

In her own voice: a narrative inquiry into how three women recently diagnosed with breast cancer utilized the artist's fold book.

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### Abstract

This research investigates how three women with a recent diagnosis of breast cancer approached the multi-faceted artist's fold book within an art therapy group. Literature from a variety of disciplines indicates that a diagnosis of breast cancer is a life-altering event which can have a negative impact on psychological well-being and create psychosocial challenges (Davis, 2004; Tish Knobf, 2007; Turner et al., 2005). A number of authors have noted the benefits of art-making in a supportive environment for women with breast cancer (Collie et al., 2006; Predeger, 1996;

Serlin et al., 2000). The literature also reveals a lack of patient-centred knowledge on how these women can benefit from visual artistic expression (Collie et al.). This study provided an opportunity for women with breast cancer to share, in their own voices, their experiences making art together. For this study, a five-week art therapy group was run at a local cancer wellness centre, followed by narrative-based interviews. Data included the artwork and related discussions arising in group sessions, case notes, and the follow-up interviews; qualitative data analysis was used to identify the major themes that came up in the interviews. The major themes that emerged were Breaking Down the Isolation; Emotional Awakenings; Structure and Freedom to Explore; and Realizing Capabilities . It was of utmost importance to include the authentic voices and stories of the women I worked with as they explored both their recent diagnoses and how the art-making assisted them in their daily lives. The 3 women who participated became, in effect, co-researchers. This research describes a unique art-therapeutic intervention to aid in meaning-making and to address the psychosocial and emotional disruptions that may occur following a recent breast cancer diagnosis.

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