work of psychotherapist Miles Groth (2001) who says that he does not find it troubling to “reject the summons to settle on one identity, one fixed persona” and sees his non-fixity as a serial sequence of complete individual multiple selves that gravitate to one whole self. He added:

I am not insecure about being one thing, and then another. Nor do I feel I am one person playing different roles; that would unnerve me. Instead, I should say that I am potentially many but always only one centre of tailored action and disciplined competence, at times doing this and at other times doing that.”

(Groth (2001) p. 95).

Here Groth’s “one thing, and then another … at times doing this and at other times doing that” suggested a sequence of whole selves that make up the complete self as the “center of tailored action” (p. 95). For art therapists, making art is often seen as a place
where the “center of tailored action” can be achieved. Art can be a site for integration of conflicting thoughts and feelings; in this context art therapist Jan Glass asserted that art helps “integration into acceptable forms” (in Hogan 2001, p. 194).

Through the deconstruction of The Gathering (Figure 4.19), my presumption that multiple selves automatically aligned to either Joyce or Susan was contested when one of the selves, Witness, refused to align herself to either Joyce or Susan. The figure below (Figure 5.2) illustrated how selves visually depicted in The Gathering (Figure 4.19) do not neatly fit into either Joyce or Susan.

![Figure 5.2 Witness Position](image)

The inability to contain Witness within the Joyce/Susan dyad not only has contested the neat divide of dualism of Joyce and Susan; it also has contested the unitary notion Joyce - and - Susan, as totalling who I am.

The modernist theories and concepts of harmony and order are frequently contested by postmodern feminists who deconstruct the unifying, totalising schemes in favour of plurality, fragmentation, and complexity, with an emphasis on diversity, difference and continual change. Postmodern feminism renounces closed structures, fixed meaning, and rigid order in favour of indeterminacy, incompleteness, uncertainty, ambiguity, contingency, and chaos (Best & Kellner 1997). The self that resists static definition, Moya Lloyd (2005) has referred to as “subject-in-process”, that which “refuses the axiom that politics requires a stable consistent subject” (p. 27). With the multiple selves
I continued to question the stability of selves through deconstructing Screamer depicted in The Gathering.

My presumption that each multiple self was stable and consistent over time was contested. When viewing the findings for the description of Screamer, three separate artworks Lead Face, Ghost Face and Rage Face gave diverse and contradictory descriptions of Screamer, as in Figure 5.3. Viewing Screamer with these variant and multiple aspects, construes Screamer more as temporal and mutable rather than a fixed definitive stable self.

![Figure 5.3 Three Faces of Screamer](image)

The aspect of self called Screamer is in no way fixed, rather it moves in a constant state of rearticulation. As Lloyd (2005) asserted, “selves are never fixed; rather, their identity is permanently open to rearticulation, as discursive lines shift along different vectors … Moreover, pealing away the layers reveals no essential self” (p. 15-16).

**From stable self to mutable subjectivities**

The findings have demonstrated that whilst I was an art student, my reaction to homophobic responses to my lesbian depiction caused a major shift in my artwork style. I began to paint the previously figurative subject matter in concealed abstract style, and
whilst the painterly style is shown to have changed dramatically, the thematic content remained a depiction of lesbianism. With this in mind, I considered more abstract symbolism as also possible referents to selves. One of the most abstract symbols depicted in the findings was Straight Lines. I investigated Straight Lines through its relationship with White Mask.

The relationship between Straight Lines and White Mask was first detected in a reflective journal image where lines were emerging in a chaotic fashion out of Floating Figure’s head only to straighten up before entering White Mask (Figure 4.89). In other journal images and the painting Behind the White Mask, the Straight Lines become a platform of support for White Mask (Figures 4.72, 4.77 & 4.90). The repeated depiction of Straight Lines and White Mask could easily determine their fixed meanings, Straight Lines as complying and White Mask as concealing. However, the two symbols are proved to be less stable as the deconstruction process muddled their previous, firmly inscribed meanings.

In the process of making the painting Behind the White Mask (Figure 4.77), there was a great emphasis on obtaining a high glossy shiny smooth surface on White Mask. This surface was evident particularly in the initial stages of layering (Figure 4.69). I had identified the connection between the desire to achieve a highly shiny surface with a similar desire in a previous painting where a similar shine represented a pristine easily wiped surface that nothing would stick to. However, in two further paintings, made as part of the study process, the glossy, easy to clean, blemish resistant surface that once adorned White Mask, developed into a laminate onto Straight Lines (Figures 4.92 & 4.93). Moreover, this further development rendered the figurative depiction of White Mask redundant while in its new configuration Straight Lines had gained a shiny surface. Straight Lines still represented ‘conform’, but with the new merger of an element of White Mask, Straight Lines was also ‘pristine and resistant’.

The exchange of shiny surface between Straight Lines and White Mask demonstrates that by transferring a layer of meaning onto another symbol new meanings are inspired in a constant rearticulation of selves through mutable subjectivity. The exchange of elements of selves significantly demonstrates the fluidity of subjectivities.
as Hall (2004) stated, subjectivity is, “neither diachronically static nor synchronically one-dimensional” (p. 129-130). At this point I realised that the process of exploring selves in the postmodern sense is not a process that has a result or settled ending; there is no neat decisive answer or static moment when we can conclusively define selves, for it has always already shifted.

To conclude this section of the discussion, I have shown how the modernist realist themes through which I had perceived myself were deconstructed and reconstructed through a postmodern feminist frame. The deconstruction revealed several major challenges to my previous realist notions of self. Firstly, the dual selves of Joyce and Susan, once perceived as distinct separate selves in opposition, were reconceptualised as being contingent on each other’s existence. Secondly, the fixed and defining attributes of Joyce and Susan, were seen to be flawed and unreliable once deconstructed. Thirdly, multiple selves were not able to consolidate neatly and compactly into a whole stable self. Fourthly, a multiple self was not able to be determined through any single fixed description. Fifthly, the more abstract symbolic selves showed inconsistency in their specific meaning as tangible or symbolic attributes mutated onto other symbolic selves.

Having identified and deconstructed the modernist themes through postmodern feminist frame, the reconstruction of subjectivity was feasible. Personal attributes were no longer defined or limited by their oppositional dualistic position; they were fluid, flexible, and mutable. As such this positioning enabled me an access to attributes that I had previously perceived unattainable within the binary arrangement. For instance, within the dualistic frame my previous oppositional choice of either ‘disabled’ or ‘dynamic’ now expanded to include the possibilities of a broader range of all that lie in-between and either side of disabled and dynamic. My multiple selves previously perceived as signs of madness, or my ideal whole self as faulty, were now perceived as a positive condition for negotiating a multitude of situations. My previous presumption that a defined visual symbol was reliably cohesive with a defined aspect of myself, was reconstructed as capable of mutating, enabling a constant shifting rearticulation of subjectivity, the ability to juggle selves. During my analysis, I pictured a more optimistic of multiple subjectivities as my ability to juggle selves in accordance to any given situation (Figure 5.4).
Multiple fluid subjectivities and sexuality is relevant to both visual art and art therapy. Visual artists (Boffin and Fraser 1991; Kiss & Tell 1991, 1994; Slater 1996; Bright and Posener 1996; Hammond 2000), phototherapist, (Martin 2003) and art therapists (Ellis 2007; Fraser and Waldman 2003; Jones 2003) have acknowledged how ‘lesbian identity’ as a variable, multiple layered and constantly changing aspect of self, becomes intricate and complex when investigation is underway. The “tension between definitions and fluid sexuality” (Fraser and Waldman, 2003, p. 73) brings further complexities of belief systems and social constructions of identity categories. Whether as an art therapist working with clients or a practicing visual artist, investigating subjectivity and sexuality and identifying belief systems can become complex tasks. These are further complicated if they are to be deconstructed and reconstructed towards new notions of subjectivity and sexual identity. This discussion on subjectivity has demonstrated how working through visual images and symbolic representations enabled complexities to be momentarily tangible enough to allow reflexive contemplation, which then directed the investigation to another layer.

Once an image is made it is inevitably linked to the wider symbolic systems of representations; the artist’s responses to their made images is also intrinsically connected to the broader signifying systems of representation. In the next section I discuss visual representation in the context of visually representing self.
Self-visual representation

When viewing the findings for self-visual representations I found three predominant themes and have arranged this section on self visual representation accordingly into these three themes:

- Disrupting dualism in art
- Contesting images of multiple selves as signs of madness
- Readdressing lesbian self visual representation

Under the first of these, I consider the segregation of my artwork styles and link these to similar segregations in visual art culture. I discuss how divisions in visual art have separated art from life, high art from low art, and trained artists from the untrained. I claim these divisions had become influential in my segregation of my artwork into dualistic styles. I explore how various artists and art establishments actively disputed such divisions, while also reflecting how a postmodern feminist framework enabled me to contest my own artwork divisions during this study.

For the second theme, I discuss representing myself as multiple selves in paintings such as The Gathering, making links to the history of images being used as tools for detecting madness, and how this relationship between art symbolism and the detection of madness is still a concept entrenched in some contemporary therapeutic practices. I discuss how art therapists are often opposed to, and refrain from, assuming a client’s mental health status through interpretation of their art image and show how my own embedded correlation between multiple selves and madness was contested. I discuss how image making, with its expansive multi-dimensional properties, often yields multiplicity of selves, and moreover, how image making may be employed to enable the investigation of multiple selves.

Thirdly, focusing on my visual representation of lesbianism from within the findings, I discuss how my initial essentialist beliefs led to a perpetual cyclic pattern of attempting to counteract lesbian invisibility and then recoiling due to negative responses to the images I had made. I examine how various theorists have perceived visually representing the lesbian body and explain how my own visual representation had become concealed by either making images small enough to hide in boxes, or concealing lesbianism in an abstract style. I discuss how postmodern feminist ideas of
lesbianism and lesbian representation challenged my previous perpetual cycle and led to a reframing of my own ideas of lesbian visual representation.

**Disrupting the dualisms in art**

The findings revealed that I had conceptualised my artwork styles through a dualistic arrangement where my figurative artwork influenced by art therapy was distinct and opposite to my abstract artwork influenced by visual arts training, and that these were also concurrent with dualistic selves. Through the postmodern feminist investigation these dualistic arrangements had been disrupted. Using thumbnail prints of artwork cited in the thesis, I mapped in my study journal the dualistic arrangement of selves and artwork styles together with the postmodern feminist shift that cut through the dualistic arrangement (Figure 5.5).

![Figure 5.5 Postmodern Feminist Disruption of Dualisms](image)

The art therapy that influenced artwork was described as being made with some immediacy to ensure interpretation towards self-understanding with little or no aesthetic consideration. In contrast, the visual art influenced artwork centred on aesthetics and allowed for contemplation of surface and form inspired from my former visual art education. By collating descriptions from the findings, characteristics of Joyce’s artwork and Susan’s artwork are clearly in opposition (Table 5.2)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Joyce</th>
<th>Susan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Small works on paper</td>
<td>Large works on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Art Therapy</td>
<td>Visual Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Mostly dry materials, oil crayon, pencil</td>
<td>Wet materials, paint, mediums, varnishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Figurative, self communication</td>
<td>Abstract expressionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Self-awareness and self-understanding</td>
<td>Enhance artistic practice and professional recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Immediate spontaneous</td>
<td>Contemplative, theoretical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artwork destiny</td>
<td>Folder in plastic box in studio</td>
<td>Gallery exhibition, stacked in studio or purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultimate achievement</td>
<td>Self-understanding</td>
<td>Artistic progression, sale of work &amp; artistic recognition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Initial Oppositional Characteristics of Artwork

The divisions of my artwork styles corresponded with divisions in traditional and conventional art of the pre-1950’s era. There are three archetypical divisions:

- a separation of art from life
- a distinct division of high art from low art
- a departure of psychological from aesthetics

Each of these conventional divisions also sustained the stringent segregation of both art and artists to either the public or the private sphere.
My own judgment of what was acceptable in image content for public viewing and what was not acceptable was governed by morality in ‘doing the right thing’. The term ‘moral’ as “adhering to the code of behaviour that is considered right or acceptable” (Pearsall, 2002, p. 925) is appropriate in that it was my moral judgment that had deemed the aspects of life depicted in the figurative artwork of Joyce as unworthy of public interest and undeserving of inclusion into the realm of ‘proper art’. It was also my moral judgment that concealment of subject matter about life through abstraction in the abstract artwork of Susan would render my art suitable for public viewing in the art world. Both artistic genres accessed a degree of artistic freedom while maintaining moral codes of non-disclosure.

For instance, Joyce accessed the artistic freedom to retrieve her revelatory subject matter from her psychological depths but maintains her moral responsibility to ‘do the right thing’ by restricting the display of her life away from public viewing. In part of her dialogue Joyce says about her artwork, “Images that come out of me are very real indeed ...They explain what it’s like inside” and “I wouldn’t want to exhibit personal imagery. I can’t imagine displaying my guts on walls”. Here the separation of art from life is clear as Joyce places one term about life in opposition to a term about art, where ‘inside’, ‘personal’, ‘guts’ of ‘life’ are pitched in opposition to ‘exhibit’, ‘display’ and ‘walls’ of ‘art’.

Susan was seen as accessing artistic freedom in making expansive paintings that will hang on gallery walls, while maintaining moral responsibility ‘doing the right thing’, by concealing her life in abstract coding. In part of Susan’s dialogue with Joyce, she defended her artwork style, “There are so many ways of thinking and presenting ideas other than straight representation” and “Just cos it ain’t got screaming friggin’ faces all over it doesn’t mean it hasn’t got emotional content” and “I’m a thinker not a spewer”. Here again the dichotomy is clearly between the abstract thinker presenting ideas in ‘art’, and the representational faces and emotional spewer of ‘life’.

In deconstructing my segregations of art from life I found that the previously perceived distinct separate styles were not unrelated, disengaged and isolated from one another. I found they functioned as a mutual modus operandi through which to negotiate artistic freedom and moral codes; I had to navigate modernist ideologies that had separated ‘art’ from ‘life’. The link between style and morality is discussed by philosopher Robert
Wicks (2001), “artistic criteria and moral criteria are compatible since it is possible to do the right thing with style”. David Novitz (2001) explained that it is this boundary between art and life that postmodernism contests, “Postmodernist art begins with the assault on the modernist boundaries of art; a refusal to see art as purely formal and as distinct from life” (p. 163-4).

The division of art from life was contested in art movements such as Dadaism in the 1950’s, and onwards through the work of Marcel Duchamp, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol. Melting the divide between art and life through playing with and on art traditions was partly the premise for which postmodernism became renown (Best & Kellner 1997; Novitz 2001).

During the 1970’s, visual autobiography was taken up by feminist artists to infuse into the art world the visibility of women’s lives as differing from that previously defined exclusively by male artists. Feminist artists also used autobiography as a site to contest the portrayal of women as a mere object of male gaze and how women had been “biographically scripted in disabling ways” (Smith & Watson, 2003, p. 14). Feminist artists used their art practice not only to address the exclusion of women artists from art history, but also as a site to critique how women had been construed and constructed through male ideologies. Feminist autobiographical art did not simple engage in the visibility of a woman artist’s own body, but concerned itself more with “the artist’s engagement with the history of seeing women’s bodies” (Smith & Watson, 2003, p. 7) and in doing so, feminist artists’ autobiography synthesised art and life to reveal how visual art discourse had shaped women unfavourably by omitting women’s own life experiences.

During the study my two artwork styles as distinct from one another were challenged when jointly working on the same surface. The deconstructive process exposed how both styles mutually employed strategies to enable artistic freedom while maintaining moral codes of non-disclosure and that these strategies were supported by realist ideologies that separated art from life. Through the reconstructive process and the very manner by which this thesis and its content becomes exhibited and available for public scrutiny, the previous realist moral codes became subverted (Butler 1990, 2004; Menon 2004). The small, easily hidden, figurative art lost its concealed status rendering ‘life’ revealed in the ‘art’ arena. Similarly, the abstracted style with its concealed coding lost
its obscurity by its merger with the figurative and thus exposed ‘life’ in the artwork to a viewing audience. Having transgressed the divisions that separated Joyce’s art from Susan’s art, the figurative from abstract, the private from public and art from life, the reconstruction reveals the styles as unfixed, overlapping, multiple and varied. Furthermore, the deconstructive and reconstructive process impacted on the division between the art made for personal exploration informed by experience as an art therapy client and art informed by formal visual art training, the two genre often referred to as ‘low art’ and ‘high art’.

Expressive art from non-trained artists is often termed ‘Outsider Art’. Under the rubric of Outsider Art is mad art, primitive art, raw art or laypersons art, all of which have been generally excluded from mainstream art gallery praxis and art history. From a visual arts perspective, it is presumed that an artist has acquired formal visual art training to claim entry into ‘high art’. The findings have shown that my dual artwork styles comply with mainstream art segregations where Joyce’s art therapy influenced artwork falls into the category of ‘outsider art’, ‘raw art’ or ‘low art’ excluded from the art world, whereas Susan’s art via formal visual art training is definable as ‘high art’ and acceptable in the mainstream art world.

Entry into ‘high art’ was not because of pictorial quality, or “any intrinsic feature, but because it is appropriately related to a larger historical, institutional or theoretical context” (Lopes, 2001, p. 491). The art world tends to focus “narrowly on the Western context in which ‘high’ art is made while ignoring ‘low’ art and non-Western art” (Davis, 2001, p. 174). During the modernist art movement of the 1950’s “the graduation towards abstraction and minimalism was equated with progress in art” (Efland et al 1996, p. 91). These higher artistic achievements were often displayed in vast pristine galleries, visited only by the elite, a praxis that also supported the separation of high art from outsider or laypersons art. In the 1960’s the modernist abstract purity had reached its limit in a painting by Russian artist Kasimir Malevich, “White on White”, which featured “two barely discernible white squares superimposed on one another” (Best & Kellner, 1997, p. 133). This ultimate artistic form heralded the end of modernist painting and the end of high art.

The term ‘Outsider Art’ was coined in 1972 by academic Roger Cardinal who found that the qualities found in Outsider Art were of great interest to many visual artists;
however this interest was not openly acknowledged and still continues to be veiled. In a recent radio interview, author of *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (2000) Colin Rhodes stated that although there are a “fair few contemporary artists who really like …Outsider Art …very few of them will admit it in public …they don’t want to be revealed as people who are interested in Outsider Art” and “…the mainstream art world still treats Outsider Art with a certain amount of kind of professional disdain” (Mitchell 2006).

In a backlash to the elitism of high art, some organisations, authors, artists and art therapists have contested mainstream art’s exclusory practice that marginalises untrained artists and excludes their artwork from public viewing. For instance, the not-for-profit organisation *Intuit*, has geared its operation to solely represent low art or Outsider Art artists in the public domain and has thus bridged the divide. The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art aims their service at supporting “artists who demonstrate little influence from the mainstream art world and who seem instead motivated by their unique personal visions” and includes “self-taught art” (Intuit n.d.).

The Cunningham Dax Collection, which has a permanent exhibition space in Melbourne, houses art from past psychiatric patients, which straddles the division between gallery quality visual art and the untrained layperson’s art. It is named after one of the pioneers of art therapy in the UK, psychiatrist Dr Eric Cunningham Dax, who collected patients’ artwork from closing asylums, an acquisition that formed the base collection which has grown further from the contributions of art therapy participants from Melbourne’s psychiatric health facilities. The gallery revolves over 12,000 artworks which are “created by people with an experience of mental illness and/or psychological trauma” and serves a purpose in promoting a “greater understanding of people who experience mental illness and/or psychological trauma” (The Cunningham Dax Collection n.d.). The gallery education officer Penelope Lee commented that the display of work is not intended to “prescribe a meaning but …to open up dialogue”. As Director Dr Eugen Koh explained, Dax’s intention in exhibiting artwork of past patients’ experience was to show how “art itself could relieve them of their mental suffering” (Mitchell and Barraud 2007). In August 2007 I visited The Cunningham Dax Collection gallery and as I browsed the gallery with its white walls, polished timber floors and precisely framed artworks, it struck me as unusual to see what would usually be considered low art, due to having been made by untrained artists, being displayed in

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such a high art environment, an environment that would otherwise exclude such artwork as unworthy of being exhibited. I considered how the raw expressive artworks articulated with mediocre materials were made in a similar vein to the art therapy influenced artwork that Joyce produced. However, I also considered the stark ambiance of the art gallery as similar to the type of venue that Susan’s artwork was often exhibited. Here then, at The Cunningham Dax Collection, the borders of separating life from art, high art from low art, and visual art from outsider art were being challenged, and furthermore, my own segregation of Joyce’s art from Susan’s art, art therapy art from visual art, and figurative art from abstract art, were being challenged.

The Prinzhorn Collection of 19th and 20th century asylum artwork in Heidelberg is another example of refuting the divide between high and low art. Psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn perceived art made by psychiatric patients as liberated from art school taught styles. The Prinzhorn collection Director Thomas Roeske values the work exhibited as perspectives from “people who were taken out of society” and artistic expressions from “personal experiences as marginalised people in asylums”. Seeing the art of his patients as free from art school rationalism and restraints, Dr Hans Prinzhorn named such artwork “artistry” as counter-art to the mainstream that excluded the untrained (Mitchell and Barraud 2007).

Artists also sought to contest narrow limits and privilege claims of high art. French painter Jean Dubuffet is well known for intentionally centring his art practice on bridging the psychological / aesthetic divide. In his attempt to recuperate aesthetics rebuffed by Western values, he coined the term “Art Brut” meaning literally raw art in relation to his own artwork style. Art Brut became an art movement in 1948. Inspired by graffiti and art made by the mentally ill, Dubuffet’s painting style “was contrary to everything expected of a painter” and “dealt a serious blow to the usual aesthetic assumptions” (Avgikos n.d.). In his brazen style of non-compliance, Dubuffet directed his interest towards uninhibited energy and spontaneity in his image making rather than being influenced by the predetermined aesthetic codes of painterly practice. Nevertheless, his controversial painterly style did exclude him from the generally acceptable art practice at the time.

The modernist art that postmodernism refuted is described by Best & Kellner (1997), “The modernist artist was thus driven to create the great work, the masterpiece, and his
or her own unique individual style. Genius monumentalism, and distinctive style and vision were thus intrinsic features of modernist aesthetics” (p. 128). As a critique of modernism, postmodernism refuted the elitism of high art, distinct style and monumentalism and instead showcased the inescapable influences of mass media and popular culture, often by utilising the same techniques and/or practice to form new artwork. Best & Kellner (1997) note that, “postmodernists spurned elitism and combined “high” and “low” cultural forms in an aesthetic pluralism and populism” (p. 130). For instance, Robert Rauschenberg was first to appropriate images from media and combine them with mixed materials including his bedding, thus breaking three rules of art, originality, single ‘specialised’ genre, and separation of art from life. Similarly, Jasper Johns painted flags onto canvas with no intentional message other than to steal a readymade image. But perhaps the most influential artist to confuse art boundaries and art rules was Andy Warhol, who in the 1950’s and 1960’s began to steal images from popular media and commerce which he then mass-produced through print machinery often operated by manual workers, only to be touched with a final signature by Warhol himself, and thus contested art as ‘high art’, exclusive, and elite.

Feminist artists had long challenged the elitism and exclusion of women from the high arts, a world which insisted on a hierarchal division between the high art of men and the lower craft work of women (Worth 2001, p. 437-466). Since the early 1970s, feminist theorists have critiqued ‘art history’ to show it up as the history of only one gender’s art production. Linda Nochlin made the point clearly in her 1971 essay aptly titled “Why have there been no great women artists?”(Nochlin 1971). The postmodern onslaught on modern elitism supported a cause already taken to task by feminists. As Belsey (2000) stated, “feminism and postmodernism share a skepticism which is both epistemological and political” (p. 33). It is this exposure of the powerful, the elite, and the privileged that bring postmodernism and feminism into alliance, as Belsey (2000) explained, “The plurality of the postmodern … discredits supremacism on the part of any single group. It celebrates difference of all kinds, but divorces difference from power. Postmodernism is in all these senses the ally of feminism” (p. 34). However, as Belsey further stated, this does not amount to any consistency within feminism or to an unchanging position, “Feminism at any specific moment invades and occupies the terrain between domination and subordination, but the terrain itself is constantly shifting and is often uncertainly defined” (p. 35). Belsey continued, “Feminism in its current mode is also a
constitutive element of our postmodern condition: and that means recognising plurality, acknowledging that there are many ways to be a feminist” (2000, p. 35).

Colin Trodd (2001) suggested that the postmodern attack on modernism has enabled artists to “reorient artistic practice, enlarge the productive range of art and develop an inclusive approach to the use of culture and its objects” (p. 89). Postmodernism and feminism have both contested elitism in art and sought to embody art made by broader social and cultural groups that have previously been marginalised by the art world. In the late 1960’s Susan Sontag “attacked elitism and pretentiousness of modernism and promoted camp, popular culture, new artistic forms, and new sensibility over allegedly stale, boring forms of entrenched modernism” (Best & Kellner 1997, p. 131). Some artists used parody and irony to refute ‘reality’, demonstrating instead that reality is merely formed from and through relentless repetition.

The findings have elucidated that while Joyce wanted to access psychological understanding through her artwork, Susan wanted to advance her creative aesthetic skills. There was reluctance from both to relinquish the purpose of their artwork. Joyce wanted to continue to access psychological content, “I want to explore more and understand more about myself” while Susan wanted to maintain her abstract aesthetic interest in that, “there are so many ways of thinking and representing ideas”. In the context of art therapy, David Maclagan (1999) considered the problems related to “psychological aesthetics”. He traced the philosophical, psychological and psychoanalytic influences that have seen ‘psychological’ and ‘aesthetics’ separated in “a split between the psychological interpretation of art and its aesthetic qualities” that led “to divorce aesthetic qualities from any psychological meaning” (p 306). According to Maclagan, the emphasis on spoken language in the psychological sciences and the inadequacies of language when explaining aesthetics has divided science and art into communication and expression. Art therapist Rita Simon (1992) brought psychological and aesthetic into focus by forming a framework for art therapists to consider clients’ pictorial content as well as their artistic style. She became “fascinated with pictorial styles and what they might indicate about the personality of the persona using a particular style” (Hogan 2001, p. 208). Art therapist Catherine Hyland-Moon transgressed the divide between psychological and aesthetic in her insistence that creativity is influenced by environment and that it is unreasonable for art therapists to expect a client to make art in a clinically pristine setting. She suggested the studio
atmosphere should be cultivated by art therapists together with demonstrative techniques in the successful use of art materials to help clients gain a greater grasp of artistic expression (Moon 2002).

As I have discussed, organisations, authors, and artists have contested the realist boundaries of art and by doing so have reframed what can be considered art, what can be exhibited as art, and who can qualify as an artist. More recently the previously suppressed Outsider Art has become a highly acclaimed area of art practice and thus transgressed the previous divides of high art from low art, and public art from private art. This also contests the previous divisions of the rational from the mad, the trained artist from the non-trained, and the aesthetic from the psychological, thus loosening the realist divisions, providing gaps through which an alternative perspective can be gained. Such a transgression of previous realist boundaries in art melts the rigidity of dualistic oppositions and allows for the expression of lives, the co-mingling of styles and the multiplicity of creative expression.

During the creative study process, there were significant shifts from my previous realist themes in art towards a more postmodern feminist position in art. These shifts are visible in the artwork made during the study process and specifically, can be identified by three significant turns. Firstly, the dual artwork styles that were influenced by the realist separation of art from life were combined into a series of single artwork, thus disrupting the art and life dichotomy by incorporating aspects of life into art. Secondly, the separation of art therapy influenced art from psychiatric hospital, and visual art taught at art school was aligned with the realist division of low art from high art; this genre division was disrupted through the joint painting on the same surface. Thirdly, the previously neat division of psychological and aesthetic was blurred as psychological exploration and aesthetic advancement were combined on the same artworks.

Table 5.3 elucidated how the previous oppositional qualities and categories were dislodged in the four integrative paintings.
Table 5.3 The Disruption of Dualistic Arrangements Through Integrative Artworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Breath of Life</th>
<th>The Gathering</th>
<th>Self Crossed Out</th>
<th>Same Shadow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Art v High Art</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private v Public</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological v Aesthetic</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small v Medium v Large</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figurative v Abstract</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Figurative</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper v Canvas</td>
<td>Canvas</td>
<td>Canvas</td>
<td>Reused Canvas</td>
<td>Paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effects of dislodging Joyce and Susan from their previous entrenched styles were also expressed in the dialoguing within the findings. Even though the integrative images demonstrate a divergence from their own individual original conventions and exclusory practices the change was almost ‘palpable’. The difficulty in shifting from low art status to fuse with high art status was expressed by Joyce as, “I don’t really care what it looks like” and “I just don’t do a head trip or ego trip on myself when I paint”. Susan negated the fusion with figurative imagery by saying that it is, “un-contemporary, and has no artistic merit”. However both Joyce and Susan felt some risk, although it was for different reasons. With the plan to show all of the new artwork in a public space, Joyce’s private artwork status incited her fear of public scrutiny. She expressed this movement from private to public as, “I’ve got my whole world of madness being displayed out there”. Susan, on the other hand, believed mixing her abstract elitism with figurative naivety bore some risk to her artistic professional credibility. In her words she said to Joyce “it’s my reputation as a contemporary artist that is at stake”.

A review of the postmodern feminist reconstruction of my artwork styles finds artistic worth in the figurative expression of personal crisis that has previously been delegated.
to low art, outsider art, and hidden from view in a cardboard folder or a plastic box. The reconstruction of what I had called my figurative art or sometimes my “mad art” makes apparent the relational links between the realist concepts in the institution of art and its exclusory practices that postmodernism and feminism have contested. However, this study project includes exhibiting the artwork from the findings, some of which is the private artwork of Joyce that will be shown in public space for the very first time, bringing the previously private artwork about life, about gender, about mental health, about sexuality and marginality into public space and thus crossing the realist boundaries that once insisted on the separation of art and subject matter into either public or private sphere.

My range of artistic expression has demonstrated multiplicity and adaptability and has collapsed the divisions between art and life, high and low art, psychological and aesthetical orientation, and white male elitism versus lesbian sensibility. I need to emphasise that the gulf between figurative and abstract styles has not merged, rather there is no longer a need to maintain the tight boundaries that previously segregated the artwork of Joyce and Susan. The gradual loosening of the once rigid opposition can be seen in the graduation of position and background of images made throughout the study process. One journal image of Joyce and Susan created at the onset of the project illustrated them face to face in conflict, ready for battle (Figure 4.4). Whereas a much later image, Same Shadow (Figure 4.98), has shown the two entities in a closer formation, a ring of orange connecting them in an “embrace of collaboration”. The early image of The Gathering (Figure 4.19) pitches two selves on a distinct contrasting background of black and white, while the background grey shades in Same Shadow (Figure 4.98) is hardly distinguishable.

Returning to the study journal image (Figure 5.5), the reconstruction demonstrated my multiplicity in having more than one artistic style of expression. In this condition of artistic multiplicity there are endless possibilities, the styles may come to overlap, they might combine into another form, or an opening might have encouraged a new style to materialise. However, the once dualistic artwork styles will probably never be polarised and locked into the binarism as they were at the start of this project, and probably never resume the oppositional hierarchies maintained by the realist dualities in the art world.
Contesting images of multiple selves as signs of madness

Returning to the findings to view my depiction of self as multiple selves, I discussed the history of images viewed as signs of madness, and I further looked at contemporary practices that continue to rely on detecting madness through peoples’ artwork. In addition, I expounded various views in art therapy that suggested attributes inherent in art making provoke multiplicity, and I suggested that the employment of art making enables fruitful exploration of complex multi-layered aspects of multiple selves.

The findings highlighted my concern in having visually represented myself as multiple selves in images that would be viewed by others. My concern was based more on others’ interpretation and categorisations of me, rather than any concern about my own depiction or expression. In particular my concerns were with my art therapy peers and especially those who might perceive the notion of multiple selves within a traditional psychopathological frame. I was also self conscious of openly demonstrating my practice of alternating from one artistic style to another, and one art material to another, as a general perception of mental instability. However, I was even more concerned with the thematic content of my artworks that graphically presented myself as several selves. My past experiences with psychotherapists’ responses to my depiction of multiple selves supported my concerns. The findings have highlighted this concern. In this reflexive passage from the findings I had written, “some practitioners might interpret such images as The Gathering and Multiple Me with an immediate diagnosis of Multiple Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality or Bipolar Disorder”. Having revealed images of my multiple selves had felt like providing the very material that some therapists have historically used, and currently use, to justify their clients’ mental health diagnosis as mentally ill.

The detection of madness through images has an interesting history. In researching the power of photography, John Tagg (2006) recalled the work of Dr Hugh Welch Diamond, who in mid 1848 was elected resident superintendent of the Female Department of the Surrey County Lunatic Asylum, the same asylum where I became a patient over a century later. Diamond took many photographs of his patients, mostly his female patients. His appraisal “for clinical photography was that it functioned as a means of rapid identification” (Tagg, 2006, p. 345). His photographs were reproduced into lithographs where some of the supposed traits of madness were exaggerated in an attempt to exemplify that mental illness was detectable by physical identifiable markers.
Diamond’s 1856 paper titled “On the Application of Photography to the Physiognomic and Mental Phenomena of Insanity” promoted the application of photography to the delineation of insanity (Tagg, 2006, p. 343). Diamond’s photography sat in amongst, not only the contemporary conventions of the portraiture of madness such as Hogarth’s painting ‘The Rake’s Progress’ (Gilman, 1976, p. 8), but also the established insane typologies and “already developed codes of medical and psychiatric illustration found in the line drawings and engravings” of the eighteenth century (Tagg, 2006, p. 345). Diamond’s photographs of the insane earned a significant place in medical history, not for their intended physical detection of madness, but as “procedure of objectification and subjection, the transmission of power in the synaptic space of the camera’s examination” (Tagg, 2006, p. 364), thus contributing to examples of the general historical misuse of images in medical and psychiatric typology.

The history of art therapists’ interpretation of images to determine mental health diagnosis continued to be evident. During the 1980’s to mid 1990’s there was great interest and a flurry of literature demonstrating the success of using clients’ artwork to detect and categorise persons with the then named Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) amongst other disorders such as Bi-polar Disorder (BPD). The use of pre-designed diagnostic drawing tests are still frequently used by health practitioners and claimed to secure a client’s diagnosis. Techniques have been designed to aid the art therapists’ clear-cut interpretation of themes or qualities that might occur in a client’s artwork and through which some art therapists feel able to form an accurate mental health diagnosis. For instance, from her study, Nancy Fuhrman (1993) claimed that “evidence of one’s multiplicity can be observed in artistic production via developmental studies” (p. 28). Her results have shown:

that the developmental stages of MPD patients are independent of one another and change as switching among alters occurs. Switching results in a fluctuation among represented stages of artistic growth. While normal creative development progresses in a smooth, predictable manner, the developmental process noted in artwork of MPD patients presents something quite different (p. 27).

Anne Mills and Barry Cohen (1993) developed a diagnostic drawing series (DDS) asking their clients to complete three pictures, a free picture, a tree picture, and a feeling picture, moving their paper in any direction (p. 42). Their DDS system was based on the
“commonality of themes found in artwork by people with MPD” (p. 40) and “the hypothesis regarding the DDSs of MPD subjects was that the progression, the manner in which the three consecutive drawings graphically related, would be uneven or erratic” (p. 51). Mills and Cohen claimed “the DDS, a structured interview designed to facilitate psychiatric diagnosis, is a beneficial tool for identifying MPD” as “each set of drawings were categorised according to the DSMIII diagnosis” (p. 40). Their analysis of pictures included reporting visual representation of movement, odd trees, tilts more than 15 degrees (despite the client having been invited to rotate their paper), abstraction, and enclosure, all of which is said to assist in MPD diagnosis.

Although Mills and Cohen acknowledge the “differential diagnosis of MPD and BPD through art alone to be the most challenging” they are later able to conclude that “MPD artwork generally looks more disintegrated and impoverished than BPD artwork” (p. 50). In demonstrating their “Graphic Profile” of what “a typical MPD sample looks like” they declare “Clients with MPD generally create artwork in their DDSs that look like an MPD profile to a trained clinician” (p. 52-53). Using clients’ artworks, Mills and Cohen demonstrated their “MPD profiles” as “unusual placement” in the free picture; “upside down trees”, “odd trees”, “trees at extreme right or left of the paper”, trees that “have been cut down or have the tops lopped off” in the tree picture; and “enclosure” in the feeling picture (p. 57-60). They point out that “the appearance in a DDS of a cluster of structural signs, in conjunction with certain elements of themes and context, should raise the clinician’s index of suspicion and promote further investigation” (p. 59). They also assert that “because of the uniqueness of the graphic characteristics with multiplicity, art therapists who have become familiar with the DDS research and rating system now have an effective way to determine MPD through art” (p. 40). They concluded, “Art can be used to facilitate early, accurate diagnosis” (p. 62).

How a figure is portrayed, or even the stance of a figure is seen as the artist’s alters acting out. Christine Spaletto (1993) cited Wilbur (1984) who stated that one of the commonly found conflicts in MPD patients is “self-esteem versus worthlessness” and that pictorially, “Alters act according to the particular stance they assume in these conflicts” (p. 72). In my painting of The Gathering, the figures of Work Person, Flying Woman and Earth Woman versus Foetus, Skeleton and Star could certainly be read as “self-esteem versus worthlessness”. Pictorial shapes and body parts have also been used to suggest signs of mental illness. In Dee Spring’s (1993) analysis of MPD patients’
artwork, she claims that artwork containing “Wedges and eyes tend to be the work of alters” (p. 89). However, she concluded by assuring that “The MPD patient can integrate to a unified whole through the symbolic language of art” (p. 98). I had also presumed my multiple selves in The Gathering would integrate into a whole.

The findings have elucidated the predominance of two styles of artwork, small dry art materials on paper and large wet art materials on canvas. The shifting from one material to another is also made available for diagnosis. In another study on art therapy with hospitalised patients diagnosed with MPD, Spaletto (1993) observed that “Some alters may have a preference for certain material and become invested in showing their skills and expressing their experiences exclusively with this choice. Child alters often prefer relatively regressive materials, such as finger paint, clay, or crayons” (p. 71).

There is a disagreement amongst art therapist as to the use of images made in therapy for diagnostic purposes (Case & Dalley 1992; Hogan 2001). For example, Case and Dalley (1992) warned that images made in therapy are “vulnerable to misinterpretation” and that “Care must be taken not to make rapid interpretation …As the image is unique to the patient, it is only she can that can ultimately come to understand its full significance” (p. 65).

As this discussion has shown, in terms of realist themes, whether made by artists, medics or patients, images have been presumed to hold inherent clues for the detection of mental illness. These detections have been claimed through the interpretation of portraiture, pictorial qualities and image contents. However, image and health historian Sander Gilman (1995a) stated that, often what has, “been avoided is the idea of multiple, simultaneous meanings, the very ambiguity that is inherent to visual images, no matter what their venue” (p. 19).

**Re-addressing lesbian visual representation**
Continuing under self visual representation, I next focus on my own visual representation of lesbianism where, through stories and images within the findings, I surmised that I had been caught in a perpetual cycle through my responses to lesbian invisibility and lesbian censorship. I found four points that enabled my continuation in the cyclic pattern and I will now discuss these in view of authors who had brought to light the complexities of lesbian visual representations. I will demonstrate through a
postmodern feminist deconstruction and reconstruction process, my own visual representations of lesbianism had undergone transformations, which disrupted my perpetual cyclic pattern, inspiring new perceptions on lesbian representation and artistic expression.

**Perpetual cycle of lesbian representation**

In terms of lesbian representation, when scrutinising the findings I identified that my reaction to lesbian invisibility and rejection of my lesbian themed artwork had resulted in my being caught in a perpetual circular motion. My mapping of the divides and cyclic motion can be viewed in a study journal image (Figure 5.6) upon which I have expanded.

![Figure 5.6 Cyclic Motion of Lesbian Depiction](image)

Describing the cyclic images in Figure 5.6, at the top there is a cloud with “Lesbian Invisibility” scribed on it. The symbolism of a cloud is apt as it suggested that the ability to see others or one’s own reflection is obliterated. The cloud symbolically described my having internalised the invisibility of lesbianism as personal denigration and an annihilation of myself. In response to this personalisation of lesbian invisibility, I had felt compelled to actively rectify the situation and bring myself into existence by making lesbian themed images (top right). However, visually communicating lesbianism proved complex and my images were met with disdain and rejection from both heterosexuals and lesbians (middle right). My response to the public negative reaction was two-fold, I either recoiled by reducing the size of artwork depicting lesbian themes so that they were small enough to hide away, or I would produce large
undetectable lesbian images concealed in abstract style (bottom). This placed my depiction of lesbianism into several divides, small or large, figurative or abstract, visible or invisible, and public or private (lower left). The cycle would repeat when eventually I again felt starved of lesbian depiction; I would produce further images which were responded to negatively, and so continue this cyclic ordeal.

I ascertained that maintaining this perpetual cycle relied on four pivotal modernist principles. Firstly, the cycle was propelled by my perception that to be invisible and under-represented was both personally and politically denigrating or annihilating. Secondly, it relied on the need for corrective action to rectify the situation and make lesbian images. Thirdly, it assumed the possibility that depicting ‘lesbian’ was possible, and fourthly, it relied on a presumed universality of lesbian visual depiction that other lesbians would welcome. These essentialist themes are listed below:

- My correlation of the invisibility of lesbian representation with my identity
- My need to actively turn lesbian invisibility into visibility
- My supposition that representing lesbian was possible
- My presumption that all lesbians would welcome and respond positively to my representations of lesbianism

To further examine the essentialist themes and dualistic oppositions, together with the postmodern feminist reconstructions, I discuss each of the four areas one by one.

My first point is related to how I had correlated the general invisibility of lesbian representation with my own existence as a lesbian. This correlation between self and other was conceptualised by philosopher Martin Buber (1958) through the relationship between “I and thou” where Buber declared that without a “thou” there was no “I”. Being seen by others also signifies one’s own existence as Donald Winnicott (1971) proposed, “When I look I am seen, so I exist” (p. 114). In relation to lesbian representation Buloff & Osterman (1995) observed, “Peering into the face of society …the lesbian looks for a reflection of herself” (p. 95). Peggy Phelan (1993) stated that the “relationship between representation and identity is linear and smoothly mimetic. What one sees is what one is [and therefore] if one’s mimetic likeness is not represented, one is not addressed” (p. 7). In another stance, Elizabeth Ashburn (1996) asked how one can act on that which cannot be seen.
The social and cultural referents to lesbianism and the “profound absence of mirroring of lesbian sexual orientation cannot be underestimated” (Susan Gair 1995 p. 120). The effect of limited mirroring on forming one’s emotional understanding is a point taken up by Judith Glassgold (1995) who asserted, “As mirroring or recognition by other is a first step in self-recognition, this initial lack of recognition can make it harder for some women to recognise and understand the meaning of their feelings” (p. 208). For lesbians, the lack of self mirroring may be doubled in that she will often see no self reflection either in her family members or in her socio-cultural surroundings (Buloff & Osterman, 1995). In relation to the lack of lesbian representation and self validation, Gair (1995) postulated, “How do these experiences influence the development of self-cohesion, the valuing of all parts of the self? (p. 107). The question of validation was also put forward by Buloff & Osterman (1995), in that once identified as a lesbian “…where does she go to get the sense of validation and affirmation …that validate and affirm the loving part of herself?” (p. 99).

Through the postmodern feminist frame I questioned my correlation between lesbian representation and my existence. I recalled times in my life when I had no lesbian referents at all, when there was no “thou” to signify ‘I’ (Buber 1958), and no reflection through which to perceive self (Buloff & Osterman 1995). I also questioned how I had survived at all. I recalled historical accounts of lesbian artists such as Brooks and Gluck and how they were able to form assertive affirmative personalities and outward achievements in the mid to late 1800s when there were no opportunities for mirroring their lesbian existence. I came to question how lesbian artists of the 1970’s onwards created a visual history of defying censorship and gender restrictions by performing the transgressive act of being a lesbian artist in a male defined and occupied discipline where lesbian mirroring was limited.

I also considered my dualistic opposition of lesbian invisibility as powerlessness and lesbian visibility as powerful. I contemplated that, “[i]f representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture” (Phelan (1993, p. 11). Through my reconstruction of ‘lesbian’, I found ambiguity and obscurity offered more inventive opportunities than entrenched familiarity, more flexibility to continually self-invent, and this bought about a broadening of my overall perception of lesbianism, and those who may identify as lesbian.
My second point was my drive to counteract lesbian invisibility with visibility in order to rectify not being addressed (Phelan 1993). The findings illuminated that I had painted images picturing two women’s bodies together as the only way I could envisage communicating lesbian. The findings also revealed that I did not perceive any of my lesbian themed artworks to be a deliberate stir or shock when shown at art college or to the lesbian collective. Lesbian depiction and the range of overt or subtle intention was taken up by several theorists (Hart 1998; Cruikshank 1992; Gever 2003). Lynda Hart (1998) observed that, “lesbians defended themselves by insisting on the naturalness and purity of their love and by disassociating their lesbian “identities” from sexual passion” (p. 48), while Cruikshank (1992) commented that in tackling lesbian representation there was often no intention to sensationalise rather to portray lesbianism as “common and ordinary” (p. 164). However, do subtle depictions of such “naturalness and purity”, “common and ordinary”, begin to conform to heterosexual normality and restrict lesbian representations, as Gever (2003) asked, “Will lesbians trade in imaginative assaults on normalcy for these well-made, well-managed, reasonable selves?” (p. 197). Whether subtle or overt, distinguishing a lesbian body from a heterosexual body is fraught with representational problems.

My third supposition, concerned how to communicate ‘lesbianism’ when ‘lesbian’ has no unified visual marker. As Creed (1995) observed, “To function properly as ideological litmus paper, the lesbian body must be instantly recognisable” (p. 101). In the depiction of a single lesbian body complexity arises with distinguishing this from a heterosexual body. A question Creed (1995) posed, “If it is the female body in general – rather than specifically the lesbian body – which signifies the other, how then, does the lesbian body differ from the so-called ‘normal’ woman?” (p. 87-88). Even when two female bodies are pictured together, how can we secure their lesbian status? Jagose (2002) made the point that,

[the] lesbian body, even (and perhaps particularly) when naked, looks first and foremost like a woman’s body. Nor is there much reassurance - although any amount of pleasure - in bringing two women’s naked bodies together to represent lesbianism as a relational phenomenon (p. 143-144).

Indeed the only way I had found to depict lesbianism as “ideological litmus paper” (Creed 1995, p. 101) was to depict two women’s bodies together with some obvious
sexual intention. Nevertheless, women’s bodies together give little reassurance of lesbian identity (Jagose 2002).

Depicting lesbianism through sex activity proved disadvantageous for several reasons. The attempt to visually define the lesbian as a sexual ‘type’ supported the historical sexologists’ insistence that lesbianism was physiologically detectable; any visual description of lesbianism becomes consistent with the “fraught and long-frustrated sexological attempt to taxonomise female homosexuality as a distinct category” (Jagose 2002 p. 141). The perception of a lesbian taxonomy was made apparent when during one of my presentations of this study a male psychotherapist in the audience asked whether I was going to include genetic research on why lesbians were so muscular.

Delineating lesbianism as a ‘type’ upheld the homophobic crucial urge to reduce lesbianism to identifiable minority criteria in order to maintain the ‘normalcy’ of heterosexual women. As Jagose (2002) explained,

lesbian visibility is … always in the service of a homophobic imperative to know and mark the lesbian as distinct and identifiable, as emblematic of a certain pathology, as a member of a fixed minority population in order to license as natural and in no need of explanation that heterosexual femininity which the lesbian dangerously imitates and from which she must therefore be distinguished (p. 143).

According to Judith Butler (1990, 2004) there is a common reliance on female heterosexual representation as the guiding model or prototype which lesbian representation must attempt to replicate, in other words, homosexuality must aspire to match the original heterosexuality. It is in this Butlerian sense that heterosexuality is contested as the original sexuality or ‘normal sexuality’ to which homosexuality must be a copy, to avoid being seen as a failed second. In a similar vein to Butler, when Gever (2003) questioned, “Will lesbians trade in imaginative assaults on normalcy for these well-made, well-managed, reasonable selves?” (p. 197), she implied that definitional aspirations towards normalcy (heterosexuality) may indeed be limiting, whereas a more imaginative lesbian sensibility could view lesbianism as self-defining, multitudinous and mobile.
During the study, my own dualistic visual representation of lesbianism as either small figurative depictions of sexual activity or large abstractly concealed paintings began to expand towards more conceptually unconfined and multi-layered images that represented my multiple perceptions of my lesbianism.

My fourth and last point was my continual presumption that other lesbians would welcome and respond to my images of lesbianism positively. I constantly found that this was not the case which caused me to recoil. Making lesbianism visible through bodies and sexuality came about in the 1970’s to late 1980’s when to visually sexualise women was considered by some lesbians as anti-feminist. Wilton (2004a) recalled that the so-called ‘sex-war’ split feminism into two groups, “those who believed sexually explicit imagery to be irrevocably contaminated by sexism and others who insist that sexual exploration is central to women’s liberation” (p. 115). Lesbian feminists spoke out in response to being labelled sexual perverts and sexually promiscuous; Hart (1998) commented that “Pervasive in the literature of the lesbian feminists of the 1970’s are accounts of persecutions grounded in the reduction of lesbianism to sexuality” (p. 47). The censorship of women and sexual depiction by some feminist camps had served to further marginalise lesbian depiction by lesbian artists.

The deconstruction process had led me to identify my cyclic pattern in which dualistic oppositions were significant factors. A closer investigation of my cyclic pattern pointed to four essentialist and dualistic attitudes that had perpetuated my cyclic motion. I examined the four points individually. Firstly, I discussed how my view of lesbian invisibility versus lesbian visibility had been correlated with validation of my existence; secondly, I examined my beliefs in invisibility as disempowering versus visibility as more empowering; thirdly, I considered my presumption that lesbian could be made visible; and fourthly, I explored my assumptions in relation to how lesbians would respond to my visual representations of lesbianism.

Through the postmodern feminist reconstruction I questioned my correlation of lesbian invisibility with personal invalidation, and reconceptualised lesbian invisibility with its ambiguous status as advantageous for creative self invention with fluid multiple meanings. I also questioned my presumption that visibility equals power, and further reconsidered how a lesser regulated and controlled category had significant opportunities for the powerful act of transgressing the boundaries and borders of
conventions. The postmodern feminist frame also led me to query previous unified notions of lesbian visibility and question what aspect of lesbianism actually renders lesbian visible. The deconstruction of my previous assumption of lesbian response to lesbian representations bought me to the recognition that a multitude of historical, cultural and individual variants maintain lesbian visual representation relentlessly unstable and as a site of endless reinvention.

In concluding the discussion on disrupting the dualisms in art, this section began by viewing the findings to identify how I had arranged my artistic identity and art practice into several dualistic oppositions, such as Joyce and Susan, figurative and abstract, small and large, art therapy influenced and visual art influenced, and private and public. I discussed how art history and art culture has endorsed oppositional attitudes in the separations of art from life, high art from low art, psychological from aesthetics, and public from private. I explained how artists and art organisations have contested such divisions and I demonstrated how the postmodern feminist deconstructive process had challenged my own binary oppositions, reconstructing a more fluid sense of artistic identity and artwork style.

I investigated the findings where I had associated depicting multiple selves with some apprehension of being perceived by others as unstable, unhealthy or mad. I discussed how images have historically been used to detect individuals as mad or sane and how some clinical practices still utilise clients’ artwork to obtain a clinical diagnosis, however, I also put forward that some art therapists’ consider this as misguided and a misuse of the client’s image. I explained how the psychotherapies have formed the concept of healthy and sane through notions of ‘whole’ and ‘single’ and that this was pitched in opposition to unhealthy and insane through notions of ‘fragmented’ and ‘multiple’. Through postmodernism and feminism I explained how imaging multiple selves has enabled me to reflexively investigate the variety of ways I had experienced my selves in a multitude of situations. I had put forward the idea that visualising a multiplicity of selves assisted in the recognition of the various facets of selves in relation to changing times, situations and emotional states.

In the last segment of this section, I focused on lesbian representation discussing how the findings had bought to light an ongoing cycle of reaction and production. I investigated how the cycle was perpetuated through my dualistic and essentialist beliefs.
and I discussed these in light of other theorists. I demonstrated how through postmodern feminist deconstruction I had been able to question my own dualistic arrangements, previous assumptions, and essentialist beliefs. The reconstruction evoked more questions than answers about lesbian representation; I now have further questions that will provide the impetus for creative ways of perceiving and representing lesbian while recognising ‘lesbian’ as a multiple, mutable, ever shifting term.

Self perceptions and visual artwork cannot be divorced from the influences of ones social, political and cultural context. Having previously discussed subjectivity in the first part of this discussion and disrupting the dualisms in art in the second part, the third part of the discussion further scrutinises the findings and discusses issues of self in relation to social positioning.

**Social positioning**

In relation to my social positioning, the findings revealed a pattern of oscillation through a number of dualistic oppositions. Such oscillation was shaped by how I experienced and interpreted my particular attributes within the socio-political sphere. There were three prominent themes identified within the findings. These were:

- Gender scripts
- Lesbian identity
- Mental health

Whether learnt through subtle socialisation, influenced by negative attitudes, or induced by socio-political discrimination, I had perceived gender, sexuality and mental health as having positioned me in a less than favourable social order. Gender, lesbianism and mental health as subject areas are too vast in theoretical contributions to be done justice within the limitations of the thesis. Therefore, I have briefly examined the shifts that occurred from my previous realist perceptions of my social positioning to the postmodern feminist reconstruction of my perceptions of my social positioning. To ascertain the relative links between social positioning within the findings, realist ideologies, and postmodern feminist shifts, I have used the subject headings of Gender, Lesbian, and Mental Health to structure the discussion. However, as the postmodern shifts have considerable intersections the discussion under these three subject headings has considerable overlap.
**Gender scripts**

The early indoctrination relating to gender category was apparent in the findings. As an only girl with three brothers, the findings revealed how I had observed the distinct difference in my upbringing in comparison to that of my brothers. In one story, I expressed the gendered division of activities, objects, and behaviours as my getting “a raw deal” while pressure to conform to the female script was expressed as “trying to walk in someone else’s shoes”. My awkward relationship with the conventions of femininity was symbolised by items that dampened or limited my exuberance, such as frocks, hair styles and gifts that rendered me immobile while my brothers’ clothes and gifts supported their continued vitality. The findings show that my unsuccessful indoctrination into the full ‘feminine’ script had resulted in my feeling like a “girl gone wrong” symbolised by a red cross. Images of my non-compliance to the pre-prescribed ‘feminine’ script were presented with a red cross over my ‘unfeminine’ social acclaims. This is evident particularly in School Sports Cup Winner (Figure 4.63) and Swords Boy Girl (Figure 4.64). A painting made during the study showed me running from the mirror reflection of what a ‘proper’ girl ‘should’ look like (Figure 4.65) - the running figure is dressed in blue jeans and blue shirt.

The inculcation of gendered social values into young children was highlighted by early feminists such as Juliet Mitchell (1966). Children’s mannerism and interests were curtailed and controlled through categorising activities and behaviours as either feminine or masculine, private or public (Gilligan 1982). Learned early in life, the acceptable codes of conduct became embedded in Western culture through feminine or masculine scripts which were supported and controlled through a frame of ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’. Femininity was typified by preparing a girl for the transition to a woman’s sexual attractiveness and availability to men, with the emphasis on appearance as identity, with feminists such as Phyllis Chesler (1972) claiming that to attempt to fulfil the criteria for ‘femininity’ was also a prescription for failure. Girls were guided towards child rearing, service in the home, and towards subservience and dependency on men, under the guise of ‘natural’ and ‘feminine’. Activities were also divided into gendered categories. Women who exerted themselves in sport or recreation in the public sphere were perceived as unfeminine, while activities of domesticity in the private sphere of the home were considered appropriately feminine.
The findings revealed that I experienced the imposition and the impracticality of ‘femininity’ as disabling and socially ostracising. If, as claimed, women are always positioned ‘other’ to men (de Beauvoir, 1953), then my non-conformity to conventional female gender scripts placed me not only ‘other’ to men, but also ‘other’ to conventional feminine women. Knowing I was not a boy but not recognising myself as a girl, from an early age the findings show that I described myself using the terms “misfit” and “girl gone wrong”.

The visual symbolism used to convey my non-conformity to gender script was the red cross and blue clothing; a closer investigation revealed the subtle differing emphasis of the two symbols. The red cross which was often seen placed over my face and partially covering my eyes, symbolised self concealment as a result of feeling my unacceptability and shame in not meeting the standards of ‘proper’ female through conventional ‘feminine’ codes. However, the symbolism of blue clothing did not indicate the same sense of concealment, nor imply unacceptability or shame, but rather symbolised the intent to rebel and defy social conventions. The symbolism of the red cross and blue clothes conveyed two distinct responses to gender script non-conformity, one conveys having failed feminine conventions while the other conveys intent to rebel and transgress feminine conventions. I will return to further discuss these symbols later in this section under postmodern feminist reconstructions.

Often referred to as the public/private divide, feminists have critiqued all discourses that have resulted in women being differently positioned to men. Hierarchical social positioning was based on biological determinism and gender divisions, however, feminism had to also rely on essentialism in order to identify ‘woman’ as a category denigrated to a lower social order. Activities assigned as feminine pursuits were delegated to the private and were therefore of menial social significance. The dualistic divisions of women/men, natural/cultural, private/public were central in establishing and maintaining patriarchal power controlled through ideologies and repression in order to retain categories as unquestionable and fixed ‘truths’ (Rubin, 1975).

Shulamith Firestone (1970) suggested that structuring society through the unquestionable binary framework affects every aspect of our social lives, while other theorists (Grosz 1994a; 1994b; Lupton, 1995; Turner, 1984) have focused on the mind
body divide where the mind is required to dominate a body seen as a mass of unruly impulse desires and emotions which “is linked to and replicated in a series of other differentiations: of reason from passion, public from private, reality from appearance, culture from nature, humanity from animality, male from female, self from other” (Harding 1998, p.29-30). Feminists have tended to view the public/private division as representative of the many dualistic divisions that have placed women in a disadvantaged or marginalised position. As Joan Landes (1998) stated, by focusing on questions of public and private life, feminism calls attention to the ways in which public and private divisions have been drawn in the past and continue to be drawn today, …questions of recognition and representation, culture and interest, equality and justice are discussed in terms of the gendered organisation of public and private life (p. 16).

Feminist critiques of gender divisions have long been scrutinised, (see Janeway 1971, Ortner 1973, Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974, Mathieu 1978, Griffin 1982, Gilligan 1982, Mitchell 1966, Landes 1998) and have revealed the power differentiations within discourses and social attitudes. Despite feminist onslaughts, dualistic oppositions and modernist conventions continue to be embedded in many contemporary attitudes. For instance, women continue to be considered unable to cope or to be isolated if unmarried. The findings revealed that the car battery sales woman presumed I would require a “husband to help” fit a new battery in my car, and a female psychiatrist presumed that I “lived all alone in isolation”, giving her concerns about my “ability to interact on a personal level” due to my lack of a husband. The postmodern feminist deconstruction and reconstruction of my gender scripts will be discussed later in this section on social positioning.

Lesbian identity
The findings show that as well as gender scripts, identifying as a lesbian had a significant effect on my perceived social positioning and that my alignment with a stigmatised group had, at times, positioned me outside what was the considered ‘normal’, and therefore socially marginalised.
From the findings, I identified many themes that linked my identification as a lesbian with my sense of marginalised social positioning. These themes included homophobia and anti-lesbian sentiment in the family, education, politics and health care. Within the limits of this thesis, I am unable to venture into all of these areas in any depth. Therefore, I have focused on health care and in particular, on the theme of lesbianism and silencing in health care. Although the findings have demonstrated that the issues of my lesbianism and mental health were continually entwined, I have discussed them consecutively in order to expose the modernist realist themes in relation to social positioning and to be better able to identify the shifts that occurred through the postmodern feminist frame later in this section.

I began by discussing the early indoctrination of homophobic attitudes and how this impacted on identity development. I then discussed the various ways in which discourses become an influential tool, in which lesbianism becomes silent and lesbians become silenced. I then discussed how mental health systems have played a part in silencing and also in the formation of prejudices and discrimination. Finally I addressed how this postmodern feminist investigation became an empowering process, one that led me to gain new perceptions of my social positioning.

**Homophobia and secrecy in education**

Prejudice and discrimination towards lesbians can start early in life. Whilst I was aware of my lesbianism from primary school age, and although in the 1960’s many school children, including myself, would have never been aware of meeting or seeing a lesbian even on television, I nevertheless experienced feeling socially ostracised due to negative taunts. Research has signalled that homophobic attitudes change little in adulthood. In a 2003-4 Australian report by Roy Morgan Research, of the 24,718 respondents, 35 per cent aged over 14 years (43% males, 27% females) believed homosexuality to be immoral (Flood & Hamilton in Healey 2007 p. 22-23). Throughout my thirteen years of schooling, stigmatisation and hate crimes towards homosexuals threatened my personal safety making it imperative to remain silent about my lesbianism. Public hatred towards such a central aspect of oneself as sexuality, together with prolonged self-silencing, can result in a diminished social status; as Hinshaw (2007) points out, “members of stigmatised groups are prone to internalise the negative messages they receive and to use coping responses of secrecy and concealment. …stigmatisation can lead to
dehumanisation, with perceptions of less-than-human status” (p. 26). Homosexuality and secrecy has continued in higher education, where secrecy has been central to some gays and lesbians maintaining their standing as students and educators at all levels of education (Glass, 2002). Some have been forced to conceal their sexuality or seek another profession as GAP (2000) confirmed, “Prominent educators who are gay or lesbian themselves often fear that disclosure of their sexual orientation will adversely affect their professional standing” (p. 67).

Identity formation in a hostile climate
At the time of my last psychiatric hospital discharge in early 1980’s UK, and during the Conservative Party’s political term, Margaret Thatcher introduced Section 28 which claimed that any education on homosexuality was promotion of promiscuity (Calhoun 2000 p.150). Following the introduction of Section 28, there was a surge in anti gay sentiment and homosexual crimes of violence, including the burning of gay owned businesses and with the suppression of HIV AIDS, related safe-sex education programs. Media sensationalism incited public mocking of gays and lesbians in the public sector and the outbreak of HIV AIDS gay and lesbians were perceived as disease carriers and disease spreaders. It was a cultural climate in which forming a confident social identity and affirmative social positioning as a lesbian was challenging, and with the addition of a lengthy mental health record, attaining a positive sense of social positioning was improbable. Silence and concealing of sexual identity became imperative for personal safety, one that was reinforced by government legislation.

Silencing and concealment of sexuality as a health issue
Gayle Pitman (1999) insists that the “institutional promotion of homophobia is manifested through every aspect of our culture” (p. 133). Silencing and concealment of sexual identity has been shown to take a psychological toll; as Joanne DiPlacido (1998) stated, “the constructs of self-concealment and emotional inhibition can be conceptualised as important internal stressors for many sexual minorities” (p. 148). Furthermore, “holding back the expression of feelings and thoughts requires physiological work. Cumulative inhibition of thoughts and feelings produces wear and tear on the body” (DiPlacido, 1998 p. 148).
Sexuality and space

Calhoun (2000) made an important distinction between oppression based on sexuality and other oppressions due to difference:

lesbian and gay subordination differ substantially in form from gender and racial oppression …[it] does not materialise in a disadvantaged place that …reduce[s] access to …social goods like income, wealth, education, employment, and authoritative social positioning. Instead, lesbian and gay subordination consists in the systematic displacement of gays and lesbians to the outside of civil society so that … [they] have no legitimised place, not even a disadvantaged one (p. 76).

From the findings, this lack of legitimate space is symbolised in a painting Out Of Here (Figure 4.56) which depicts suicidal thoughts and the wish to leave four buildings which are detailed as the large psychiatric hospital, my work place, my parent’s home and a house where I had unsuccessfully tried to comply by living with a man. The commentary spoke of wanting “to be away from all these places and I felt as though no other places existed for me to reside in”. The reference here is consistent with Calhoun’s comments that the overwhelming predominance of heterosexuality resulted in “no legitimised place”.

Whether out or closeted, the codes of public space are rigid with heterosexual acceptability and homosexual unacceptability outside of the private sphere. As Calhoun (2000) remarked, there is a “requirement that all citizens adopt at least the appearance of heterosexual identity as a condition of access to the public sphere” (p. 76). Allotting homosexuality to the private sphere implied curtailing affection and concealing identity in the public domain in order to maintain (heterosexual) public order. Furthermore:

[t]he presence of persons who are gay or lesbian need not contaminate the heteronormativity of public space providing that homosexuality and lesbianism, as identities, remain private matters, and providing that, in public, gay men and lesbians adopt pseudonymous heterosexual identities (Calhoun 2000 p.88).

Calhoun (2000, p. 84-85) described how the public/private divide sets an impossible legal minefield for gays and lesbians. On the one hand the social message is that homosexuality, if tolerated at all, should be tolerated only behind closed doors in the
private sphere while at the same time differentiated legal rights brings homosexuality into the public sphere as a legal matter. Blatant inequalities at state and federal levels of politics convey the inferior social status of homosexuals and sanction prejudice and discrimination towards homosexuals as permissible and acceptable (Wilton 2000; Healey 2007). Sexually marginalised people respond to such public statements by feeling “publicly insulted” (McNair, Thomacos & Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, 2005, p. 7). The lack of recognition of same sex relationships has “a real and daily impact on the lives of thousands of gay and lesbian Australians” (The 2006 Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby Report, in Healey, 2007, p. 3). In a recent Victorian report on same sex relationships, McNair and Thomacos (2005) found their respondents experienced the same level of discrimination from both the legal system and the health care system (p. 50).

Lesbianism and silence in health care systems

Silence around lesbianism was a theme within the findings stemming from both the medical clinicians and myself. Whilst a patient in a psychiatric hospital, I met my first two self-identified lesbians nurses, Lillian and Mary. However, my meeting Lillian and Mary coincided with their being sacked from their psychiatric nursing career upon the discovery of their same sex relationship. Even in psychiatric care, my perception of lesbian was framed by continual negative associations of lesbianism as inferior or faulty.

The UK medical records I obtained during the study revealed that my four psychiatric admissions occurred over a three year period 1977 to 1980. The medical records outlined that throughout this period several mental health professionals speculated about my sexuality without any health practitioner ever actually approaching me on the subject. Some of the entries read as follows:

Consultant Psychiatrist 9th January 1978. “When I saw Susan in hospital, she seemed a rather odd personality and gave the impression of a primary neurotic depressive state. I wondered in fact whether there was some sexual psychopathology”.

Psychiatric Registrar 5th January 1978. “It appears to be a personality disorder …and homosexuality but this cannot, however, be conclusively stated. She continues to complain of phases of depression”.

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Although in the US, homosexuality had been removed from the DSM in 1973, it was not removed from the UK edition of the DSM until as late as 1987. Therefore, during my psychiatric admissions, homosexuality was still categorised as a mental illness. Despite my lack of familiarity with psychiatric diagnoses, the findings indicated I related my disclosure of lesbianism with a fear of further treatment, as these three passages expressed, “what would happen to me if the medics found out”, “what would the medics do to me?”, and “if I could be incarcerated and drugged for no reason, what would they do to me if they knew I was a lesbian” This fear maintained my side of the silence about my lesbianism while the medics maintained theirs.

Despite the removal of homosexuality as a mental illness category, “many mental health professionals seem to have retained homophobic attitudes and many of their lesbian and gay clients report inadequate or distressing experiences in consequence” (Wilton, 2000, p. 104). In King & McKeown’s (2004) study, twenty-three gays and lesbians, all of whom had previous experiences with mental health practitioners, gave “accounts of mental health practitioners’ unwillingness to draw out or engage with the issues surrounding their client’s sexuality” (p. 158). Therapists’ lack of engagement around sexuality was confirmed by a therapist who had also been receiving therapy (Davis, Cole & Rothblum, 1996). For example, as a client in therapy with a male psychiatrist, Pearlman (1996) recalls the therapist’s response when she explained her attraction to a woman:

when I related all this to my therapist, it was as though my words evaporated before they reached his ears. He did not respond, nor did he say a word, and so I was silenced and compliantly changed the subject (p. 72).

The therapist’s reaction to their client’s homosexuality was termed by Falco (1991) as “The Inadequate Response …wherein lesbianism is treated with avoidance by the therapist” (p. 44-45).
Between the reluctance of mental health practitioners to enter the subject of sexuality and the client’s reluctance to reveal their sexuality due to fear of pathologisation, there remains a double sided silence that could support a client’s continued impoverished mental health state. Rarely is homosexuality per se the central issue that brings a client to a mental health practitioner, it is more probable that being in stigmatised category that attracts prejudice and discrimination causes mental health stressors. As Suzanne Pharr (2004) clarified,

> It is not healthier to be heterosexual or right handed. What is unhealthy - and sometimes a source of stress and sickness so great it can lead to suicide - is homophobia, that societal disease that places such negative messages, condemnation, and violence on gay men and lesbians (p. 259).

Pharr (2004) made the connection between hatred and depression, “Many lesbians and gay men are …put in mental institutions. The impact of such hatred and negativity can lead to depression and, in some cases, suicide” (p. 272). Despite my mental health being so impoverished that four psychiatric admissions were warranted, neither the mental health clinicians nor I were able to utter my lesbianism, we were all silent on this issue.

**Pathologisation of lesbianism**

The influence of psychoanalytic theory on the psychopathologisation of lesbianism is an area well critiqued and a well recognised body of work (Falco 1991; O’Conner & Ryan 1993; Glassgold & Iasenza 1995, 2004). Falco (1991) documented the history of lesbian ‘cures’ such as surgical removals, drug treatment, electric shock treatment, aversion therapy, and hospitalisation and surmised that “it is clear that lesbianism is seen as an illness primarily because it contradicts established attitudes about women’s place in the realm of sex and marriage” (p. 19). Lesbian mental health needs may be better served through non-mainstream health services and because “the disease model of homosexuality has been of such little help (and has even done damage) to gays and lesbians, many gay– and lesbian-affirmative practitioners have adopted an antidiagnostic viewpoint” (Falco, 1991, p. 62).

Given that the profession of art therapy attracts up to 95% more women practitioners than men (Waller in Hogan 2003, p. 9), proportionately a lesbian client seeking art therapy for mental health support is more likely to engage with a women art therapist, a
feminist art therapist, or a lesbian feminist art therapist. However, as I have mentioned elsewhere (Joyce 1997), in Australia, the male dominated field of psychiatry has enjoyed the monopoly of mental health therapy provision weighted by government rebate schemes, while clients who seek non-psychiatric therapists such as feminist therapists or art therapists are not eligible to claim monetary rebates. Financial incentives for psychiatric (and more recently psychology) services limit “women’s options and choice in the type of therapy and the gender of the therapist, directing them towards male-dominated oppressive systems” (Joyce 1997, p. 85), leaving lesbians with little choice for their mental health support.

Art Therapy and lack of exploring lesbianism

The findings have shown that the psychiatric setting did not encourage the exploration of my lesbianism and although I had a positive recollection of my initial art therapy experience within the psychiatric setting, (“my incarceration turned into a self exploration”), the opportunity for self-exploration did not include exploration of my lesbian identity. Yet the reproduction of the first painting I made in the art therapy department, Dead Black Dog (Figure 4.58) contained the prominent theme signalling one dog having different attributes out of a family of six dogs; the coding being proportionate to the number of homosexuals to heterosexuals in my family. However, the many art therapy sessions spent talking through this image did not uncover my lesbian status within a heterosexual family.

I cannot speculate on the art therapists’ attitudes with regards to homosexuality. However, I propose that my own inability to explore my sexuality within the art therapy department was threefold. Firstly, the art therapy department was integrated into the psychiatric hospital system where I was fearful of my lesbianism being viewed as a psychopathology thereby provoking further treatment. Secondly, having learned that prejudice against lesbians within the hospital resulting in them being sacked, I was not about to invite homophobia. Thirdly, art therapy was about making pictures and at the time of hospitalisation I had only seen one brief image of lesbian representation on television, thus my visual resources to depict ‘lesbian’ were virtually absent.

The silence I experienced within the mental health system in relation to my lesbianism was symbolised by interruptions to my mouth through depicting black tape, bandage,
Having discussed Gender and Lesbianism in relation to perceived social positioning, I then moved on to the third subject heading of Mental Health in relation to social positioning. However, the realist ideologies and the postmodern reconstructions between lesbianism and mental health are considerably entwined; therefore I first discuss the findings under the heading Mental Health before looking further at the deconstruction and reconstruction that encompasses both Lesbianism and Mental Health.

**Mental health**

**Early perceptions of madness**

The findings demonstrated my own early prejudgment with regards to mental illness. In my childhood, the game of “spot the loony” played from the “safety of the back seat of my parents’ car” was based on detecting any escapees from the mad house. Despite my inexperience, my vocabulary and perception on the subject was already established. Hinshaw (2007) stated, “language patterns signal a preoccupation with mental disorder across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, with a host of terms related to mental illness used to scapegoat and demean those who violate social norms” (p. 117). As a child, there was the presumption that the “loony” was segregated into the “loony bin” for my safety, which signalled that people with mental illness were ultimately dangerous; as Hinshaw (2007) claimed, “language related to mental functioning reveals a preoccupation with mental stability and control, embedded in everyday words and phrases” (p. 117). Ironically, it was in the very same “loony bin” that as a child I had identified as place that held dangerous mad people, where I would eventually find myself as a patient.

**Asylum history**

In terms of the historical context, the Surrey County Lunatic Asylum for Paupers, later named Brookwood Hospital, opened in 1867 and was designed to house 650 inmates. Standing on 150 acres the building was supposed to take the overspill of inmates from
surrounding overcrowded workhouses, but upon its completion the asylum was already full and a further extension was immediately started. It was the era when the workhouses that had previously housed frail, uneducated, disabled and mentally unstable people were considered inhumane and did not provide opportunities for improving health. Asylums were vastly superior to workhouses and intended to provide therapeutic intervention towards improved health outcomes. However, during the Victorian era, Brookwood Hospital in particular earned a significant reputation - not for health improvement, but for the increased suicide attempts among inmates, with one third becoming ‘at risk’ within the asylum. In their study of Victorian Asylums historians, Anne Shepherd and David Wright (2002) researched the age group and mortality rate at Brookwood Hospital, concluding that, “High mortality rates were even reflected in the younger patients, up to a third of admissions under the age of 35 died within five years of entering the asylum” (p. 183).

During my own psychiatric admissions there were several suicides and attempted suicides, including my own. The findings relay health professionals’ lack of consultation and negotiation in all stages of my mental health treatment experience. From leaving my workplace where I was a microbiology assistant to driving to my G.P. appointment, to lying in a bed in a psychiatric hospital having been heavily medicated twice in one day, my part in any decision making was negligible. Within my four psychiatric admissions, the ongoing consultation between mental health practitioners and myself about my diagnosis and treatment was completely absent, and my requests to be involved in decisions about my treatment were denied, rendering a vast gap between authoritative professional and powerless consumer. The asylum was one of the ultimate institutions where authoritative control over people was sanctioned. Studies have examined the history of asylums, especially in regard to the rise and fall of the asylum and the trends of treatment therein. (Foucault 1973, Martin 1985, Shepherd & Wright 2002).

**Asylum institutional praxis**

When compared to general medical hospital, the institutional practice of the asylum differs considerably in relation to consumer rights and consumer input. Once clinicians claim the patient to be of unsound mind, discussing diagnosis, providing information and negotiating a treatment plan with the patient seemed to be deemed futile. In his
1961 publication titled *Asylums*, Erving Goffman described the asylum as a “total institution”. Referring to Goffman’s work, Rogers and Pilgrim (2005) explained “total institution” as “all activities and interventions are determined by the regime of the hospital. When this is the case, patients have little or no moment-to-moment powers of decision making. In effect, they have abandoned their right to agree or disagree to specifiable actions on admission or it is taken away from them” (p. 156). They further explained that such an institution, “runs according to an enclosed and formalised administrative regime” and is “geared towards fulfilling the official aims of the institution rather than the needs of individuals. A strict demarcation exists between ‘inmates’ and staff” (p. 172).

The findings revealed that upon entering the asylum, my clothing was suddenly taken without either my permission or an explanation, leaving me suspicious that there had been a “trick since they had taken all of my clothes”, replacing them with hospital garments unfit for outdoor wear. There has been some interest in forms of institutional control which begins immediately upon entering the asylum, one such practices included the stripping of identity upon entering the asylum, a process Goffman (1961) termed the “mortification of self” where there was an expectation on the ward to “disown their former selves through devaluation of past lives” (Rogers and Pilgrim, 2005, p. 173). The relinquishing of previous identity is described by Hinshaw (2007) as the ritual of “systematically stripping inmates of personal identity from the moment of entering the facility (e.g. giving up personal clothing for institutional garb)” (p. 121). The stripping of a new arrival of personal effects was termed by Goffman (1961) as the “degradation ceremony”. An admission procedure was described by Rogers and Pilgrim (2005),

> On entering the hospital a person was deprived of their previous identity through regimentation. This entailed stripping a person of their previous affirmation of self, movement was restricted, clothes worn on entry replaced with pyjamas or with hospital owned clothing, and personal belongings such as money and jewellery taken away” (p. 172).

These items were not returned until departure from the institution.
Mental health diagnosis

According to my medical records, a diagnosis was not forthcoming. The failure of mental health professionals to concur on a diagnosis was not uncommon, and this failure of clinicians to concur retained the instability of diagnostic categories, as Hinshaw (2007) uncovered, “Research was demonstrating that even seasoned clinicians could not agree on the presence of major mental disorders … How valid was the concept of mental illness if its most serious manifestations could not be diagnosed reliably” (p. 84). Rogers and Pilgrim (2005) added “[t]here are no benchmarks that experts from different camps can agree on and discuss. Thus ‘mental disorder’ or ‘mental illness’ or ‘maladaptive behaviour’ or simply being ‘loony’ do not necessarily have a single referent” (p. 10). However, the inability of clinicians to agree on a diagnosis or lack of a single referent in mental disorder categories merely evoked the establishment of a more and more precise system of the categorisation of mental illness, which in turn seemed to attempt to further legitimise the credibility and reliability of mental health diagnostic categories.

Nevertheless, the power to differentiate an abnormal mental functioning from a normal functioning automatically also exposes a value judgment made in collusion with respective institutional objectives, as Rogers and Pilgrim (2005) put forward in their question,

Who decides what is ‘unwanted’ or ‘unacceptable’? … those who have more power will tend to be the definers of reality…. Consequently, it reflects both the power relationships and the value system operating in a culture at a point in time (p. 7).

Medication as treatment

Accounts from the findings stated that psychotropic medication was central to my treatment. My psychiatric hospitalisation occurred during a period when psychotropic drugs were considered a cost effective cure for mental disorders and an answer to the ‘labour-intensive’ talking therapies and this seems still to be the case today as Rogers and Pilgrim (2005) confirmed, “psychotropic drugs … are still arguably cheaper to deliver than labour-intensive talking treatments … [and] a cheap alternative to crisis intervention, intensive family support and psychological programmes” (p. 144). The
findings relay that medication was not helpful but simply “prevented me from doing much”. The side effects resulted in my “not being able to retain my saliva”, damaged my eyesight and left me feeling in a “continual zombie state”. Yet my attempts to enter into negotiation around strength of the medication was to no avail, and my effort to seize control of my intake was met with a frightening penalty of incarceration in “the tower”, with doses of medication further increased.

Unlike medical physicians, psychiatric clinicians could override the need to negotiate, consult or inform mental health patients about treatment, as Rogers and Pilgrim (2005) explained, “Professionals may override the need to seek consent from patients about treatment if they believe that the patient is lacking insight into their condition” (p. 154). They go on to say that “psychiatric patients are less likely to be told why they were receiving medication [and] that psychiatrists are less willing than physicians to discuss diagnosis and rationale for treatment with their patients” (p. 155). The lack of clinician consultation with patients about their treatment together with the effects of medication gave the clinicians enormous power over their medicated passive patients. Scott (1973) declared that both the illness model, plus the symptom-inducing passivity effects of medication, was causing a “treatment barrier” between professionals and clients. I had explained the extent of my powerlessness in a passage; “everything had been taken away from me, my freedom, my body, my mind”.

**Over medicated**

Stories and paintings from the findings relay several experiences of being over medicated, disconnected from my body, labelled, withdrawn, silenced and suicidal. While in a psychiatric hospital. These experiences were personified through multiple selves such as Massively Medicated, Screamer, Lost in Labels, Floating Figure, Foetus, Black Tape and Skeleton. The initial stigmatisation of my mental health experiences was first felt at home, where “adding to my silenced lesbianism was now my silenced madness”. The findings suggested that I had internalised the social stigma around my experiences of mental health treatment and hospitalisation and had compartmentalised mental health experiences into the hidden, less social, aspect of self, namely Joyce.
As a withdrawn anti-social character, Joyce became the container in which to conceal stigmatised attributes. Concealing stigmatised attributes is not uncommon, Hinshaw (2007) found that “strategies of secrecy and social withdrawal were common, as would be expected for a stigmatised condition that is potentially concealable (i.e., a history of mental illness or mental hospitalisation)” (p. 104). Hinshaw (2007) further found that those who have concealed psychiatric hospitalisation from a young age can develop a negative self-perception due to stigmatisation, “mental disorder originating in childhood or adolescence may fuel a lifelong sense of unworthiness and self-blame, particularly in cultures that foster stigmatisation …and promote silence about a history of mental hospitalisation” (p. 138). Likewise Markowitz (2005) reinforced that, “those labeled as mentally ill are predicted to experience lowered self-esteem and feelings of demoralisation” (p. 134). The effect of mental health social stigma can be more challenging than the original mental health problem, and can hinder full recovery. Hinshaw (2007) claimed that stigma is, “as important, if not more so, than the effects of mental illness itself” (p. 105), and that self-stigma “is considered by many to be a significant obstacle to recovery from severe mental illness” (Corrigan 2005 p. 157).

Dissatisfactions with mental health - the demise of the asylum

The upsurge of dissatisfaction from British mental health consumers often centred on the professional preference of a “strong bias towards drugs …at the expense of user choice” (Rogers and Pilgrim, 2005, p. 143). The sheer numbers of complaints from mental health consumers placed psychiatric institutions under the media’s watchful eye. Only a few weeks after my discharge from the psychiatric hospital, a major claim of physical mistreatment at the same hospital reached the national press. Media reports prompted others to voice their mistreatment, and from the 1980’s onwards mental health consumer “dissatisfaction reached such a point that, in terms of numbers and organisations, it constituted a mature ‘new social movement’” (Rogers and Pilgrim, 2005, p. 226). One of the main motives for the survivors’ movement was an emphasis on the ex-patient’s common experience of an oppressed identity (Rogers & Pilgrim, 2005, p. 227).

The reasons for the demise of the large asylum were manyfold. In his publication *Hospitals in Trouble*, Martin (1985) studied the failures of the British mental institutions between 1965 and 1983. The large asylums, which had an institutionalised
effect on patients, were seen to have failed as places for people to retain or regain mental health and the invention and popular use of psychotropic medications meant more people could continue their treatment at home, although in 1982, two years after my last psychiatric admission there were still 100,000 people in psychiatric institutions in Britain, the number having only fallen from 154,000 in 1954 (Rogers and Pilgrim, 2005, p. 176). The gradual demise of mental institutions for health, humanitarian and economic reasons did not offer improved options for people with mental health problems; instead the closures saw “an increase in number of homelessness and prison occupants with mental health problems” (Hinshaw, 2007, p. 80). Brookwood Hospital, ceased functioning as a psychiatric hospital in 1994.

Ex-patients’ aversions to seeking mental health treatment

For many like myself who had experienced living in a large mental institution, the experience of lack of negotiation, freedom, and choices resulted in a total lack of confidence and an aversion to ever using mainstream health services for mental health issues. My negativity towards mainstream mental health services was further compounded by the social stigma surrounding mental illness and my hospitalisation. While many people with a mental illness might have been tolerated in a community, hospitalisation for a mental illness became a marker for the level of personal or social incapacitation or degree of social danger; put simply, if you had been in ‘the bin’ you were undoubtedly very crazy. Together with reports from an organisation called Nostigma, Thornicroft (2006) recognised “stigma as the prime reason people do not seek the mental health services they need” (p. 59) and likewise Hinshaw (2007) commented that “stigma may directly hamper engagement with treatment” (p. 105). Whether a previous mental health service consumer or not, “people may opt to not seek out treatment so they are not identified with a stigmatised group” (Corrigan and Kleinlein 2005 p. 27) and “although public knowledge of mental disorder is more sophisticated than in past decades … considerable distancing and stigmatisation remain in place (Hinshaw 2007 p. 104).

In the more contemporary climate, studies expose “important social processes, which maintain prejudice and stigma” (Rogers and Pilgrim, 2005, p. 77). Some studies on stigmatisation of mental illness suggest that when portrayals of mental illness in “mass media reach increasing number of people …with rampant promotion of widely
stereotyped views of those with mental illness …these images appear to play a major role with respect to stigma” (Hinshaw 2007 p. 151).

**Mental health stigma within the ranks**

Training, practicing and lecturing in art therapy placed my mental health history into an invidious social position. The supposedly neat divide between clinician and client, between the healer and the sick, between worker and consumer, had all existed within myself. This imaginary neat division is termed by Thornicroft (2005) as “helper syndrome”, in which “those providing health care feel that there is a categorical difference between themselves …and those whom they treat” (p. 97). Similarly, Hinshaw (2007) reported that mental health professionals “tendencies to see clients as “them” versus “us” are salient” (p. 168). One might expect mental health professionals to be the least likely to partake in mental health stigma, yet Thornicroft (2006) claimed “Mental health staff may be especially unforgiving when their own members suffer from mental illness” (p. 59) and Hinshaw (2007) also found that “health and mental health professions have been extremely slow to accept that mental disorders exist in their own membership” (p. 121).

As an art therapist I had perceived concealing my past mental health hospitalisation as crucial as I had felt that any disclosure would threaten my professional credibility and future work opportunities. Hinshaw (2007) stated that health workers receiving any mental health treatment, “do not disclose this fact to their peers …When such disclosures were in fact made, significant [numbers] reported ostracism and damage to their professional reputation” (p. 121). He continued, “particularly in the medical and mental health professions, there is great shame related to disclosing mental health disorder …colleagues may call into question one’s competence and ability to perform clinical work” (p. 132). Such mental health stigma within the ranks may lead to the “potential for shame”; a health worker’s current or past mental health issues “may become paralyzing, with silence and isolation perceived as the only option” (Hinshaw 2007 p. 132).

**Academia, multiple positioning, and valuing stories**

During the study, and in my role as art therapy educator where I am open about my identification as a lesbian, I conducted several tutorials with Masters Degree art therapy
students to encourage self-research into their own attitudes and prejudices towards mental health consumers. This included exploring their attitudes towards professional colleges who may seek mental health services, and I used personal experience to exemplify mental health stigma. From a postmodern feminist perspective, the bringing together of my lesbian identity, my past experience as art therapy consumer with my role as art therapy educator, was an empowering act in acknowledging my multiple positionings within the mental health sector and valuing my multiple stories within the context of academia.

All three attributes, being female, a lesbian, and a past mental health patient, are in various ways and to various degrees stigmatised categories. The categorisation of individuals and the ‘truth’ that is attached to such categories reinforces stereotyping, and “attempts to deny any flexible thinking with categories” (Pickering, 2001, p. 3). Through the art-based study, visually depicting multiple selves enabled me to deconstruct my often dualistic relationships and discover previously unrecognised attitudes I held about myself such as self-shame and self-silencing. Such exploration provided me with the opportunity to reconstruct myself as more open and proud of whom I am.

Postmodern feminist reconstructions
In order to demonstrate the postmodern feminist shifts from realist themes in social positioning, I have navigated the discussion through two sets of images. The first set of images considered shifts in issues of gender and sexuality. The second set of images considered shifts in mental health recipient status.

The postmodern feminist shifts around gender and sexuality could be seen through critiquing two sets of images from the findings. The first two images, School Sports Cup Winner and Swords Boy Girl (Figure 4.63 & 4.64), are a past family photograph and a newspaper cutting which were both digitally manipulated to have a red cross placed over the face and body. These convey feelings of being out of line with traditional gender scripts, explained in the written text as “girl gone wrong” and “misfit”. I considered these two images with another two images made further through the research process. The second pair of images do not rely on past images but are
performed as new scenarios which are then photographed. These performed photographs are Mum’s Only Girl and Girl Meets Boy/Girl (Figure 4.66 & 4.67).

I referred to the first set as the “red cross images” and the second set as the “performed images” and I suggested that a paradigm shift could be seen between the two sets of images, red cross images and the performed images. The red cross images could be seen as expressing from within the context of gender norms and therefore expressing the effects of not complying with gender scripts, whereas the performed images contested the construction of gender norms by playing with, and messing up, gender’s ‘normal’ registration to certain bodies.

I surmised that the red cross images become necessary for the autobiographical identification of themes and issues, such as feeling inadequate in complying to realist conventions of ‘proper female’. However, the performed images seemed to remove the causation or ‘inadequacy’ from the subject and direct interest to the system of categorisation of gender and sexuality norms, displaying them as not fixed but mutable. The tool that was used in the performed images was the use of parody within performativity. Both parody and performativity have played a significant role in postmodernism and feminism critique as a way of turning the tables to reveal the conventions that otherwise remain cocooned in ‘truth’ assumptions.

There are several ways to consider lesbianism. Lesbian feminists generally take the critical view that ‘lesbianism’ is socially constructed in a particular historical period and culture (Burns 2000). This is valorised by contrasting with Native American two-spirited equivalence perceived as a third gender and as an honourable tribal position (Jacobs et al, 1997; Lang, 1998). Within the acknowledgement of its social constructedness, ‘lesbian’ is perceived in three pivotal theories. Lesbian can be defined by that which it is not, i.e. heterosexual (Fuss 1991), by its social location for instance as an outsider to the institution of marriage (Rust 1996), and through acknowledging repetitive “performative” representations (Butler 1990). It was this latter repetition and performativity that I was especially interested in with regards to the performed images being discussed here.

Performativity was popularised by Judith Butler (1990) through examples of butch-femme lesbians and drag to deconstruct the binary oppositions that give status of
‘natural’ to gender and sexuality. Butler viewed sexualities as becoming ‘normalised’ through repetition and that it is was the butch-femme lesbian that dislodges gender (identity) from sexuality (bodies). Heterosexuality, according to Butler, was not ‘normality’ but a commonly repeated performance and this repetition brought into question its status as ‘original’ and ‘natural’. If homosexuality is held up as a poor copy or imitation of heterosexuality, and heterosexuality has lost its status of originality, homosexuality is left as a copy without an original. Therefore without an original there can be no copy and without a copy there can be no original (Butler 1990). It is the “dissonance, within the expected link between gender (identity), and sex (body), and desire that highlight the performative quality of all genders and all sexualities” (Burns 2000, p. 580). Performativity then, can be used as a way of dislodging given status of “natural” and “normal” from their position as “original”.

Performativity and parody work well in unison and have been used as a postmodern feminist tool for challenging a myriad of discourses. Hutcheon (2002) explained parody as “doubly coded in political terms, it both legitimises and subverts that which it parodies” (p. 97). Yet to subvert successfully, parody must make explicit the convention which has been targeted for subversion, or in Butler’s (1990) terms, the potential for “troubling”. Therefore parody can only function from a place outside the term it is intending to trouble. For instance, it is within a non-heterosexual frame that “parodic replication …of heterosexual constructs” (Butler 1991, p. 23) become revealed as repetitious which can then expose their fictitious origins.

Within the art context, parody can be used to explore questions such as “How do some representations get legitimised and authorised? And, at the expense of which others? Parody can offer a way of investigating the history of that process” (Hutcheon, 2002, p. 97), however, parody must also be accompanied by recognisable representations otherwise the irony will be missed. As such parodic representations are often blatant rather than obscure, accompanied by several ways of reading so as not to fail in conveying the irony. In terms of the feminist critique of art, Hutcheon (2002) asserted that “parodic strategies are often used by feminist artists to point to the history and historical power of those cultural representations, while ironically contextualising both in such a way as to deconstruct them” (p. 98). In terms of self research, Hutcheon (2002) explained how parody “can be used as a self-reflexive technique that points to art as art, but also art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past. Its ironic reprise
also offers an internalised sign of a certain self-consciousness about our culture’s means of ideological legitimation” (p. 97).

Returning to the two red cross images and the two performed images selected for this discussion, the red cross images used visual material from my past and youth when unquestioned immersion in doctrines would have rendered me in effect of such constructs. Yet it was this visual material with its additional red crosses to the face and body that led to further explorations and therefore have significant value in identifying the conventions to be subverted. The shift from the red cross images to the performed images can be viewed as a shift from the causation being seated within the individual to the causation being solely with the doctrines. “One of the potentials of postmodern theory is to challenge the idea of modernity’s clean break with past discourses of subordination and exclusion” (Horne & Lewis 1996 p. 3), yet, parody can continually reintroduce and repeat the constructedness of cultural, social and political discourses.

I used the term ‘subvert’ or ‘subversion’ so as to “undermine the power and authority of (an established system or institution)” (Pearsall 2002, p. 1431). In terms of gender and sexuality I have referred to “subversion” through performativity and parody as Maltry and Tucker (2002) considered, “an understanding of intention as a viable position from which to articulate subversive fem(me)ninety, and a refusal to identify one image as authentically lesbian” (p. 101). The two performed images both use parody to subvert the fixity of identities to bodies or genders to sexualities. In Mum’s Only Girl, the parody of the word “girl” coupled with its precious idealism in the words “mum’s only”, is paradoxically juxtaposed with the mature self image dressed in suit, shirt and tie, with a grin that conveys my intentional subversion of gender and sexuality norms.

In Girl Meets Boy/Girl, identity and bodies are paradoxically performed to convey the ways in which lesbian culture with all its diversity from butch through to femme, subverts gender and sexuality conventions by refuting the correlation of masculine/feminine to man/woman. Interestingly, when I presented Mum’s Only Girl in a seminar to an academic audience, it brought immediate response in appreciation of its parody. However, the performed image Girl Meets Boy/Girl did not have the same immediate response as only the frocked-up figure was taken to be me. My audience’s non-recognition of me as the suited-up boy only shows the ease to which conventions can be successfully destabilised from their intended locations, and how the use of
A similar shift can be seen to have taken place in relation to my mental health status and social positioning. Again I contrasted two sets of images to demonstrate the postmodern feminist shift. The first set of images consists of a scanned copy of my original medical records and Lost in Labels (Figures 4.53 & 4.59). The second set comprise of Cut and Paste Medical Records, Cut and Paste Sexual Psychopathology, and Rewriting My Medical Record (Figure 4.54, 4.55 & 4.60). The first set demonstrated the mental health diagnostic system in action by way of authoritative documentation and its effect upon myself through labels that diminish my personage, while the second set of images have cut and pasted the terms, removing them from their previous uncontested authoritative doctrine, and displaying them as farcical remarks and the peculiarity of homosexual curiosity together with the notable absence of the word ‘lesbian’. The rewriting of the medical record effectively contests authoritative irrefutability by subverting clinical gaze onto myself as expert.

The first set of images, the medical records and Lost in Labels, cited from within the effect of medical discourse in a similar way to how the red cross images expressed the effect from within the conventions of gender and sexuality, whereas the second set, the cut and pastes and rewritten medical records, perform via lifting the terms and rewriting the documents to display their bizarre rhetoric and psychosexual gaze. The performance of texts was manipulated and subverted in a similar way to how Mum’s Only Girl (Figure 4.66) and Girl Meets Boy/Girl (Figure 4.67) performed to subvert gender and sexuality conventions. The similarity between the red cross images and the medical records together with Lost in Labels was that both sets of images worked to identify the conventions to be subverted, whereas the similarity between Mum’s Only Girl, Girl Meets Boy/Girl, Cut and Paste Medical Records, and Cut and Paste Psychosexual (Figures 4.66, 4.67, 4.54 & 4.55) and Rewriting Medical Records (Figure 4.60) was that they subverted the previously identified conventions through parody and/or performativity. Again the first two sets of images identified the conventions or discourse and their effects, while the two second sets subverted the conventions.
During the writing of this discussion chapter I spontaneously made three small paintings without preconception. Each of the paintings can be seen to visually depict some of the shifts that I have discussed in this chapter. The first painting called **Breaking Red Cross** (Figure 5.7) depicted me having broken the red cross through my awareness of its weakness, rendering it powerless to strike me out as “wrong”.

![Figure 5.7 Breaking Red Cross](image)

The second painting **Black Dog Returns** (Figure 5.8) relates to the dog in the painting **Dead Black Dog** (Figure 4.58). As I am not particularly fond of dogs, I have never owned a dog nor would ever let a dog lick my face, my reading is that the former aspect of myself that felt depressed, exhausted and dead, is in fact alive, well, and in high spirits.

![Figure 5.8 Black Dog Returns](image)
The third painting called Unsilenced (Figure 5.9) depicted me removing the black tape that had previously symbolically covered my mouth rendering me silent about my having been a lesbian and mental health recipient. In taking a personal risk of conducting the study through using autobiographical material, my fears and vulnerabilities have been deconstructed, conventions have been exposed, and in the reconstruction I have become unsilenced (Figure 5.9).

![Figure 5.9 Unsilenced](image)

The painterly style of Unsilenced (Figure 5.9) included both the pictorial theme once aligned to Joyce and the loose, abstract strokes once aligned to Susan. The figure wears a shirt that is neither the light blue that symbolised Joyce nor the dark blue of Susan. The background colour was neither black nor white as in The Gathering (Figure 4.19), it was yellow. In comparison to other similar artwork compositions such as Black Tape & Red Cross (Figure 4.45) and Bandage Interrupting Mouth (Figure 4.46) the background is bright and vibrant like the positive yellow light that Flying Woman pointed to in The Gathering (Figure 4.19) and Rescuing Skeleton (Figure 4.14). These comparisons signal to me an affirmative therapeutic outcome to the study.

**Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have discussed and analysed the findings in relation to self perceptions, visual representations and perceived social positioning. In terms of art therapy and therapeutic work with images, I found the distinction between images that identify conventions through past experiences and those that deconstruct and subvert conventions to be an unexpected and significant outcome. In my work as a feminist art
therapist, I have often found that when female clients identify oppressive regimes, a significant change in their life or perspective accompanies this identification and although this is of great value, it is also where the therapeutic work with images in art therapy seems to come to a halt.

In terms of my process in this study, I was able to envisage the images that identified the oppressive conventions as an initial stage of identification. These were then taken further through performative deconstruction of conventions and mainstream discourses and in turn, towards a reconstruction of subjectivity, self representation and social positioning. The postmodern feminist framework, when used in conjunction with reflexivity, intertextuality and art making offered the potential in transforming autobiographical experiences from the identification of disempowering and discriminatory practices to a performative deconstruction and reconstruction of subjectivity. Such deconstruction and reconstruction interrogated ingrained realist notions resulting in mobility in sense of self perception and social positioning.

This chapter has critiqued and analysed the realist themes identified in the findings and suggested how the postmodern feminist deconstructive and reconstructive processes have offered less fixed notions of subjectivity, self representation, and social positioning. Perceptions of self were shown to be steeped in a framework of binary oppositions that placed a unitary, known, whole integrated self in a positive light while perceiving a fragmented, unknown, multiple shifting self as unfavourable. The discussion followed contemporary therapeutic rhetoric demonstrating how the fixed whole self was perceived as the ultimate healthy self while multiplicity brought personal stability into question and interrogation. The dualities within the arts were discussed for their distinction between high art and low art, between aesthetic and the psychological and between visual art and outsider art, where high aesthetic visual art occupied the public sphere and low psychological outsider art was relegated to the private sphere. Some postmodern feminist onslaughts on artistic conventions were outlined, opening diverse and far-reaching options for visual representations.

Lesbian visual representation was discussed in terms of its delegation to the private sphere as the art world has been predominantly a world that represents heterosexual men’s art work. Lesbian depiction was discussed not only in terms of exclusion from public space but for the impossibilities in visually representing lesbian as a ‘type’. The
discussion took in the historical context of sexologists whose relentless attempts failed to find establish lesbian markers about the lesbian body. As well as discussing lesbian visual representation, the visual representation of multiple selves was also discussed in the historical and contemporary context to demonstrate how images made by, and images of, patients have been used as tools to detect madness and validate mental health diagnosis.

Social divisions were discussed in terms of their dualist and hierarchical allocation where the public, rational, and cultural had been aligned with masculinity as men’s domain, while the private, emotional, and natural was aligned with femininity as women’s realm. The divisions within gender have relied on assumptions of ‘normality’ and the ‘naturalness’ of gender traits. The discussion exposed that much of the same system of normal and naturalness in gender division and power allocation had been used to distinguish homosexual from heterosexual. To ensure that homosexuality remained marginalised and out of notions of normality, political, legal, educational, economic and social discourses have clearly sanctioned heterosexuality while overtly discriminating against homosexuality.

The divisions of ‘mad’ and ‘sane’ were discussed in terms of the asylum as a praxis which had earned exclusive rights over people unparalleled with other areas of health. Historically the rise and fall of the asylum was discussed in that the introduction of drug therapy caused part of its demise and how past recipients in revolt amounted to an unprecedented social movement. Community mental health service provision did not reveal improvement particularly as there was an increase in prison admissions and homeless populations. The discussion has demonstrated that stigma around mental illness remains entrenched and affects both professional and personal status.

The artwork in the findings with the themes of duality and multiplicity together with themes of silence, wrong, masking and conforming, were discussed in light of gender, lesbianism and mental health to illuminate the effect on self perception, self representation and social positioning. Through the lens of a lesbian and past mental health recipient, the autobiographical findings were utilised to identify and discuss the modernist realist themes embedded in major discourses and public attitudes, revealing how they influenced and shaped self-perceptions, self-representations and social positionings.
Whereas a modernist study would have sought results through neat classifications, definitive data, and corresponding categories, this postmodern feminist informed study focused on the leaks in the neat categorisations of subjectivity, visual representation and social positioning. The study identified the rigidity of categories in order to then contest the binary system through which I had formed my self perceptions. The borders of regimented categories were interrogated. I searched for sites of contestation and as such, I questioned my own ingrained truths aiming to destabilise and subvert taken-for-granted authoritative truths. Whereas a modernist study would have used autobiography to stabilise the facts within a ‘proof’ of a life experience, the postmodern feminist informed autobiographical study sought to shift my entrenched perceptions by embracing uncertainty, ambiguity and malleability, I thus arrived at another point, not as an alternative regime or one that substituted truth, rather, such a process that dismantled rigidity, reliability and certainty. This in turn suggested habitual identity categorisation, binary oppositions, and discriminatory practices were regulatory systems of control and that subjectivity can be perceived as fluid, mutable, multiple, and untameable with a multitude of variants that shift with time and within a changing world.
Chapter Six: Conclusion
Introduction

Consistent with the postmodern feminist approach, the conclusion does not aim to identify any fixed results, nor does it seek evidential ‘truths’. This conclusion acknowledges the processes that were evoked through the research design, how these processes addressed the research aim and question, the research outcomes and analysis, and the implications of the research.

I have arranged the conclusion under five headings; meeting the research aim and question, methodological design, research outcomes, relevance of the study, and further research and dissemination. I begin by first revisiting the research aim and question and explaining how these were addressed in the study. Secondly, I show how the methodological design aligns with the research aim and question, and how the methodological components formed unexpected processes that became ‘exemplar agents’ for investigating subjectivity. Thirdly, I address the outcomes through the moments and movement that occurred towards transformation and emancipation. Fourthly, I propose several areas where the study will be relevant and valuable in both its practical application and research design. Lastly I suggest where this study ignites potential for further research and how the study will be disseminated.

Meeting the research aim and question

The research aim was to investigate my own multiple positioning within art therapy and visual arts. This was achieved through an art-based investigation using autobiographical material that created intertextual findings. The findings were reflexively responded to during their production and throughout their analysis.

My research question had asked, what is the relationship of a lesbian’s self investigation of dualistic perceptions of selves and artwork styles to the discourse of art therapy? The discussion and analysis revealed that my perceptions of selves and dualistic artwork styles had correlations with my perceptions of lesbian identification. Furthermore, it was consistently evident that my perceptions had been influenced through experiences of homophobia and heteronormativity. Concealing or silencing such a central aspect of
myself as my sexuality was shown to have had ramifications in forming oppositional self perceptions and artistic expressions.

The discussion and analysis revealed that the art therapy discourse with its roots in both health and arts had formed similar dualistic positionings towards lesbianism and lesbian representation. Through my own multiple experiences and positionings within art therapy and visual arts, I was able to articulate the absence of lesbian perspectives in both disciplines.

The literature review revealed that while lesbian perspectives within visual arts had become more abundant from the early 1980s, the topic of lesbianism remained almost absent within the art therapy literature. I indicated the reason for such scarcity of lesbian perspectives in art therapy was two fold, firstly there was an overall lack of attention to sexual diversity in art therapy, and secondly, when sexual diversity was considered in art therapy literature, it was constantly amalgamated under a broad rubric. While I recognised that any discussion on sexual diversity in art therapy was significant, a generalised discussion overlooked fundamental gender issues such as women’s relationship to the visual arts, and women’s relationship to the visual depiction of female bodies. Disregarding the significance of women’s relationships confronted lesbians particularly when a lesbian visually represented herself as a lesbian.

Picturing oneself is a frequent visual articulation in art therapy practice. By examining my own self perceptions and self visual representations I foresaw that my lesbian lens might impart a lesbian’s perspective on art therapy in relation to lesbian self visual representation. As Ellis (2007) pointed out, “sexuality and existence are interfused” (p. 65). Therefore, my lesbianism could not be separated out from any other parts of me, and so I considered all aspects of my existence as lesbian existence.

I took heed from art therapists who had previously suggested that qualities inducing a degree of intrigue often result in successful outcomes. For some time I had been curious about my self perception as two selves, my two artwork styles and my two social personas. I was intrigued with the possible connections between my dualistic self perceptions and my identification as a lesbian. Therefore, in my endeavour to investigate the more recognised dual selves and styles that I portrayed, I also sought to
establish any possible links to my identification as lesbian. Accordingly, it followed that I would further explore any relationship these connections had to art therapy.

**Methodological design: developing innovative investigative processes**

**Postmodern Feminism: Personal as political**
Using postmodern feminism as a philosophical frame permitted me to focus on the categories through which I had shaped my self perceptions while also critically viewing such categories as socially constructed. For instance, I was able to investigate aspects of subjectivity such as ‘healthy’, ‘woman’, ‘lesbian’, ‘artist’, and ‘sanity’ while at the same time casting suspicion on the terms ‘stability’, ‘veracity’ and ‘neutrality’.

Postmodern feminist deconstruction enabled me to scrutinise my own dualistic positionings at a local level while also unearthing influences of binary oppositions prevalent in major discourses and modernist conventions. Investigating subjectivity at both local and socio-political levels, assured that the personal aspects of self hidden within the private sphere become politicised within the public domain, revealing their regulatory partiality and thus destabilising the ‘truths’ entrenched in binary oppositions.

**Researching self**
Researching self by the utilisation of an autobiographical method proved to be particularly valuable and innovative in addressing the research aim and question. By selecting myself as both the researcher of the study and the sole participant in the study, I was able to impart with some immediacy a reflexive experience. Therefore, such a methodological decision offered considerable detail about the investigative processes. I was able to demonstrate how the research processes manoeuvred, entwined and shifted the data in multiplicitous configurations. For instance, the position of researching self enabled me to make transparent my initial perceptions of my selves, my artwork styles, and my social positionings, explicating their impact on the study.

Researching self also enabled me to reveal the creative reflexive processes where the making and analysing of images was charted and intertextual linkages detailed. When deliberately troubling binary oppositions, the position of researcher researching self permitted me to map deconstructions and reconstructions. As a result, I was able to convey my own experiences of expansive and emancipatory outcomes as both
researcher and research participant. These disclosures suggested the potential for therapeutic application and of equal importance demonstrated merit in researching self in academic research.

**Processes evoked from methodological design**
The methodological design evoked unexpected convolution where complex processes came in and out of play, sometimes converging yet always on the move. In such processes one might imagine confusion could transpire, yet during the investigative process the made visual image, with its quality of ‘permanence’ and ‘solidity’, provided a significant space/place of stillness for introspection, through which layers of selves could be investigated.

In order to address the research aim and question, I designed a research methodology comprising: a postmodern feminist approach to conceptualise the research, autobiographical and art-based methods to generate and investigate data, reflexivity and intertextuality to provide momentum in the research process. Where these elements of the research design combined marked an innovative methodology offering a snapshot to other researchers of the possibilities for research involving self investigation. However, in relation to my own investigation in postmodernist terms, this research resulted in a constructive contestation of self perceptions, simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction, again exemplifying the importance of a reflexive process.

In terms of reflexivity I detailed a spiral process of art making that generated momentum as one image after another arrived in this creative process (Figure 4.1). I demonstrated how intertextual links bounded from one text to another text, across genre and across time (Figure 3.4). I detailed the reflexive process as I witnessed my constant changing selves in constantly changing streams (Figure 3.5). When contemplating images for their symbolic meanings I discussed how this enquiry led back and forth through layers where the symbolic meanings continually changed. I pictured the layers of meaning in my study journal as follows (Figure 6.1).
The discussion also detailed the deconstruction of my fixed self perceptions and the reconstruction of new notions of selves that again lay vulnerable for deconstruction thus creating a continual spiral of investigations and transformations (Figure 5.1). In addition, I was able to explain how the multiplicity of selves that evolved, adapted, mutated, disappeared and reappeared formed an ongoing process of mutable, multiple, fluid subjectivities (Figure 5.4).

Within these numerous, multiple, shifting, and constantly changing processes, I often encountered perplexity rather than lucidity. As the various processes in their state of flux intermingled they formed a highly complex web in constant motion and in constant change like a spider’s web changing shape as it is propelled through a whirlwind. This is where I found the value of images to be paramount.

Amongst the converging convoluting processes, the artwork made during the investigative process sustained a seemingly ‘concrete’ quality, and although impermanent, each newly created artwork provided temporal sites for contemplation, offering spaces where selves could be momentarily understood until the next layer of investigation was revealed. Furthermore, artwork made during the research project signalled my shifting perceptions as one image marked a divergence from self perceptions signalled in the previous image.

**Research outcomes: picturing lesbian through investigating subjectivity**

The research outcomes have addressed the research aim and question that had sought to investigate self perceptions, self visual representations and lesbianism. The study
revealed that homophobia, no matter how subtle, can be interpreted and internalised as negative aspects of self. For personal safety and to avoid homonegativity, a lesbian may gauge the degree to which her sexual orientation is revealed or concealed in each situation she encounters. The multitude of situations result in a constant oscillation. Revealing and concealing can evolve into a dualistic partitioning where less favourable attributes gravitate into one self while socially acceptable attributes develop into another self. This was apparent in the divisions of Joyce and Susan.

The many varied prejudices one encounters and the equally varied attitudes towards a lesbian can result in many selves being established, as was seen in the painting, *The Gathering* (Figure 4.19). As fixed personas, such distinct selves were shown to cause difficulty in life tasks when switching from one self to another self. The postmodern feminist deconstructive investigation contested the dualistic divides and oppositional attributes and such theorising resulted in contesting the assumption that each of the multiple selves were distinct. Through the various methodological processes, multiple subjectivities became viewed as more fluid and mutable, less fixed and defined. With this approach to subjectivity, ‘lesbianism’ also became a flexible mutable notion, and less of a defined or distinct category.

The research demonstrated that to picture lesbian, the artist has to transgress normative codes of artist, images, and viewer. Such codes presume firstly that the artist is male, secondly that the subject is female, and thirdly that the consumer is male. When a lesbian visually articulates herself or another lesbian, the artist is female, the subject is female, and the intended consumer of the image is female. The research also demonstrated that when met with homophobic responses, the lesbian artist may withdraw lesbian depiction from public scrutiny altogether, through either making ‘lesbian images’ small enough to be hidden or by concealing ‘lesbianism’ within the style of artwork. Furthermore, the depiction of a lesbian body becomes problematic when attempting to find visual markers that distinguish a lesbian body from a heterosexual body. The symbolic systems used to signal ‘lesbian’ may only be decipherable by certain lesbians and may be missed entirely by heterosexuals. A frequent depiction of lesbianism has been to depict two women in sexual configuration; however there may be some reluctance to communicate lesbianism through the sexualisation of lesbianism. In a clinical health setting, a lesbian may be reluctant to reveal her lesbian identification through fear of her sexuality being pathologised or
negatively viewed by health professionals. Although these issues of lesbianism and self visual representation have been thoroughly critiqued in lesbian contributions to the visual arts, there remains a lack of such critiques in art therapy where the encompassing term ‘sexual orientation’ shrouds lesbian particularity.

Socio-political discrimination against homosexuality, from family to federal level, significantly affected a lesbian’s perception of her social positioning. Furthermore, oppressive gender scripts and links between homosexuality and mental illness also compacted the inferior positioning in the social sphere. One of the themes that became significant through experiences of social positioning as a lesbian was that of being silenced. Silence occurred through education systems, social spaces, health care systems, and through the continual evasion of a lesbian viewpoint in social, political and health discourses. It is evident that such silence profoundly affected my emotional health in my early twenties.

**Utilising a postmodern feminist approach to subvert normative codes**

The study demonstrated how a postmodern feminist framework, when combined with art making, reflexivity, and intertextuality, created an approach for investigating subjectivity. This approach was demonstrated through providing a snapshot of experiential transitions from modernist embedded perceptions of self towards postmodern feminist informed reconstructions of subjectivity, while all the time noting the root of such perceptions in social discourses. The snapshot revealed several shifts in my self perceptions, from my rigid compartmentalisation of my dual selves towards a more fluid sense of selves, from idealism embedded in ‘healthy’ as ‘a whole self’ towards appreciating the adaptability of multiple subjectivities, and from personal attributes as fixed towards perceiving them as mutable and transitionary. The study demonstrated the methodology in action through the example of changing self perceptions and subsequently changing selves.

For instance, the research demonstrated how the investigative process challenged my perceptions of my self visual representations and my artwork styles. Some of these perceptions were found to be commonplace in modernist visual art discourses that segregate art into distinct value laden genre. My previously limited artwork styles of figurative or abstract became unfastened from their dualistic oppositional positioning, through insisting artwork styles intersected on one artwork surface. This gesture
exposed my own value laden attitudes towards my artwork styles, that had resulted in their oppositional positioning.

The use of images for the detection of madness was shown to be rife in medical history. My visual depiction of myself as multiple selves had also become laden with negative connotations of madness. In the reconstruction, the depiction of multiple selves was reconceptualised as a positive asset, that of being able to adapt while maintaining self awareness in multifarious situations. The links between mental health and lesbianism was shown to have contributed to the formation of my self perceptions as mentally unstable and silenced. The study process enabled these self perceptions to be challenged through storytelling and picturing lesbian which effectively ‘de-silenced’ (Glass 1998) and reconstructed my perceptions of my lesbian identity.

During the self investigation my perpetual cycle of lesbian visibility and lesbian concealment was also deconstructed, exposing my strong correlation of ‘lesbian visibility’ with ‘my existence’. In the reconstruction, my dualistically driven cyclic pattern was interrupted, bringing with it a less urgent need to verify my existence through making and exhibiting lesbian images and in turn this opened new opportunities for more inventive self representations.

The investigative process made visible my perceptions of my social positioning which were perceived as binary oppositions. Artworks made during the study identified embedded social discourse which had shaped my self perceptions. These embedded images were important as they identified the links between my self perceptions and social oppressions. Social oppression was seen to stem from a multitude of life experiences where I perceived myself as having ‘failed’ conventional codes of ‘normality’. Several images were intentionally made to subvert conventions, and these ‘performative images’ reconstructed my perceptions of my social positioning.

The research demonstrated that the investigative process went further than identifying issues through telling a story of a life. The postmodern feminist informed investigative process deconstructs the elements, unveils their source, and offers opportunities for the reshaping of self perceptions, self representations, and perceived social positionings. The art making process with intertextual links permits a life to be researched in such a
way as to allow issues within a life to emerge through symbolism; the symbolism becomes the location for subversive acts enabling reinventions.

The dead black dog was made known to me through making pictures as a patient in a psychiatric hospital; thirty years later the symbol of the black dog continues to be relevant in conveying to me my mental and emotional wellbeing. This makes clear that the process of self investigation is not a process that has an ending; arguably, it should not result in a conclusion.

The thesis marks a point at which the self investigation was prepared and completed for examination. This notwithstanding, it is a snapshot of an ongoing life investigation, yet it is complete in order to be disseminated for use by others in their professional practice, personal development and/or research area.

**Relevance of the study**

This thesis is most useful in the sector of emotional health including areas such as art therapy, psychotherapy, counselling, psychology, psychiatry, nursing, community health and welfare. Within these health professions, this study can influence health care practices, health science and human services education and the health carer’s own professional development.

For health care practice, the study is useful as a model to shape therapeutic processes. It is proposed that health care professionals can guide clients with their use of artwork to identify and deconstruct their own self perceptions, and accordingly, reconstruct new self perceptions. In any field of health education, this study is a valuable example of experiential reflexiveness. As such, this research may encourage health science students to use images reflexively in their own identification of poignant issues, as a process to acknowledge any biases towards cultural differences such as race, gender, age, sexuality and disability, and in turn subvert these, to bring forward new perceptions of selves and others.

As current professional development in health sectors requires high standards of professionalism, health care practitioners are often encouraged to be engaged in ongoing self reflection either through a therapy practitioner or through self investigation.
In art therapy these two reflective opportunities are referred to as ‘personal therapy’ and ‘studio practice’.

This thesis can demonstrate how a postmodern feminist framework provides the conceptual landscape for self investigation, how reflexivity and intertextuality provides awareness and momentum, and how the creative process of art making and symbolic representation gives opportunities for self contemplation and transformation. This investigative process offers a way through which to explore selves while also enhancing quality health service delivery. Furthermore, the investigative framework demonstrated in this study can provide a workable basis for professional supervision where health practitioners’ perceptions are deconstructed and reconstructed in researching themselves, their work with clients, their relationship with their work colleagues, and their broader work environment.

The thesis is useful for artists who can utilise the investigative process in their art practice and use symbolism to subvert conventions. The history of lesbian art shows the use of images to transgress conventional codes that attempted to exclude. The thesis is most relevant to those who perceive themselves marginalised or their artwork peripheral to the mainstream. The thesis demonstrates how the very perception of one’s position as marginal or unconventional can begin an exploration of the artist, their artwork style, and the convention through which they perceive their positioning as marginal. Community social action groups can utilise the process herein to deconstruct social prejudices, such as homophobia or mental health stigma, while also researching the long term effects of discrimination on perceptions of selves.

The thesis demonstrates a research methodology for investigating subjectivity and in particular articulates a lesbian perspective on subjectivity. For art therapists the thesis is valuable in several ways. It exemplifies the potential of the postmodern feminist conceptual frame, when used in conjunction with art-based research, to form a suitable research design for investigating aspects of subjectivity and more particularly aspects of lesbian experience and lesbian self visual representation. It demonstrates how reflexivity and the creative art making process work to expose and readdress art therapists’ assumptions. This thesis also contributes and expands the art therapy research resources for art therapy researchers who centre their research area on lesbianism, thus moving the theme of lesbianism within art therapy from the extreme
margins to the centre. More broadly, lesbian researchers can utilise this thesis in addition to the wealth of literature already in circulation on lesbian representation in the visual arts, and the quandaries of lesbian representations within heteronormative regulated symbolic systems.

**Further research and dissemination**

Several potential studies might follow this research project. For instance, it would be useful to record the effectiveness of the methodology when applied to art therapy practice in clinical and community settings. It would also be interesting to explore the effects when the methodology is applied specifically for exploring the constraints of lesbian or mental health stereotypes. Additional explorations could include whether lesbians experience change in their self perceptions and self esteem when subverting conventions. An art therapy study may investigate contrasting lesbian clients. One group could be offered mainstream visual material for their art making with lesbian clients and another group could be offered lesbian themed visual material for art projects. Art therapy or visual art research might further investigate the multiplicity of lesbian identity and the complexities and variations in picturing ‘lesbianism’.

This study has been made available as a digital thesis. Several refereed journal articles will promote aspects of the methodology for research and it is intended that these be published in journals in art therapy, visual art and health science. The literature review collates and critiques lesbian visual arts and lesbian art therapy issues, an area not previously published in the field of art therapy, therefore it is aimed to disseminate this material in an art therapy refereed journal. The thesis may also be suitably adapted towards publications that focus on utilising the methodology as an approach for art therapy and visual art practice where the examples herein would demonstrate deconstruction of self perceptions towards the reconstruction of subjectivity for emotional wellbeing.

On a final note, and within the context of postmodernism’s resistance to concise endings, I offer a viewing side by side of two of my artworks already cited in the thesis, the reproduction of the 1978 drawing made while I was an in-patient in a psychiatric hospital, *Dead Black Dog* (Figure 6.2), and the 2008 PhD study image, *Black Dog Returns* (Figure 6.3), made thirty years later. I invite the reader to ponder.
Figure 6.2 Dead Black Dog

Figure 6.3 Black Dog Returns
References


Markowitz, F. E. (2005). Sociological models of mental illness, stigma: Progress and


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