

article

Poetic licence to write resistance: women resisting intimate partner violence through poetry

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The poetry therapy programme discussed describes work alongside members of a rural women's support group addressing intimate partner violence. This approach contributes to social work theory/practice by expanding understandings of how women resist violence and affirms a tenet of Response-Based Practice: 'alongside each history of violence there runs a parallel history of prudent, determined, and often creative resistance' (Wade, 1997: 23). This approach to creative group-based work supports 'positive social responses' to women resisting intimate partner violence, expanding the ways in which social workers can respond to survivors of violence (Richardson and Wade, 2009: 209). Subtle and safer responses to violence are undervalued by dominant therapeutic practices. Response-Based Practice maintains that violence is resisted on a spectrum and that less noticeable forms of resistance are well reasoned and maintain dignity. This article describes how combining poetry therapy with Response-Based Practice can disrupt notions of resistance as solely outwardly expressed and large-action-oriented.

key words Response-Based Practice • poetry therapy • interdisciplinary and collaborative social science research • group work • intimate partner violence

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Foreword

We wish to express gratitude to the remarkable women who participated in the poetry therapy groups described in this article. These participants, as well as other people resisting violence, continually inspire us and support us to grow our collaborative anti-violence theory and practice. We are deeply grateful for the important work of the Response-Based

Practice Dignity Team of practitioners/social justice activists (see Centre for Response-Based Practice, 2018).

The article title – ‘Poetic licence to write resistance: women resisting intimate partner violence through poetry’ – was chosen to recognise and name the work done in the poetry therapy group in a reflexive way. The ‘positive social responses’ – affirming responses to victims of violence and oppression – shared in the poetry therapy programme were collaborative and group-created (Richardson and Wade, 2009: 209). While group facilitation utilised Response-Based Practice, it is important to note that the theories and practices became a shared language among everyone in the group. The clichéd phrase ‘poetic licence’ is meant to bring attention to how group members addressed a gap between what they know and do to resist violence and how these actions are often dominantly constructed and recuperated as somehow not enough, and/or how their resistance is made invisible. The use of ‘poetic licence’ is meant to centre affirming responses to and to acknowledge the processes of what women always already know and do to resist violence. The validity of creativity in resistance to violence is centred and invoked by the word ‘licence’. We use this to disrupt dominant notions surrounding the meanings of the word ‘licence’ in favour of expanding the restriction in the word ‘licence’ to describe fluid, creative poetic resistance. Simultaneously, we invoke the clichéd meaning of ‘poetic licence’ to reveal and disrupt the dominant discourses that construct creative and spectral – specifically, more subtle or less noticeable or outward – resistance to violence as hyperbole, fiction and/or irrelevant to the ‘real’ (or more noticeable) work of specific kinds of dominantly sanctioned resistance. This article title is meant to operationalise Response-Based Practice at the site of language to reveal resistance and re-signify what is dominantly constructed and ‘known’ about how women resist intimate partner violence (Coates and Wade, 2007).

Introduction

In this article, we¹ overview the approach and methodology of a poetry therapy programme and focus on the qualitative research results of the programme approach.² We summarise key concepts of Response-Based Practice to provide a scaffold for the poetry therapy programme research data. We then recount the research methods, offer analysis on the advantages of interdisciplinary teamwork, describe the women’s support group that participants for the poetry therapy group were recruited from and describe how these groups were bridged. We include and analyse pre-poetry therapy programme qualitative data and provide a brief overview of how Mazza and Hayton’s (2013) poetry therapy modalities correspond to Response-Based Practice ideas. We conclude with post-poetry therapy programme participant responses and link this feedback to the contribution offered by combining Response-Based Practice and poetry therapy.

The qualitative data included and analysed in this article are from a multi-year poetry therapy programme and longitudinal research study designed to investigate the efficacy of a co-facilitative poetry therapy curriculum in eliciting awareness of inner strengths (Dubrasky et al., 2019). This article specifically looks at how members of a rural women’s support group utilised poetry to resist intimate partner violence.

The eight-week women’s poetry therapy group was comprised of women who were recruited from a weekly psycho-educational women’s support group composed of women resisting – pushing back against and healing from – intimate partner violence. The poetry therapy group was a supplemental group co-facilitated by a professional poet and licensed

therapist. Research on the poetry therapy group demonstrated that relationships transferred from the support group to the poetry therapy group produced successful creative group-based therapeutic interventions that centred 'positive social responses' to women resisting intimate partner violence (Richardson and Wade, 2009). Positive social responses were offered through the discussion, composition and sharing of poetry and life experiences. In our diverse, and, at times, overlapping, roles as poetry programme creators, facilitators and researchers, our self-awareness and professional/personal development was deepened by eliciting poetry programme feedback that was descriptive of what women who are resisting violence always already know and do to maintain safety.

This programme offered a unique blend of theory, practice and research by collaboratively creating affirming space intended to identify group and individual abilities. This work also focused on resistance to violence on a spectrum from less noticeable to more outward forms of resistance, those that are not always validated by dominant social work practice but that are creative and effective interventions in intimate partner violence. In the words of Dr Laura Tohe (2013), named Navajo Poet Laureate in 2015, one of the aims of this work was to address the question 'how do we claim the sacredness in what sustains us?'. Further, this work endeavours to transfer the answers to this question into social justice social work practice that centres client-generated interventions in intimate partner violence.

The poetry therapy programme was created, delivered and researched by an interdisciplinary social work, English and psychology research team at Southern Utah University (Dubrasky et al., 2019). As an interdisciplinary team, we were able to combine our education and experiences – unifying our diverse pedagogy and practice in a shared epistemology – to facilitate a curriculum and to research programme outcomes. Each team member contributed different skills to our work. In this article, we contextualise and describe diverse team contributions in order to focus on theoretical and practice orientations from Response-Based Practice, recognising that 'alongside each history of violence there runs a parallel history of prudent, determined, and often creative resistance' (Wade, 1997: 23).

We start from the standpoint that when people experience violence, we always push back in various ways to protect ourselves; people never 'do nothing' in response to violence, but rather resist that violence in ways that are designed to maintain as much safety and dignity as possible in the context of each experience of violence. More covert forms of resistance, those that initially may not be discernible to a bystander or practitioner, can be identified through eliciting detailed narratives of how each person responded to violence. This practice is known as Response-Based Practice microanalysis and can be operationalised in therapeutic discussion, as well as by using narrative-based poetry. Response-Based Practice microanalysis seeks to understand *in detail* how a victim of violence responded to each part of an assault in order to amplify victim responses (resistance to violence). Amplifying resistance to violence identifies more covert resistance while simultaneously making the violence more visible. Evoking descriptions of less noticeable forms of resistance to violence allows practitioners and other witnesses to support processes of healing from violence by noticing and validating those actions. We are also better able to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence when we recognise victim resistance in its less discernible forms. When we recognise resistance to violence, we necessarily recognise that there is violence to be resisted whether it is more or less covert (Coates and Wade, 2004).

Response-Based Practice

An overview of the theories and practices of Response-Based Practice is necessary in order to: contextualise the qualitative research questions and participant feedback on the poetry therapy programme; elucidate theory and practice approaches; and substantiate the research findings that the use of Response-Based Practice in both of the women's groups supported. Response-Based Practice was a significant theory and practice for knowledge transfer from the support group to the poetry therapy group. This research data strongly suggest that the use of Response-Based Practice is an effective therapeutic, academic, research and social justice response to violence.

Response-Based Practice was created by academics/researchers/therapists/social justice activists Dr Linda Coates, Dr Allan Wade and Nick Todd MEd, registered psychologist, as a set of contextually expansive social justice theories and practices responding to violence. Response-Based Practice ideas, research and collaborations are currently shared in workgroups hubbed by the Centre for Response-Based Practice in British Columbia, Canada. Response-Based Practice includes the following ideas:

- where there is violence, there is resistance to that violence;
- 'acts of resistance are *responses* to violence, not *effects* or *impacts* of violence';
- violence is resisted on a spectrum from covert to overt resistance depending on social context, subjectivity and social location, while violence, with uncommon exclusion, is deliberate;
- when resistance to violence is recognised, violence is recognised and can be addressed – eliciting resistance can lead to positive social responses that support individual and group healing and restoration of dignity, as well as spur social change; and
- microanalysis of social interaction and language supports effective therapeutic alliances, anti-violence research and social change, and affirms agentic being (Richardson and Wade, 2009: 206; Centre for Response-Based Practice, 2018).

Richardson and Wade (2009: 206) write that 'We found that focusing on victims' responses allowed us to better identify and construct accounts of their resistance. Accounts of resistance provide a basis in fact for contesting accounts of pathology and passivity, which are typically used to blame victims.'

Research methodology

Our poetry therapy programme and research team used an *applied interdisciplinary research approach*³ to work with a convenient, non-random sample (women recruited from the women's support group). This methodology is also a quantitative and qualitative case-study approach.⁴ This work was designed to develop a co-facilitative poetry therapy curriculum to be implemented in a poetry therapy group. Membership in the poetry therapy group was recruited from a support group of women resisting intimate partner violence (Dubrasky et al., 2019). Permission for recruitment was established through a partnership with the rural community-based agency hosting the women's support group.⁵ The purpose of this interdisciplinary teamwork was to research the efficacy of co-facilitative poetry therapy in eliciting inner strengths. The

outcomes supported analysis on how women may use poetry to resist and articulate resistance of intimate partner violence.

The study was approved by the Southern Utah University Institutional Review Board, with Dubrasky named as principal investigator. Permission from the partnering community agency was secured through a formal letter of consent from the executive director that was included with the successful Institutional Review Board submission. Corser developed the quantitative research questions, analysed the quantitative data and worked with Donovan to develop the qualitative questions. Corser administered the informed consent process, secured all informed consent documentation, administered the pre- and post-programme questionnaires, and secured those written research documents. The programme was delivered by Dubrasky, Sorensen and Donovan.

Interdisciplinary team

A leader in the poetry therapy field, Mazza (2016: 2) provided this definition of poetry therapy: 'poetry therapy involves the use of language, symbol, and story in therapeutic, educational, growth, and community-building capacities'. Mazza's definition of poetry therapy is reflexive in that it indicates the necessity for openness and fluidity in order to promote the creative processes and accommodate the myriad of clinical theories and practices that expressive arts can support. This definition of poetry therapy indicates room for diverse approaches to the modality that, while alternative to traditional poetry therapy, may be generative and allegiant to the rigour and justice of traditional poetry therapy's applications and outcomes. The most common therapeutic interventions that use poetry are offered by therapists trained in poetry therapy. The poetry therapy programme and research study team developed an alternative way in which to design, implement and research poetry therapy by drawing on interdisciplinary academic models intended to increase the breadth and depth of skills through the intersection of disciplinary knowledges (Dubrasky et al., 2019). While poetry therapy is traditionally utilised by a licensed therapist who has trained and been certified in poetry therapy, we were able to combine our skills in poetry, clinical therapy and research to design, implement, execute and evaluate an original poetry therapy programme. Hills and Richards (2014: 3) note that interdisciplinary research in behavioural health care often produces more multifaceted data than does discreet discipline-based research because it 'combines data, tools, methods, concepts, and theories identified with distinct disciplines in an effort to create an understanding of an issue that is greater than the sum of its parts'. By working collaboratively across disciplines, our interdisciplinary poetry therapy team was able to combine our diverse skills, theories and methods to support successful service delivery.

Our team consists of a women's group coordinator, a licensed clinical social worker, a professional poet and a psychology researcher. Our alternative interdisciplinary approach to poetry therapy allowed us to successfully transfer solid group relationships from the women's support group to the poetry therapy group, draw on a myriad of therapeutic modalities, create and deliver a professional poetry curriculum, and research programme effectiveness (Dubrasky et al., 2019).

We were able to unify our diverse fields, practices and theories by dividing the work and then mending together an expanded set of programme roles. The women's group coordinator connected the work that women accomplished in the intimate partner violence support group with the work done in the poetry group. The professional

poet created the curriculum, selected the poems, presented them to the group for discussion, assigned writing exercises and offered positive feedback to the poetry created by the group members. During group discussions, the therapist offered support from strengths-based perspectives and the women's group coordinator collaborated by utilising Response-Based Practice. The women participating in the poetry therapy group used discussions on the poetry and peer-to-peer knowledge transfer to share what they knew about and did to resist violence, and to offer group and individual positive social responses to stories of resistance (Dubrasky et al., 2019).

The women's support group

In this section of the article, the weekly psycho-educational support group for women resisting intimate partner violence is described. This description is offered in order to contextualise how Response-Based Practice supported knowledge and relationship transfer from the women's support group to the poetry therapy group. The women's support group participants shared a commitment to honouring the path that each woman walks in her journey of resisting violence. The group kept an awareness that what women who resist violence know and do to resist that violence is diverse, individual and indicates courage and an orientation to justice. The women's support group worked to acknowledge the courage that each member demonstrated and to support her from her own place of resistance to violence. As part of the overarching structure and through weekly curriculum development and delivery, the women's group centralised women's individual and group abilities to build a community that nurtured and promoted the sharing of wisdom and the addition of new skills. A major group objective was to collaboratively create positive social responses, from affirming individual anti-violence action to working in our community to create anti-violence initiatives. The women's group curriculum focused on addressing individual victimisation, larger social contexts of violence and responses to violence.

Response-Based Practice is central to Donovan's feminist therapeutic approach and forms the foundation of the curriculum that she has developed for the women's support group described in this article. Donovan's use of Response-Based Practice is informed by the work of practitioner/academics from the Centre for Response-Based Practice. The women's group curriculum and facilitation is underpinned by Response-Based Practice, which centres socially contextualised justice-based positive social responses to women resisting violence, recognising that 'alongside each history of violence there runs a parallel history of prudent, determined, and often creative resistance' (Wade, 1997: 23). In recognising that violence and oppression are always resisted, it must be acknowledged that resistance to violence is spectral – though, significantly, not always valued or deemed credible by dominant helping structures. Noting that resistance to violence exists on a spectrum recognises that there are a variety of ways that people respond to violence, from less discernible acts of resistance to more noticeable acts. For instance, when it is not safe enough to run away or use our bodies to fight back, we may use our imaginations to escape to another place. Using less overt forms of resistance to violence often saves victims from increased harm as perpetrators frequently respond with increased violence to more outward forms of resistance. Acts of resistance to violence are employed based on careful consideration of contexts that impact how a person is best able to remain as safe as possible. The women's support group recognised that women who are resisting

violence know what types of resistance they need to employ in order to ensure the safest outcomes for themselves.⁶

Bridging groups: connecting the women's support group and the poetry therapy programme

The poetry therapy groups were composed of women participating in the women's support group. Response-Based Practice and the language of resistance to violence were the central theory and practice in the women's support group and were transferred to the poetry therapy programme. Response-Based Practice supported the transfer of positive social responses and knowledges on resistance to violence from work in the women's group to the poetry therapy group. Response-Based Practice not only provided the support group with shared knowledge, but also aided in the continuity of solid relationships among the women in the support group and continued to generate trust among group members and the support group coordinator (Dubrasky et al., 2019). The work in the poetry group demonstrated that creative group-based activities support 'positive social responses' to women resisting intimate partner violence (Richardson and Wade, 2009: 209). This was accomplished through discussion, composition and the sharing of life experiences through poetry. As the bridging between the groups developed, the alliance from the women's support group was extended to the newly introduced poetry therapy programme facilitators.

Using Response-Based Practice to transfer knowledge from the women's group to the poetry group: pre-programme feedback

The pre-poetry therapy programme qualitative data excerpted in the following demonstrated how the women in the intimate partner violence survivors support group invoked Response-Based Practice to describe their ways of resisting violence and maintaining dignity:

- Research question: 'What are your thoughts, currently, about resistance to violence?'
- Group participant answer: 'Resistance to violence is innate in each one of us. I recently realised that some of the things I did as a kid were my way of resisting violence. Most times, they were never validated. I see my children doing some similar things so now I am able to understand and validate them. I used to hate myself for "freezing" instead of "doing something". Now I know it was a form of preserving my dignity.'
- Group participant answer: 'The spectrum of violence resistance is so vast, my thoughts are as broad. I value the definition and truly hope these times will prove beneficial in our society regarding a better view, [more] comprehension of resistance to violence. I believe the hegemonic forces in our lives are harmful, and yet we are able to overcome tribulations with our dignity intact because of our amazing abilities to resist violence.'

Women went into the poetry group equipped with their wisdom, and familiar with Response-Based Practice. The responses that women provided at the end of the poetry therapy programme indicated that Response-Based Practice is particularly useful for expanding on existing wisdom. Response-Based Practice recognises that what victims of violence always already know and do to fight back comes from carefully and creatively responding to violence in ways that best preserve safety and dignity. Women from the weekly support group were using the language of resistance when they joined the poetry group. Their feedback at the end of the poetry programme indicated that Response-Based Practice used alongside narrative-centred poetry therapy supported an expanded sense of resistance to violence and created diverse forms of collaborative positive social responses. Victims of violence are better and more accurately responded to when their stories are elicited in greater detail and when their narratives can be expanded on in diverse ways (in this case, with the addition of narrative poetry therapy exercises). When more details of a story of resistance to violence are told and understood, the ways in which victims responded to violence become clearer – particularly when the resistance to violence is less outwardly discernible. When a victim's resistance to violence becomes clear, it is more easily validated. When a victim's resistance is validated (when there is a positive social response), healing from violence is supported.

Poetry therapy group curriculum overview

The article "Discovering inner strengths": a co-facilitative poetry therapy curriculum for groups' (Dubrasky et al., 2019) offered an in-depth discussion and analysis of the poetry therapy programme curriculum that Dubrasky created and co-facilitated with Sorensen. The overview included in this section is brief and intended to provide a context for the research results.⁷

Women authors were chosen in order to foreground the writing of women and to address gendered themes of oppression and resistance. Mazza and Hayton (2013) offer three modes of poetry therapy that work together: the receptive mode, the expressive mode and the celebratory mode. These three poetry therapy modes were adopted as a curricular scaffold and adapted in content and context for use in the poetry therapy group. Mazza and Hayton (2013) describe the receptive mode of poetry therapy as stemming from the use of complete and evocative poems for therapeutic support. Through a Response-Based Practice lens, the receptive mode of poetry therapy may be understood as a process of listening to respond, specifically connected with listening to offer a positive social response to resistance to violence.

Mazza and Hayton (2013) noted that the second mode of poetry therapy, the expressive mode, is writing to express emotions. Within the expressive mode of poetry therapy, it became possible to use Response-Based Practice to elicit poetic work that supports microanalysis. Coates and Wade (2018) indicate that one of the several important reasons Response-Based Practice ideas include close attention to microanalysis is that:

Microanalysis reveals forms of pre-existing ability that are generally ignored. In this way, it acts as a counterweight to deficit-based approaches in the mental health field.... We took this orientation into the practice of therapy in cases of violence and eventually, with the help of determined clients, began to see the profound importance of small responses to violence, as acts of resistance.

Eliciting poetry that allows microanalysis supported a clear reading of resistance to violence. Clear understandings facilitated an immediate way to provide positive social response to the writer, thereby supporting her healing and the restoration of her dignity.

The ceremonial mode of poetry therapy is defined by Mazza and Hayton (2013) as the sharing of composed poetry. From a Response-Based Practice standpoint, the sharing of group members' original poetry was a way to further resist by recalling resistance to violence, and an agentic opportunity to receive and provide group and individual positive social responses that affirmed dignity and supported healing.

Using Response-Based Practice in the poetry therapy programme

To further clarify how Mazza and Hayton's (2013) modes of poetry therapy are particularly complimentary to Response-Based Practice, and to connect the theory of Response-Based Practice to the post-programme research data in the next section of this article, it is important to provide solid definitions of resistance to violence from Response-Based Practice perspectives. The two definitions of resistance to violence used in both groups come from Richardson (2010) and Wade (1997). Print copies of these definitions of resistance to violence were circulated in each group and referred to throughout the poetry therapy programme:

1. 'When I refer to resistance, I am suggesting a broad scope of action that protests against mistreatment in many ways – with gestures grand or subtle, flagrant or delicate – and facilitates the reassertion of personal dignity' (Richardson, 2010: 123).
2. 'Virtually any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression, from disrespect to overt abuse, or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance. Further, any attempt to preserve or reassert one's dignity, to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality on behalf of one's self or others, including any effort to redress the harm caused by violence or other forms of oppression, represents a de facto form of resistance' (Wade, 1997: 25).

Using these two definitions as touchstones in the programme work, and as a foundational validation of women's resistance to violence, supported both positive social responses in the poetry therapy group and the bridging of theory and practice from the weekly women's group to the poetry therapy group.

Listening to the wisdom in the room: participant responses

Voices of resistance: responses to pre-poetry therapy programme research questions

The pre-poetry therapy programme responses all indicated a sense of community and belonging as protective factors and expectations of the work. This feedback affirmed the central importance that positive social responses play not only in the restoration of dignity, but also in the *expectation* of the restoration of dignity. These data also corroborated a key Response-Based Practice idea: that people know what they need to heal:

- Research question: 'What are your current ideas on coping, with regard to coping with violence?'
Group participant answer: '[Poetry is] a valuable tool in asserting one's dignity and/or healthy resistance to violence.'

This participant adeptly resisted the language of 'coping' by substituting the language of resistance to violence, effectively communicating her knowledge that she has always resisted violence and was not only now coming to a space of action as connoted by the use of the word 'coping'. This participant's critique of the word choice (use of the word 'coping') in the research question demonstrated the efficacy of Response-Based Practice to support both awareness and the practice of agentic being. This response also demonstrated how the poetry therapy programme and research results were effective in deepening researcher capacities by creating an increased awareness of the importance of recognising that what women who are resisting violence always already know and do to maintain their safety is of central importance.⁸

- Research question: 'What are your expectations from this poetry course?'
Group participant answer: 'I have no expectations; however, I do hope to have a space to share and to connect with others.'
Group participant answer: 'I would like to be able to put into writing some feeling.... I would also like to refresh my memory on some technicalities of writing poetry and explore different styles of poetry that I can learn from and implement in my writing. Most importantly, I would love to feel a strong sense of community and belonging in this class. Thank you!'

The narrative function of poetry therapy and Response-Based Practice generates compatibility between the two. These participants indicated both an openness to the creative process and an overarching expectation for (and willingness to provide) positive social responses based on connection. One participant termed a 'sense of community and belonging' as the 'most important' aspect of the programme and then ended her pre-poetry therapy programme feedback with 'Thank you!' While this feedback clearly indicated an expectation that positive social responses would be shared, the conclusion, a strong 'Thank you!', may also be read as sending a message to the researchers, backed by this participant's knowledge, that gatherings that support positive social response are healing. This 'Thank you!', then, appears to be an invitation to accountability, an articulation of her expectation that the type of healing to be done in the programme will support the type of healing that she already knows works.

Voices of resistance: responses to post-poetry therapy programme questions

Post-poetry programme participant responses strongly indicated the therapeutic utility of creative group narrative engagement combined with the language of resistance and the sharing of positive social responses. The post-programme data showed that Response-Based Practice used alongside poetry therapy can create an expanded sense of, and a vocabulary for, resistance to violence, as well as contribute to a collaborative positive social response:

Research question: 'What were your expectations from this poetry course?'

Group participant answer: 'I don't know if I had any expectations other than possibly a sense of community or sharing. I've found this class has been that and much more. This class has helped me to process things I didn't know I could.'

Response-Based Practice demands close attention to this participant's word choice. She indicated a distinction between what she knows is wrong – the violence she has resisted and is resisting – and the unavailability of a method to process what she has experienced. This is an important distinction because it disrupts a common dominant victim-blaming discourse that constructs women who are victims of violence as passive and, as a result, singly or sequentially abused by partners who use violence. This participant's feedback indicates that she is aware of her resistance to violence and that she did not have a way in which to process this awareness and/or action(s). Recognition that a person has resisted violence is important to that person's ability to recover from it. If a person's resistance to violence is not validated, is questioned or is seen as not enough, the violence is submerged (made invisible) and the victim and her actions (or constructed lack thereof) become the problem instead of the use of violence being the problem (Coates and Wade, 2004). For instance, when a victim imagines that they are somewhere else in order to resist violence, this resistance often goes unrecognised, and the victim's actions or perceived lack thereof are often scrutinised. If the victim imagines that they are somewhere else, they may be asked 'Why didn't you do something?' If their imagining is not validated as resistance, the victim is constructed as the problem and the focus on the violence and holding the perpetrator accountable is minimised – it becomes background to the victim-blaming discourse that sees the victim's actions/constructed non-actions as the issue. Victims' resistance (regardless of being overt or covert) must be recognised as not only resistance, but also a careful choice given the context. In a situation in which more outward resistance would have increased their vulnerability to violence, a regular feature of intimate partner violence, we must recognise that there are dire implications of refusing to recognise covert resistance to violence. This victim-blaming discourse relies on undermining the diverse ways that women resist violence through the binary construction of resistance, wherein more obvious forms of resistance are understood to be valid and less active or outward resistance is understood as acquiescence to violence. Less active or obvious resistances to violence are, in fact, fluid and intertwined experiential/intellectual responses that demonstrate an acute awareness of safety, systemic inequity and shifting social contexts. This participant's feedback and distinction between what she knows and the lack of support available to her for help, and in naming what she knows squarely, identifies the gap as created by dominant normative knowledges, service provision and lack of resources, not an issue of pathology and personal inadequacy. Following Coates and Wade (2004), this participant's feedback revealed the violence and absence of supportive processing interventions as a systemic problem, and simultaneously works to de-pathologise her as an individual.

- Research question: 'What is your current relationship with poetry?'
Group participant answer: 'It is a wonderful relationship filled with opportunity to grow, explore, express and find myself and others through words. I love it!!'

This participant's feedback made strong links between her abilities and the abilities of her peers to accomplish self-expression, development, self-awareness and connection with others. From a Response-Based Practice perspective, all the abilities that this participant names were pre-existing skills that the poetry therapy curriculum supported. Her feedback demonstrated that Response-Based Practice and poetry therapy are complimentary as combined therapeutic approaches. Activist feminist poet Audre Lorde (1984: 37) insisted:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is the vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought.

- Research question: 'What are your thoughts, currently, about resistance to violence?'
Group participant answer: 'I have resisted violence in so many ways I wasn't aware of before. This gives me strength and has helped me to uncover a hidden dignity to acknowledge. Women, men and countless children resist violence; their courage and ability to overcome adversity should be celebrated.'

Using Response-Based Practice microanalysis and drawing from the expressive mode of poetry therapy, this feedback may be read as a 'safe enough'⁹ and covert¹⁰ critique of (resistance to) dominant helping structures (Reynolds, 2012: 28). Similar to the prior participant's feedback, this participant's feedback distinguished between her 'awareness' of her resistance and knowledge of her resistance. She says that 'I have resisted violence', indicating that she knows her actions were resistance to violence, and then that 'in so many ways I wasn't aware of before', indicating that her resistance was not validated – named as resistance – and so not brought into awareness, in a dominant sense – not actionable, unnamed and so constructed as not real. She goes on to say that 'This gives me strength and has helped me to uncover a hidden dignity to acknowledge.' She indicates that the poetry therapy programme has given her strength and identifies that she has developed this strength through the validation of what she knows and has done to structure safety, as well as through a positive social response. She says that the experience 'helped me uncover a hidden dignity to acknowledge'. By choosing to use the word 'hidden', she infers that her dignity was acted on and that positive social response supported her (as the active agent) to 'uncover' and recover it. She chose to use the word 'acknowledge', which infers recognition and so connection with a positive response. This participant crafted careful and poignant feedback that operationalised resistance within a critique of historic negative social responses that have not recognised it. She critiqued the negative social response that she has suffered, asserted her unfailing personal agency, and connected the role of a positive social response to her recovery of her dignity.

Responses to post-programme questions

The women in the poetry therapy group offered responses to the research questions that frequently critiqued individual pathologising and linked the oppression they experienced to larger systems of social inequality. These analyses often pointed out how systemic oppression is 'interlocked' – for example, how gendered inequity can inform and be informed by social services and legal processes (Fellows and Razack, 1997):

- Research question: 'What are your thoughts, currently, about resistance to violence?'
- Group participant answer: 'After participating in this class and the weekly group, I have not only learned, but embraced the above definition of resistance to violence!^[11] To me, this has been a journey to recovery and believing in my strength and good judgement in several ways that I resist violence.'
- Research question: 'What are your current ideas on coping, with regard to coping with violence?'
- Group participant answer: 'I have been better equipped to cope with recurring violence, whether it be from my ex-husband, family members, communities and other systems. I've also been able to think quickly or quicker because I now recognise instances of violence sooner. This enables me to stand up for myself and my children faster. Writing is another way for me to cope and process violence.'¹²

This participant referenced the importance of positive social responses in her resistance to violence and pointed out how recognition of resistance to violence reveals concealed violence (Coates and Wade, 2007).

While there is literature on the importance of social workers recognising resistance to violence, Response-Based Practice goes beyond strengths-based discourse to insist that clinicians recognise resistance as it occurred/is occurring. Poetry therapy used alongside Response-Based Practice is an approach to eliciting more detailed stories of resistance to violence. This original interdisciplinary approach to poetry therapy contributes to social work theory/practice by expanding practitioner understandings of how women resist violence. When survivors tell their stories of resistance to violence in detail and through diverse narrative practices, their resistance to violence often becomes more evident. This co-facilitative poetry therapy programme is a unique programme using Response-Based Practice and designed, implemented and evaluated by an interdisciplinary team. The intersections of our work in poetry, therapy and research supported survivors to tell comprehensive stories of resistance to violence. When rich stories of resistance are told, clinicians are more able to craft nuanced and accurate responses to resistance to violence in support of healing. This approach to creative group-based work supports 'positive social responses' to women resisting intimate partner violence, expanding the ways in which social workers can respond to survivors of violence (Richardson and Wade, 2009: 209).

The programme data indicated that combining poetry therapy with Response-Based Practice disrupted notions of resistance as solely outwardly expressed and

large-action-oriented, as well as that it is important to recognise that violence is resisted on a spectrum and that less noticeable forms of resistance are well-reasoned and maintain dignity. The authors have published the curriculum for this programme elsewhere and believe that other interdisciplinary teams could successfully transfer this knowledge to work in other groups (Dubrasky et al., 2019). Certainly, there are opportunities for additional programme development and research to be done in this type of co-facilitated interdisciplinary poetry therapy with other types of therapy groups.

Dr Laura Tohe posed an important question on the continuity of flourishing, on claiming what is always already there, she asked: 'how do we claim the sacredness in what sustains us?' (2013). Innumerable research studies and anecdotal evidence on violence conclude that how those who have resisted violence are responded to is the best indicator of and facilitator in recovery from violence and the restoration of dignity – this is a central Response-Based Practice idea. Similarly, the practice of group therapy relies on the holistic value of gathering together to express ourselves and to share positive social responses. This poetry programme and research data indicated that having a poetic licence to write resistance is one way to *claim the sacredness* – our actions that protect and nurture ourselves and others – *in what sustains us* – dignity.

Notes

¹ The contributions of Danielle Beazer Dubrasky PhD, Scott Sorensen LCSW, Andrea Donovan LCSW and Grant Corser PhD are cited throughout this article. As part of our collaborative research and methodology, we have agreed that publications and presentations on this work will foreground our joint efforts and our distinct contributions as team members. While our research team collaborated on this work, particularly at the intersections among our disciplines, we also had distinct areas of influence and ownership in the work. Dubrasky, who is both a professional poet and a professor of English, designed and co-facilitated the programme's poetry curriculum. Sorensen provided clinical co-facilitation. He is a clinician and educator with a background in social work education and an interest in life transition pedagogy. Corser is a research psychologist who contributed his experience in institutional review, research design and assessment to this programme. As the women's group facilitator, Donovan's contributions flowed from experience in feminist theory and practice, group facilitation alongside women resisting violence, and therapeutic alliances centring Response-Based Practice.

² For an in-depth outline of the curriculum used in the poetry therapy programme, see Dubrasky, Sorensen, Donovan and Corser (2019).

³ An applied interdisciplinary research approach is used to 'examine policies and programs that respond to the changing needs of vulnerable populations' (Hills and Richards, 2014: 5). In our programme, working collaboratively to combine our individual skills – poetry, therapy and research skills – supported us to develop a programme that was narratively based and evaluated. This increased our ability to develop, administer and evaluate in ways that better elicited and recognised group members' resistance to violence and so enhanced the programme findings by centring the group members' knowledge. This interdisciplinary program was presented on at The Association for Social Work with Groups XXXVI Annual Symposium, 2014.

- ⁴ For the purposes of this article, only the qualitative research data is included and analysed. Corser's quantitative inquiry was built on the work of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale developed by Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey and Palfai (1995). This includes three subscales (Emotional Repair, Emotional Clarity and Attention to Emotion) and such sample questions (measured on a five-point Likert scale) as: 'I can never tell how I feel'; 'I pay a lot of attention to how I feel'; and 'No matter how badly I feel, I try to think about pleasant things.'
- ⁵ Agency permission was facilitated by Donovan, and the agency was chosen to be approached for this work in order to transfer facilitator and peer familiarity and trust, as well as knowledge of Response-Based Practice, from the women's support group to the poetry therapy group.
- ⁶ Dr Catherine Richardson's analysis on contextualised resistance to violence provides an additional dimension: 'Contextualizing the situation provides information about each interactional exchange and why the victim did precisely what she did in each interaction. More complexly, it is also related to the social responses she has and will receive, both real and anticipated/perceived' (personal communication, 2 January 2017).
- ⁷ The poetry therapy group curriculum, aside from consultation with Sorensen and Donovan regarding the design and content of session opening and closure exercises, was developed by Dubrasky. The curriculum overview in this article foregrounds Response-Based Practice ideas presented by Donovan (2015).
- ⁸ Further supporting the data from this study which suggests that Response-Based Practice and poetry therapy are complementary is Furman's (2005) work on the pedagogical success of therapeutic narrative writing to support the development of empathy among students studying in helping professions. Furman defines empathy as attempting to understand another within that person's social context and subject position. Connected to this argument, researcher theory and practice learning was supported by both the programme participation and research feedback, wherein participants communicated the importance of researcher accountability, critiqued the language of effects (particularly the use of the language of coping in one of our research questions) and offered critique of dominant helping professions.
- ⁹ Activist therapist Dr Viki Reynolds (2012: 28) refers to 'safe enough' in her work on structuring safety: 'the practices of negotiating or co-constructing conditions, structures, and agreements that will make space for "safe-enough" work. Therapeutic relationships that are experienced as safe are not capricious, natural, or random. They require intentional practices that create consistency, predictability, and set the space for *safe-enough* conversations. Structuring Safety is not something therapists do to get ready for the real work; it *is* the real work.' For additional information see Richardson and Reynolds, 2012.
- ¹⁰ Scott (2010: 6; see also Scott, 1990) writes of everyday sites of a resistance that appears passive and is intentionally less noticeable in order to create safety: 'what happens if we consider this politics?... foot-dragging, not complying, and other such tactics that people deploy when faced with brutal or authoritarian power, are often the only political tools available for most of the world's population'.
- ¹¹ The reference this participant makes to "the above definition of resistance to violence" regards the two definitions of resistance to violence described as being used in both groups and provided by Richardson (2010) and Wade (1997).
- ¹² For additional information see Richardson and Wade, 2013.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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