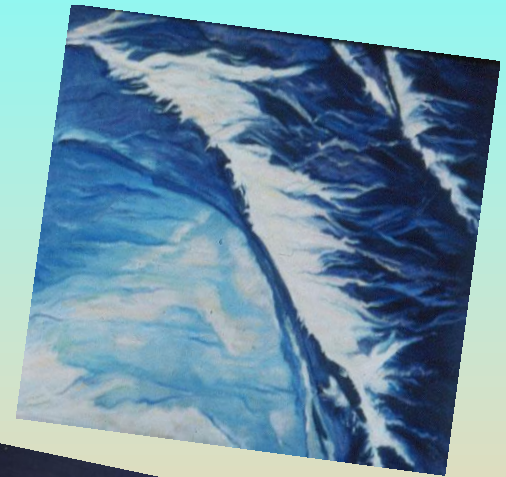


# ***A Collective Case Study of Veterans Inside an Arts and Crafts Room and their Perceptions Regarding Empowerment***

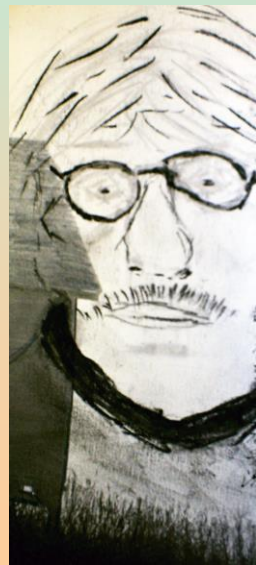
***By Dr. Cindy Lee Hasio***



Examples of craft kits and artwork created by various veterans inside the arts and crafts room

## ***Statement of the Problem***

- Creating arts and crafts based on their painful experiences is an outlet for some veterans to discover meaning in the experience that allows them to work through PTSD issues.
- Veterans' needs for creative work during the process of recovery is not commonly understood.
- Veterans' voices and personal histories can contribute to learning about art education in diverse settings. It is here that arts and crafts become part of a learning process that can help them heal, and, in some instances, fully overcome personal obstacles.
- What can we learn from these veterans and how might that knowledge be applied to other art education settings?



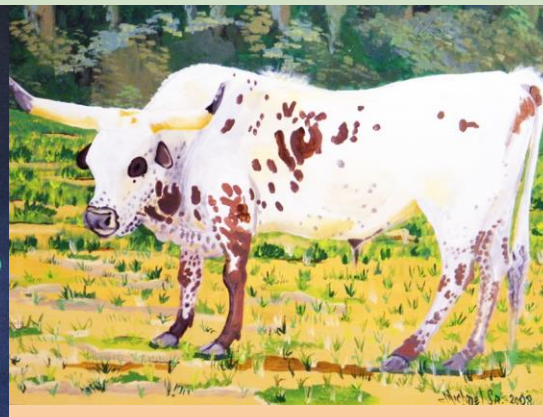


## ***Research Questions***

Do veterans perceive that they become empowered through their creative activities and interactions inside an arts and crafts room at the VA hospital in Dallas, Texas?

Empowerment in this context is defined as gaining self-esteem and motivation within oneself. This includes becoming more confident and positive, as well as gaining the ability to learn about one's own identity. Sub-questions for this study are:

- a) If so, to what degree does making arts and crafts influence veterans' perceptions of empowerment?
- b) If so, to what degree do interactions among veterans influence their perceptions of empowerment?



Artwork created by various veterans inside the arts and crafts room

## ***Introduction of this Study***

- The study explores the diversity of individual perspectives offered by a diversity of veterans amid their interactions around arts and crafts.
- This study describes how the interactions between the participants are shaped by the social contexts within which they come together.
- Such relations of sympathy and empathy are important parts of *connected knowing* (Stanton, 1996). Connected knowing connotes putting one's self in another person's place to understand his or her perspectives and feelings (Clinchy, 1996).



Artwork created by various veterans inside the arts and crafts room



## ***Purpose of Study***

- The purpose of this study is to understand how veterans may or may not perceive a sense of empowerment through various interactions and activities in an arts and crafts environment.
- Furthermore, an essential reason for this study is to examine veterans in the arts and crafts environment to explore whether their experiences were important, meaningful, and empowering, and especially important in this regard are the interactions among veterans



## ***Limitations of the Study***

1. Some of the veteran participants did not come into the recreation room on a continual basis.
2. I am a younger female researcher, and many veterans might not trust me due to my age and/or gender.
3. Due to limited number of female veterans there were none available in the arts and crafts room in this location to participate in this study.

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Photo from the internet from Google images

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Post-Modern Feminist Theory**

*Feminist theory that this study's research is focused on the interactions among members of disenfranchised groups, particularly in the ways that the processes and products of creative activity bring empowerment.*

### **Narrative Inquiry**

*The importance of learning from others through dialogue and personal stories is a central tenet of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories are rich in historical, psychological, and human perspectives, which are universal, as all humans have stories to share in order to construct knowledge and self-development*

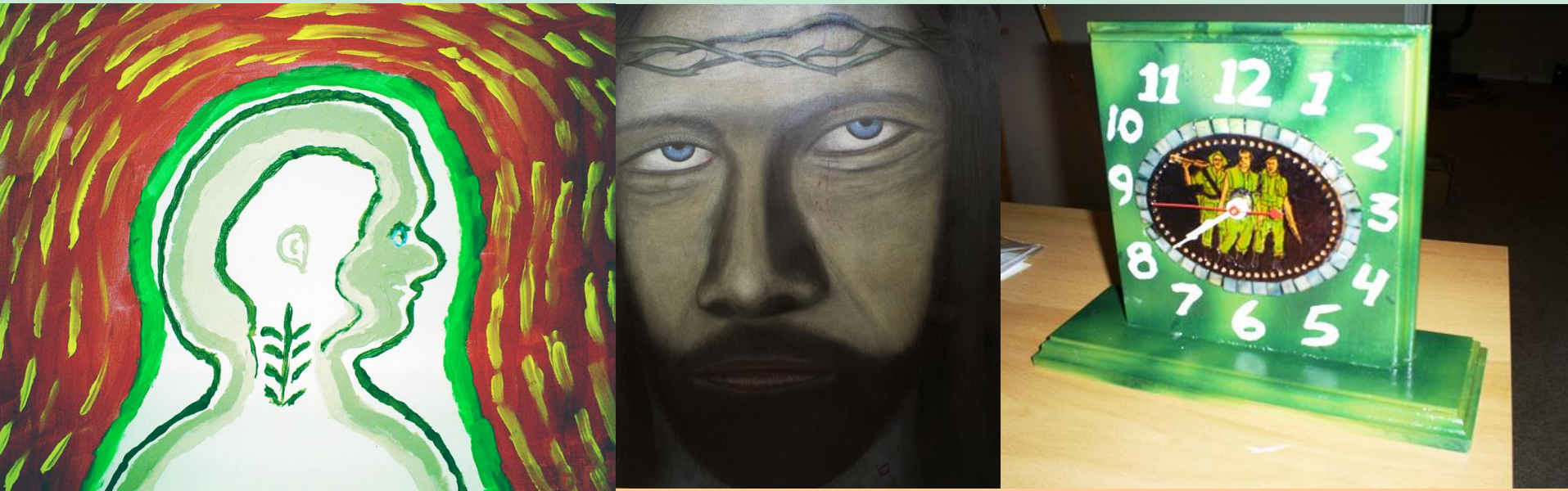
### **Care Theory**

In order for a sense of empowerment to emerge, there has to be the component of caring during teaching and learning. Care theory recognizes that individuals have different levels of need for help to achieve adequate levels of functioning in particular circumstances (Engster, 2007).



## ***METHODOLOGY***

- ***Research Design*** – I used an interpretive perspective because it entails that the concepts of reality can vary from one person to another. Social meanings and the interpretation of these meanings influence human actions when they are shared with others belief that the creative process of learning is reflective and continuous, synthesized from different perspectives on reality.
- ***Data Collection*** process involved observations, interviewing participants, gathering documents, and selecting testimonies and photographic evidence of arts and crafts room work.





## ***Data Analysis***

I used content analysis to analyze my data because I used field notes, interview transcriptions, photography to collect the data, and then drew interpretations and conclusions about the patterns and themes within the data collection. It is more inductive because potential themes and other questions may arise from the close scrutiny of the data (White & Marsh, 2006). Content analysis allowed me to code and create categories so that I could increase and generate knowledge that helped me with my interpretations.

<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Content Analysis</b>
Digital photography	The purposes of taking photos are for reference and data documentation, and also to show the veterans who may want to see their progress and reflect upon them.
Individual interviewing with audio recordings and semi-structured interviewing	Individual interviewing with audio can help me probe answers to clarify and further gain insight into the participants' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Audio recordings will allow me the opportunity to transcribe what occurs in a setting and play it over as much as necessary. The semi-structured interviewing allows me to organize questions and answers that are similar for each respondent's answer to the same question.
Participant observation and field note documentation	Participant observation fosters an in-depth understanding of a social setting and situation and the behavior of the participants in that setting. It can help me gain an understanding of situated learning and the participants' ways of interacting and participating in creative activities. Field not documentation allows me to observe patterns of interaction with the participants. Concepts can be constructed from documenting the data collection.

# Validity of Study

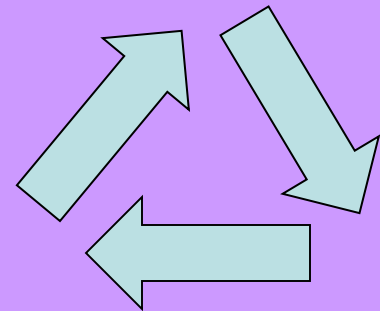
- Member checking can be both formal and informal during the normal course of observation and conversation with veterans in the arts and crafts room who have known and worked with the participant being interviewed (Creswell, 1998). I asked the recreational specialist and other people inside the room if they could describe what they observed from each participant in question to validate the participant's process inside the arts and crafts room.



- Reporting descriptive information about events, objects, behaviors, people, environment, times, places, and interactions was also used to establish validity. Cross-checking (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) through photographs and field notes helped me validate my observations.



- I used the triangulation approach as I re-listened to the recordings and collected data from my observations to confirm accurate interpretations of the participants' meanings. I also allowed the participants to review my notes and transcriptions from the interviews to see if there were any discrepancies between my documentation and what they told me.





## ***Sample Selection***

This collective case study involved a group of male veterans. Each participant was assigned an anonymous name of his choice. There are more men than women receiving care and participating in programs at the Dallas VA Hospital, which is why all three of my participants are males ranging from age 50–60. To select my participants, I used purposeful sampling or criterion sampling .



## ***Sample Selection***

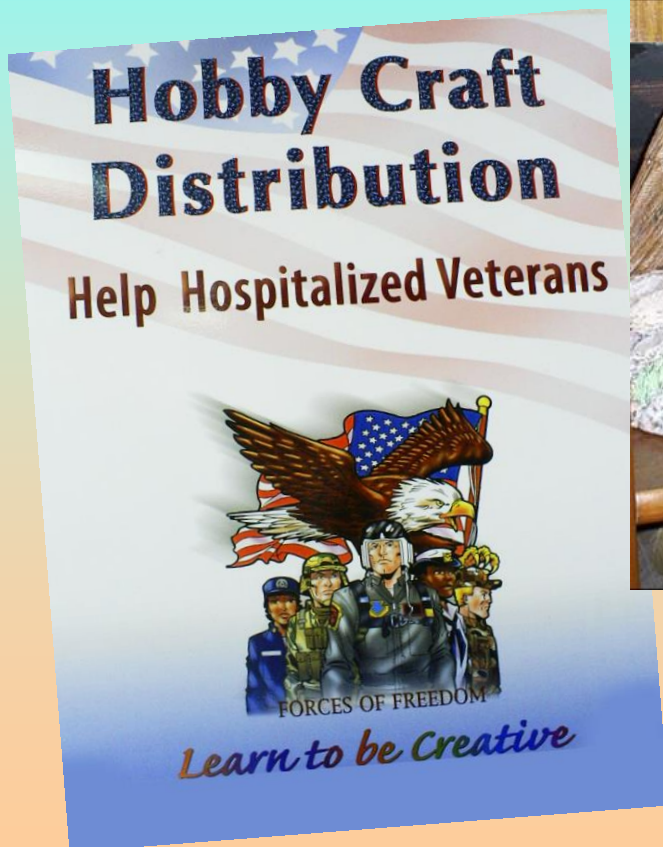
The criteria that I used for these participants were: (a) one veteran participant who preferred to make crafts only, (b) one veteran participant who preferred to make expressive and creative art from any media of his choice not from a craft kit, (c) one veteran participant who preferred to interact inside the room most of the time that did not participate in creative activities, (d) participants who came back to the room on a consistent basis and, (e) participants who were out-patients. I preferred out-patients because in-patients have stricter confidentiality rules, and I was not allowed to record them while they were being treated.





## ***THE ARTS AND CRAFTS ROOM ENVIRONMENT***

The arts and crafts room is located on the first floor of the Veteran's Hospital close to the inpatient mental ward unit and is unlike other areas of the hospital, which are typically white and undecorated.



## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**“Chuck”**- a Caucasian male in his late 50s who served in the Army during 1973-1975 as a machine gun personnel carrier. expressive art with lots of colors, abstract and symbolic images. Disabled in a wheelchair. Reported to have been diagnosed with multiple mental illnesses from the VA Hospital.



**“Alexander”** a Caucasian male in his early 50s. He served in the Navy during January 1971–November 1978 as a radar man. Uses a walker and wheelchair. He learned to paint realistic landscapes and animals as possible on his own. Reported to have been diagnosed with a mental illness from the VA Hospital.



**“Marine”** in his 60s and he told me that he did a great deal of crafts before and after the military because his heritage of Native American made him familiar with many of his culture’s art traditions. He prefers only craft kits and dislikes painting. He worked with leather, tiles, and wood but his favorite medium is beads. He told me he is diagnosed with terminal cancer later. Served as a “tunnel rat” and reported to have been diagnosed with multiple mental illnesses from the VA Hospital.



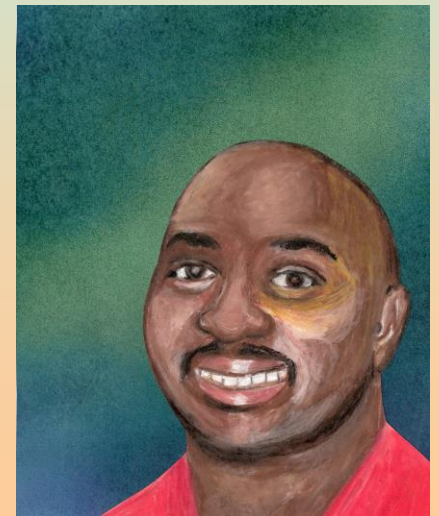


## ***DATA ANALYSIS***

From data, field notes, semi-structured interviews, observations, and photography I drew inferences to provide structure for my interpretations. One way I categorized the data was through transcribing the information from my notes and voice recordings and organizing it based on patterns and behaviors expressed by each participant.

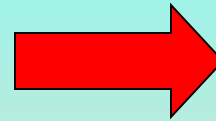
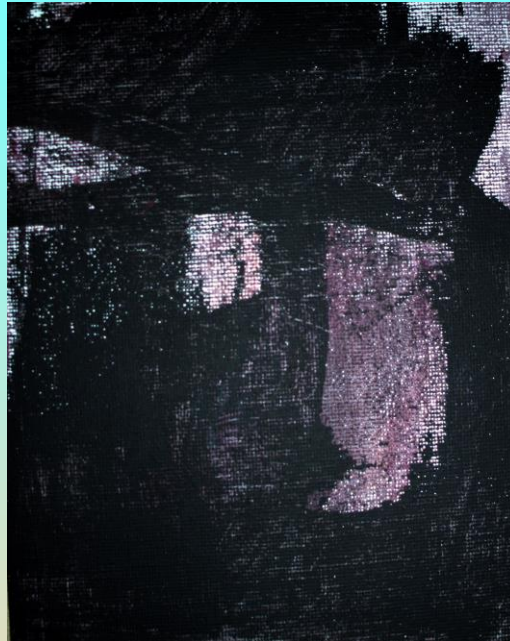
I also did cross-analysis and came up with three themes that emerged from coding:

**Personal Transformation  
Empowerment Through Learning  
Creation as a Tool for Self-Esteem**



Artwork created by Cindy Hasio

## *Interpretation*



Chuck-his empowerment was evidenced in his paintings during the course of a year where it transformed from dark to light. The darker paintings represented his pain and suffering but then became lighter colored when his attitude and outlook on life became positive. For him, making art influenced his perceptions of empowerment to a great degree because it gave him a sense of healing and hope to change what was negative in his life to a more positive outlook.

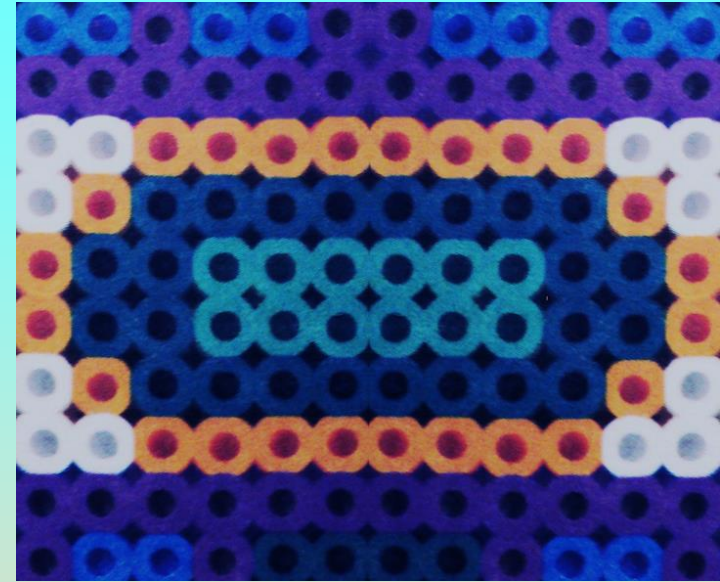
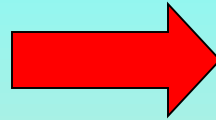
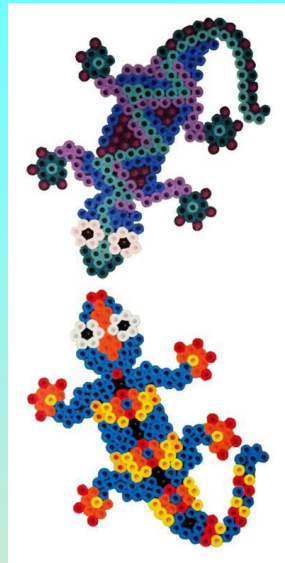


Alexander- making art influenced his perceptions of empowerment to a great degree because it gave him a sense of accomplishment to learn painting techniques to build up his self-esteem. Art-making also helped him break free of just painting realistically from looking at pictures to more surreal images that came from his imagination.



Artwork created by "Alexander"





Marine-told me he felt fulfilled and appreciated when he made bead crafts and gave them away to other veterans inside the hospital. Marine decided one day to not follow the instructional manual in the craft kit and use the beads to make something more abstract. Making bead crafts at first seemed like a distraction to his physical and mental pain, but it later became his passion and his purpose to live, empowering him to a great degree.

## *Implications for Future Research*

- Veterans in my dissertation research will provide a model for art educators, pre-service students, and others, inspiring a sense of responsibility to construct deeper insights about marginalized groups by listening to their stories and accepting their feelings.
- Interchanges with the veteran community can promote lifelong learning outside the classroom—for both veterans and art educators—through the process of creating, talking about, and reflecting upon veterans' arts and crafts.



For future implications, myself and others interested in situated learning within an arts and crafts environment or the topic of veterans and art could research women veterans and their art, pre-service observations in a situated learning environment, and testing a merging curriculum based on the veteran community's needs and interests



Artwork created by various veterans from the arts and crafts room

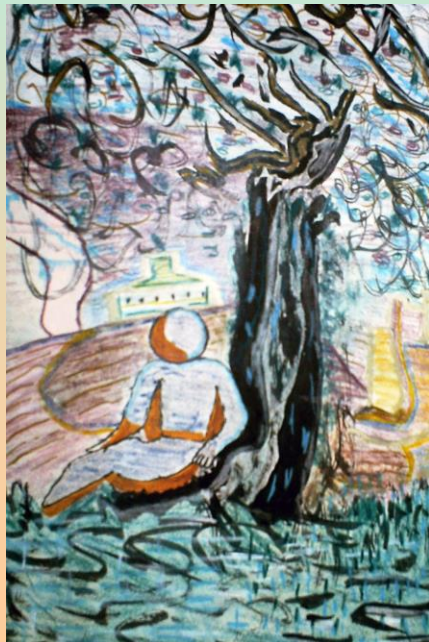


## ***What I've Learned from this Research***

The most valuable lesson offered by such research insights are that people with unique experiences make arts and crafts for diverse reasons, often explicitly distinct from the desire for expression.

I had never considered the power of tedious and painstaking crafting to foster personal liberation for an individual like Marine, for whom crafting became a method to come to terms with painful experiences in his past personal history.

Also, Alexander, mastering a technique to produce realistic images with no personal connection to the artist, could be a true method of empowerment.



Artwork created by various veterans from the arts and crafts room

## ***Lesson learned—it's hard to be objective***

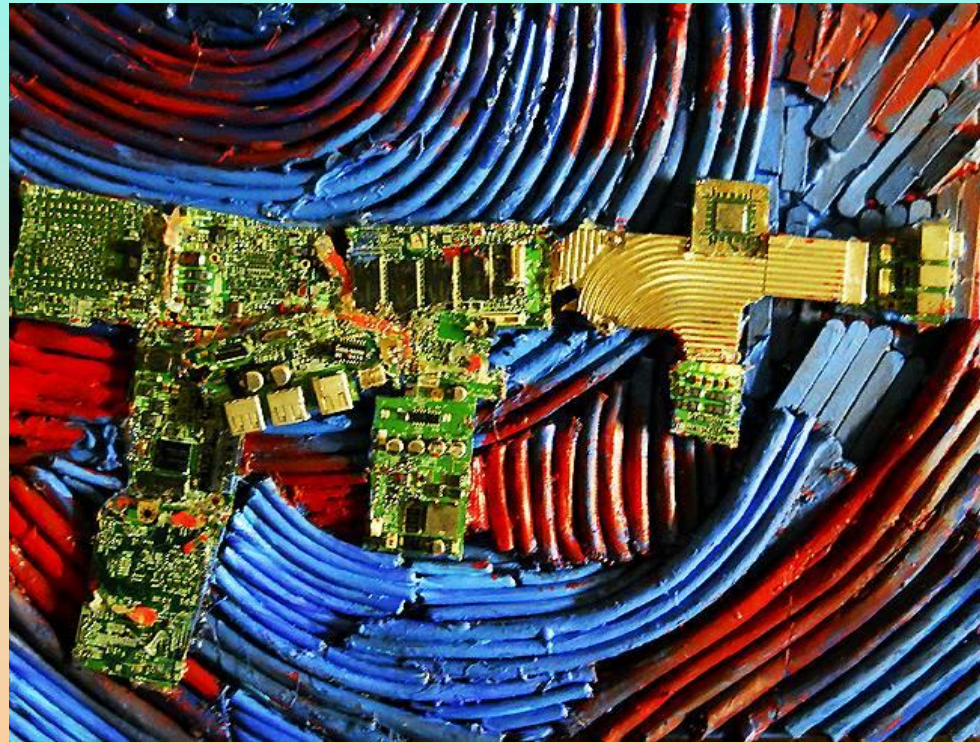
For example, my relationship with Chuck often impeded my role as a researcher. I gave him my phone number so he could text me when he came into the arts and crafts room, but he called me several times in crisis, contemplating suicide. Several times, Chuck became angry at me when I did not return his calls right away, accusing me of “betraying” and “ignoring” him. I understood that his attitudes stemmed from his personal difficulties, but my empathy and compassion for him in this situation drained my capacities as a researcher and undermined my objectivity





## ***Lesson learned—Showing care also helped me gain trust***

Listening to their stories with empathy, compassion and genuine interest was how I showed them care. The true value of art creation can come from sharing the experience with others. It is through this sharing of ideas, stories, frustrations, and accomplishments that empowerment becomes a mode of connection and an opportunity to appreciate the contributions of others.



Artwork created by Cindy Hasio



## ***Lesson learned- Shared experiences***

The true value of art creation can come from sharing the experience with others. It is through this sharing of ideas, stories, frustrations, and accomplishments that empowerment becomes a mode of connection and an opportunity to appreciate the contributions of others.





Here's a story. I was stationed at Pearl Harbor in the Navy. I was at Waikiki. Waikiki is beautiful; nice beach, beautiful sunsets, palm trees, ocean but when I was alone it was boring. Then I met two other guys who were stationed there. We ended up doing stuff together and exploring the area. Then Waikiki turned out to be the paradise that it should be. When you are alone it's not so meaningful and it's boring. When you have others to share the experience with it is more meaningful. That's how it is in the arts and crafts room. I go there to share my experiences in making arts and crafts with others and people go there to be around people to make arts and crafts. It's like Six Flags. If you go alone then it's boring but if you're with someone then it's fun.

(Alexander, Personal communication, June 20, 2010).